



A Border Ruffian

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PART I

West

The Incident of the Boston Young Lady, the Commercial Traveller, and the Desperado.

Chapter I

Throughout the whole of the habitable globe there nowhere is to be found more delightful or more invigorating air than that which every traveller through New Mexico, from Albuquerque, past Las Vegas, to the Raton Mountains, is free to breathe.

Miss Grace Winthrop, of Boston, and also Miss Winthrop, her paternal aunt, and also Mr. Hutchinson Port, of Philadelphia, her maternal uncle—all of whom were but forty hours removed from the Alkali Desert west of the Continental Divide—felt in the very depths of their several beings how entirely good this air was; and, as their several natures moved them, they betrayed their lively appreciation of its excellence.

Miss Grace Winthrop, having contrived for herself, with the intelligent assistance of the porter, a most comfortable nest of pillows, suffered her novel to remain forgotten upon her knees; and, as she leaned her pretty blond head against the wood-work separating her section from that adjoining it, looked out upon the brown mountains, and accorded to those largely-grand objects of nature the rare privilege of being reflected upon the retina of her very blue eyes. Yet the mountains could not flatter themselves with the conviction that contemplation of them wholly filled her mind, for occasionally she smiled a most delightful smile.

Miss Winthrop, retired from the gaze of the world in the cell that the Pullman-car people euphemistically style a state-room, ignored all such casual excrescences upon the face of nature as mountains, and seriously read her morning chapter of Emerson.

Mr. Hutchinson Port, lulled by the easy, jog-trot motion of the car, and soothed by the air from Paradise that, for his virtues, he was being permitted to breathe, lapsed into calm and grateful slumber: and dreamed (nor could a worthy Philadelphian desire a better dream) of a certain meeting of the Saturday Night Club, in December, 1875, whereat the terrapin was remarkable, even for Philadelphia.

Miss Winthrop, absorbed in her Emersonian devotions, and Mr. Hutchinson Port, absorbed in slumber, did not perceive that the slow motion of the train gradually became slower, and finally entirely ceased; and even Grace, lost in her pleasant daydream, scarcely observed that the unsightly buildings of a little way-station had thrust themselves into the foreground of her landscape—for this

foreground she ignored, keeping her blue eyes serenely fixed upon the great brown mountains beyond. Nor was she more than dimly conscious of the appearance upon the station platform of a tall, broad-shouldered young man clad in corduroy, wearing a wide-brimmed felt-hat, and girded about with a belt, stuck full of cartridges, from which depended a very big revolver. In a vague way she was conscious of this young man's existence, and of an undefined feeling that, as the type of a dangerous and interesting class, his appearance was opportune in a part of the country which she had been led to believe was inhabited almost exclusively by cut-throats and outlaws.

In a minute or two the train went on again, and as it started Grace was aroused and shocked by the appearance at the forward end of the car of the ruffianly character whom she had but half seen from the car window. For a moment she believed that the train-robbery, that she had been confidently expecting over since her departure from San Francisco, was about to take place. Her heart beat hard, and her breath came quickly. But before these symptoms had time to become alarming the desperado had passed harmlessly to the rear end of the car, and after him had come the porter carrying his valise and a Winchester rifle.

"Goin' to Otero? Yes, sah! All right, sah! Put yo' heah; nice seat on shady side, sah! Thank yo', sah! Have a pillow, sah?" And, hearing this address on the part of the porter, Grace knew that the desperado, for the moment at least, was posing in the character of a law-abiding citizen, and was availing himself of his rights as such to ride in a Pullman-car. Being thus relieved of cause for immediate alarm, her breast presently began to swell with a fine indignation at the impudence of this abandoned person in thus thrusting himself into a place reserved, if not absolutely for aristocratic, certainly, at least, for respectable society.

Chapter II

The slight stir incident to the entrance of this offensive stranger aroused Mr. Hutchinson Port from his agreeable slumber. He yawned slightly, cast a disparaging glance upon the mountains, and then, drawing an especially good cigar from his case, betook himself to the smoking-room. Grace did not realize his intentions until they had become accomplished deeds.

Mr. Hutchinson Port—although a member (on the retired list) of the First City Troop, and therefore, presumably, inflamed with the martial spirit characteristic of that ancient and honorable organization—was not, perhaps, just the man that a person knowing in such matters would have selected to pit against a New Mexico desperado in a hand-to-hand conflict. But Grace felt her heart sink a little as she saw the round and rather puffy form of her natural protector walk away into the depths of a mirror at the forward end of the car, and so vanish. And in this same mirror she beheld, seated only two sections behind her, the scowling ruffian!

The situation, as Grace regarded it, was an alarming one; and it was the more trying to her nerves because it did not, reasonably, admit of action. She was aware that the very presence of a ruffian in a Pullman car was in the nature of a promise,

on his part, that for the time being it was not his intention either to murder or to rob—unless, indeed, he were one of a robber band, and was awaiting the appearance of his confederates. For her either to call her uncle, or break in upon the Emersonian seclusion of her aunt, she felt would not be well received, under the circumstances, by either of these her relatives. As to the porter, that sable functionary had vanished; there was no electric bell, and the car, one of a Pullman train, had no conductor.

For protection, therefore, should need for protection arise, Grace perceived that she must depend upon the one other passenger. (They had lingered so long amid the delights of a Santa Barbara spring that they were journeying in that pleasant time of year when spring travel eastward has ended, and summer travel has not yet begun.) This one other passenger was a little man of dapper build and dapper dress, whose curiously-shaped articles of luggage betokened his connection with commercial affairs. Grace was forced to own, as she now for the first time regarded him attentively, that he did not seem to be wrought of the stern stuff out of which, as a rule, champions are made.

As she thus looked upon him, she was startled to find that he was looking very fixedly upon her; and she was further startled, as their eyes met, by the appearance upon his face of a friendly smile. She would have been vastly surprised had she been aware that this little person labored under the belief that he had already effected a favorable lodgement in her good graces; and she would have been both surprised and horrified could she have known that each of her own strictly confidential smiles during her day-dream had been accepted by the commercial traveller as intended for himself; and had been met, as they successively appeared, by his own smiles in answer. Yet this was the actual state of the case; and the little man's soul was uplifted by the thought that here was a fresh proof, and a very pleasant one, of how irresistible were his personal appearance and his personal charm of manner when arrayed in battery against any one of the gentler sex.

Viewed from the stand-point of his experience, this inquiring look and its attendant eye-encounter indicated that the moment for more pronounced action now had arrived. With the assured air of one who possibly may be repulsed, but who certainly cannot be defeated, he arose from his seat, crossed to Miss Grace Winthrop's section, and, with a pleasant remark to the effect that in travelling it always was nice to be sociable, edged himself into the seat beside her.

For a moment, the insolent audacity of this move was so overwhelming that Grace was quite incapable of coherent expression. The lovely pink of her cheeks became a deep crimson that spread to the very tips of her ears; her blue eyes flashed, and her hands clinched instinctively.

"Looked like a perfect little blue-eyed devil," the drummer subsequently declared, in narrating a highly-embellished version of his adventure, "but she didn't mean it, you know—at least, only for a minute or two. I soon combed her down nicely." What he actually said, was:

"Been travellin' far, miss?"

"What do you mean by this? Go away!" Grace managed to say; but she could not speak very clearly, for she was choking.

"Come, don't get mad, miss! I know you're not mad, really, anyway. When a woman's as handsome as you are, she can't be bad-natured. Come from California, I suppose? Nice country over there, ain't it?"

What with surprise and rage and fright, Grace was very nearly frantic. For the moment she was powerless—her uncle in the smoking-room, her aunt locked up with her Emersonian meditations, the porter in the lobby; the only available person upon whom she could call for aid a horrible drunken murderer and robber, steeped in all the darkest crimes of the frontier! She felt herself growing faint, but she struggled to her feet. The drummer laid his hand on her arm: "Don't go away, my dear! Just stay and have a little talk. You see—"

But the sentence was not finished. Grace felt her head buzzing, and then, from somewhere—a long way off, it seemed—she heard a voice saying: "I beg your pardon; this thing seems to be annoying you. Permit me to remove it."

Her head cleared a little, for there was a promise of help—not only in the words but in the tone. And then she saw the desperado calmly settle a big hand into the collar of the little man's coat, lift him out of the seat and well up into the air, and so carry him at arm's-length—kicking and struggling, and looking for all the world like a jumping-jack—out through the passage-way at the forward end of the car.

As they disappeared, she precipitately sought refuge in the state-room—where Miss Winthrop was aroused from her serious contemplation of All-pervading Thought by a sudden and most energetic demand upon her protection and her salts-bottle. And, before she could be made in the least degree to comprehend why Grace should require either the one or the other, Grace had still further complicated and mystified the matter by fainting dead away.

Chapter III

In the course of two or three hours—aided by Miss Winthrop's salts and Mr. Hutchinson Port's travelling-flask of peculiar old Otard, which together contributed calmness and strength, and being refreshed by a little slumber—Grace was able to explain in an intelligible manner the adventure that had befallen her.

"And no matter what dreadful crimes that horrible man may have committed," she said, in conclusion. "I shall be most grateful to him to my dying day. And I want you, Uncle Hutchinson, no matter how unpleasant it may be to you to do so, to thank him from me for what he did. And, oh! it was so funny to see that detestable little impudent man kicking about that way in the air!" Which remembrance, at the same moment, of both the terrifying and the ludicrous side of her recent experience, not unnaturally sent Grace off into hysterics.

Mr. Hutchinson Port was quite ready to carry the message of thanks to the desperado, and to add to it some very hearty thanks of his own. But his good intentions could not be realized; the desperado no longer was on the train.

"Yes, sah; I knows the gen'l'm yo' means, sah," responded the porter, in answer to inquiries. "Pow'fl big gen'l'm yo' means, as got on this mo'nin' to Vegas. Thet's th' one, sah! He'd some kind er trib-bilation with th' little gen'l'm—th' drummer

gen'lm' as got on las' night to Lamy—an' he brought him out, holdin' him like he was a kitten, to the lobby, an' jus' set him down an' boxed his ears till he hollered! Yes, sah, thet's th' one. He got off to Otero. An' th' little man he got off to Trinidad, an' said he was agoin' up by the Denver to Pueblo. Yes, sah; they's both got off, sah! Thank yo', sah! Get yo' a pillow, sah?"

Chapter IV

And so it came to pass that Miss Grace Winthrop returned to Boston cherishing towards desperadoes in general, and towards the desperadoes of New Mexico in particular, sentiments as generous as they were unusual.

Miss Winthrop the elder, whose soul was accustomed to a purer ether than that in which desperadoes ordinarily are found, presently forgot the vicarious excitements of her journey eastward in the calm joys of the Summer School of Philosophy.

And Mr. Hutchinson Port longed to be able to forget the whole State of California: when he realized, as he did with a most bitter keenness, that the superficial charms of that greatly overrated region had detained him upon the Western coast until the terrapin season was absolutely at an end!

PART II

East

The Incident of the Mysterious Stranger, and the Philadelphia Dinner-party.

Chapter I

Mrs. Rittenhouse Smith had achieved righteousness. That is to say, being a Philadelphian, she was celebrated for giving successful dinners. The person who achieves celebrity of this sort in Philadelphia is not unlike the seraph who attains to eminence in the heavenly choir.

It was conceded that Mr. Rittenhouse Smith (he was one of the Smiths, of course—not the others. His mother was a Biddle) was an important factor in his wife's success; for, as became a well-brought-up Philadelphian, he attended personally to the marketing. But had these Smith dinners been commendable only because the food was good, they would not have been at all remarkable. In Philadelphia, so far as the eating is concerned, a bad dinner seems to be an impossibility.

In truth, Mrs. Smith's dinners were famous because they never were marred by even the slightest suggestion of a contretemps; because they glided along smoothly, and at precisely the proper rate of speed, from oysters to coffee; and, because—and to accomplish this in Philadelphia was to accomplish something very little short of a miracle—they never were stupid.

Therefore it was that Mrs. Rittenhouse Smith stood among the elect, with a comfortable sense of security in her election; and she smelled with a satisfied nose the smell of the social incense burned before her shrine; and she heard with well-pleased ears the social hosannas which constantly were sung in her praise.

Chapter II

Occupying a position at once so ornate and so enviable, the feelings of Mrs. Rittenhouse Smith may be imagined upon finding herself confronted. with the tragical probability that one of her most important dinner-parties would be a failure.

In preparing for this dinner-party she had thought deeply in the still watches of the night, and she had pondered upon it in the silence of noonday. For Mrs. Smith, above all others, knew that only by such soulful vigilance can a perfect

dinner be secured. It was her desire that it should be especially bright intellectually, for it was to be given to Miss Winthrop, of Boston, and was to include Miss Winthrop's niece, Miss Grace Winthrop, also of Boston. These ladies, as she knew, belonged to clubs which, while modestly named after the days of the week, were devoted wholly to the diffusion of the most exalted mental culture. Moreover, they both were on terms of intimacy with Mr. Henry James. On the other hand, it was her desire that the dinner should be perfect materially, because among her guests was to be Miss Grace Winthrop's uncle, Mr. Hutchinson Port. It was sorely against Mrs. Smith's will that Mr. Hutchinson Port was included in her list, for he had the reputation of being the most objectionable diner-out in Philadelphia. His conversation at table invariably consisted solely of disparaging remarks, delivered in an undertone to his immediate neighbors, upon the character and quality of the food. However, in the present case, as Miss Grace Winthrop's uncle, he was inevitable.

And, such was Mrs. Smith's genius, she believed that she had mastered the situation. Her list—excepting, of course, Mr. Hutchinson Port, and he could not reasonably be objected to by his own relatives—was all that she could desire. The nine other guests, she was satisfied, were such as could be exhibited creditably even to ladies belonging to Boston clubs and personally acquainted with Mr. Henry James. As to the dinner itself, Mr. Rittenhouse Smith, who never spoke inconsiderately in matters of this grave nature, had agreed with her that—barring, of course, some Providentially interposed calamity such as scorching the ducks or getting too much salt in the terrapin—even Mr. Hutchinson Port would be unable to find a flaw in it.

And now, at the last moment, at twelve o'clock of the day on which the dinner was to take place, came a note from the man upon whom she had most strongly counted to make the affair a success—the brightest man on her list, and the one who was to take out Miss Grace Winthrop—saying that he was laid up with a frightful cold and face-ache! He tried to make a joke of it, poor fellow, by adding a sketch—he sketched quite nicely—of his swelled cheek swathed in a handkerchief. But Mrs. Rittenhouse Smith was in no humor for joking; she was furious!

When a woman misses fire in this way, it usually is possible to fill her place with a convenient young sister, or even with an elderly aunt. But when a man is wanted, and, especially, as in the case in point, a clever man, the matter very readily may become desperate. Mrs. Rittenhouse Smith certainly was dismayed, yet was she not utterly cast down. She had faith in her own quick wits, which had rescued her in times past from other social calamities, though never from one darker than this, of having, at a single fatal blow, her best man cut off from one of her most important dinner-parties, and the dinner-party itself reduced to thirteen; an ominous and dismal number that surely would be discovered, and that would cast over her feast a superstitious gloom.

In this trying emergency Mrs. Smith acted with characteristic decision and wisdom. She perceived that to send invitations simultaneously to all the possible men of her acquaintance might involve her in still more awkward complications, while to send invitations successively might result in a fatal loss of time. Obviously, the only practicable course was a series of prompt, personal appeals from one to another, until assurance was received that the vacant place certainly

would be filled. Therefore she despatched a note to Mr. Rittenhouse Smith, at his down-town office, acquainting him with the impending catastrophe and bidding him drop all other concerns until he had averted it by securing a satisfactory man.

Chapter III

Now, under ordinary circumstances, Mr. Rittenhouse Smith would have obeyed his wife's orders cheerfully and promptly; but on this particular day there was a flurry in the stock-market (Mr. Smith was a stock-broker), and every minute that he was away from his office exposed him to serious business danger. At what he considered to be the safest moments, he made no less than five sallies after as many different men; and three of these had engagements for the evening, and two of them were out of town. What with the condition of the stock-market and the gloomy outlook for the dinner-party, Mr. Smith, albeit he was ordinarily a calm, sedate man, was almost distraught.

Three o'clock brought a prospect of relief, but after a day of such active dealing his books could not be settled hurriedly. In point of fact, when at last he was able to leave his Third Street office the State House clock was striking five; and the dinner, in accordance with Philadelphia custom, was to be at seven! He knew that his wife had discharged into his hands the matter of procuring the needed man; and he knew that this line of action on her part had been both right and wise; but he groaned in spirit, as he thought how dreadful a responsibility was his!

Mr. Smith was a methodical man, and in the calmness partly bred of his naturally orderly habits, and partly bred of his despair, he seated himself at his desk, in company with a comforting cigar, to think of any possible men whom he might beat up at their homes as he went westward. While he thus meditated—and while blackness settled down upon his soul, for of none could he think available for his purpose—he looked idly at the list of hotel arrivals in the morning paper that chanced to lie beside him; and suddenly he arose with a great shout of joy, for in this list he beheld the name, "Van R. Livingstone."

Here, indeed, was good-fortune at last! Van Rensselaer Livingstone was in college with him, in his own class, at Harvard. They had been capital friends while their college life lasted; and although Livingstone had spent the last ten or twelve years in Europe, they had not wholly lost track of each other. Clever, handsome, well-born, and well-bred, he was everything that the present occasion required. He seemed to have been sent from heaven direct. In twenty minutes Mr. Smith was asking for him at his hotel.

"Mr. Livingstone? Mr. Livingstone is out."

"Did he leave any word as to when he would come in?"

"Yes, sir. He said that a gentleman might call, and to say that he certainly would be back at six, and would not go out again to-night."

Mr. Smith looked at his watch—it was 5:30. Had there been any uncertainty as to Livingstone's return, he would have waited. But it was clear that he was coming back to dine at his hotel, and to spend the evening there. A note, therefore, could

be trusted to do the business, and by writing, instead of waiting, Mr. Smith would save half an hour; moreover, if he waited, he would not have time to make the mayonnaise.

Probably it is only in Philadelphia that it ever occurs nowadays to the master of a feast to dress the salad; which, doubtless, is the reason why a better salad is served at certain dinner-tables in Philadelphia than at any other dinner-tables in the whole world.

The thought of the mayonnaise settled the matter. Mr. Smith hastily wrote an account of the trying situation, and concluded his note with a solemn demand upon "dear old Van" to fill the vacant place, "in the holy name of the class of '68, and for love of your old classmate, R. Smith."

Chapter IV

Presently the person thus adjured returned to his hotel, and with a somewhat puzzled expression read the adjuration. "R. Smith," he murmured, reflectively. "I think I do remember a Dicky Smith, from Philadelphia, at Columbia. But he wasn't in my class, and my class wasn't '68, but '76, and I don't remember ever saying a dozen words to him. He's got a good deal of cheek, whoever he is—and he, and his dinner, and his missing man may all go to the devil together! His invitation is absurd!" And with this ultimatum Mr. Livingstone laid the letter and envelope neatly together, preparatory to tearing them into fragments.

But before this purpose was accomplished, another view of the situation came into his mind. "I don't see why I shouldn't go," he thought. "I've been muddling all day with this wretched wool man—which is a bore, even if I have made a pretty good bargain with him for next season's clip; and Ned hasn't come to time, which is another bore, for now I'll have to eat my dinner alone. And this Dicky Smith writes like a gentleman, even if he is cheeky; and he certainly seems to be in a peck of troubles about his missing man, and his thirteen at table, and the rest of it. Why, it's a regular adventure! And to think of having an adventure in Philadelphia, of all places in the world! By Jove, I'll go!"

Chapter V

"How very, very good of you, Mr. Livingstone, to come to our rescue!" It was Mrs. Rittenhouse Smith who spoke, and she spoke in a guarded tone; for Livingstone was among the last to arrive, and she had no desire to publish among her guests the catastrophe that so nearly had overtaken her.

"And I know," she continued: "that you will understand how sorry I am that this first visit of Mr. Smith's old friend to our house should be under such peculiar circumstances. But you will have your reward, for you are to take out the very

prettiest and the very brightest girl here. Come and be rewarded!" And Mrs. Smith slipped her hand upon her benefactor's arm, and piloted him across the room.

"Miss Winthrop, permit me to present Mr. Livingstone. Miss Winthrop is half Boston and half European, Mr. Livingstone; and as you, after these ten years abroad, must be wholly European, you can cheer each other as fellow foreigners in the midst of Philadelphia barbarism"—with which pleasant speech the hostess turned quickly to receive the last arrival (a man, of course; only a man would dare to be even near to late at one of Mrs. Rittenhouse Smith's dinners), and then, standing beside the doorway, with Mr. Hutchinson Port, marshalled her company in to dinner. It was a comfort to her to know that for once in his fault-finding life Mr. Port would be compelled, since he was to be seated beside his hostess, to eat his food without abusing it.

Just at this time two things struck Mrs. Smith as odd. One was that as she presented her handsome guest to Miss Grace Winthrop she certainly had felt him start, while his arm had trembled curiously beneath her hand. The other was that as Mr. Rittenhouse Smith left the drawing-room, passing close beside her with Miss Winthrop upon his arm, he made a face at her. The first of these phenomena struck her as curious. The second struck her as ominous. Had it been possible she would have investigated the cause of Mr. Smith's facial demonstration. But it was not possible. She only could breathe a silent prayer that all would go well—and the while sniff anxiously to discover if perchance there were a smell of scorching duck.

Mrs. Smith would have been still more mystified could she have been cognizant at this juncture of her husband's and of Miss Grace Winthrop's and of Mr. Livingstone's thoughts.

The first of these was thinking: "It isn't Van Rensselaer Livingstone, any more than I am; though he certainly looks like him. And I'm sure that he knows that he don't know me. And I think that we've managed to get into a blank idiotic mess!"

And the second of these was thinking: "If he's been in Europe for the past ten years, there's not one chance in fifty that I ever have laid eyes on him. But I know I have!"

And the third of these was thinking: "There isn't man in the room who looks enough like Dicky Smith to be his tenth cousin. But if ever the goodness of heaven was shown in the affairs of men it is shown here to me to-night!"

Chapter VI

Even as the sun triumphs over the darkness of night and the gloom of the tempest, so did Mrs. Rittenhouse Smith's dinner-party emerge radiantly from the sombre perils which had beset it. It was a brilliant, unqualified success.

Miss Winthrop was good enough to say, when the evening was ended—saying it in that assured, unconscious way that gives to the utterances of Boston people so peculiar a charm—"Really, Mrs. Smith, you have given me not only a delightful

dinner, but a delightful surprise; I would not have believed, had I not seen it myself, that outside of Boston so many clever people could be brought together!"

And Mr. Hutchinson Port, upsetting all his traditions, had kept up a running fire of laudatory comment upon the dinner that had filled Mrs. Smith's soul with joy. She had expected him, being cut off by her presence from engaging in his accustomed grumbling, to maintain a moody silence. She had not expected praise: and she valued his praise the more because she knew that he spoke out of the fulness of his wisdom; and because in a matter of such vital moment as eating she knew that she could trust him to be sincere. His only approach to invidious comment was in regard to the terrapin.

With the grave solemnity that marks the serving of this delicacy in Philadelphia; in the midst of a holy calm befitting a sacred rite, the silver vessels were carried around the board, and in hushed rapture (a little puzzling to the Bostonians) the precious mixture was ladled out upon the fourteen plates; and Mr. Hutchinson Port, as the result of many years of soulful practice, was able to secure to himself at one dexterous scoop more eggs than fell to the lot of any other two men.

It was while rapturously eating these eggs that he spake: "My dear Mrs. Smith, will you forgive me if I venture to suggest, even to you—for what I have seen this night has convinced me that you are one of the very few people who know what a dinner ought to be—that the Madeira used in dressing terrapin cannot possibly be too old?"

Chapter VII

Proceeding in accordance with the cue that Mrs. Smith had given her, Miss Grace Winthrop engaged Mr. Livingstone in conversation upon European topics; and was somewhat astonished to find, in view of his past ten years in Europe, that they evidently had very little interest for him. And all the while that she talked with him she was haunted by the conviction that she had seen him somewhere; and all the while she was aware of something in his manner, she could not tell what, that seemed to imply that she ought to know who he was.

What Miss Grace Winthrop did feel entirely certain about, however, was that this was one of the cleverest and one of the manliest men she had ever come across. His well-shaped hands were big and brown, and his face was brown, and the set of his head and the range of his broad shoulders gave him an alert look and a certain air of command. There was that about him which suggested a vigorous life in the open air. There was nothing to suggest ten years in Europe, unless it were the charm of his manner, and his neat way of saying bright things.

As for Livingstone, he was as one who at the same time is both entranced and inspired. He knew that he never had been happier in his life; he knew that he never had said so many clever things in so short a time. Therefore it was that these young people always thereafter were most harmoniously agreed that this was the very happiest dinner that they had eaten in all their lives.

It came to an end much too soon for either of them. The ladies left the room, and cigars were invoked to fill their place. This was the moment that Livingstone had looked forward to as affording the first practicable opportunity for taking his host apart and explaining that his, Livingstone's, presence at that particular feast certainly must be owing to some mistake. And this was the moment that Mr. Smith, also, had looked forward to as available for clearing up the mystery—of which his wife still was blissfully ignorant—as to who their stranger guest really was. But the moment now being come, Livingstone weakly but deliberately evaded it by engaging in an animated conversation with Mr. Hutchinson Port in regard to the precise number of minutes and seconds that a duck ought to remain before the fire; and Mr. Smith—having partaken of his own excellent wines and meats until his whole being was aglow with a benevolent friendliness—contented himself with thinking that, no matter who his guest was, he certainly was a capital fellow; and that to cross-question him as to his name, at least until the evening was at an end, would be a gross outrage upon the laws of hospitality.

Livingstone, however, had the grace to feel a good deal ashamed of himself as they returned to the drawing-room. In all that had gone before, he had been a victim of circumstances. He had an uncomfortable conviction that his position now was not wholly unlike that of an impostor. But as he pushed aside the portiere he beheld a pair of blue eyes which, he flattered himself, betrayed an expression of pleased expectancy—and his compunctions vanished.

There was only a little time left to them, for the evening was almost at an end. Their talk came back to travel. Did she like travelling in America? he asked. Yes, she liked it very much indeed, "only"—as a sudden memory of a past experience flashed into her mind—"one does sometimes meet such dreadfully horrid people!"

They were sitting, as they talked, in a narrow space between a table and the wall, made narrower by the presence of an unused chair. Just as this memory was aroused, some one tried to push by them, and Livingstone, rising, lifted the obstructing chair away. To find a clear space in which to put it down, he lifted it across the table; and for a moment he stood erect, holding the chair out before him at arm's-length.

When he seated himself and turned again to speak to Grace, he was startled to find that her face and shoulders, and even her arms—her arms and shoulders were delectable—were crimson; and in her eyes he found at last the look of recognition that he had hoped for earlier in the evening, but that now he had ceased to expect. Recognition of this emphatic sort he certainly had not expected at all.

"You—you see," she said, "I al—always have thought that you were a robber and a murderer, and shocking things like that. And I didn't really see you that day, except as you walked away, holding up that horrid little man, kicking—just as you held up the chair. Can you ever, ever forgive me for thinking such wicked things about you, and for being so ungrateful as not to know you at the very first?"

And Livingstone, then and later, succeeded in convincing her that he could.

Chapter VIII

By an emphatic whisper Miss Grace Winthrop succeeded in impressing upon her aunt the necessity—at no matter what sacrifice of the social conventions—of being the last to go. In the matter of keeping Livingstone, she experienced no difficulty at all. And when the unnecessary eight had departed, she presented to her aunt and uncle her deliverer, and—in a delightfully hesitating way—told to Mr. and Mrs. Smith the story of her deliverance.

It was when this matter had been explained that Livingstone, who felt that his position now was absolutely secure, brought up the delicate question of his own identity.

“You can understand, I am sure, Mrs. Smith,” he said, “how very grateful I am to you for this evening; but, indeed, I don’t think that I am the person you meant to ask. And it has occurred to me, from something that you said about my having been in Europe for a good while, that Mr. Smith might have meant his invitation for Van Rensselaer Livingstone. He’s my cousin, you know; and he has spent the last ten years in Europe, and is there yet, I fancy. But I am Van Ruyter Livingstone, and if I can be said to have a home anywhere—except the old home in New York, of course—it is on my sheep range in New Mexico.

“But you won’t be cruel enough, Mrs. Smith, after letting me into Paradise—even if I did get in by mistake—to turn me out again; will you?”

And Mrs. Rittenhouse Smith, who was a clever woman, as well as a remarkably clear-sighted one, replied that even if she wanted to turn Mr. Van Ruyter Livingstone out of Paradise she believed that it was now too late.

