on about such an impulse as that which started us off—he thinks now that he will be better off there."

"I am afraid you have not derived much pleasure from your European experiences," said John.

"Pleasure!" she exclaimed. "If ever you saw a young woman who was glad and thankful to turn her face toward home, *I* am that person. I think that one of the heaviest crosses humanity has to bear is to have constantly to decide between two or more absolutely trivial conclusions in one's own affairs; but when one is called upon to multiply one's useless perplexities by, say, ten, life is really a burden.

"I suppose," she added after a pause, "you couldn't help hearing our discussions at dinner the other night, and I have wondered a little what you must have thought."

"Yes," he said, "I did hear it. Is it the regular thing, if I may ask?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, with a tone of sadness; "it has grown to be."

"It must be very trying at times," John remarked.

"It is, indeed," she said, "and would often be unendurable to me if it were not for my sense of humor, as it would be to my sister if it were not for her love, for Julius is really a very lovable man, and I, too, am very fond of him. But I must laugh sometimes, though my better nature should rather, I suppose, impel me to sighs."

"'A little laughter is much more worth,'" he quoted.

CHAPTER IV.

THEY were leaning upon the rail at the stern of the ship, which was going with what little wind there was, and a following sea, with which, as it plunged down the long slopes of the waves, the vessel seemed to be running a victorious race. The sea was a deep sapphire, and in the wake the sunlight turned the broken water to vivid emerald. The air was of a caressing softness, and altogether it was a day and scene of indescribable beauty and inspiration. For a while there was silence between them, which John broke at last.

"I suppose," he said, "that one would best show his appreciation of all this by refraining from the comment which must needs be comparatively commonplace, but really this is so superb that I must express some of my emotion even at the risk of lowering your opinion of my good taste, provided, of course, that you have one."

"Well," she said, laughing, "it may relieve your mind, if you care, to know that had you kept silent an instant longer I should have taken the risk of lowering your opinion of my good taste, provided, of course, that you have one, by remarking that this was perfectly magnificent."

"I should think that this would be the sort

of day to get Mr. Carling on deck. This air and sun would brace him up," said John.

She turned to him with a laugh, and said: "That is the general opinion, or was two hours ago; but I'm afraid it's out of the question now, unless we can manage it after luncheon."

"What do you mean?" he asked with a puzzled smile at the mixture of annoyance and amusement visible in her face. "Same old story?"

"Yes," she replied, "same old story. When I went to my breakfast I called at my sister's room and said, '"Come, boys and girls, come out to play, the sun doth shine as bright as day," and when I've had my breakfast I'm coming to lug you both on deck. It's a perfectly glorious morning, and it will do you both no end of good after being shut up so long.' 'All right,' my sister answered, 'Julius has quite made up his mind to go up as soon as he is dressed. You call for us in half an hour, and we will be ready.'"

"And wouldn't he come?" John asked; "and why not?"

"Oh," she exclaimed with a laugh and a shrug of her shoulders, "shoes."

"Shoes!" said John. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say," was the rejoinder. "When I went back to the room I found my brother-in-law sitting on the edge of the lounge, or what you call it, all dressed but his coat, rubbing his chin between his finger and thumb, and gazing with despairing perplexity at his feet. It seems that my sister had got past all the other dilemmas, but in a moment of inadvertence had left the shoe question to him, with the result that he had put on one russet shoe and one black one,

and had laced them up before discovering the discrepancy."

"I don't see anything very difficult in that situation," remarked John.

"Don't you?" she said scornfully. "No, I suppose not, but it was quite enough for Julius, and more than enough for my sister and me. His first notion was to take off *both* shoes and begin all over again, and perhaps if he had been allowed to carry it out he would have been all right; but Alice was silly enough to suggest the obvious thing to him—to take off one, and put on the mate to the other—and then the trouble began. First he was in favor of the black shoes as being thicker in the sole, and then he reflected that they hadn't been blackened since coming on board. It seemed to him that the russets were more appropriate anyway, but the blacks were easier to lace. Had I noticed whether the men on board were wearing russet or black as a rule, and did Alice remember whether it was one of the russets or one of the blacks that he was saying the other day pinched his toe? He didn't quite like the looks of a russet shoe with dark trousers, and called us to witness that those he had on were dark; but he thought he remembered that it was the black shoe which pinched him. He supposed he could change his trousers—and so on, and so on, *al fine, de capo, ad lib.*, sticking out first one foot and then the other, lifting them alternately to his knee for scrutiny, appealing now to Alice and now to me, and getting more hopelessly bewildered all the time. It went on that way for, it seemed to me, at least half an hour, and at last I said, 'Oh, come now, Julius, take off the brown shoe—it's too thin, and doesn't go with your

dark trousers, and pinches your toe, and none of the men are wearing them—and just put on the other black one, and come along. We're all suffocating for some fresh air, and if you don't get started pretty soon we sha'n't get on deck to-day.' 'Get on deck!' he said, looking up at me with a puzzled expression, and holding fast to the brown shoe on his knee with both hands, as if he were afraid I would take it away from him by main strength—'get on deck! Why—why—I believe I'd better not go out this morning, don't you?'"

"And then?" said John after a pause.

"Oh," she replied, "I looked at Alice, and she shook her head as much to say, 'It's no use for the present,' and I fled the place."

"M'm!" muttered John. "He must have been a nice traveling companion. Has it been like that all the time?"

"Most of it," she said, "but not quite all, and this morning was rather an exaggeration of the regular thing. But getting started on a journey was usually pretty awful. Once we quite missed our train because he couldn't make up his mind whether to put on a light overcoat or a heavy one. I finally settled the question for him, but we were just too late."

"You must be a very amiable person," remarked John.

"Indeed, I am not," she declared, "but Julius is, and it's almost impossible to be really put out with him, particularly in his condition. I have come to believe that he can not help it, and he submits to my bullying with such sweetness that even my impatience gives way."

"Have you three people been alone together all the time?" John asked.

"Yes," she replied, "except for four or five weeks. We visited some American friends in Berlin, the Nollises, for a fortnight, and after our visit to them they traveled with us for three weeks through South Germany and Switzerland. We parted with them at Metz only about three weeks since."

"How did Mr. Carling seem while you were all together?" asked John, looking keenly at her.

"Oh," she replied, "he was more like himself than I have seen him for a long time—since he began to break down, in fact."

He turned his eyes from her face as she looked up at him, and as he did not speak she said suggestively, "You are thinking something you don't quite like to say, but I think I know pretty nearly what it is."

"Yes?" said John, with a query.

"You think he has had too much feminine companionship, or had it too exclusively. Is that it? You need not be afraid to say so."

"Well," said John, "if you put it 'too exclusively,' I will admit that there was something of the sort in my mind, and," he added, "if you will let me say so, it must at times have been rather hard for him to be interested or amused—that it must have—that is to say——"

"Oh, *say* it!" she exclaimed. "It must have been very *dull* for him. Is that it?"

"'Father,'" said John with a grimace, "'I can not tell a lie!'"

"Oh," she said, laughing, "your hatchet isn't very sharp. I forgive you. But really," she added, "I know it has been. You will laugh when I tell you the one particular resource we fell back upon."

"Bid me to laugh, and I will laugh," said John.

"Euchre!" she said, looking at him defiantly. "Two-handed euchre! We have played, as nearly as I can estimate, fifteen hundred games, in which he has held both bowers and the ace of trumps—or something equally victorious—I should say fourteen hundred times. "Oh!" she cried, with an expression of loathing, "may I never, never, never see a card again as long as I live!" John laughed without restraint, and after a petulant little *moue* she joined him.

"May I light up my pipe?" he said. "I will get to leeward."

"I shall not mind in the least," she assented.

"By the way," he asked, "does Mr. Carling smoke?"

"He used to," she replied, "and while we were with the Nollises he smoked every day, but after we left them he fell back into the notion that it was bad for him."

John filled and lighted his pipe in silence, and after a satisfactory puff or two said: "Will Mr. Carling go in to dinner to-night?"

"Yes," she replied, "I think he will if it is no rougher than at present."

"It will probably be smoother," said John. "You must introduce me to him——"

"Oh," she interrupted, "of course, but it will hardly be necessary, as Alice and I have spoken so often to him of you——"

"I was going to say," John resumed, "that he may possibly let me take him off your hands a little, and after dinner will be the best time. I think if I can get him into the smoking room that a cigar and—and—something hot with a bit

of lemon peel and so forth later on may induce him to visit with me for a while, and pass the evening, or part of it."

"You want to be an angel!" she exclaimed. "Oh, I—we—shall be so obliged. I know it's just what he wants—some *man* to take him in hand."

"I'm in no hurry to be an angel," said John, laughing, and, with a bow, "It's better sometimes to be *near* the rose than to *be* the rose, and you are proposing to overpay me quite. I shall enjoy doing what I proposed, if it be possible."

Their talk then drifted off into various channels as topics suggested themselves until the ship's bell sounded the luncheon hour. Miss Blake went to join her sister and brother-in-law, but John had some bread and cheese and beer in the smoking room. It appeared that the ladies had better success than in the morning, for he saw them later on in their steamer chairs with Mr. Carling, who was huddled in many wraps, with the flaps of his cap down over his ears. All the chairs were full—his own included (as happens to easy-tempered men)—and he had only a brief colloquy with the party. He noticed, however, that Mr. Carling had on the russet shoes, and wondered if they pinched him. In fact, though he couldn't have said exactly why, he rather hoped that they did. He had just that sympathy for the nerves of two-and-fifty which is to be expected from those of five-and-twenty—that is, very little.

When he went in to dinner the Carlings and Miss Blake had been at table some minutes. There had been the usual controversy about what Mr. Carling would drink with his dinner, and he

had decided upon Apollinaris water. But Miss Blake, with an idea of her own, had given an order for champagne, and was exhibiting some consternation, real or assumed, at the fact of having a whole bottle brought in with the cork extracted—a customary trick at sea.

"I hope you will help me out," she said to John as he bowed and seated himself. "'Some one has blundered,' and here is a whole bottle of champagne which must be drunk to save it. Are you prepared to help turn my, or somebody's, blunder into hospitality?"

"I am prepared to make any sacrifice," said John, laughing, "in the sacred cause."

"No less than I expected of you," she said. "*Noblesse oblige!* Please fill your glass."

"Thanks," said John. "Permit me," and he filled her own as well.

As the meal proceeded there was some desultory talk about the weather, the ship's run, and so on; but Mrs. Carling was almost silent, and her husband said but little more. Even Miss Blake seemed to have something on her mind, and contributed but little to the conversation. Presently Mr. Carling said, "Mary, do you think a mouthful of wine would hurt me?"

"Certainly not," was the reply. "It will do you good," reaching over for his glass and pouring the wine.

"That's enough, that's enough!" he protested as the foam came up to the rim of the glass. She proceeded to fill it up to the brim and put it beside him, and later, as she had opportunity, kept it replenished.

As the dinner concluded, John said to Mr. Carling: "Won't you go up to the smoking room

with me for coffee? I like a bit of tobacco with mine, and I have some really good cigars and some cigarettes—if you prefer them—that I can vouch for."

As usual, when the unexpected was presented to his mind, Mr. Carling passed the perplexity on to his women-folk. At this time, however, his dinner and the two glasses of wine which Miss Blake had contrived that he should swallow had braced him up, and John's suggestion was so warmly seconded by the ladies that, after some feeble protests and misgivings, he yielded, and John carried him off.

"I hope it won't upset Julius," said Mrs. Carling doubtfully.

"It won't do anything of the sort," her sister replied. "He will get through the evening without worrying himself and you into fits, and, if Mr. Lenox succeeds, you won't see anything of him till ten o'clock or after, and not then, I hope. Mind, you're to be sound asleep when he comes in—snore a little if necessary—and let him get to bed without any talk at all."

"Why do you say 'if Mr. Lenox succeeds'?" asked Mrs. Carling.

"It was his suggestion," Miss Blake answered. "We had been talking about Julius, and he finally told me he thought he would be the better of an occasional interval of masculine society, and I quite agreed with him. You know how much he enjoyed being with George Nollis, and how much like himself he appeared."

"That is true," said Mrs. Carling.

"And you know that just as soon as he got alone again with us two women he began backing and filling as badly as ever. I believe Mr.

Lenox is right, and that Julius is just petticoated to death between us."

"Did Mr. Lenox say that?" asked Mrs. Carling incredulously.

"No," said her sister, laughing, "he didn't make use of precisely that figure, but that was what he thought plainly enough."

"What do you think of Mr. Lenox?" said Mrs. Carling irrelevantly. "Do you like him? I thought that he looked at you very admiringly once or twice to-night," she added, with her eyes on her sister's face.

"Well," said Mary, with a petulant toss of the head, "except that I've had about an hour's talk with him, and that I knew him when we were children—at least when I was a child—he is a perfect stranger to me, and I do wish," she added in a tone of annoyance, "that you would give up that fad of yours, that every man who comes along is going to—to—be a nuisance."

"He seems very pleasant," said Mrs. Carling, meekly ignoring her sister's reproach.

"Oh, yes," she replied indifferently, "he's pleasant enough. Let us go up and have a walk on deck. I want you to be sound asleep when Julius comes in."

CHAPTER V.

JOHN found his humane experiment pleasanter than he expected. Mr. Carling, as was to be anticipated, demurred a little at the coffee, and still more at the cigarette; but having his appetite for tobacco aroused, and finding that no alarming symptoms ensued, he followed it with a cigar and later on was induced to go the length of "Scotch and soda," under the pleasant effect of which—and John's sympathetic efforts—he was for the time transformed, the younger man being surprised to find him a man of interesting experience, considerable reading, and, what was most surprising, a jolly sense of humor and a fund of anecdotes which he related extremely well. The evening was a decided success, perhaps the best evidence of it coming at the last, when, at John's suggestion that they supplement their modest potations with a "night-cap," Mr. Carling cheerfully assented upon the condition that they should "have it with him"; and as he went along the deck after saying "Good night," John was positive that he heard a whistled tune.

The next day was equally fine, but during the night the ship had run into the swell of a storm, and in the morning there was more motion than the weaker ones could relish. The sea grew quieter as the day advanced. John was