CHAPTER IV

"JUDGE BASS AND PARTY"

CYNTHIA was deprived, too, of that thrilling first view of the capital from the train which she had pictured, for night had fallen when they reached Washington likewise. As the train slowed down, she leaned a little out of the window and looked at the shabby houses and shabby streets revealed by the flickering lights in the lamp-posts. Finally they came to a shabby station, were seized upon by a grinning darky hackman, who would not take no for an answer, and were rattled away to the hotel. Although he had been to Washington but once in his life before, as a Lincoln elector, Jethro was greeted as an old acquaintance by this clerk also.

"Glad to see you, Judge," said he, genially. "Train late? You've come purty nigh missin' supper."

A familiar of great men, the clerk was not offended when he got no response to his welcome. Cynthia and Ephraim, intent on getting rid of some of the dust of their journey, followed the colored hall-boy up the stairs. Jethro stood poring over the register, when a distinguished-looking elderly gentleman with a heavy gray beard and eyes full of shrewdness and humor paused at the desk to ask a question.

"Er — Senator?"

The senator (for such he was, although he did not represent Jethro's state) turned and stared, and then held out his hand with unmistakable warmth.

"Jethro Bass," he exclaimed, "upon my word! What are you doing in Washington?"

Jethro took the hand, but he did not answer the question.

"Er — Senator — when can I see the President?"

"Why," answered the senator, somewhat taken aback, — "why, to-night, if you like. I'm going to the White House in a few minutes and I think I can arrange it."

"T-to-morrow afternoon — t-to-morrow afternoon?"

The senator cast his eye over the swallow-tail coat and stove-pipe hat tilted back, and laughed.

"Thunder!" he exclaimed, "you haven't changed a bit. I'm beginning to look like an old man; but that milk-and-crackers diet seems to keep you young, Jethro. I'll fix it for to-morrow afternoon."

"W-what time — two?"

"Well, I'll fix it for two to-morrow afternoon. I never could understand you, Jethro; you don't do things like other men. Do I smell gunpowder? What's up now — what do you want to see Grant about?"

Jethro cast his eye around the corridor, where a few men were taking their ease after supper, and looked at the senator mysteriously.

"Any place where we can talk?" he demanded.

"We can go into the writing room and shut the door," answered the senator, more amused than ever.

When Cynthia came downstairs, Jethro was standing with the gentleman in the corridor leading to the dining room, and she heard the gentleman say as he took his departure: —

"I haven't forgotten what you did for us in '70, Jethro. I'll go right along and see to it now."

Cynthia liked the gentleman's looks, and rightly surmised that he was one of the big men of the nation. She was about to ask Jethro his name when Ephraim came limping along and put the matter out of her mind, and the three went into the almost empty dining room. There they were served with elaborate attention by a darky waiter who had, in some mysterious way, learned Jethro's name and title. Cynthia reflected with pride that Jethro, too, was one of the nation's great men, who could get anything he wanted simply by coming to the capital and asking for it.

Ephraim was very much excited on finding himself in Washington, the sight of the place reviving in his mind a score of forgotten incidents of the war. After supper they found seats in a corner of the corridor, where a number of people were scattered about, smoking and talking. It did not occur to Jethro or Cynthia, or even to Ephraim, that these people were all of the male sex, and on the other hand the guests of the hotel were apparently used once in a while to see a lady from the country seated there. At any rate, Cynthia was but a young girl, and her two companions, however unusual their appearance, were clearly most respectable. Jethro, his hands in his pockets and his hat tilted, sat on the small of his back rapt in meditation; Cynthia, her head awhirl, looked around her with sparkling eyes; while Ephraim was smoking a cigar he had saved for just such a festal occasion. He did not see the stout man with the button and corded hat until he was almost on top of him.

"Eph Prescott, I believe!" exclaimed the stout one. "How be you, Comrade?"

Heedless of his rheumatism, Ephraim sprang to his feet and dropped the cigar, which the stout one picked up with much difficulty.

"Well," said Ephraim, in a voice that shook with unwonted emotion, "you kin skin me if it ain't Amasy Beard!" His eye travelled around Amasa's figure. "Wouldn't a-knowed you, I swan, I wouldn't. Why, when I seen you last, Amasy, your stomach was havin' all it could do to git hold of your backbone."

Cynthia laughed outright, and even Jethro sat up and smiled.

"When was it?" said Amasa, still clinging on to Ephraim's hand and incidentally to the cigar, which Ephraim had forgotten; "Beaver Creek, wahn't it?"

"July 10, 1863," said Ephraim, instantly.

Gradually they reached a sitting position, the cigar was restored to its rightful owner, and Mr. Beard was introduced, with some ceremony, to Cynthia and Jethro. From Beaver Creek they began to fight the war over again,

backward and forward, much to Cynthia's edification, when her attention was distracted by the entrance of a street band of wind instruments. As the musicians made their way to another corner and began tuning up, she glanced mischievously at Jethro, for she knew his peculiarities by heart. One of these was a most violent detestation of any but the best music. He had often given her this excuse, laughingly, for not going to meeting in Coniston. How he had come by his love for good music, Cynthia never knew — he certainly had not heard much of it.

Suddenly a great volume of sound filled the corridor, and the band burst forth into what many supposed to be "The Watch on the Rhine." Some people were plainly delighted; the veterans, once recovered from their surprise, shouted their reminiscences above the music, undismayed; Jethro held on to himself until the refrain, when he began to squirm, and as soon as the tune was done and the scattering applause had died down, he reached over and grabbed Mr. Amasa Beard by the knee. Mr. Beard did not immediately respond, being at that moment behind logworks facing a rebel charge; he felt vaguely that some one was trying to distract his attention, and in some lobe of his brain was registered the fact that that particular knee had gout in it. Jethro increased the pressure, and then Mr. Beard abandoned his logworks and swung around with a snort of pain.

"H-how much do they git for that noise — h-how much do they git?"

Mr. Beard tenderly lifted the hand from his knee and stared at Jethro with his mouth open, like a man aroused from a bad dream.

"Who? What noise?" he demanded.

"The Dutchmen," said Jethro. "H-how much do they git for that noise?"

"Oh!" Mr. Beard glanced at the band and began to laugh. He thought Jethro a queer customer, no doubt, but he was a friend of Comrade Prescott's. "By gum!" said Mr. Beard, "I thought for a minute a rebel chain-shot had took my leg off. Well, sir, I guess that band

gets about two dollars. They've come in here every evening since I've been at the hotel."

"T-two dollars? Is that the price? Er — you say two dollars is their price?"

"Thereabouts," answered Mr. Beard, uneasily. Veteran as he was, Jethro's appearance and earnestness were a little alarming.

"You say two dollars is their price?"

"Thereabouts," shouted Mr. Beard, seating himself on the edge of his chair.

But Jethro paid no attention to him. He rose, unfolding by degrees his six feet two, and strode diagonally across the corridor toward the band leader. Conversation was hushed at the sight of his figure, a titter ran around the walls, but Jethro was oblivious to these things. He drew a great calfskin wallet from an inside pocket of his coat, and the band leader, a florid German, laid down his instrument and made an elaborate bow. Jethro waited until the man had become upright and then held out a two-dollar bill.

"Is that about right for the performance?" he said — "is that about right?"

"Ja, mein Herr," said the man, nodding vociferously.

"I want to pay what's right — I want to pay what's right," said Jethro.

"I thank you very much, sir," said the leader, finding his English, "you haf pay for all."

"P-paid for everything — everything to-night?" demanded Jethro.

The leader spread out his hands.

"You haf pay for one whole evening," said he, and bowed again.

"Then take it, take it," said Jethro, pushing the bill into the man's palm; "but don't you come back to-night — don't you come back to-night."

The amazed leader stared at Jethro — and words failed him. There was something about this man that compelled him to obey, and he gathered up his followers and led the way silently out of the hotel. Roars of laughter and

applause arose on all sides; but Jethro was as one who heard them not as he made his way back to his seat again.

"You did a good job, my friend," said Mr. Beard, approvingly. "I'm going to take Eph Prescott down the street to see some of the boys. Won't you come, too?"

Mr. Beard doubtless accepted it as one of the man's eccentricities that Jethro did not respond to him, for without more ado he departed arm in arm with Ephraim. Jethro was looking at Cynthia, who was staring toward the desk at the other end of the corridor, her face flushed, and her fingers closed over the arms of her chair. It never occurred to Jethro that she might have been embarrassed.

"W-what's the matter, Cynthy?" he asked, sinking into the chair beside her.

Her breath caught sharply, but she tried to smile at him. He did not discover what was the matter until long afterward, when he recalled that evening to mind. Jethro was a man used to hotel corridors, used to sitting in an attitude that led the unsuspecting to believe he was half asleep; but no person of note could come or go whom he did not remember. He had seen the distinguished party arrive at the desk, preceded by a host of bell-boys with shawls and luggage. On the other hand, some of the distinguished party had watched the proceeding of paying off the band with no little amusement. Miss Janet Duncan had giggled audibly, her mother had smiled, while her father and Mr. Worthington had pretended to be deeply occupied with the hotel register. Somers was not there. Bob Worthington laughed heartily with the rest until his eye, travelling down the line of Jethro's progress, fell on Cynthia, and now he was striding across the floor toward them. And even in the horrible confusion of that moment Cynthia had a vagrant thought that his clothes had an enviable cut and became him remarkably.

"Well, of all things, to find you here!" he cried; "this is the best luck that ever happened. I am glad to see you. I was going to steal away to Brampton for a couple of days before the term opened, and I meant to look you up there.

And Mr. Bass," said Bob, turning to Jethro, "I'm glad to see you too."

Jethro looked at the young man and smiled and held out his hand. It was evident that Bob was blissfully unaware that hostilities between powers of no mean magnitude were about to begin; that the generals themselves were on the ground, and that he was holding treasonable parley with the enemy. The situation appealed to Jethro, especially as he glanced at the backs of the two gentlemen facing the desk. These backs seemed to him full of expression.

"Th-thank you, Bob, th-thank you," he answered.

"I like the way you fixed that band," said Bob; "I haven't laughed as much for a year. You hate music, don't you? I hope you'll forgive that awful noise we made outside of your house last July, Mr. Bass."

"You — you make that noise, Bob, you — you make that?"

"Well," said Bob, "I'm afraid I did most of it. There was another fellow that helped some and played the guitar. It was pretty bad," he added, with a side glance at Cynthia, "but it was meant for a compliment."

"Oh," said she, "it was meant for a compliment, was it?"

"Of course," he answered, glad of the opportunity to turn his attention entirely to her. "I was for slipping away right after supper, but my father headed us off."

"Slipping away?" repeated Cynthia.

"You see, he had a kind of a reception and fireworks afterward. We didn't get away till after nine, and then I thought I'd have a lecture when I got home."

"Did you?" asked Cynthia.

"No," said Bob, "he didn't know where I'd been."

Cynthia felt the blood rush to her temples, but by habit and instinct she knew when to restrain herself.

"Would it have made any difference to him where you had been?" she asked calmly enough.

Bob had a presentiment that he was on dangerous ground. This new and self-possessed Cynthia was an enigma to him — certainly a fascinating enigma.

"My father would have thought I was a fool to go off serenading," he answered, flushing. Bob did not like a lie; he knew that his father would have been angry if he had heard he had gone to Coniston; he felt, in the small of his back, that his father was angry now, and guessed the reason.

She regarded him gravely as he spoke, and then her eyes left his face and became fixed upon an object at the far end of the corridor. Bob turned in time to see Janet Duncan swing on her heel and follow her mother up the stairs. He struggled to find words to tide over what he felt was an awkward moment.

"We've had a fine trip," he said, "though I should much rather have stayed at home. The West is a wonderful country, with its cañons and mountains and great stretches of plain. My father met us in Chicago, and we came here. I don't know why, because Washington's dead at this time of the year. I suppose it must be on account of politics." Looking at Jethro with a sudden inspiration, "I hadn't thought of that."

Jethro had betrayed no interest in the conversation. He was seated, as usual, on the small of his back. But he saw a young man of short stature, with a freckled face and close-cropped, curly red hair, come into the corridor by another entrance; he saw Isaac D. Worthington draw him aside and speak to him, and he saw the young man coming towards them.

"How do you do, Miss Wetherell?" cried the young man joyously, while still ten feet away, "I'm awfully glad to see you, upon my word, I am. How long are you going to be in Washington?"

"I don't know, Mr. Duncan," answered Cynthia.

"Did Worthy know you were here?" demanded Mr. Duncan, suspiciously.

"He did when he saw me," said Cynthia, smiling.

"Not till then?" asked Mr. Duncan. "Say, Worthy, your father wants to see you right away. I'm going to be in Washington a day or two — will you go walking with me to-morrow morning, Miss Wetherell?"

"She's going walking with me," said Bob, not in the best of tempers.

"Then I'll go along," said Mr. Duncan, promptly.

By this time Cynthia got up and was holding out her hand to Bob Worthington. "I'm not going walking with either of you," she said; "I have another engagement. And I think I'll have to say good night, because I'm very tired."

"When can I see you?" Both the young men asked the question at once.

"Oh, you'll have plenty of chances," she answered, and was gone.

The young men looked at each other somewhat blankly, and then down at Jethro, who did not seem to know that they were there, and then they made their way toward the desk. But Isaac D. Worthington and his friends had disappeared.

A few minutes later the distinguished-looking senator with whom Jethro had been in conversation before supper entered the hotel. He seemed preoccupied, and heedless of the salutations he received; but when he caught sight of Jethro he crossed the corridor rapidly and sat down beside him. Jethro did not move. The corridor was deserted now, save for the two.

"Bass," began the senator, "what's the row up in your state?"

"H-haven't heard of any row," said Jethro.

"What did you come to Washington for?" demanded the senator, somewhat sharply.

"Er — vacation," said Jethro, "vacation — to show my gal, Cynthy, the capital."

"Now see here, Bass," said the senator, "I don't forget what happened in '70. I don't object to wading through a swarm of bees to get a little honey for a friend, but I think I'm entitled to know why he wants it."

"G-got the honey?" asked Jethro.

The senator took off his hat and wiped his brow, and then he stole a look at Jethro, with apparently barren results.

"Jethro," he said, "people say you run that state of yours right up to the handle. What's all this trouble about a two-for-a-cent postmastership?"

"H-haven't heard of any trouble," said Jethro.

"Well, there is trouble," said the senator, losing patience at last. "When I told Grant you were here and mentioned that little Brampton matter to him, — it didn't seem much to me, — the bees began to fly pretty thick, I can tell you. I saw right away that somebody had been stirring 'em up. It looks to me, Jethro," said the senator gravely, "it looks to me as if you had something of a rebellion on your hands."

"W-what'd Grant say?" Jethro inquired.

"Well, he didn't say a great deal — he isn't much of a talker, you know, but what he did say was to the point. It seems that your man, Prescott, doesn't come from Brampton, in the first place, and Grant says that while he likes soldiers, he hasn't any use for the kind that want to lie down and make the government support 'em. I'll tell you what I found out. Worthington and Duncan wired the President this morning, and they've gone up to the White House now. They've got a lot of railroad interests back of them, and they've taken your friend Sutton into camp; but I managed to get the President to promise not to do anything until he saw you to-morrow afternoon at two."

Jethro sat silent so long that the senator began to think he wasn't going to answer him at all. In his opinion, he had told Jethro some very grave facts.

"W-when are you going to see the President again?" said Jethro, at last.

"To-morrow morning," answered the senator; "he wants me to walk over with him to see the postmaster-general, who is sick in bed."

"What time do you leave the White House?"

"At eleven," said the senator, very much puzzled.

"Er — Grant ever pay any attention to an old soldier on the street?"

The senator glanced at Jethro, and a twinkle came into his eye.

"Sometimes he has been known to," he answered.

"You — you ever pay any attention to an old soldier on the street?"

Then the senator's eyes began to snap.

"Sometimes I have been known to."

"Er — suppose an old soldier was in front of the White House at eleven o'clock — an old soldier with a gal — suppose?"

The senator saw the point, and took no pains to restrain his admiration.

"Jethro," he said, slapping him on the shoulder, "I'm willing to bet a few thousand dollars you'll run your state for a while yet."

CHAPTER V

COUSIN EPHRAIM'S COMRADE

"HEARD you say you was goin' for a walk this morning, Cynthy," Jethro remarked, as they sat at breakfast the next morning.

"Why, of course," answered Cynthia, "Cousin Eph and I are going out to see Washington, and he is to show me the places that he remembers." She looked at Jethro appealingly. "Aren't you coming with us?" she asked.

"M-meet you at eleven, Cynthy," he said.

"Eleven!" exclaimed Cynthia in dismay, "that's almost dinner-time."

"M-meet you in front of the White House at eleven," said Jethro, "plumb in front of it, under a tree."

By half-past seven, Cynthia and Ephraim with his green umbrella were in the street, but it would be useless to burden these pages with a description of all the sights they saw, and with the things that Ephraim said about them, and incidentally about the war. After New York, much of Washington would then have seemed small and ragged to any one who lacked ideals and a national sense, but Washington was to Cynthia as Athens to a Greek. To her the marble Capitol shining on its hill was a sacred temple, and the great shaft that struck upward through the sunlight, though yet unfinished, a fitting memorial to him who had led the barefoot soldiers of the colonies through ridicule to victory. They looked up many institutions and monuments, they even had time to go to the Navy Yard, and they saved the contemplation of the White House till the last. The White House, which