

As she did not offer to touch the mis- sive, His Highness presently sat down and crowded up against her knees. Then he laid the letter in her lap.

Her expression became inscrutable as she picked up the letter; while she was reading it there was color in her cheeks; after she had read it there was less.

"I see not necessity," she said to His Highness—"I see no necessity for his go- ing. I think I ought to tell him so. . . . He overestimates the 'mportance of a matter which does not concern him. . . . He is sublimely self-conscious, . . . a typical man. And if he presumes to believe that the hazard of our encounter is of the slightest moment . . . to me . . .

The dog dropped his head in her lap.

"I wish you wouldn't do that!" she said, almost sharply, but there was a dry catch in her throat when she spoke, and she laid one fair hand on the head of His Highness.

A few moments later she went down- stairs to the great hall, where she found Colonel Hyssop and Major Brent just finishing their morning cocktails.

When they could at last comprehend that she never began her breakfast with a cocktail, they conducted her solemnly to the breakfast-room, seated her with empressment, and the coffee was served.

It was a delicious, old-fashioned, coun- try breakfast—crisp trout, bacon, eggs, and mounds of fragrant flapjacks.

"Langham's gone off to the West Branch; left duty's compliments and all that sort of thing for you," observed the Colonel, testing his soffee with an air.

His Highness, who had sniffed the bacon, got up on a chair where he could sit and view the table. Moisture gather- ed on his jet-black nose; he licked his jowl.

"You poor darling!" cried his mistress, rising impulsively, with her plate in her hand. She set the plate on the floor. It was cleaned with a snap, then carefully polished.

"You are fond of your dog, madam," said the Major, much interested.

"He's a fine one," added the Colonel. "Gad! I took him for Langham's cham- pion at first."

She bent her head over the dog's plate.

Later she walked to the porch, fol- lowed by His Highness.

A lovely little path invited them on— a path made springy by trodden leaves; and the dog and his mistress strolled forth among clumps of hazel and silver- birches, past ranks of alders and Indian- willows, on across log bridges spanning tiny threads of streams which poured into the stony river.

The unceasing chorus of the birds freshened like wind in her ears. Spring echoes sounded from blue distances; the solemn congress of the forest trees in session murmured of summers past and summers to come.

How could her soul sink in the pres- ence of the young world's uplifting?

Her dog came back and looked up into her eyes. With a cry, which was half laughter, she raced with him along the path, scattering the wild birds into flight from bush and thicket.

Breathless, rosy, she halted at the river's shallow edge.

Flung full length on the grass, she dipped her white fingers in the river, and dropped wind-flowers on the ripples to watch them dance away.

She listened to the world around her; it had much to say to her if she would

only believe it. But she forced her mind back to her husband and lay brooding.

An old man in leggings and corduroys came stumping along the path; His Highness heard him coming and turned his keen head. Then he went and stood in front of his mistress, calm, inquisitive, dangerous.

"Mornin', miss," said the keeper; "I guess you must be one of our folks."

"I am staying at the club-house," she said, smiling, and sitting up on the grass.

"I'm old Peter, one o' the guards," he said. "Fine mornin', miss, but a leetle bright for the fish—though I ain't deny- in' that a small dark fly'd raise 'em; no'm. If I was sot on ketchin' a mess o' fish, I guess a hare's-ear would do the business; yes'm. I jest passed Mr. Langham down to the forks, and I seed he was a-chuekin' a hare's-ear; an' he riz 'em, too; yes'm."

"How long have you been a keeper here?" she asked.

"How long, 'm? Waal, I was the fust- est guard they had; yes'm. I live down here a piece. They bought my water rights; yes'm. An' they give me the job. The president he sez to me, 'Peter,' he sez, jest like that—'Peter, you was raised here; you know all them brooks an' rivers like a mink; you stay right here an' watch 'em, an' I'll do the squar' by ye,' he sez, jest like that. An' he done it; yes'm."

"So you knew the president, then?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Knew him?—him? Yes'm."

The old man laughed a hollow, tooth- less laugh, and squinted out across the dazzling river.

"Knew him twenty year, I did. A good man, and fair at that. Why, I've seen him settin' jest where you're settin' this minute—seen him a hundred times a-settin' there."

"Fishing?" she said, in an awed voice.

"Sometimes. Sometimes he was a-drink- in' out o' that silver pocket-pistol o' his'n. He got drunk a lot up here; but he didn't drink alone; no'm. There wasn't a stingy hair in his head; he—"

"Do you mean the president?" she said incredulously, almost angrily.

"Him? Yes'm. Him an' Colonel Hys- sop an' Major Brent; they had good times in them days."

"You knew the president before his marriage," she observed, coldly.

"Him? He wasn't never married, miss!" said the old man, scornfully.

"Are you sure?" she asked, with a troubled smile.

"Sure? Yes'm. Why, the last time he was up here, three year come July Fourth, I seen him a-kissin' an' a-huggin' of old man Dawson's darter—"

She was on her feet in a flash. The old man stood there smiling his senile smile and squinting out across the water, absorbed in his garrulous reminiscence.

"Yes'm; all the folks down to the vil- lage was fond o' the president, he was that jolly and free, an' no stuck-up city airs; no'm; jest free and easy, an' a-sparkin' the 'gals with the best o' them—"

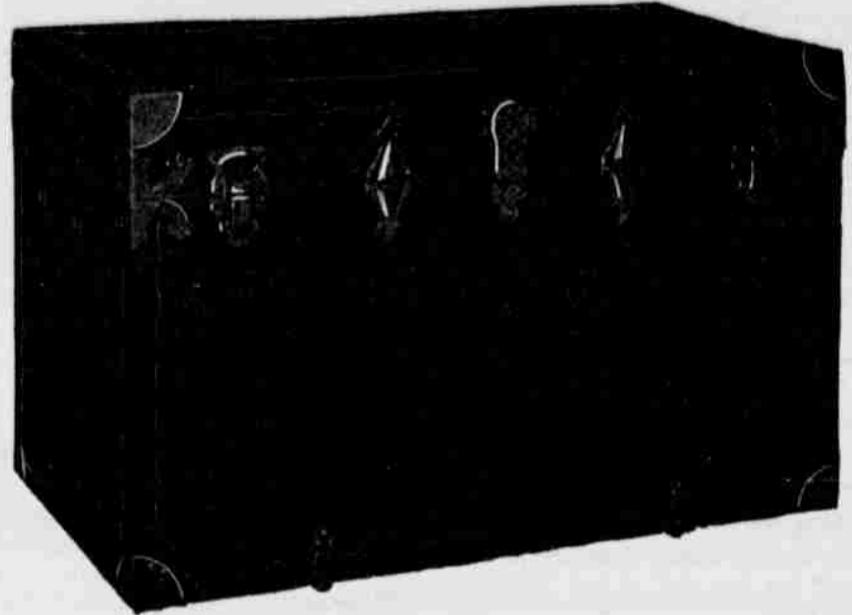
The old man laughed and crossed his arms under the barrel of his shot-gun.

"Folks said he might o' married old man Dawson's darter if he'd lived. I dun'no. I guess it was all fun. But I hear the gal took on awful when they told her he was dead; yes'm."

## VI

Towards evening Langham waded across the river, drew in his dripping

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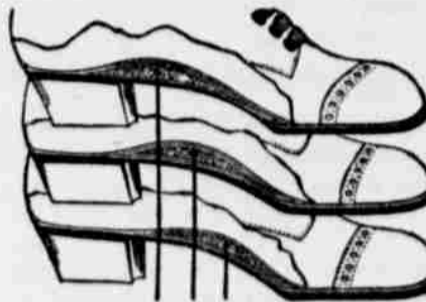
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