I am not going to attempt a description of my thoughts that night. It would take too long and the description would be wearisome. Other people's miseries are not interesting and I shall not catalog mine. Morning came at last and I rose, bathed my hot face in cold water, and went down stairs. Early as it was, not yet six, I heard Dorinda in the kitchen and, having no desire for conversation, I went out and walked up and down the beach until breakfast time. I had to pretend to eat, but I ate so little that both Lute and Dorinda once more commented upon my lack of appetite. Lute, who had never become fully reconciled to my becoming a member of the working class, hastened to lay the blame for my condition upon my labors at the bank.

"The trouble is," he announced, dogmatically, "the trouble is, Roscoe, that you ain't fitted for bein' shut up astern of a deck. Look at yourself now! Just go into Comfort's room and stand in front of her lookin' glass and look at yourself. There you be, pale and peaked and wore out. Look for all the world just as I done when I had the tonsils two winters ago. Ain't that so, Dorindy?"

His wife's answer was a contemptuous sniff.

"If you mean to say that you looked peaked when you had sore throat," she announced, "then there's somethin' the matter with your mind or your eyesight, one or t'other. You peaked? Why, your face was swelled up like a young one's balloon Fourth of July Day. And as for bein' pale! My soul! I give you my word I couldn't scurcely tell where your neck left off and the strip of red flannel you made me tie 'round it begun."

"Don't make no difference! I FELT pale, anyhow. And I didn't eat no more'n Ros does. You'll have to give in to that, Dorindy. I didn't eat nothin' but beef tea and gruel."

"You et enough of them to float a schooner."

"Maybe I did," with grieved dignity; "maybe I did. But that's no reason why you should set there and heave my sufferin's in my face."

"What is the man talkin' about now? I didn't heave 'em in your face. They come there themselves, same as sore throat sufferin's generally do, and if you hadn't waded around in the snow with leaky boots, because you was too lazy to take 'em to the shoemaker's to be patched, they wouldn't."

Lute drew back from the table. "It's no use!" he declared, "a man can't even be sick in peace in this house. Some wives would have been sorry to see their husbands with one foot in the grave."

"Your feet was in the cookstove oven most of the time. There! there! the more you talk the further from home you get. You started in with Roscoe and the bank and you're in the grave already. If I was you I'd quit afore I went any further."
Land knows where you might fetch up if you kept on! I . . . Mercy on us! who's at the kitchen door this time in the mornin'?

Her husband, ever curious, was on his way to answer the knock already. He came back, a moment later, sputtering with excitement.

"It's that Mr. butler, the Johnson over to Mr. Colton's," he whispered. "I mean it's that Jutler--that--There, Dorindy! you see what sort of a state your hectorin' has worked me into! It's that parson critter who opens Colton's door for him, that's who 'tis. And he wants to see Ros. I tried to find out what for, but he wouldn't tell."

Even Dorinda showed surprise. She looked at the clock, "This hour of the mornin'!" she exclaimed; "what in the world--?"

I hastened to the kitchen, closing the dining-room door behind me just in time to prevent Lute's following me. Johnson, the butler, was standing on the mica slab at the threshold inspecting our humble premises with lofty disdain.

"Mr. Colton sent this to you, sir," he said, handing me an envelope. "He wishes you to send a receipt by me."

I took the envelope and, stepping back out of sight, tore it open. Inside was a check on a New York bank for four thousand dollars. It was made payable to "Bearer." With it was this brief note:

Dear Paine:

This is the best I can do for you, as I haven't the money on hand. Cash it yourself, take out your thirty-five hundred and hold the additional five hundred until I, or one of the family, call for it. I made the thing payable to Bearer because I imagined you would prefer it that way. Send me some sort of receipt by Johnson; anything will do. I will see my lawyer in a day or two. Meanwhile have your papers, deeds, etc., ready when he calls for them.

Yours truly,

JAMES W. COLTON.

For a minute I considered. If I could cash the check at the bank without Taylor's knowledge and get him off to Boston on the early train, I might be able to cover my tracks. It was necessary that they should be covered. Knowing George as I did I knew that he would never consent to my sacrifice. He would not permit me to wreck my future in Denboro to save him. The money must be turned over to the Boston bankers and the bank's bonds once more in the vault where they belonged before he learned where that money came from. Then it would be too late to refuse and too late to undo what had been done. He would have to accept and I might be able to prevail upon him to keep silent regarding the whole affair. I disliked the check with Colton's name upon it; I should have much preferred the cash; but cash, it seemed, could not be had without considerable delay, and with that bank examiner's visit imminent every moment of time was valuable. I folded the check, put it in my pocketbook, and, hastily scribbling a receipt in pencil at the bottom of Colton's note, replaced the latter in the envelope and handed it to Johnson, who departed.

Entering the dining-room I found Dorinda and Lute at the window, peering after the butler.

"By time!" exclaimed Lute, "if I didn't know I should say he was a bigger big-bug than old Colton himself. Look how he struts! He sartin is a dignified lookin' man. I don't see how he ever come to be just hired help."

"Um-hm," sniffed the cynical Mrs. Rogers. "Well; you can get an awful lot of dignity for its board and lodgin'! There's nothin' much more dignified or struts much better'n a rooster, but it's the hens that lay the eggs. What did he want, Roscoe?"

I made some excuse or other for Mr. Johnson's early call and, taking my cap from the rack, hurried from the house. I
went "across lots" and, running a good part of the way, reached the bank just as Sam Wheeler was sweeping out. He expressed surprise at my early arrival and wished to know what was up.

"Ain't nothin' wrong, is there, Ros?" asked Sam anxiously. "I saw by the paper that the market was feverish again yesterday."

Sam was an ambitious youth and, being desirous of becoming a banker in the shortest possible time, read the financial page with conscientious thoroughness. I assured him that the market's fever was not contagious—at least I had not contracted the disease—and sent him out to sweep the front steps. As soon as he had gone I opened the safe, found, to my joy, that we had an abundance of currency on hand, cashed the Colton check and locked it securely in the drawer of my own desk. So far I was safe. Now to secure George's safety.

He came in soon after, looking as if, as he had told me, he had not slept for years. He bade Sam good morning and then walked over to my side.

"Well, Ros?" he asked, laying a shaking hand on the desk beside me.

"Not here, George," I whispered. "Come into the directors' room."

I led the way and he followed me. I closed the door behind us, took the thirty-five hundred dollars in notes from my pocket and laid them on the table.

"There's the money, George," I said. "Now you've got just time enough to catch that nine o'clock train for Boston."

I thought, for a moment, he was going to collapse altogether. Then he pounced upon the money, counted it with fingers that trembled so he could scarcely control them, and turned to me.

"Ros--Ros--" he stammered. "Where did you--how did you--Great God, man! I--I--"

"There! there!" I interrupted. "I told you I wasn't a pauper exactly. Put that where you won't lose it and clear out. You haven't any time to argue."

"But--but, Ros, I hadn't ought to take this from you. I don't see where you got it and--"

"That's my business. Will you go?"

"I don't know as I ever can pay you. Lord knows I'll try all my life, but--"

I seized his arm. "George," I urged, impatiently, "you fool, don't waste time. Get that train, do you hear! Those bonds must be in that safe by night. Go!"

The mention of the bonds did what my urging had failed to do. He crammed the bills into his pocket book, thrust the latter into an inside pocket, and rushed from the room. I followed him as far as the outer door. He was running up the road like a wild man. Sam stared after him.

"For mercy sakes!" he cried, "what's the matter with the boss? Has he gone loony?"

"No," I said, turning back to my desk; "he's sane enough, I guess. He's after the train."

"I should think he was after somethin'. Did you see the face he had on him? If he ain't crazy then you and I are, that's all I've got to say."

"All right, Sam," I answered, drawing a long breath, "perhaps that's it. Perhaps you and I are the crazy ones—one of us, at any rate."

All that day I worked hard. I did not go home for lunch, but sent Sam over to Eldredge's store for canned ham and
crackers which I ate at my desk. It was a fairly busy day, fortunately, and I could always find some task to occupy my mind. Lute called, at two o'clock, to inquire why I had not been home and I told him that Taylor was away and I should be late for supper. He departed, shaking his head.

"It's just as I said," he declared, "you're workin' yourself sick, that's what you're doin'. You're growin' foolish in the head about work, just the same as Dorindy. And YOU don't need to; you've got money enough. If I had independent means same as you've got I tell you I'd have more sense. One sick invalid in the family's enough, ain't it?"

"No doubt, Lute," I replied. "At all events you must take care of your health. Don't YOU work yourself sick."

Lute turned on me. "I try not to," he said, seriously; "I try not to, but it's a hard job. You know what that wife of mine is cal'latin' to have me do next? Wash the hen house window! Yes sir! wash the window so's the hens can look at the scenery, I presume likely. I says to her, says I, 'That beats any foolishness ever I heard! Next thing you'll want me to put down a carpet in the pigsty, won't ye? You would if we kept a pig, I know.'"

"What did she say to that?" I inquired.

"Oh, the land knows! Somethin' about keepin' one pig bein' trouble enough. I didn't pay much attention. But I shan't wash no hen's window, now you can bet on that!"

I shouldn't have bet much on it. He went away, to spend the next hour in a political debate at Eldredge's, and I wrote letters, needlessly long ones. Closing time came and Sam went home, leaving me to lock up. The train was due at six-twenty, but it was nearly seven before I heard it whistle at the station. I stood at the front window looking up the road and waiting.

I waited only a few minutes, but they were long ones. Then I saw George coming, not running this time, but walking with rapid strides. The crowd, waiting on the post-office steps, shouted at him but he paid no attention. He sprang up the steps and entered the bank. I stepped forward and seized his hand. One look at his face was enough; he had the bonds, I knew it.

"Ros, you here!" he exclaimed. "Is it all right? The examiner hasn't showed up?"

"No," I answered. "You have them, George?"

"Right in my pocket, thank the Lord--and you, Ros Paine. Just let me get them into that safe and I--What! You're not going?"

"Yes, I'm going. I congratulate you, George. I am as glad as you are. Good night."

"But Ros, I want to tell you about it. I want to thank you again. I never shall forget . . . Ros, hold on!"

But I was already at the door. "Good night," I called again, and went out. I went straight home, ate supper, spent a half hour with Mother, and then went to my room and to bed. The excitement was over, for good or bad the thing was done beyond recall, and I suddenly realized that I was very tired. I fell asleep almost immediately and slept soundly until morning. I was too tired even to think.

I had plenty of time to think during the fortnight which followed and there was enough to think about. The lawyer came and the papers were signed transferring to James W. Colton the strip of land over which Denboro had excited itself for months. Each day I sat at my desk expecting Captain Dean and a delegation of indignant citizens to rush in and denounce me as a traitor and a turncoat. Every time Sam Wheeler met me at my arrival at the bank I dreaded to look him in the face, fearing that he had learned of my action and was waiting to question me about it. In spite of all my boasts and solemn vows not to permit "Big Jim" Colton to obtain the Shore Lane I had sold it to him; he could, and it was to be expected that he would, close it at once; Denboro would make its just demand upon me for explanations, explanations which, for George and Nellie's sake, I could not give; and after that the deluge. I was sitting over a
powder mine and I braced myself for the explosion.

But hours and days passed and no explosion came. The fishcarts rattled down the Lane without hindrance. Except for the little flurry of excitement caused by the coming wedding at the Dean homestead the village life moved on its lazy, uneventful jog. I could not understand it. Why did Colton delay? He, whose one object in life was to have his own way, had it once more. Now that he had it why didn't he make use of it? Why was he holding back? Out of pity for me? I did not believe it. Much more likely that his daughter, whose pride I had dared to offend, had taken the affair in her hands and this agony of suspense was a preliminary torture, a part of my punishment for presuming to act contrary to her imperial will.

I saw her occasionally, although I tried my best not to do so. Once we passed each other on the street and I stubbornly kept my head turned in the other direction. I would risk no more looks such as she had given me when, in response to her father's would-be humorous suggestion, she had offered me her "congratulations." Once, too, I saw her on the bay, I was aboard the Comfort, having just anchored after a short cruise, and she went by in the canoe, her newest plaything, which had arrived by freight a few days before. A canoe in Denboro Bay was a distinct novelty; probably not since the days of the Indians had one of the light, graceful little vessels floated there, and this one carried much comment among the old salts alongshore. It was the general opinion that it was no craft for salt water.

"Them things," said Zeb Kendrick, sagely, "are all right for ponds or rivers or cricks where there ain't no tide nor sea runnin'. Float anywhere where there's a heavy dew, they say they will. But no darter of mine should go out past the flats in one of 'em if I had the say. It's too big a risk."

"Yup; well, Zeb, you ain't got the say, I cal'late," observed Thoph Newcomb. "And it takes more'n say to get a skiff like that one. They tell me the metal work aboard her is silver-plated--silver or gold, I ain't sure which. Wonder the old man didn't make it solid gold while he was about it. He'd do anything for that girl if she asked him to. And she sartin does handle it like a bird! She went by my dory 'tother mornin' and I swan to man if she and the canoe together wan't a sight for sore eyes. I set and watched her for twenty minutes."

"Um--ye-es," grunted Zeb. "And then you charged the twenty minutes in against the day's work quahaugin' you was supposed to be doin' for me, I suppose."

"You can take out the ten cents when you pay me--if you ever do," said Newcomb, gallantly. "'Twas wuth more'n that just to look at her."

The time had been when I should have agreed with Thoph. Sitting in the canoe, bare-headed, her hair tossing in the breeze, and her rounded arms swinging the light paddle, she was a sight for sore eyes, doubtless. But it was not my eyes which were sore, just then. I watched her for a moment and then bent over my engine. I did not look up again until the canoe had disappeared beyond the Colton wharf.

I did not tell Mother that I had sold the land. I intended to do so; each morning I rose with my mind made up to tell her, and always I put off the telling until some other time. I knew, of course, that she should be told; that I ought to tell her rather than to have her learn the news from others as she certainly would at almost any moment, but I knew, too, that even to her I could not disclose my reason for selling. I must keep George's secret as he had kept mine and take the consequences with a close mouth and as much of my old indifference to public opinion as I could muster. But I realized, only too well, that the indifference which had once been real was now only pretense.

I have said very little about George Taylor's gratitude to me, nor his appreciation of what I had done for him. The poor fellow would have talked of nothing else if I had let him.

"You've saved my good name and my life, Ros," he said, over and over again, "and not only my life, but what is a mighty sight more worth saving, Nellie's happiness. I don't know how you did it; I believe yet that there is something behind all this, that you're keeping something from me. I can't see how, considering all you've said to me about your not being well-off, you got that money so quick. But I know you don't want me to talk about it."
"I don't, George," I said. "All I ask of you is just to forget the whole thing."

"Forget! I shan't forget while I live. And, as soon as ever I can scrape it together, I'll pay you back that loan."

He had kept his word, so far as telling Nellie of his financial condition was concerned. He had not, of course, told her of his use of the bank bonds, but he had, as he said he would, told her that, in all probability, he should be left with nothing but his salary.

"I told her she was free to give me up," he said, with emotion, "and what do you suppose she said to me? That she would marry me if she knew she must live in the poorhouse the rest of her days. Yes, and be happy, so long as we could be together. Well, I ain't worth it, and I told her so, but I'll do my best to be worth something; and she shan't have to live in the poorhouse either."

"I don't think there's much danger of that," I said. "And, by the way, George, your Louisville and Transcontinental speculation may not be all loss. You may save something out of it. There has been considerable trading in the stock during the past two days. It is up half a point already, according to the papers. Did you notice it?"

"Yes, I noticed it. But I tell you, Ros, I don't care. I'll be glad to get some of my money back, of course; enough to pay you and Cap'n Elisha anyhow; but I'm so happy to think that Nellie need never know I was a thief that I don't seem to care much for anything else."

Nellie was happy, too. She came to me and told me of her happiness. It was all on George's account, of course.

"The poor fellow had lost money in investments," she said, "and he thought I would not care for him if I found out he was poor. He isn't poor, of course, but if he was it would make no difference to me. I am so glad to see him without that dreadful worried look on his face that I--I--Oh, you must think me awful silly, Roscoe! I guess I am. I know I am. But you are the only one I can talk to in this way about--about him. All Ma wants to talk about now is the wedding and clothes and such, and Pa always treats me as if I was a child. I feel almost as if you were the closest friend I have, and I know George feels the same. He says you have helped him out of his troubles. I was sure you would; that is why I wrote you that letter. We are both SO grateful to you."

Their gratitude and the knowledge of their happiness were my sole consolations in this trying time. They kept me from repenting what I had done. It was hard not to repent. If Colton had only made known his purchase and closed the Lane at once, while my resolution was red hot, I could have faced the wrath of the village and its inevitable consequences fairly well, I believed; but he still kept silent and made no move. I saw him once or twice; on one occasion he came into the bank, but he came only to cash a check and did not mention the subject of the Lane. He did not look well to me and I heard him tell Taylor something about his "damned digestion."

The wedding day came. I, as best man, was busy and thankful for the bustle and responsibility. They occupied my mind and kept it from dwelling on other things. George worked at the bank until noon, getting ready to leave the institution in my charge and that of Dick Small, Henry's brother, who had reported for duty that morning. The marriage was to take place at half past one in the afternoon and the bridal couple were to go away on the three o'clock train. The honeymoon trip was to be a brief one, only a week.

Every able-bodied native of Denboro, man, woman and child, attended that wedding, I honestly believe. It was the best sort of advertising for Olinda Cahoon and Simeon Eldredge, for Olinda had made the gowns worn by the bride and the bride's mother and a number of the younger female guests, and Sim had sold innumerable bottles of a peculiarly penetrating perfume, a large supply of which he had been talked into purchasing by a Boston traveling salesman.

"Smell it, Ros, do ye?" whispered Sim, grinning triumphantly between the points of a "stand-up" collar. "I give you my word when that slick-talkin' drummer sold me all that perfumery, I thought I was stuck sure and sartin. But then I had an idee. Every time women folks come into the store and commenced to talk about the weddin' I says to 'em, says I, 'Can't sell you a couple of handkerchiefs to cry on, can I, Miss So-and-so? Weddin's are great places for sheddin'"
tears, you know.' If I sold 'em the handkerchiefs all well and good; but if they laughed and said they had a plenty, I got out my sample bottle of 'May Lilock', that's the name of the cologne, and asked 'em to smell of it. 'If you cry with that on your handkerchief,' says I, 'all hands will be glad to have you do it. And only twenty cents a bottle!' You wouldn't believe how much I sold. You can smell this weddin' afore you come in sight of the house, can't ye now."

You could, and you continued to smell it long after you left. My best suit reeked of "May Lilac" weeks later when I took it out of the closet.

Dorinda was there, garbed in rustling black alpaca, her Sunday gown for ten years at least, and made over and "turned" four or five times. Lute was on deck, cutaway coat, "high water" trousers and purple tie, grand to look upon, Alvin Baker and Elnathan Mullet and Alonzo Black and Thoph Newcomb and Zeb Kendrick were, as the Item would say, "among those present" and if Zeb's black cutaway smelled slightly of fish it was, at least, a change from the pervading "May Lilac."

Captain Jed strutted pompously about, monarch of the day. He greeted me genially.

"Hello, Ros!" he said. "You out here? Thought you'd be busy overhaulin' George's runnin' riggin' and makin' sure he was all ready to heave alongside the parson."

"I have been," I answered. "I am on my way back there now."

"All right, all right. Matildy give me fits for not stayin' upstairs until the startin' gun was fired, but I told her that, between her with her eyes full of tears and Olindy Cahoon with her mouth full of pins, 'twas no place for a male man. So I cleared out till everything was shipshape. Say, Ros," he laid his hand on my shoulder and bent to whisper in my ear: "Say, Ros," he said, "I'm glad to see you're takin' my advice."

"Taking your advice?" I repeated, puzzled.

"Yes; about not playin' with fire, you know. I ain't heard of you and the Princess cruisin' together for the past week. Thought 'twas best not to be too familiar with the R'yal family, didn't you? That's right, that's right. We can't take chances. We've got Denboro and the Shore Lane to think about, ain't we?"

I did not answer. I did not risk looking him in the face.

"She's liable to be here most any time, I cal'late," he went on. "Nellie would insist on invitin' her. And I must say that, to be honest, the present she sent is the finest that's come aboard yet. The only thing I've got against her is her bad judgment in pickin' a father. If 'twan't for that I--hello! Who--Why, I believe--"

There was a commotion among the guests and heads were turned toward the door. The captain started forward. I started back. She had entered the room and was standing there, looking about her with smiling interest. I had forgotten that, considering her friendship with Nellie, she was certain to be invited.

She was dressed in a simple, but wonderful, white gown and wore a bunch of lilies of the valley at her bosom. The doorway was decorated with sprays of honeysuckle and green boughs and against this background she made a picture that brought admiring whispers from the people near me. She did not notice me at first and I think I should have escaped by the side door if it had not been for Simeon Eldredge. Simeon was just behind me and he darted forward with outstretched hand.

"Why, how d'ye do, Miss Colton!" exclaimed Sim. "You're just in time, ain't ye! Let me get you a chair. Alvin," to Mr. Baker, who, perspiring beneath the unaccustomed dignity of a starched shirt front, occupied a front seat, "get up and let Miss Colton set down."

She looked in Sim's direction and saw me, standing beside him. I had no opportunity to avoid her look now, as I had done when we met in the street. She saw me and I could not turn away. I bowed. She did not acknowledge the bow. She
looked calmly past me, through me. I saw, or fancied that I saw, astonishment on the faces of those watching us. Captain Jed stepped forward to greet her and I went into the adjoining room, where George was anxiously awaiting me.

"Good land, Ros!" he exclaimed, with a sigh of relief, "I was beginning to be afraid you'd skipped out and left me to go through it all alone. Say something to brace me up, won't you; I'm scared to death. Say," with a wondering glance at my face, "what's struck YOU? You look more upset than I feel."

I believe I ordered him not to be an idiot. I know I did not "brace him up" to any extent.

It was a very pretty wedding. At least every one said it was, although they say the same of all weddings, I am told. Personally I was very glad when it was over. Nellie whispered in my ear as I offered her my congratulations, "We owe it all to you, Roscoe." George said nothing, but the look he gave me as he wrung my hand was significant. For a moment I forgot myself, forgot to be envious of those to whom the door for happiness was not shut. After all I had opened the door for these two, and that was something.

I walked as far as the corner with Lute and Dorinda. Dorinda's eyes were red and her husband commented upon it.

"I thought a weddin' was supposed to be a joyful sort of thing," he said, disgustedly. "It's usually cal'lated to be. Yet you and the rest of the women folks set and cried through the whole of it. What in time was there to cry about?"

"Oh, I don't know, Luther," replied Dorinda in, for her, an unusually tolerant tone. "Perhaps it's because we've all been young once and can't forget it."

"I don't forget, no more'n you do. I ain't so old that I can't remember that fur back, I hope. But it don't make me feel like cryin'."

"Well, all right. We won't argue about it. Let's be pleasant as we can, for once."

Now that is where Lute should have taken the hint and remained silent. At least he should have changed the subject. But he was hot and uncomfortable and, I suspect, his Sunday shoes were tight. He persisted.

"Huh!" he sniffed; "I don't see's you've given me no sensible reason for cryin'. If I recollect right you didn't cry at your own weddin'."

His wife turned on him. She looked him over from head to foot.

"Didn't I?" she said, tartly. "Well, maybe not. But if I'd realized what was happenin' to me, I should."

"Lute," said I, as I parted from them at the corner, "I am going to the bank for a little while. Then I think I shall take a short run down the bay in the Comfort. Did you fill her tank with gasolene as I asked you to?"

Lute stopped short. "There!" he exclaimed, "I knew there was somethin' I forgot. I'll do it soon's ever I get home."

"When you get home," observed Dorinda, firmly, "you'll wash that henhouse window."

"Now, Dorinda, if that ain't just like you! Don't you hear Roscoe askin' me about that gas? I've had that gas in my head ever since yesterday."

"Um-hm," wearily. "Well, I shouldn't think a little extry more or less would make much difference. Never mind, don't waste any more on me. Get the gas out of your head, if Roscoe wants you to. You can wash the window afterward."

Lute's parting words were that he would fill that tank the very first thing. If he had--but there! he didn't.