



CHAPTER I.

Nestling half way down the slope of one of our low Hampton hills stands a small farm house, which in my memory lay vacant for many years. The situation was bleak or pleasant according to the season, and the air was cold and dreary it had been in a driving winter storm, with the snow whirling round the hills, the night wind rattling at the casement. Spring time, however, was not long in paying back winter's debt of dreariness. Thereabout the earlier spring breeze, and the sunshine had more light in it and the air a sweeter smell around that spot than anywhere in the neighborhood. Even now I, John Book, who have kept the chemist's shop in Hampton these many years, crawl up there sometimes, and take the breeze of spring, which runs into my blood like wine, and I feel something of the young man tingling in my crazy limbs. Garden and house, windows and ceilings, were all going to the bad together, and at last we called the place Tumbledown Farm; and we used to say that even the rats knew better, that to live in Tumbledown Farm.

One day, however, my boy, who was up to his eyes in gossip, came rushing in, basket in hand, and called out, "The farm's taken!"

"Tumbledown Farm?" I said. "Never!" "I've seen the people," cries he; "an old fellow in a nightcap and spectacles and a young lady."

"Hear the name, Bob?" "Hardware."

Mysterious tenants these newcomers turned out. As for the old man, he scarcely ever went outside his little garden. He was tall, decrepit, with a long white beard and heavy spectacles, and seemed in wretched health. But his daughter came into the village almost every day, and soon became a well-known character. She was a striking young woman, her age hardly more than twenty-two, but she looked six years older. Her figure was that of one in her career of school, her neck and head wonderfully graceful. She was mindful of the beauty of her figure, and wore her shawl cleverly so as to set herself off; and she knew that she had a pretty pair of feet, and let other people know it too. Her step was quick, and her carriage lively and alert. She had the whitest skin possible, a handsome face boldly cut, and two dark eyes easier noticed than forgotten.

I admired this young woman's appearance, yet something in her manner gave me a turn against her. There was wickedness in her eyes, and she was awkward, but my way of putting it is this: her eyes seemed such that, when you looked into them, your own were fastened for a moment, and in withdrawing your glance you seemed to draw the wicked eyes after you.

Our rectory, who made a point of calling on every new parishioner, poor or rich, very soon found his way to Tumbledown Farm. I asked him one morning who they were, and all he could tell me was the name, which I knew already.

"The young woman is his daughter, I suppose?" I said.

"She is; he calls her Vanity," replied the rector.

"Strangest name for a Christian I ever heard," I remarked. "Miss Vanity Hardware—sounds odd enough. Well, Vanity is that Vanity does."

That name of "Hardware" kept ringing in my ears, and made me more curious than ever to know something of the young woman who bore it. "Bide your time, John Book," said I to myself. "Everything will come to light if you wait long enough." And I was right.

Once or twice Mr. Hardware was seen in the village. He was very infirm, and used to drive in Jupp's fly. Hardware was tall, and looked venerable. He wore a brown cap with lappets over the ears and a long blue cloak with a cape. His hair you could scarcely see, but his beard was long and white, and his shoes were large, with knobs on the toes, which caught my eye as I watched him lumbering out of the carriage.

"Bunions," said I.

He could hardly rise from his seat, falling back twice, and slipped out at last by his daughter and the driver.

"Lumbago," said I again.

Then he was seized with a coughing fit that nearly shook him to pieces.

"Asthma," cried I the third time.

Almost immediately after, the father and daughter crossed over the street and entered my shop, he supporting himself on her arm, and leaning heavily on his stick besides. He fell into a chair with a great sigh of relief, and Miss Vanity came to the counter and made one or two purchases, the old man wheezing and mumbling to himself all the time.

In my little garden there was a blossomy sweet-smelling rose, which grew close beside a gnarled withered elder bush. Do you know, Miss Vanity, dressy and handsome young, standing beside this grumbling, antiquity, made me think of the rose and the elder?

Now begins the story proper. Just as I was thinking of the rose and the elder, a young fellow, whom I dearly loved, named Willie Snow, stepped into my shop. He was in haste, so, with one of his easy, pleasant nods, he asked Miss Vanity to allow him to be served before her, upon which she drew aside. I marked her watching him while he stood leaning carelessly against the counter, as taking a young fellow as one would meet in day's walk. There came over her face a look as if she would try to snare him, when she got a chance. She got the chance soon; for as Willie put the vial in his pocket he turned to thank her. She smiled and, having fixed her dark eyes upon him just for an instant, withdrew her gaze with an air of tender modesty that might melt any man's heart!

"Well done, Miss Vanity!" thinks I. "Next to being bashful, the prettiest thing in a pretty woman is to seem so."

But Willie, being not half my age, could not be expected to take the thing in this cool way. A light flashed in his soft gray eyes, surprise and pleasure mixing their rays, and the color deepened on his cheek. He hesitated.

"Good—good—morning," said he, with stammering lips. "Thank you!"

"You are very welcome."

Only four words, mark you. But how charming she looked! A thousand soft and winning beams played over her face, her voice had a melancholy ring, and her eyes dropped to the ground again. A creature—actress, from her pretty cheek to her heart's core!

Willie seemed struck and dazed; he gazed out silently, and she turned to me

again. I filled her orders. Then the old man hobbled out to the fly, dragging at his daughter's arm. I must say she seemed kind to him. He managed to get seated, and the carriage door was fastened. The vehicle and the crazy old gentleman went off together, creaking and groaning, jolting and jolting. And I here declare to you that though I disliked that young woman and despised her artful ways, yet when she was gone out of the shop I felt as if the sunlight had gone with her.

CHAPTER II.

Willie Snow, taking him all round, was one of the finest young men I ever knew. When he was only fifteen his father, a bank clerk, died suddenly, leaving behind him a widow, one son and seventy pounds a year. Mrs. Snow lived decently on her income and gave her son a good education; and in due time he got a situation at an iron works in the city, where he rapidly rose in the esteem of his employers. Willie had been a good son, and when, a year before this time, his mother died, he showed remarkable sorrow. He was now in an excellent position. In addition to all this, he was good-looking. His eyes were clear gray; his hair dark and thrown across his left temple in becoming irregularity; he was tall, and a particular melancholy in his expression made his kind, frank smile very pleasant to see. He loved the lad—every one loved the lad. The girls especially. At home he was a breaking fellow you could not find in all the West of England; and he broke hearts for one reason, just because he never tried. He won the girls' affections everywhere—he who never troubled his head about love.

Heard I said he did not trouble his head about love? I ought to qualify that statement; for just now he was on the point of being engaged to a thrifty managing girl, who had a small fortune of her own. This Miss Nancy Steele, of her own free will, fell desperately in love with Willie, and let him know it—cleverly, for she was clever in all things. I was not quite sure that he loved her back again, but the upshot was that affairs between the two were plainly nearing that point where the measure of the young woman's finger is taken. Only the final word had not been spoken. The fish had nibbled, was hooked, and Miss Nancy was just gathering her wrist to swish him on to the land.

The evening of the day upon which Willie met Miss Nancy Steele in my shop he looked in to see me. Something was on that young man's mind, and at last it came out.

"Singular old man I saw in your shop this morning."

"You thought so?" I replied.

"That young woman is his daughter, I suppose?"

"So I understand."

"Pretty sort of girl," he said, with make-believe indifference. "A very tolerable girl indeed."

"I call her a woman—full grown," said I, emphatically. "Knows more than nine men out of ten, I'll be bound."

A few days after Willie met Miss Nancy walking at her usual active pace, and looking as handsome as ever. The young man blushed like a girl fallen in love for the first time; the young woman preserved her easy air. Willie would have given a ten-pound note for any decent pretext under which he might have spoken to her. As a matter of fact, he stole only one shy glance in passing.

It was by no means easy to climb the fence of mystery that shut the Hardware from public view. A gossip named Miss Axford was especially anxious to discover everything about them. Though nearly eighty years of age, she was still sharp as a needle. Morning by morning she went round the village, hearing all she could, telling all she could. Miss Axford, as I have said, ran crazy in old age. One day she looked in, uttering with excitement, "I have heard some news at last," she cried.

"What may it be, ma'am?" "He drinks!"

"Old man?"

"Yes. Two dozen bottles of gin went up there last week—cordial gin. He is an old sot—a brute beast!" cried Miss Axford.

"Range old lady! But I have not inserted his name merely to fill up the page. That would be bad story telling. No, long enough after, on one awful day, I remembered Miss Axford and her discovery about the quarts of cordial gin."

CHAPTER III.

Meanwhile Willie Snow worked as hard as any of us to get at the secret. Still he found out nothing. His evening walk, however, was always uphill now. I dare say the sharp eyes of Vanity Hardware soon noticed him strolling past the farm every evening, for after a time she had learned to mark the signs of kindness. She met him occasionally on the unfrequented road; and how those dark staring eyes set his honest young heart beating none but himself knew.

On a particular evening in June, Willie pursued his upward way, coming to the turn of the road where on either side ran tall hedges, pink and white with flowers, that made the sunset air sweet like honey from their thousand breathing blossoms. Who should he see here but Miss Hardware. Of course she did not know he was near, innocent girl! She was trying might and main to catch at a spray of wild rose that hung temptingly out just beyond her reach. What an opening for Willie! He plucked up courage.

"Can I—can I—do that for you?"

She turned round her face bright with surprise and pleasure.

"Thank you. I do so wish for that particular rose."

If the spray had been twenty-five feet above his head, mark you, Willie would have secured it. In a moment he held the rose out to her, neatly trimmed by his ready pocket knife. She took it gracefully. Looping the spray round her rustic hat with skillful fingers, she stood before him, one arm raised over her head statue-like, while love and laughter played over her face.

"Beautiful! Isn't it?"

"Wonderful! Isn't it?" replied Willie, in a low earnest voice, and with such a sigh!

Then he walked on, intoxicated. Golden was the June that year. Long sunlit days passed into warm, cloudless evenings and breathless brilliant starry nights. Willie became more regular than ever in his uphill walks. Nor did Vanity give him any rebuff. Somehow she man-

aged to meet him constantly at one particular spot where tall trees shaded the road, and from which the distant landscape could be seen in perfect beauty.

So Vanity and Willie met frequently; he talking about weather, scenery, news, any trifle, while his heart was full of love; she, all glance and smile, letting off flights of arrowy plainties barbed with mock tenderness. Little suggestive sayings, laughs tipped with a sigh—all meant to insinuate "I am dying for you!" but quite capable, you observe, of being explained as meaning nothing at all.

What was Miss Nancy Steele doing all this time? Biting her finger nails, I suspect; tightening her lips, tossing her haughty head, clenching her fist, but not giving up the game for lost, not if her name was Nancy Steele. That Willie was cooling toward her she could not but discover. But Nancy was a long-headed girl. Other girls would have flown into a passion. Not Nancy! She may have fumed and sobbed, but this was in secret. She got scent of Willie's evening walks, and thought she might take a walk herself now and then.

By this artful conduct on the part of Miss Nancy, Willie was put in a fix. When they met she smiled and chatted as usual, never reproving his coldness even by a glance.

"Doctor," said Willie to me one evening, "I feel like a schemer. I have been rather sweet upon Nancy Steele for a long time. What must I do?"

"Marry her," I replied. "Take her to have and to hold from this day forward."

"But I don't love her," he answered, "and I do love Miss Hardware—passionately."

"Then let Miss Nancy know," I said, gravely. "Honor bright, Will."

"I will let her know," cried Willie—"this very night."

"Steady, my lad, steady," said I; "you have not asked the other girl yet. Wait and see, Will; wait and see. Steady does it."

(To be continued.)

"SUGAR AUNTS AND UNCLES."

Amusing New Year's Customs Among the Children of Belgium.

All over the broad earth children display the same characteristic at New Year's—they expect gifts, says the New York Herald. Sometimes they use every art in order to make their expectations realities. Sometimes they even resort to force to gain their ends. One amusing custom is found in Belgium. There, on St. Sylvester's day, the eve of New Year's day, the children strive to secure a "sugar uncle" or a "sugar aunt," as the relative who falls a victim to their wiles is technically termed.

On that day all the children of the household enter into a solemn conspiracy for the mutual good at the expense of the unwary adult whom they may entangle in the meshes of their intrigues.

They employ every artifice to get one of the older members of the household under lock and key. Early on that day the keys of all the doors in the house have mysteriously disappeared. They have been secreted by the children, who retain them, nearly for instant use whenever the occasion shall occur. Then strictest watch is maintained, to the end that some unsuspecting one may be alone in a room. An uncle enters a room to search for the paper which he has mislaid. Presto! There comes a pattering rattle of feet in the hallway, the door is slammed, the key rattles in the lock. The alarmed uncle springs to the door.

Woe betide him now if he be in a hurry, and if he be ungenerous, for he must yield to the terms of these youthful brigands before he can escape. He must solemnly covenant with them that he will pay to them whatsoever ransom they may demand ere the prison door will swing open. When the prisoner has promised all that is asked the triumphant company restore him to liberty.

Trying to Top the Crowd. He entered the car on which I was seated on the Sixth avenue elevated, and after a bit he leaned over and whispered in my ear:

"I'll be hanged if they haven't done it!"

"Done what?" I asked.

"Got my watch?"

"Who?"

"Dunno. Some feller picket it out of my pocket!"

"Well, that's too bad. You ought to have been more careful. Are you a stranger in the city?"

"Yes, perfect stranger. Got here only two hours ago. Say, it's immense, ain't it?"

"I don't exactly understand."

"Don't you, Wall, I do. Do you know what'll happen when I get back home?"

"The folks will laugh at you for losing your watch."

"Will they? Not as I know of. You just let me get down alongside the stove in White's grocery and tell the crowd that some feller down here in New York picked that watch off'n me and I never felt a touch and I'll be the biggest man in town for the next two weeks!"

"And if you lost your wallet you'd be a bigger man yet?"

"You bet I would! Here she is, stickin' in 'right out my pocket, and there's nine dollars in her out, and somebody'll sneak her out and not let me feel 'em I kin go home and knock the socks off'n the feller who was clubbed by a policeman and run over by a cable car down here!"—Detroit Free Press.

A Sham Battle.

In the show window of a Greenwich street saloon called the Defender, a very interesting performance takes place every day. The performance is a big black cat and a fat white rat.

The performance consists of a series of graceful gambols, in which the cat pats the rat with its soft paw, chases it about the window, catches it gently in its mouth, and otherwise disports itself. The rat, being unable to defend itself, is obliged to submit, though with a very bad grace. It is plain that it suffers more from terror than from physical pain, for the cat works with sheathed claws and is very gentle.

At times, when tormented to the very limit of desperation, the rat does the only thing that a defenseless creature can do under the circumstances. It turns sullenly at bay, sits up on its hind legs and makes a show of fighting. There are some who say they have seen the rat chase the cat around the window, but this is not very likely, unless, indeed, the cat permitted it in a spirit of fun.

It is said that a cat will never harm a white (or albino) rat, and will never go further than to play with it. Two different cats have been placed in the window on Greenwich street, and neither of them has done the rat any injury.—New York World.

THE LITTLE COMFORTER.

I shall not rail at fortune or at fate While in the dark or light I hear a footstep pattering to the gate That closes on the night. But for those little feet Each pathway shall be sweet— The sad stormy rimmed with rainbows, where the paths of angels meet!

I shall not rail at fortune or at fate While under Loye's own skies My little queen walks where the roses wait And wins me with her eyes. For in those eyes I seem To read the stars that stream On bright celestial meadows where the angels sing and dream!

I shall not rail at fortune or at fate While still I feel the beat Of her glad heart, and in life's twilight Of her laid heart, and in life's twilight

Her rosy lips and sweet! Lovely as still thou art, Rest on my heart, sweetheart! Till God's white angel smiling kiss lips and lives apart!

—FRANK L. STANTON.

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(To be continued.)

TRIAL BY FIRE.

The Major was one of the many well-born Englishmen who came to California with a younger son's portion and a small monthly allowance, and hope to make a fortune on a vineyard or a wheat ranch. The plan always looks feasible in England, and the agent assigns his victim that the £1,000 will buy a ten-acre plot, plant vines, build a decent bungalow and tide the owner over until the vines shall bear and bring him a harvest of good American gold.

The Major was going the way of many of his English friends. The £1,000 legacy was gone, and the monthly allowance of £20 (which, viewed from a distance, seemed large) always grew painfully small as it neared California, and the debts it was supposed to cover. The Major's little mountain vineyard had been destroyed by phylloxera, and he was living on the verge of ruin, and he was living on the verge of ruin, and he was living on the verge of ruin.

Over the mountain side, a half mile away, Pete leaned on his hoe, and watched a thread of fire crawling, like a red snake, through the underbrush of chapparal and manzanita. He knew only too well that no human power could stop it, and within a few minutes the gentle breeze would cause a flying spark to fall upon the long, dry grass, and puff—the crawling snake would become a great swirling, galloping mass of flame and smoke, and would pass over the place where Ellie sat sulking and dreaming. Pete had firmly determined to leave the ranch. He would not—but the fire was on fire and Pete made a dash for the house yelling at the top of his lungs for the Major.

The volume of smoke was rising high when Ellie rose to her feet and sniffed the air. Before she could gather up her points a thin rim of fire ran along the top of the little hill above her. The small birds and insects rose from the ground with a whirl, and scattered down the hillside. Ellie glanced quickly backward, and saw the fire licking up the grass as it bore down upon her and the smoke rolling heavenward in dense, sooty clouds. She did not lose her presence of mind, but remembered a small ploughed field a short distance away, where the flames could not reach her, and ran nimbly down the hill, her fluttering skirts gathering cockle-burns and sticker weed as she sped.

When she was fairly on the ploughed ground and gasping for breath she saw the young Englishman tearing along the hill at a frantic rate. Through the smoke he looked pale and frightened. Ellie felt a thrill of satisfaction; here was the longed-for proof of his love, he thought she was in danger and had come to her rescue. A deep blush mounted to her cheeks and her heart beat to suffocation. But he did not seem to see her. It was evident to her that he was crazed with fear and would plunge into the fire in search of her. Merciful God! he would be burned.

"Brompton!" she screamed; "Brompton, I am here, safe!"

The fire was very close and she had to throw herself upon the ground to escape being burned. She gave one more despairing cry as she felt the hot breath scorching her clothing:

"Brompton! Brompton! Brompton!"

A great wave of smoke and flame swept around the edges of the ploughed ground, and for a minute nothing could be seen or heard. Fortunately for Ellie, the dry grass burned like tinder, and the fire was soon roaring down the hill toward the valley.

When Ellie, choked and frightened, lifted her head, she saw the thin, long, scantly-clad legs of her husband bounding over the blackened earth toward her. His duck trousers were smeared with soot, and he had a wet blanket about his shoulders. He could not speak, but caught Ellie in his arms and burst into stifled sobs.

Back of them was heard the voice of Brompton Edwards.

"Hello, there, Major," he called; "I had a very narrow squeak of it. My hammock and books are burned to tinder by this. By jove, old fellow, you are burned yourself, aren't you? Your wife was safe enough. I knew she could take care of herself."

But Ellie buried her head in the wet blanket with a shudder, and burst into tears of shame and contrition.

"Well, well," gasped Pete, who had stumbled up the hill with a bundle of wet sacks, "I never was so playfully scared in my life. Thought you'd be burned sure, Miss Ellie. Me an' the Major'll have a fine time next week clearing—"

For Pete had reconsidered his ninety-and-ninth vow. Indeed, it was only a week later when he was speculating if ever there was a happier couple than the Major and his Ellie. And Pete beamed as he thought of the ignoble part Brompton Edwards played on the day of the fire.—San Francisco Argonaut.

After a week had been given up to driving his protegee about the valley and introducing him to the English colony, the Major returned to his daily routine of pruning olive trees and digging out worm-eaten grape vines. Ellie soon discovered in the young man's clean-cut features and fine athletic figure an entirely new field for art study, and Edwards found the time pass more pleasantly as a model than as an embryo rancher. They were together during most of the daylight hours. When

Brompton was not posing for a wild Norseman or a Greek hero, he was sitting very close to Ellie, criticizing, in soft, caressing tones, the sketches of himself which she had been doing. Without actually straying from the path of duty, Ellie was treading on dangerously uncertain territory. She quite frankly admitted to herself that she was pretty and charming, and, being of that mind, she did not repress comparisons between her husband and the younger man.

Matters had arrived at a state where a warm-hearted, but vain, young woman needed a friend with the strength to hold up a good, powerful, unrelenting mirror for her to gaze into. Pete could have held up the mirror with right good will, but he did not know how. In those days he followed the Major around with dog-like devotion, and only glowered when Ellie came out to the orchard one morning with her paints and succeeded in bringing upon herself a scolding from her over-indulgent husband. She held her head very high and stiff, and marched over the hill some distance away, where she seated herself and pretended to sketch, but was in reality nursing her injured feelings to keep them alive. The Major watched her disappear with a pained expression on his good-natured face, and then went dejectedly into the house. Pete was deeply incensed against Ellie, and made another solemn vow to desert the ranch. It was the ninety-and-ninth time that he had done so, and this time he sealed the vow with an oath.

The long grass on the Napa hills was burned and crisp, and Ellie was dabbling yellow ochre and burnt umber over her canvas with vicious strokes. She was not giving any attention to her work, however, for an athletic form stood between her and the landscape, and she was indulging in a very foolish day-dream. To do the little woman justice she was not in love with Brompton, but her vanity had been stimulated to such wonderful activity by his youthful gallantries, that she fancied he was deeply infatuated with her.

Over the mountain side, a half mile away, Pete leaned on his hoe, and watched a thread of fire crawling, like a red snake, through the underbrush of chapparal and manzanita. He knew only too well that no human power could stop it, and within a few minutes the gentle breeze would cause a flying spark to fall upon the long, dry grass, and puff—the crawling snake would become a great swirling, galloping mass of flame and smoke, and would pass over the place where Ellie sat sulking and dreaming. Pete had firmly determined to leave the ranch. He would not—but the fire was on fire and Pete made a dash for the house yelling at the top of his lungs for the Major.

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NOTES AND COMMENTS.

The Japanese Government has just placed orders for 18,000 watches, not to cost more than \$2.50 each. They are to be distributed among the officers and men who distinguished themselves in the late war, and are to take the place of the medals usually awarded at the close of national hostilities.

Already Alfred Austin, England's custom-made Laureate, is paying the penalty of greatness. His mail is enormous, and the autograph fiend is after him in force. One of the curious features of the case is that Mr. Austin receives as many requests for his signature from the United States as he does from England. Olney and Lodge should look into this matter.

Benjamin D. Stillman, of Brooklyn, becomes the oldest living Yale graduate by the death of Charles L. Powell, of Alexandria, Va. Mr. Powell was born in 1804, and was graduated from Yale in the class of 1823. For several years his name has appeared first in the list of living Yale graduates. Below his name, in the class of 1824, was that of Mr. Stillman, who was born just one year after Mr. Powell.

There seems to be little doubt that John B. Robinson, of South Africa, is the richest man in the world. His fortune is estimated at \$350,000,000. In 1878 Robinson was in debt. He had kept a grocery store in the Orange Free State, but he could not make both ends meet. He and his wife begged their way for 300 miles to Kimberley. Here Robinson laid the foundation of his enormous fortune by picking up a rough diamond worth \$1,200. His ambition now is to be worth a billion.

Electricity is likely to be an important factor in the agriculture of the future, according to the Italian Professor A. Aloi, who has collected evidence showing that both terrestrial and atmospheric electricity are favorable to the germination of seeds and the growth of plants. M. Bonnier has found in the course of his experiments with continuous electric light on plants, that Alpine plants, cultivated under constant light, present points of structure identical with those of Arctic plants, which grow under the midnight sun.

A general, simultaneous census of the world for the year 1900 is asked for by the International Statistical Institute. It can be taken if slight modifications in the time of their regular censuses are made by the chief countries of the world. Portugal, Denmark, the United States, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, Hungary and Sweden will regularly take their censuses on different days of the year 1900. Holland on the last day of 1899, Norway on the first day of 1901, and Great Britain, France and Italy later in that year.

Prof. Becker, of the United