

"I?" She straightened herself up in the seat, cast a curious glance into the dark corner, and then, letting herself down again, said: "Oh dear, no!"

Another five minutes elapsed. She had evidently forgotten him. She might, at least, have been civil. He took refuge again in his reserve. But it was now mixed with a certain pique.

Yet how much softer her face looked in the moonlight! Even her square jaw had lost that hard, matter-of-fact, practical indication which was so distasteful to him, and always had suggested a harsh criticism of his weakness. How moist her eyes were — actually shining in the light! How that light seemed to concentrate in the corners of the lashes, and then slipped — a flash — away! Was she? Yes, she was crying.

Cass melted. He moved. Miss Porter put her head out of the window and drew it back in a moment dry-eyed.

"One meets all sorts of folks traveling," said Cass, with what he wished to make appear a cheerful philosophy.

"I dare say. I don't know. I never before met any one who was rude to me. I have traveled all over the country alone, and with all kinds of people ever since I was so high. I have always gone my own way, without hindrance or trouble. I always do. I don't see why I should n't. Perhaps other people may n't like it. I do. I like excitement. I like to see all that there is to see. Because I'm a girl I don't see why I can't go out without a keeper, and why I cannot do what any man can do that is n't wrong; do you? Perhaps you do — perhaps you don't. Perhaps you like a girl to be always in the house dawdling or thumping a piano or reading novels. Perhaps you think I'm bold because I don't like it, and won't lie and say I do."

She spoke sharply and aggressively, and so evidently in answer to Cass's unspoken indictment against her, that he was not surprised when she became more direct.

"You know you were shocked when I went to fetch that Hornsby, the coroner, after we found the dead body."

"Hornsby was n't shocked," said Cass, a little viciously.

"What do you mean?" she said, abruptly.

"You were good friends enough until" —

"Until he insulted me just now; is that it?"

"Until he thought," stammered Cass, "that because you were — you know — not so — so — so careful as other girls, he could be a little freer."

"And so, because I preferred to ride a mile with him to see something real that had happened, and tried to be useful instead of looking in shop-windows in Main Street or promenading before the hotel" —

"And being ornamental," interrupted Cass. But this feeble and un-Cass-like attempt at playful gallantry met with a sudden check.

Miss Porter drew herself together, and looked out of the window. "Do you wish me to walk the rest of the way home?"

"No," said Cass, hurriedly, with a crimson face and a sense of gratuitous rudeness.

"Then stop that kind of talk, right there!"

There was an awkward silence. "I wish I was a man," she said, half bitterly, half earnestly. Cass Beard was not old and cynical enough to observe that this devout aspiration is usually uttered by those who have least reason to deplore their own femininity; and, but for the rebuff he had just received, would have made the usual emphatic dissent of our sex, when the wish is uttered by warm red lips and tender voices — a dissent, it may be

remarked, generally withheld, however, when the masculine spinster dwells on the perfection of woman. I dare say Miss Porter was sincere, for a moment later she continued, poutingly :

"And yet I used to go to fires in Sacramento when I was only ten years old. I saw the theatre burnt down. Nobody found fault with me then."

Something made Cass ask if her father and mother objected to her boyish tastes. The reply was characteristic if not satisfactory :

"Object? I'd like to see them do it!"

The direction of the road had changed. The fickle moon now abandoned Miss Porter and sought out Cass on the front seat. It caressed the young fellow's silky moustache and long eyelashes, and took some of the sun-burn from his cheek.

"What's the matter with your neck?" said the girl, suddenly.

Cass looked down, blushing to find that the collar of his smart "duck" sailor shirt was torn open. But something more than his white, soft, girlish skin was exposed; the shirt front was dyed quite red with blood from a slight cut on the shoulder. He remembered to have felt a scratch while struggling with Hornsby.

The girl's soft eyes sparkled. "Let *me*," she said, vivaciously. "Do! I'm good at wounds. Come over here. No — stay there. I'll come over to you."

She did, bestriding the back of the middle seat and dropping at his side. The magnetic fingers again touched his; he felt her warm breath on his neck as she bent toward him.

"It's nothing," he said, hastily, more agitated by the treatment than the wound.

"Give me your flask," she responded, without heeding. A stinging sensation as she bathed the edges of the cut

with the spirit brought him back to common sense again. "There," she said, skillfully extemporizing a bandage from her handkerchief and a compress from his cravat. "Now, button your coat over your chest, so, and don't take cold." She insisted upon buttoning it for him; greater even than the feminine delight in a man's strength is the ministration to his weakness. Yet, when this was finished, she drew a little away from him in some embarrassment — an embarrassment she wondered at, as his skin was finer, his touch gentler, his clothes cleaner, and — not to put too fine a point upon it — he exhaled an atmosphere much sweeter than belonged to most of the men her boyish habits had brought her in contact with — not excepting her own father. Later she even exempted her mother from the possession of this divine effluence. After a moment she asked, suddenly, "What are you going to do with Hornsby?"

Cass had not thought of him. His short-lived rage was past with the occasion that provoked it. Without any fear of his adversary, he would have been content quite willing to meet him no more. He only said, "That will depend upon him."

"Oh, you won't hear from him again," said she, confidently; "but you really ought to get up a little more muscle. You've no more than a girl." She stopped, a little confused.

"What shall I do with your handkerchief?" asked the uneasy Cass, anxious to change the subject.

"Oh, keep it, if you want to; only don't show it to everybody as you did that ring you found." Seeing signs of distress in his face, she added: "Of course that was all nonsense. If you had cared so much for the ring you could n't have talked about it, or shown it; could you?"

It relieved him to think that this might be true; he certainly had not looked at it in that light before.

"But did you really find it?" she asked, with sudden gravity. "Really, now?"

"Yes."

"And there was no real May in the case?"

"Not that I know of," laughed Cass, secretly pleased.

But Miss Porter, after eying him critically for a moment, jumped up and climbed back again to her seat. "Perhaps you had better give me that handkerchief back."

Cass began to unbutton his coat.

"No! no! Do you want to take your death of cold?" she screamed. And Cass, to avoid this direful possibility, rebuttoned his coat again over the handkerchief and a peculiarly pleasing sensation.

Very little now was said until the rattling, bounding descent of the coach denoted the approach to Red Chief. The straggling main street disclosed itself, light by light. In the flash of glittering windows and the sound of eager voices Miss Porter descended, without waiting for Cass's proffered assistance, and anticipated Mountain Charley's descent from the box. A few undistinguishable words passed between them.

"You kin freeze to me, Miss," said Charley; and Miss Porter, turning her frank laugh and frankly opened palm to Cass, half returned the pressure of his hand and slipped away.

A few days after the stage-coach incident Mountain Charley drew up beside Cass on the Blazing Star turnpike, and handed him a small packet. "I was told to give ye that by Miss Porter. Hush—listen! It's that rather old dog-goned ring o' yours that's bin in all the papers. She's bamboozled that sap-headed county judge, Boompointer, into givin' it to her. Take my advice and sling it away for some other feller to pick up and get looney over. That's all!"

"Did she say anything?" asked Cass, anxiously, as he received his lost treasure somewhat coldly.

"Well, yes! I reckon. She asked me to stand betwixt Hornsby and you. So don't *you* tackle him, and I'll see *he* don't tackle you," and with a portentous wink Mountain Charley whipped up his horses and was gone.

Cass opened the packet. It contained nothing but the ring. Unmitigated by any word of greeting, remembrance, or even raillery, it seemed almost an insult. Had she intended to flaunt his folly in his face, or had she believed he still mourned for it and deemed its recovery a sufficient reward for his slight service? For an instant he felt tempted to follow Charley's advice, and cast this symbol of folly and contempt in the dust of the mountain road. And had she not made his humiliation complete by begging Charley's interference between him and his enemy? He would go home and send her back the handkerchief she had given him. But here the unromantic reflection that although he had washed it that very afternoon in the solitude of his own cabin, he could not possibly iron it, but must send it "rough dried," stayed his indignant feet.

Two or three days, a week, a fortnight even, of this hopeless resentment filled Cass's breast. Then the news of Kanaka Joe's acquittal in the state court momentarily revived the story of the ring, and revamped a few stale jokes in the camp. But the interest soon flagged; the fortunes of the little community of Blazing Star had been for some months failing; and with early snows in the mountain and wasted capital in fruitless schemes on the river, there was little room for the indulgence of that lazy and original humor which belonged to their lost youth and prosperity. Blazing Star truly, in the grim figure of their slang, was "played out." Not dug out, worked out, or washed out, but dissipated in a year of speculation and chance.

Against this tide of fortune Cass struggled manfully, and even evoked the slow praise of his companions. Better still, he won a certain praise for himself, in himself, in a consciousness of increased strength, health, power, and self-reliance. He began to turn his quick imagination and perception to some practical account, and made one or two discoveries which quite startled his more experienced, but more conservative companions. Nevertheless, Cass's discoveries and labors were not of a kind that produced immediate pecuniary realization, and Blazing Star, which consumed so many pounds of pork and flour daily, did not unfortunately produce the daily equivalent in gold. Blazing Star lost its credit. Blazing Star was hungry, dirty, and ragged. Blazing Star was beginning to set.

Participating in the general ill-luck of the camp, Cass was not without his own individual mischance. He had resolutely determined to forget Miss Porter and all that tended to recall the unlucky ring, but, cruelly enough, she was the only thing that refused to be forgotten — whose undulating figure reclined opposite to him in the weird moonlight of his ruined cabin, whose voice mingled with the song of the river by whose banks he toiled, and whose eyes and touch thrilled him in his dreams. Partly for this reason, and partly because his clothes were beginning to be patched and torn, he avoided Red Chief and any place where he would be likely to meet her. In spite of this precaution he had once seen her driving in a pony carriage, but so smartly and fashionably dressed that he drew back in the cover of a wayside willow that she might pass without recognition. He looked down upon his red-splashed clothes and grimy, soil-streaked hands, and for a moment half hated her. His comrades seldom spoke of her — instinctively fearing some temptation that might beset his Spartan resolutions, but he heard from time to time that she had been seen at balls and parties, ap-

parently enjoying those very frivolities of her sex she affected to condemn. It was a Sabbath morning in early spring that he was returning from an ineffectual attempt to enlist a capitalist at the county town to redeem the fortunes of Blazing Star. He was pondering over the narrowness of that capitalist, who had evidently but illogically connected Cass's present appearance with the future of that struggling camp, when he became so footsore that he was obliged to accept a "lift" from a way-faring teamster. As the slowly lumbering vehicle passed the new church on the outskirts of the town, the congregation were sallying forth. It was too late to jump down and run away, and Cass dared not ask his new-found friend to whip up his cattle. Conscious of his unshorn beard and ragged garments, he kept his eyes fixed upon the road. A voice that thrilled him called his name. It was Miss Porter, a resplendent vision of silk, laces, and Easter flowers — yet actually running, with something of her old dash and freedom, beside the wagon. As the astonished teamster drew up before this elegant apparition, she panted:

"Why did you make me run so far, and why did n't you look up?"

Cass, trying to hide the patches on his knees beneath a newspaper, stammered that he had not seen her.

"And you did not hold down your head purposely?"

"No," said Cass.

"Why have you not been to Red Chief? Why did n't you answer my message about the ring?" she asked, swiftly.

"You sent nothing but the ring," said Cass, coloring, as he glanced at the teamster.

"Why, *that* was a message, you born idiot."

Cass stared. The teamster smiled. Miss Porter gazed anxiously at the wagon. "I think I'd like a ride in

there ; it looks awfully good." She glanced mischievously around at the lingering and curious congregation. "May I?"

But Cass deprecated that proceeding strongly. It was dirty ; he was not sure it was even *wholesome* ; she would be *so* uncomfortable ; he himself was only going a few rods farther, and in that time she might ruin her dress —

"Oh, yes," she said, a little bitterly, "certainly, my dress must be looked after. And — what else?"

"People might think it strange, and believe I had invited you," continued Cass, hesitatingly.

"When I had only invited myself? Thank you. Good-by."

She waved her hand and stepped back from the wagon. Cass would have given worlds to recall her, but he sat still, and the vehicle moved on in moody silence. At the first cross road he jumped down. "Thank you," he said to the teamster. "You're welcome," returned that gentleman, regarding him curiously, "but the next time a gal like that asks to ride in this yer wagon, I reckon I won't take the vote of any deadhead passenger. *Adios*, young fellow. Don't stay out late ; ye might be run off by some gal, and what would your mother say?" Of course the young man could only look unutterable things and walk away, but even in that dignified action he was conscious that its effect was somewhat mitigated by a large patch from a material originally used as a flour-sack, which had repaired his trousers, but still bore the ironical legend, "Best Superfine."

The summer brought warmth and promise and some blossom, if not absolute fruition to Blazing Star. The long days drew Nature into closer communion with the men, and hopefulness followed the discontent of their winter seclusion. It was easier, too, for Capital to be wooed and won into making a picnic in these mountain

solitudes than when high water stayed the fords and drifting snow the Sierran trails. At the close of one of these Arcadian days Cass was smoking before the door of his lonely cabin when he was astounded by the onset of a dozen of his companions. Peter Drummond, far in the van, was waving a newspaper like a victorious banner. "All's right now, Cass, old man!" he panted as he stopped before Cass and shoved back his eager followers.

"What's all right?" asked Cass, dubiously.

"*You!* You kin rake down the pile now. You're hunky! You're on velvet. Listen!"

He opened the newspaper and read, with annoying deliberation, as follows:—

"**LOST.** — If the finder of a plain gold ring, bearing the engraved inscription, 'May to Cass,' alleged to have been picked up on the high road near Blazing Star on the 4th March, 186—, will apply to Bookham & Sons, bankers, 1007 Y. Street, Sacramento, he will be suitably rewarded either for the recovery of the ring, or for such facts as may identify it, or the locality where it was found."

Cass rose and frowned savagely on his comrades. "No! no!" cried a dozen voices assuringly. "It's all right! Honest Injun! True as gospel! No joke, Cass!"

"Here's the paper, Sacramento 'Union' of yesterday. Look for yourself," said Drummond, handing him the well-worn journal: "And you see," he added, "how darned lucky you are. It ain't necessary for you to produce the ring, so if that old biled owl of a Boompinter don't giv' it back to ye, it's all the same."

"And they say nobody but the finder need apply," interrupted another. "That shuts out Boompinter or Kanaka Joe for the matter o' that."

"It's clar that it *means* you, Cass, ez much ez if they'd given your name," added a third.

For Miss Porter's sake and his own Cass had never told them of the restoration of the ring, and it was evident that Mountain Charley had also kept silent. Cass could not speak now without violating a secret, and he was pleased that the ring itself no longer played an important part in the mystery. But what was that mystery, and why was the ring secondary to himself? Why was so much stress laid upon his finding it?

"You see," said Drummond, as if answering his unspoken thought, "that 'ar gal — for it is a gal in course — hez read all about it in the papers, and hez sort o' took a shine to ye. It don't make a bit o' difference who in thunder Cass *is* or *waz*, for I reckon she's kicked him over by this time" —

"Sarved him right, too, for losing the girl's ring and then lying low and keeping dark about it," interrupted a sympathizer.

"And she's just weakened over the romantic, high-toned way you stuck to it," continued Drummond, forgetting the sarcasms he had previously hurled at this romance. Indeed the whole camp, by this time, had become convinced that it had fostered and developed a chivalrous devotion which was now on the point of pecuniary realization. It was generally accepted that "she" was the daughter of this banker, and also felt that in the circumstances the happy father could not do less than develop the resources of Blazing Star at once. Even if there were no relationship, what opportunity could be more fit for presenting to capital a locality that even produced engagement rings, and, as Jim Fauquier put it, "the men ez knew how to keep 'em." It was this sympathetic Virginian who took Cass aside with the following generous suggestion: "If you find that you and the old gal could n't hitch hosses, owin' to your not likin' red hair or a game leg" (it may be here recorded that Blaz-

ing Star had, for no reason whatever, attributed these unprepossessing qualities to the mysterious advertiser), "you might let *me* in. You might say ez how I used to jest worship that ring with you, and allers wanted to borrow it on Sundays. If anything comes of it — why — *we're pardners!*"

A serious question was the outfitting of Cass for what now was felt to be a diplomatic representation of the community. His garments, it hardly need be said, were inappropriate to any wooing except that of the "maiden all forlorn," which the advertiser clearly was not. "He might," suggested Fauquier, "drop in jest as he is — kinder as if he'd got keerless of the world, being love-sick." But Cass objected strongly, and was borne out in his objection by his younger comrades. At last a pair of white duck trousers, a red shirt, a flowing black silk scarf, and a Panama hat were procured at Red Chief, on credit, after a judicious exhibition of the advertisement. A heavy wedding-ring, the property of Drummond (who was not married), was also lent as a graceful suggestion, and at the last moment Fauquier affixed to Cass's scarf an enormous specimen pin of gold and quartz. "It sorter indicates the auriferous wealth o' this yer region, and the old man (the senior member of Bookham & Sons) need n't know I won it at draw-poker in Frisco," said Fauquier. "Ef you 'pass' on the gal, you kin hand it back to me and *I'll* try it on."

Forty dollars for expenses was put into Cass's hands, and the entire community accompanied him to the cross roads where he was to meet the Sacramento coach, which eventually carried him away, followed by a benediction of waving hats and exploding revolvers.

That Cass did not participate in the extravagant hopes of his comrades, and that he rejected utterly their matrimonial speculations in his behalf, need not be said.

Outwardly, he kept his own counsel with good-humored assent. But there was something fascinating in the situation, and while he felt he had forever abandoned his romantic dream, he was not displeased to know that it might have proved a reality. Nor was it distasteful to him to think that Miss Porter would hear of it and regret her late inability to appreciate his sentiment. If he really were the object of some opulent maiden's passion, he would show Miss Porter how he could sacrifice the most brilliant prospects for her sake. Alone, on the top of the coach, he projected one of those satisfying conversations in which imaginative people delight, but which unfortunately never come quite up to rehearsal. "Dear Miss Porter," he would say, addressing the back of the driver, "if I could remain faithful to a dream of my youth, however illusive and unreal, can you believe that for the sake of lucre I could be false to the one real passion that alone supplanted it?" In the composition and delivery of this eloquent statement an hour was happily forgotten: the only drawback to its complete effect was that a misplacing of epithets in rapid repetition did not seem to make the slightest difference, and Cass found himself saying "Dear Miss Porter, if I could be false to a dream of my youth, etc., etc., can you believe I could be *faithful* to the one real passion, etc., etc.," with equal and perfect satisfaction. As Miss Porter was reputed to be well off, if the unknown were poor, that might be another drawback.

The banking house of Bookham & Sons did not present an illusive nor mysterious appearance. It was eminently practical and matter of fact; it was obtrusively open and glassy; nobody would have thought of leaving a secret there that would have been inevitably circulated over the counter. Cass felt an uncomfortable sense of incongruity in himself, in his story, in his treasure, to this

temple of disenchanting realism. With the awkwardness of an embarrassed man he was holding prominently in his hand an envelope containing the ring and advertisement as a voucher for his intrusion, when the nearest clerk took the envelope from his hand, opened it, took out the ring, returned it, said briskly, "T'other shop, next door, young man," and turned to another customer.

Cass stepped to the door, saw that "T'other shop" was a pawnbroker's, and returned again with a flashing eye and heightened color. "It's an advertisement I have come to answer," he began again.

The clerk cast a glance at Cass's scarf and pin. "Place taken yesterday—no room for any more," he said, abruptly.

Cass grew quite white. But his old experience in Blazing Star repartee stood him in good stead. "If it's *your* place you mean," he said coolly, "I reckon you might put a dozen men in the hole you're rattlin' round in—but it's this advertisement I'm after. If Bookham is n't in, maybe you'll send me one of the grown-up sons." The production of the advertisement and some laughter from the bystanders had its effect. The pert young clerk retired, and returned to lead the way to the bank parlor. Cass's heart sank again as he was confronted by a dark, iron-gray man—in dress, features, speech, and action—uncompromisingly opposed to Cass—his ring and his romance. When the young man had told his story and produced his treasure he paused. The banker scarcely glanced at it, but said, impatiently:

"Well, your papers?"

"My papers?"

"Yes. Proof of your identity. You say your name is Cass Beard. Good! What have you got to prove it? How can I tell who you are?"

To a sensitive man there is no form of suspicion that

is as bewildering and demoralizing at the moment as the question of his identity. Cass felt the insult in the doubt of his word, and the palpable sense of his present inability to prove it. The banker watched him keenly but not unkindly.

"Come," he said at length, "this is not my affair; if you can legally satisfy the lady for whom I am only agent, well and good. I believe you can; I only warn you that you must. And my present inquiry was to keep her from losing her time with impostors, a class I don't think you belong to. There's her card. Good day."

"MISS MORTIMER."

It was *not* the banker's daughter. The first illusion of Blazing Star was rudely dispelled. But the care taken by the capitalist to shield her from imposture indicated a person of wealth. Of her youth and beauty Cass no longer thought.

The address given was not distant. With a beating heart he rung the bell of a respectable-looking house, and was ushered into a private drawing-room. Instinctively he felt that the room was only temporarily inhabited; an air peculiar to the best lodgings, and when the door opened upon a tall lady in deep mourning, he was still more convinced of an incongruity between the occupant and her surroundings. With a smile that vacillated between a habit of familiarity and ease, and a recent restraint, she motioned him to a chair.

"Miss Mortimer" was still young, still handsome, still fashionably dressed, and still attractive. From her first greeting to the end of the interview Cass felt that she knew all about him. This relieved him from the onus of proving his identity, but seemed to put him vaguely at a disadvantage. It increased his sense of inexperience and youthfulness.

"I hope you will believe," she began, "that the few

questions I have to ask you are to satisfy my own heart, and for no other purpose." She smiled sadly as she went on. "Had it been otherwise, I should have instituted a legal inquiry, and left this interview to some one cooler, calmer, and less interested than myself. But I think, I *know* I can trust you. Perhaps we women are weak and foolish to talk of an *instinct*, and when you know my story you may have reason to believe that but little dependence can be placed on *that*; but I am not wrong in saying, — am I?" (with a sad smile) "that *you* are not above that weakness?" She paused, closed her lips tightly, and grasped her hands before her. "You say you found that ring in the road some three months before — the — the — you know what I mean — the body — was discovered?"

"Yes."

"You thought it might have been dropped by some one in passing?"

"I thought so, yes — it belonged to no one in the camp."

"Before your cabin or on the highway?"

"Before my cabin."

"You are *sure*?" There was something so very sweet and sad in her smile that it oddly made Cass color.

"But my cabin is near the road," he suggested.

"I see! And there was nothing else; no paper nor envelope?"

"Nothing."

"And you kept it because of the odd resemblance one of the names bore to yours?"

"Yes."

"For no other reason?"

"None." Yet Cass felt he was blushing.

"You'll forgive my repeating a question you have already answered, but I am *so* anxious. There was some

attempt to prove at the inquest that the ring had been found on the body of — the unfortunate man. But you tell me it was not so?"

"I can swear it."

"Good God — the traitor!" She took a hurried step forward, turned to the window, and then came back to Cass with a voice broken with emotion. "I have told you I could trust you. That ring was mine!"

She stopped, and then went on hurriedly. "Years ago I gave it to a man who deceived and wronged me; a man whose life since then has been a shame and disgrace to all who knew him; a man who, once a gentleman, sank so low as to become the associate of thieves and ruffians; sank so low, that when he died, by violence — a traitor even to them — his own confederates shrunk from him, and left him to fill a nameless grave. That man's body you found!"

Cass started. "And his name was —?"

"Part of your surname. Cass — Henry Cass."

"You see why Providence seems to have brought that ring to you," she went on. "But you ask me why, knowing this, I am so eager to know if the ring was found by you in the road, or if it were found on his body. Listen! It is part of my mortification that the story goes that this man once showed this ring, boasted of it, staked, and lost it at a gambling table to one of his vile comrades."

"Kanaka Joe," said Cass, overcome by a vivid recollection of Joe's merriment at the trial.

"The same. Don't you see," she said, hurriedly, "if the ring had been found on him I could believe that somewhere in his heart he still kept respect for the woman he had wronged. I am a woman — a foolish woman, I know — but you have crushed that hope forever."

"But why have you sent for me?" asked Cass, touched by her emotion.

"To know it for certain," she said, almost fiercely. "Can you not understand that a woman like me must know a thing once and forever? But you *can* help me. I did not send for you only to pour my wrongs in your ears. You must take me with you to this place — to the spot where you found the ring — to the spot where you found the body — to the spot where — where *he* lies. You must do it secretly, that none shall know me."

Cass hesitated. He was thinking of his companions and the collapse of their painted bubble. How could he keep the secret from them?

"If it is money, you need, let not that stop you. I have no right to your time without recompense. Do not misunderstand me. There has been a thousand dollars awaiting my order at Bookham's when the ring should be delivered. It shall be doubled if you help me in this last moment."

It was possible. He could convey her safely there, invent some story of a reward delayed for want of proofs, and afterward share that reward with his friends. He answered promptly, "I will take you there."

She took his hands in both of hers, raised them to her lips, and smiled. The shadow of grief and restraint seemed to have fallen from her face, and a half mischievous, half coquettish gleam in her dark eyes touched the susceptible Cass in so subtle a fashion that he regained the street in some confusion. He wondered what Miss Porter would have thought. But was he not returning to her, a fortunate man, with one thousand dollars in his pocket! Why should he remember he was handicapped by a pretty woman and a pathetic episode? It did not make the proximity less pleasant as he helped her into the coach that evening, nor did the recollection of another ride with another woman obtrude itself upon those consolations which he felt it his duty, from time to time, to