

that he knew every young lady of any prominence in the place. When I had described my heroine to him, he thoughtfully shook his head.

"I don't know a girl in Leavenworth that comes anywhere near that description," he said. "The lady you met must have been a stranger, and probably took the next stage for parts unknown."

"That was to me a most depressing view of the situation, and my hopes went several degrees lower.

"It was several weeks after this conversation that Stanley prevailed upon me to accept an invitation to attend a dancing party at the residence of a leading citizen of the town. We arrived late, and dancing had already begun; so we stationed ourselves in an alcove and watched the dancers, while Stanley entertained me with bits of gossip information relating to various persons present.

"That little lady dancing with Captain Patton is Miss Villars," he was saying. "Her father owns half the river steamers between here and St. Louis, and—"

"Just at that point I caught his arm with a clutch that made him wince.

"Stanley," I said, in suppressed excitement, "I have found her!"

"The deuce you have!" he answered, his gaze following mine curiously.

"She is standing in the archway between the parlors," I went on hurriedly, "talking with an elderly, military looking man. She is dressed in some thin, black stuff, and her beautiful hair glints in the gaslight like gold."

"Why, bless my soul!" he said. "As I'm a sinner, you've been raving all this time over Tom Poindexter's wife! You called her a girl, you see, and that threw me off the track. I never thought of Helen Poindexter. She is, certainly, the handsomest woman in town, and not over twenty-three; but—"

"Tom Poindexter's wife!" I repeated, mechanically, while a horrible impulse came upon me to find Tom Poindexter, whoever or wherever he might be, and strangle the life out of him.

"Well," said Stanley, "nobody knows exactly whether she is his wife or his widow. She herself doesn't know."

"Stanley," I gasped, "are you crazy? What, in heaven's name, do you mean?"

"Stanley turned and glanced at me, then slipped his hand through my arm.

"Come out, Elvers," he said; "you are attracting attention."

"He drew me away from the crowd, across a wide corridor, into a quiet, little smoking room, at the moment untenanted.

"Now," said he, "sit down and have a cigar, and I'll tell you, in a few words, all I know about Helen

Poindexter; then, if you are the sensible fellow I think you are, you will put her out of your thoughts at once and forever."

"More easily said than done," was my thought; but aloud I only said: "Go on; tell me what you meant about her not knowing whether she is a wife or a widow."

"The tale is soon told," said Stanley. "Six years ago, when a mere child of seventeen, Helen Marsh married a handsome scoundrel named Poindexter. He only lived with her a few months, during which time it became known that he was a professional gambler, a deserter from the Union army, and a bounty-jumper. Suddenly, without a word of explanation or farewell to his young wife, he disappeared from the town and the country so effectually that no trace of his whereabouts has ever been discovered, except a vague rumor of his having joined a party of emigrants bound for the far west, who were afterward said to have been massacred by Indians somewhere on the plains. That rumor, however, has never been regarded as well founded, and for six long years Helen Poindexter has not known whether she were wife or widow. It is a terrible position to be in; but she has borne up bravely, supporting herself meantime by teaching, and deporting herself in every way as if her husband were by her side. She is a grand woman, Elvers, and I don't wonder you are hard hit; but, my poor fellow, there is but one way in which you can ever hope to reach Helen Poindexter."

"And that way?" I quickly asked.

"To lay before her incontrovertible evidence of Tom Poindexter's death."

"You forget the divorce court," I suggested. "He deserted her; she might have been divorced long ago."

"Even so, she might; but she hasn't been, you see. She isn't that sort."

"But if she loved some one else, Stanley, might she not be persuaded?" I asked, anxious for his opinion.

"Elvers, old boy, I don't know, of course, just what a man like you might do with her; but I have my doubts. She has not gone through these six years without being loved and sought after by more than one good man; yet she has stood firm, and has held honor and loyalty above all else. Take my advice and keep away from her, unless you are rich enough to employ a detective to find Tom Poindexter's grave."

"Something told me that Stanley's advice was sound and that I had better follow it; but something else—some inward sense, sweeter and stronger than prudence—drew me to Helen Poindexter, and before the evening waned I had gained an introduction to her, had held her hand for an instant in mine, had reveled in the music of her voice, and read in her