

Her companion, a pale-faced youth, whose well-wrapped form and occasional cough betokened recent convalescence, simply murmured, "Pretty fair."

"Don't be so prosy, John," was the impatient rejoinder. "Look! Here we are, after only a few minutes' ride from the noisy den where we've been cooped for weeks, waiting for you to recover, you know, dear, and behold! Here are the purple depths of mystic shades, fit abodes for Doric muses!"

"Bother the Doric muses, Annie. They were a savage lot, the whole of 'em. You know I never cared for Druid's 'Mystics' or anything else pertaining to our savage ancestry. Can't you give us a suggestion of something practical? See, for instance, if you could grow radishes or even sprout white beans out here."

"Your illness has left you in an irascible state, John. Of course this road doesn't lead directly to agricultural fields, though, like the mosquitoes, they're 'on ahead a-piece,' and will surely be found whether you look for them or not, if you go far enough. It is your business to get well, John; and to be a successful convalescent you must look for more cheery sights than radish beds or sprouted beans."

On either hand were grassy steeps, rugged rocks, leafy coverts, rustic bridges, tinkling waterfalls and stately, sighing evergreens, which are wont to woo the lover of nature to their sylvan retreats, while below them lay the busy city with its whirl of travel and stir of trade. Above them rose the slopes and steeps of City View park, where nature and art have united their forces to beautify the landscape, combining the intelligent skill of man with the prodigality of opportunity afforded by his father, Water, and mother, Earth.

"Since you have ceased to love me, Annie, there is nothing left in life that has any charm for me."

"Who said I'd ceased to love you, John? Or are you losing your senses? Your manner frets me."

They were climbing to an overhanging rock, half hidden by a wilderness of ferns and hazels, among which budding shrubs of the Oregon currant, *Ribes Sanguineum*, were already exhibiting their white and scarlet graces.

The young man caught an overhanging bough of a friendly tree and swung himself to a seat on the rock where the shrubbery was thinnest and sat there panting, while his companion, her cheeks flushed from climbing, seated herself a moment later by his side.

A chipmunk darted in and out among last year's ferns, its keen eyes twinkling with mingled caution and curiosity. Annie Vale threw the welcome intruder some crumbs from a lunch basket she had wisely provided in spite of John's protest, well knowing the power of the convalescent's appetite. The tiny squirrel advanced cautiously and with graceful motion to secure the crumbs, and was settling itself for an enjoyable meal, when a Mongolian pheasant swooped down upon the food and frightened the timid animal from the scene.

"That's just the way the world wags," said John Landes, after an interval of coughing. "It's every fellow for himself and the devil for the hindmost."

Annie Vale laid her hand upon his arm just in time to divert his aim from the beautiful bird at which he assayed to shy a stone.

"Don't be cruel, John," she said, softly. There were tears in her eyes and a suspicion of sobbing in her throat as she looked at him tenderly.

"All the world is cruel," was the curt response.

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that, John. The world is as we make it—for ourselves."

She pulled down a spray of half-opened currant blossoms and began picking the petals to pieces, nervously. John eyed her a moment in silence. A song bird arched its throat and began a thrilling roundelay, joined by the twittering accompaniment of its mate in the nest over their heads.

It was a glorious April day. Below them lay the Cornell road as if asleep in the hazy quiet of the lazy sunshine. The chipmunk twittered in its hiding place, and the pheasant, its appetite appeased, flew away with a whirring sweep. Beyond them, where the road makes a turn around the hill, stretched a rude barricade, or railing, guarding the lower edge of the grade, near the top of which was an open phaeton, with a man and woman, the latter driving.

"How soon are we to have a turnout like that, John?"

"Never, Annie. This accursed cough hangs on like grim death hold of a dead darkie. I'm not only out of work but out of money. It was a cruel thing for me to ask you to come out here from your Massachusetts home to marry me. You found me, not as I hoped you would, well and prospering, with my own hired house ready to receive you, and money in the bank to pay the first installment on our suburban property. Instead of that, you met me at my dingy, bachelor boarding house, flat on my back with the prevailing epidemic. It was good of you—I mean you meant it to be good of you to

come right in and nurse me and bring me back to life; but your good intentions missed fire. They flashed in the pan."

"What do you mean, John Landes?" cried Annie, almost fiercely.

If he had been nothing to her; if there had been no prospect of his becoming her husband, this high-bred "superfluous woman" of the overcrowded Bay state would have been amused at his petulance. She was no novice in the care of invalids, having performed the various offices of nurse and housekeeper for her father since her mother's death; a sad event that had kept her a prisoner for ten years subsequently in her father's house as his ministering angel, while John Landes, the lover of her childhood, was seeking his fortune on the Pacific coast; a fortune which at thirty seemed farther from his grasp than the *ignis fatuus* he had begun to seek at twenty.

There was silence for a full minute. John toyed aimlessly with the dried ferns at his feet; Annie threw the chipmunk a fresh supply of crumbs, and the birds twittered lovingly among the leaves over their heads.

"Would you like to be rid of me, John?"

There was a tremor in Annie's voice, but she looked him in the eye with apparent steadiness and awaited his reply. The phaeton on the Cornell road had turned and was coming down the grade. The horse suddenly took fright and became unmanageable. Annie's pale face blanched with terror.

"For God's sake, John!" she said, hoarsely. "It's *he!* We must save them!"

"Blanked if I will," was the curt response. "He's given me trouble enough already."

"But what of *her*, John? Surely you are not wholly heartless."

There was a low place in the rude railing toward which the frightened horse rushed, and the frail phaeton, as the animal jumped, caught heavily upon the logs, smashing it to pieces, but breaking the horse's fall and lodging the occupants of the vehicle in a heap on the road side. Annie Vale clambered hurriedly up the rugged hillside and extricated the horse from his peril among the broken harness turned him loose upon the grade, where he began to browse upon the green twigs at the roadside, as if at peace with all the world.

The gentleman who had been thrown from the phaeton arose upon his elbows and rubbed his eyes in a bewildered way. His companion sat up on the ground and locked her hands around her knees.

"Are you badly hurt? Are any bones broken? What frightened your horse? Can I do anything for you?" asked Annie, all her questions coming in a breath, as she shook one and then the other of the victims of the accident.

John Landes came up presently, his cough forgotten and his manner stern. He began gathering the broken pieces of the phaeton together in silence.

"I wished it had killed him, blanked if I don't!" he said, under his breath.

Annie watched him furtively, a dull aching at her heart. Was she to be forever disappointed in John? She could retreat from her contract; could refuse to marry him if necessary; and a refusal would certainly be necessary if he continued to enact the role of a petulant and jealous convalescent.

"It's that blankety-blanked booby that hung around when I was at the worst, and I won't countenance him," brooded John.

Annie brought water from the trickling brook by the roadside and bathed the gentleman's face and gave him a reviving draught.

"Are you better now?" she asked, tenderly.

"S' death!" muttered John, savagely.

The lady rose to her feet and tried her limbs, delighted to find no bones broken.

"Only a few bruises and scratches, dear," she said, kneeling beside her companion. "I hope and trust you have come off as well."

"John! John Landes!" cried Annie Vale. "Come here! I've a grand surprise for you. You were not well enough to hear about it when Uncle Jack, my father's brother, came to see us at the bachelors' boarding house. And, when you got better and I saw you were a trifle jealous, I thought I'd help you to recover by giving you something to think about besides your ailment; so I let you keep on thinking you had a rival. Now let me introduce my uncle, Jackson Vale, Mr. Landes. And this is Aunt Susie, his wife."

John came forward, looking sheepish and awkward, but remembered instantly to hide his confusion by a cough.

"We had a narrow escape, Susie," said Uncle Jack, "but it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. But for this accident we would have missed our relatives entirely, for we were to have taken the steamer within an hour for Alaska. I've tried several times to meet your—ahem—Mr. Landes, Annie, since he's been upon his feet, but I've been studiously avoided or mercifully snubbed—I hardly know which you'd call it."