

## THE LAST OF THE FIRST.

## A TALE OF AN OLD TOWN.

## I.

"I've always thought somethin' would turn up after while, if I just stuck it out long enough."

"Well, if I'm not much mistaken, sir, you'll have your reward now, or soon."

The young newspaper reporter, standing there on the broken stone steps, looked up approvingly as he spoke, and drew a long, satisfied breath as he stuck the pencil with which he had been scribbling back into the elastic loops of his notebook. The old man seated on the dilapidated porch above bent forward still further, with a nod.

"You are 'most sho' that it's the same name, sir?" he asked.

"As near sure as you can get without being dead sure. 'Tis n't a common name, is it? Tebbys! I don't think I ever heard it but once before this time. With due respect to the bard of Avon, there's something in a name now and then. I hope it won't fail now. He's a wide-awake fellow, sir, that friend of mine. If a man's got even common sharpness to start with, that sort of claim agency's the thing to whittle it down to a point. If I'm not mistaken, he's off on a false scent now. But there are precious few of us who don't get fooled sometimes. Tebbys! Yes, that's the name, certain. He'd a notion the heir ought to be somewhere in Virginia, but could n't start a trail. You say that Maryland family he's gone to look up is a younger branch, — yours the main line; and you ought to know, sir. If this does n't mean more than just a common newspaper screed to all of us, — you and me and this whole queer old place, — why, I'm deucedly wide of the mark!"

The old man gave a fluttering chuckle.

"Goin' to put *me* into yo' article?" he asked.

"Do you think I could afford to leave you out, sir? Leave you out? The last of the first! Not only the oldest inhabitant, but the last of the — ahem — old first-chop sort of people! Mr. Vender," — he turned to a third man standing near, one step below, — "no offense, I hope. You told me so yourself; and being, as it seems, the main antiquary here, I reckon you know who's who. Why, to leave you out, sir," — again addressing the old man, — "would n't it be Hamlet left out of Hamlet? Oh yes, whether that million or so over there in the Bank of England comes in for me as an additional attraction or not, you'll have to take your proper stand in the old town. It's the crowning touch, the finishing point. It's such a piece of good luck for a fellow in my line that I can't help thinking something's got to come out of it for you, too. Look out for a letter soon. If Legget's back again, I'll see him to-morrow. I shan't forget, you may depend." He flashed a bright, bold glance over the gray head full into a pair of eyes beyond, and went on: "No chance of my doing *that*. Too much interested. I've been trying to stir up Mr. Vender, here, on the subject of that pyrites-mine, — make him see a glowing future there; but he says it's no good. By the bye, Mr. Vender, don't let me forget those specimens you gave me, please. It's the prettiest ore I ever saw. If all that glistens were gold, now, or had gold in it, you'd be safe. Are you sure that fellow who tested it for you was even a good amateur expert? 'Tis n't easy to find anything worth mining nowadays, with so many mines shutting up instead of opening; but it seems to me that, so

near Washington as this, or rather, right on through there to Baltimore, that sort of thing ought to be worth looking into. Your finding it yourself, too, — the town antiquary poking about the old town stone quarries on a Sunday afternoon, — I like that! Sure you did n't have help, — some pair of bright eyes along, — Miss — er — Miss Tebbys' eyes, for instance? Eh! How far from the town did you say? Half a mile! Whe-ew! If it had turned out anything worth while, enough to set matters going, would n't the Tebbys fortune piled on top of it set this old Doomstone booming again! As for the last — well, we'll see, anyhow. I'm glad I came. It's been a pleasant day all round."

His bold eyes lingered a moment on the face of the girl in the doorway. She drew herself up half resentfully, but her own gaze fell beneath the look, and a blush — not a rose-flush, but a great crimson wave of color — rushed from brow to chin. That other man, the one called Vender, saw. The old man took no notice. He was still bending forward eagerly, the rickety split-seated rocking-chair in which he sat creaking as with his own human excitement and anxiety; the silver head of the old-fashioned stick between his knees trembling under the thin, clawlike, and not over-clean hands crossed upon it. There was little or no breeze this midsummer evening, but the white locks on his head seemed also astir. His deeply sunken eyes glistened feverishly. The same flame had crept into his wasted cheeks. The face, though refined by age and perhaps some suffering, was neither strong nor intelligent. Its low brow and feeble chin spoke of degeneracy, both mental and physical. Neither was he by any means a "nice-looking" old man. The soiled alpaca coat which he wore covered a back hopelessly bent; his frayed, dingy shirt-front, a cavernous chest. There were few traces of the gentleman left in either countenance or carriage, but just

now it was as if a past hardly at times suggested, a very different past, had all at once come to life again, quivering, yearning toward a possible new future.

"Fifty years! Fif-ty years!" He leaned back suddenly in his chair, — struck the floor with his stick sharply. Mr. Stanforth, the newspaper man, also started. His keenest professional look had returned, but still the speaker did not seem to see. "Fifty years an' mo'," he went on, "I've stuck it out, — the last gentleman-born left in this old town! Ten years I've been livin' on my neighbors' charity, clean forgot by kith an' kin ev'rywhere. Now the tide's goin' to turn at last, an' they'll see if I've forgot who's done for me an' who has n't!"

Vender was looking very grave just now. Even the glance of triumph and promise cast at him with these last words met no like response.

"When the last one of 'em went, he called me a fool for stayin', but I stayed. I said I'd stick it out. The foreign trade had stopped when I was a boy, an' the place was already goin' down, but I was n't one to quit where I was born an' raised, — not to speak of father an' gran'father befo' me, — an' set off, like some Tom or Dick, seekin' my fortune. No, sirs! When they moved the co't-house an' the bank, moved 'most all the brick buildin's, just kyarted the bricks away, I stayed. When the big fire broke out an' swept off 'most all the old wooden ones, I stayed on just the same. When the creek got so filled up the last Baltimo' boat stopped comin', why, then the chills an' fevers came. They've shaken my bones ever since, year after year, but still I've stuck it out. I've lived with the chills an' without the first fam'lies, — not a single gentleman-born to play a game of kyards with, or lady for my partner in a reel! Was it any wonder, sirs, that I came down at last to takin' up with, an' 'most marryin', a gyrl from Tarrypin Forest?"

The girl in the doorway gave a fierce

start here. The old man looked around half guiltily. "I'm not sayin' anything against yo' mother, child," said he. "In most ways she was a heap too good for me. An' if I did first lay eyes on her sellin' strawberries in the street, an' barefooted too, there was never a handsomer woman in Doomstone. I might ha' done worse than to stick it out with her, as I've done since she died with you. If she'd lived, I'd ha' married her, in spite of the townspeople. They'd not hear of it, but they treated her well for my sake. They've never once turned against the last of the old sort. Have n't they fed an' clothed me now for ten years? When this fortune comes, — I knew somethin' was comin' some day, — I'll stand by them that have stood by me."

A few moments later Mr. Stanforth and Vender were walking rapidly downhill toward a smart Dayton wagon containing the party of young people with whom the reporter, spending his summer holiday near the railway station ten miles away, had come to-day picnicking. Girl voices were already calling, hurrying "cousin Stan," when he stopped halfway and wheeled suddenly around for another backward look. The hills behind sloped picturesquely down in three rugged shoulder-like swells from the high bleak upland which stretched above, away toward distant woods. Between the stone piles on this incline, the gullies wandering here and there, the pine and sassafras and sumach bushes growing alongside, stood a few irregularly scattered houses; among others, yet apart on its own comparatively bare space, the mansion the two young men had just left. Its high black-shingled roof was in gaping holes. Its high, narrow, shutterless windows were even more dilapidated. From various openings in its cavelike basement stared empty-eyed darkness. The sun sinking behind those upland woods still struck yellowly athwart the

tops of four tall chimneys, but had already left all the lower part in shadow. Against the dull, faded red of the wall, the long, jagged flight of white stone steps in front, the white stone coping, gleamed out with the effect of a rather ghastly grin. It was not the largest house in sight. Down in front by the roadside, — the old sandy tide-water road which crept along out of the woods on the left to form the principal street, and then stole back again into the woods on the right, — downhill by this road-street stood another red brick building, twice as large; once a busy, crowded tavern, telling now, by its silent emptiness, of the present as well as the past. On either hand were two or three more old stone-coped, solidly built witnesses to a larger, wealthier life which had ebbed away, but only two or three. An ancient though still stout stone bridge across a stream flashing merrily down between two of the upsants; a few tumble-down brick or stone outbuildings grouped about massive foundation walls; a few old wooden dwellings, peak-roofed and dormer-windowed, left over from the fire which was one chapter in the tale of ruin, — these, along with a dozen or so comparatively new yet prematurely rickety and decaying structures, made up now what had once been the most important, most flourishing town in this part of Virginia. Farther off in front, and lower still, where had stood the wharves, the warehouses, the custom-house (for this had even been a port of entry), yellowing corn waved high along another stream, the once broad, deep creek, now almost stagnant in shrunken shallowness, which, skirting the hills, curved lazily away, through level meadow and swamp ground, to the river just beyond sight in the distance. It had proved traitor to the place to which it first gave prosperity. Let the faithless sluggard go! At "the head of tide-water" still stood poor old Doomstone, but the tide had turned against her, indeed.

The picnickers had left no part unexplored to-day. Even Church Hill with its foundation-stones and grave-stones, even Gallows Hill, — both a good way outside, — had been visited, as well as each of the old houses, except that last, by the curious, laughing, chattering group. On the counter in the post-office and store, kept by Mr. Vender, the little collection of local relics, hospitably spread forth, had been duly inspected. He had done the honors this time faithfully, but drawn a line at last. Only one person, the most intelligent and appreciative one, had he taken with him for a call on the old man up yonder. Looking back again, they could see him now still sitting on the porch; the girl, who had stepped forward, standing near, her tall, fine shape clearly outlined, — youth, beauty, in striking contrast to its whole setting and background. The ardent young newspaper man saw, and in his way appreciated. His was only the journalistic interest in it all, — not the mingled artistic and antiquarian delight which looked out of those eager brown eyes, that thoughtful, delicate face beside him, — but he smiled broadly in pure pleasure. “George!” he burst forth, “how it will work up!”

As they turned again, he added: “If I go back to town to-morrow, I’ll see Legget right away. Don’t forget — let me forget, my pyrites. For a lady friend, you understand; but I won’t let even her put that old fellow out of my mind. Look out to hear from me soon.”

## II.

“I’ve come for the mail, if there’s any.”

The speaker had entered with a sort of soft-stepping fierceness, — with the mien, the gestures, of one who has hesitated a good while over something, but at last has made up her mind what to do. She spoke stiffly, unnaturally. Vender started,

turned, feather-brush in hand, and then dropping the empty box which he was in the act of dusting, dusted instead a stool as he dragged it hastily forward.

“Why, child,” said he, “do you think I would n’t have saved you this walk if there’d really been a letter? I am goin’ up, anyway, after a bit. Sit down. I’ll be ready by the time you’re rested.”

She simply stood, looking hard at him.

Her beauty was of the kind that nothing extraneous can dim; which rather from a mean and dingy setting gleams out all the brighter by contrast, — as now from the old gray blanket shawl thrown over her head, and held together by a shapely hand beneath her chin. The Tarrypin Forest mother had apparently added new vigor to and attracted little delicacy from the Tebbys stock. Neither in feature nor in coloring was there much trace of the good folk from that region who habitually dealt with Mr. Vender. The nose was as straight as the black eyes were bright and deep. The firm red lips were clean-cut. The flushed oval of the cheeks was perfect. The dark hair on brow and temples curled silkily. As she stood there full in the light of the solitary coal-oil lamp, it was no wonder, the admiration in those puzzled, wistful eyes that met her challenging gaze.

“How is he to-night?” he asked presently.

She gave a half-sob, half-angry pant. “If he’s better than he’s like to be to-morrow, why, he’s worse than he was yesterday.”

“Ah-h-h!” said Vender. His face fell. His eye, his hand, went helplessly back to that empty box, to certain things on the counter which had come out of it. Rhoda Tebbys stood frowning, biting her lip; seemingly nerving herself up to some effort.

“’T is n’t only a letter I’ve come here for to-night,” she said.

He looked up suddenly, but said nothing.

“’T is n’t only a letter, — though if

there's one sure enough, why, let whoever the cap fits wear it! 'Tis n't all the letter, nor him neither. You know well as me how it's been with him about it all these days an' weeks, — how he's set there an' laid there watchin' an' waitin' without hearin' one single word! He was goin' fast enough befo'. Now he's 'most gone. The hope of its bein' true has burnt him up worse than fever, an' the fear of its not bein' true has struck to his very bones. Even his appetite" — she laughed bitterly — "his appetite for charity food is gone. He don't seem to sleep any o' nights. You know how he's been lookin' an' lookin' for that letter, an' sendin' for it day after day! You know what 't would be to him — even if he died next minute — to get one, to hear 't was really true. What's the use of my sayin' any mo' about *that*? It's for myself I'm goin' to speak now."

A pair of brown eyes were staring at her in wide amazement. Something fell with a sharp clang to the floor. It was a great rusty key which Vender had been fingering. He did not seem to notice. "I — I don't understand," he said slowly.

It would seem that some restraining cord was suddenly snapped here, that some inner fire of passion flamed up, got the better of that other. "Don't understand!" she cried, with shaking voice, yet resolute. "Well, I'll make you, now. That's all! I don't s'pose it's ever struck you I might be carin', too, be lookin' an' hopin' for somethin' outside, somethin' different. I don't s'pose you've ever thought I'd a right to anything but jest life in this ole forsaken hole. An' such a life as mine's been! But you shall hear now why I won't be put off."

There was no answer as she paused for breath.

"I — I'm sorry if I hurt you" — she began; then her glance dropped from his face to something on the counter, something that had come out of that box afore-

mentioned. "What's the use talkin'?" she cried sharply. "You've got yo' ole irons an' stones an' bones. If you care any mo' for me 'an for them, 't ain't much! What's the use? But I *will* say my say! You *shall* hear! What have I had to satisfy me here? Much good bein' owned by him — havin' his name — has done me! Much the blood, as he calls it, — the blood you think so great, too, even comin' the way it has, — much it's done so far for me! What's it been but a singsong to drive me wild? Don't I know that the very people in this ole town who look up to me a little bit on account of it look down on me mo' on account of mother? But here have I been ever since she died — ever since I was born — tied to an ole crazy man; it's the truth, if he *is* my father, if I am sort o' fond o' him, — crazy as well as old! Here have I been livin' on neighbors' charity, on yo's! An' because I've some human pride in me, an' won't be beholden any mo' than I can help, livin' on scraps, goin' in shoes like darkies wear, in five-cent lawn an' calico, this ole blanket shawl" (she flung it off, down to the floor, as she spoke), — "me! with my spirit an' my looks! Nothin' to eat but gall an' bitterness, nothin' pretty to wear, no schoolin', no goin' away or seein' things anywhere else. Just foolin' along in must an' dust an' rust, with my one chance to marry you, an' settle down, after the first, deeper in it than ever! Much you've known how it's been with me! Many's the time I've wished I was all Tarrypin Forrester, livin' right out in the pines, an' never had heard the name of Tebbys! But if there's any good comin' out of it now, I want it to come. 'Tis n't because — you need n't think it's because I've taken a fancy to anybody, want anybody else any mo' 'an I've wanted you; but if any money or pleasure such as money 'll buy, anything different is comin', I want it for my own sake well as his. You know I'd not stay to spend any for-

tune here. Let him give — you take what you choose for the town, so I have my share an' go! I was fooled once, — when you thought we'd found that mine. I — I won't be put off nor fooled again. I know you've been good to us, our best friend for years an' years; but don't I know when it comes to a woman — a woman like me — there's no tellin' what the best of men may do? If you think because — because I'm one that other people besides yo'self can look at, can see is n't ugly, anyway; one that with money, and away from here, could pick and choose, — if you think because of this" (she was faltering now), "that what's 'most too late to do him any good, an' might be — harm — to you" — She paused again and shrank back a little. The face before her was so amazed, so white, so drawn with pain, that it was hard even for one by this time half beside herself to keep on, deal that final blow; but she kept on: "Do you think I'll believe he's clean forgot it, has n't written, after the way he talked, an' — an' looked? I don't, any mo' than I believe you don't know his address to write an' find out. There must have been a letter befo' this. If you've kept it back, thinkin' — thinkin'!" —

Her words failed; her voice broke. She leaned back suddenly, supporting herself with trembling hands against the other counter behind. Vender had sunk on the stool heavily, lifelessly, like one struck numb and dumb. He made no motion at first, spoke never a word. There was no sound but the girl's own stormy breath, the dripping of the rain outside. It was in a tone scarcely louder, half to himself, that he presently said, "If I 'most hoped it would n't come, I'm punished now."

"Hoped it would n't come!" She sprang upright again, seizing as it were greedily at this crumb of admission on his part, justification for herself. "Ah-h! I thought so!" she cried. "I knew there was something! Was that all?"

Vender looked at her dully. His lips were twitching. He stooped and picked up the fallen key with a shaky hand. "I thought that bad enough to fight right hard against," he said huskily. "It was all, though, and I hope now the letter — the man — will come. I hope to God you won't be disappointed."

She burst out crying. Whether those wild tears, those stormy sobs, were of sorrow or passion it would have been hard to guess. She turned suddenly around, stepping unconsciously on the despised shawl, and, with a swift childish gesture, put her elbows on the counter, her hands over her face. The glossy black hair, loosened from its coil, slipped down unheeded on one heaving rounded shoulder. Her whole frame shook. The other heard, but did not look up. He also turned his back, and began mechanically sorting and shifting his "stones and bones."

There they lay: first that ponderous rusty old key, the key of the bank whose foundation site was now overgrown with sumach, an old wrought-iron inkstand from the court-house, and the brass door-knocker left behind from one of those houses "kyarted" away. An old carved and fluted soapstone candlestick and a queer-shaped leaden oyster spoon, which came next, might have done duty in its great kitchen; while a chipped "mad-stone" from the East Indies, a knee-buckle set with Scotch pebbles, and an eighteenth-century French shell snuff-box spoke eloquently of the lost foreign trade. Two or three bundles of old business papers and parchments, fusty, musty, and quaintly suggestive, made up with these the more important part of this antique collection. And last, and probably least in their owner's eyes, certain lumps of mica-like pyritic ore, the few that Stanforth and his party had left behind, glistened amid this general dinginess with more than silvery sheen, the iron sulphuret of science, the fire-stone of the unlearned. Carefully, jealously



guarded relics of that local past so fascinating to him; still sparkling though delusive promise of a yet brighter, more prosperous future! Next to the old man up yonder, the girl here behind, these had been nearest and dearest. With what lingering tenderness had he taken them, awhile ago, from the box which needed dusting! Now he picked up one after another with nerveless fingers, and laid them down again. What was either past or future to him?

The girl's sobs died away presently. She lifted her head, then stooped and picked up the fallen tumbled shawl. The flush had faded from her face. It would seem that shame and penitence were already dawning there, but suspicion still lingered in the glance which she cast around, upward, amid the hanging tins and hats and bridles, the now shop-worn lawns and calicoes. Not even in the darkest mail pigeon-hole, however, not even on the highest shelf or under the lowest, did it apparently find anything to fasten upon. She started toward the door; then paused, with a look at the man just as he abruptly started up.

"Wait! It's dark; I'll go with you," he said.

"I'm not afraid, thank you. You needn't come."

"You needn't try to stop me," said Vender.

He put on his hat and followed as she went swiftly out, down two or three worn sandstone steps, now slippery with rain, along the miry street for a little way, then through the sodden grass up the hill.

It was a wet night. It had been a wet day. Late summer, with a burst of equinoctial sobs and tears, had turned to autumn. Yellow leaves were drifting down on damp winds from the upland. The rivulets between those hill-shoulders were running high. Each gully made way for its tributary stream. The creek, of late so lifelessly crawling, was far beyond its low banks; though in mere shallow mockery of its commerce-

bearing pride, almost as imposing as of yore. In the one sandy street of the little old town, the water settled dolefully into each footprint and wheel-track; trickled hardly less dolefully, though with now and then a musical note, from roofs new and old, shiny tin or mossy time-worn hipped-and-shingled. The merry days of watermelons, of chinquapins, were past. It was chill-and-fever time now. Even from "way up in the forest" — Tarrypin Forest — the yellow-faced natives were coming for quinine. It seemed to Vender, himself by turns shaking and parching, that he sold scarcely anything else, so great was this demand. It was too late for customers to-night, however. He was free to go with Rhoda Tebbys.

The path lay through darkness, on and up. The "house with the steps," as strangers called it, had stood all day mercifully veiled in mist, its skull-like grin softened to a smile. Now they saw but a vague dark outline, looming nigher. From only one broken window was a light gleaming, dim and low as the life-light there flickering out. The only sounds, as they went, besides the voice of high water all around, were the "swish, swish," of the girl's damp skirt, the wet sucking and splashing underfoot. He walked behind, not by her. Not a word was spoken till she paused at the lowest step, turned half round. Even then a faint choking attempt on her part died away inarticulately. But Vender said quite clearly and very gravely, "Not now; but if he wants me to-morrow, or any time, you know where to send." There was a pause, and then with a mighty effort he added, "Well, good-night, and Heaven forgive you, child, even if I can't!"

### III.

"Has he come? Who's that talkin'?"

"The neighbors in the front room, father."

"Has he come — Tommy Vender — the letter?"

The girl winced and paled, seemed to gather herself together. "No, father, not yet," she replied.

"Why can't you send for him?"

"After while — maybe."

"It must be 'most mail-time now."

It was more than an hour past. If she could get him to sleep without knowing that once more no letter had come!

"If I could hear somethin', I think 't would put new life in me. I'd be up again to-morrow — no mo' trouble to you. It must be 'most time. Can't you send? Maybe it's come at last."

"After while, father."

"You've had a hard time here with me, child. I — I see it now plainer than befo'. I've had some things to keep me up — make 'em all look up to me — that you — you have n't had. Maybe it's been harder on you than I thought. Never mind, though. Yo' mother was the handsomest woman in this town, if she was a Tarrypin Forester an' did use to go barefooted. If she had n't died, I'd ha' married her. We'll show 'em all, when this fortune comes, that a Tebbys is a Tebbys for all a new cross in the breed, an' that with parson or without. Yo' pride shan't suffer any mo'. With me it's been diff'rent, of co'se. Had n't I a sort o' claim on the town? What other gentleman-born would ha' stayed here, mixed up with such as were left, stuck by it ev'ry way, as I've done? I'd a claim, but you — Well, you can queen it now, though — in silk an' satin — keep yo' carriage. As for marryin', you can pick an' choose now. I'm fond of Tommy Vender — had no objection to him befo' — but now it seems to me you might look higher. When the town's what I'm goin' to make it with that money from ole England, the creek dredged out, an' all, why, they'll be comin' back fast enough, the ole families. You wait! Vender's good stock, but plain. He shall have all the money

he wants, everything else but this. It's yo' natural-born right to look higher. The bar sinister's no bar, after all, when it's gilded. Wait! We'll be payin' off debts now, both kinds."

"Will we?" It came with almost a cry, as if wrung out against her will. Then she seemed to recollect herself. "Don't talk about such things, about money or marryin' now, father," she said. "Just lie easy now, go to sleep!"

"I am cold."

Whether the blankets that she pulled up over that little hollow, rather than heap, in the middle of the bed were contemporary with what they covered might be subject of guess. She took from a chair hard by her gray shawl, folded it and laid it across the foot of the bed.

"Thanky, my dear," came in a whisper. "Forest blood or no, you've always been the lady with me."

She bit her lip, but the black eyes were glistening moistly as she turned toward the dying fire. Next moment a blaze sprang up, lighting each crack and corner of the room.

It was large and bare-floored, imposing and yet dilapidated. The wainscoting of polished walnut still held its own. The high mantelpiece, and above it the folding-doors of one of those old-fashioned presses now and then so placed in houses of that day, still showed their carving and paneling intact; but from the lofty ceiling and high gaunt walls the plaster had fallen in patches. In one corner stood the bed, a great four-poster, handsome and even grand in its day. The woodwork was handsome, but the cloth curtains, of faded crimson, were hanging in moth-eaten rags. Besides this bedstead and a brass-handled chest of drawers there was hardly a piece of furniture that either antiquary or thrifty housekeeper would have looked at twice. A common rickety wash-stand, a most uneasy-looking old easy-chair, a stool or two, made up the list. Opposite the fire hung what had been a map of



the town in its best, most prosperous days, now almost as tattered as the bed-curtains. It was the only decoration of the sort visible. Fine old engravings, portraits, there were none. Had they not long ago been handed over to those members of the family who went away, — sold, in short, along with nearly everything else handsome or valuable, to prolong life in the one who stayed? The poor old room told its tale too well.

There were voices not far off, talking low, but eagerly. All day the neighbors had been sending and coming. They were not all in sympathy with Vender's tastes, but even those with whom he passed for more than half crazy took an interest more or less in the old man now a-dying. He belonged to the town, — certainly depended upon the town as nobody else did. Having reached that fascinating point of illness described as "low," he lacked neither offered sympathy nor service. The tributes of retainership which they had for years been paying, the fresh butter and new-laid eggs, the tenderest chickens and choicest slices from the oldest hams, — that "charity food," which to him, graciously receiving, had been a matter of course, to his daughter gall and wormwood, — had been all day coming in, though the first mouthful had yet to be tasted. It was no easy matter now to keep the anxious "setters-up" out of the sick-room. Rhoda Tebbys, well aware of the head-shakes, the half-offended whispers, just beyond sight, reflected a little grimly that if enjoying it less than they had hoped in one way, they were enjoying it more in another. She smiled as, moving to the window, she stood there looking out into the rainy night. It was a back window, so she could not see the hillside path. Did she hope or fear most that Vender, too, might be coming for a last look at his last living relic? She had sent to the post-office awhile before, and learned not only that there was no letter, but that the postmaster was away,

— had gone off before sunrise, nobody knew where, but it was guessed on unexpected "gov'ment business" to Washington, where his position was supposed to bring him into intimate personal contact with the supreme head of the post-office department at the very least. Would he come back in time, — come at all? Her face, after that bitter little smile faded, looked haggard and drawn, but childishly young, too, childishly wistful. Was she thinking of any one else besides her father and Vender? Did she know what was coming? That thread-like voice from the bed was the voice of one dying. The fever had done its work. This chill was probably the last. Did she know? Standing there at the broken window, looking out into the dark, — while the rain fell faster, the night grew blacker, — could she really be thinking of anything or anybody but what was so plainly approaching, what those neighbors in the next room were waiting for?

There were two people coming up the path, one behind the other: first, a tall young man in a Derby hat and light overcoat, walking with an energetic swing; next, a shorter, smaller somebody, who stepped as if both weary and determined. They were talking in low tones.

"I felt sure," said Mr. Stanforth, "that if I waited — kept that article long enough — there'd be some sort of dramatic close for it."

"Did you? Well, let's hope you won't be disappointed. There's been a good deal of waiting from first to last. Somebody ought to find compensation."

Vender spoke dryly. He was not in a soft humor to-night. But the other did not seem to notice. He went on: —

"If I'd known the poor old fellow had taken it so much to heart, and if I'd not been so infernally busy, I'd have written. But, after all, what was there, till now, to tell? Judging by myself, when I found out how matters stood, I knew what a trial it would be to him.

Was n't it just as well to let him go on dreaming and planning, — thinking the grand triumph might come any day? I've my doubts about hope deferred being all misery. Now, though, it's very different, of course. There's some good news to tell, even though not exactly what he was looking for. If he takes it in his own sense — too far gone to ask particulars — we can send him off happy, with the good time coming, the old town going to be built up again — all that! Tell you what, it's a good thing you found me to-day, and saw those fellows yourself. They mean business. Altogether, I don't think this has turned out so badly, for either you or me. It's a risk to a fellow's peace of mind" (an unusual note crept into his voice), "seeing that girl again, and under present circumstances, but I guess I'll take it. And the old man! Well, I'm not in such luck every day. George! how it will work up!"

"If you think I'd have let you come without some better object than that" —  
"What?"

They had reached the steps by this time. The young journalist, in his excitement, his professional pleasure, as it were, was venturing boldly on and up, when the other's words, his tone, called him to a sudden halt. He glanced sharply over one shoulder.

"I think you not only *let*, but asked me to come," said he.

"Yes, I did, sir. Won't the very sight of you — if he's still living — seem like a sort of confirmation? I think he'll 'most save you the trouble of saying anything at all. It seemed best for you to come, for several reasons; but if you think there's nothing to be kept back, or — or treated with respect" —

"Not even Miss Tebbys," broke in Stanforth, with a laugh that was only would-be easy. Then he drew a good long breath. "My dear friend," he said good-naturedly, "I think I know my trade, — know how to fix up things for a first-class newspaper better than that.

I've a notion that you have n't told quite all your motives for inviting me here. Whether one has anything to do with the young lady — giving me another chance to fall in love with her, or her to fall out with me — I don't know; you're keeping back something. But I'll say this much: as for Miss Tebbys, I'll take the risk; as for the old gentleman, if you think anything's going to be given away, anybody's feelings hurt by that article, why, you're very much mistaken."

"You're just in time, sir, if you want to see the ole gent'man."

"Yes, yes. He's mighty low."

"'Most gone, I reck'n; an' the worst of it is, he don't 'pear to know. Ther' 's been no farewells took, nor nothin'. By her even lettin' anybody stay, it's serious; but we ain't been called in to do a thing. Though he ain't never perferred conversion, it" —

"How you harp on that, Mary Jane! 'T is n't quality style to git religion that way. He was raised in the ole church, — the 'Piscopal. They don't perless, — never let on nohow whether they've got it or not."

"Well, 'Piscopal or no 'Piscopal, it 'pears to me the preacher ought to be called in. Even a Hard-Shell, as he calls ourn, is better 'an none. It'll take some-thin' hard, I reck'n, to cut through *his* shell. Well, it's aggravatin', I must say. Not even no last words! 'Pears like his ought to be somethin' out o' common."

"Are you kin to him, sir?"

It was a small, yellow-faced woman who asked this last question, probably the youngest of the speakers. She was not ugly about the eyes and forehead; but below, chills and fever for more than forty years, and strong medicines for the same, had done their work. To Mr. Stanforth she will be forever "the woman with one tooth."

He looked round him with a sigh of delight.

Even across Vender's painfully anxious absorption there came just now a thrill of vexedness, to think that these persons, to-night the most pertinacious if not the most genuinely interested people in Doomstone, should be among the least favorable specimens. He was jealously sensitive on this point; but if Rhoda Tebbys had made a selection especially for the young newspaper man's benefit, she could hardly have pleased him better. As he stood there in the lighted front room, glancing from one to another: at the three or four old men seated around the refreshments (some of those aforementioned tributes) spread forth on an old-fashioned card-table in the midst; at the half dozen or so old or elderly women, each with snuff-stick in hand or mouth, and just risen from the fire, gazing solemnly at the new-comers, or speaking with the doleful enjoyment, the lugubrious self-satisfaction in survival common to such a company on such an occasion, — as he took all this in, his hand went instinctively to his notebook. Even the place, the room, too! Bare and wretchedly furnished as it was, even more so than that other, his keen eye took note of a certain picturesque incongruity of setting in the paneled wainscoting, shoulder-high, the handsomely carven cornice. Not for such guests as these was this old parlor built, evidently. The journalistic heart throbbed. He was feeling for the pencil, when —

"Ah-h-h!"

The door into the back room had opened. She stood there framed against the darkness, as he had seen her before.

"Come!"

There was no new-kindled eagerness now, no half-defiant pleasure in a new admiration, in either that pale face or that suppressed voice. If any feeling whatever for his own smart self were suggested, it was slight, weary contempt. Could the handsome girl who had tickled his fancy not be in love with him, after all? or was this only a bit of clever act-

ing? Somehow he felt strangely small. At Vender she did not look.

"Come!" she said again, as Stanforth still held back; then she stepped aside, made way for him.

"You, sir. Ah-h! I thought it would come — at last!"

Mr. Stanforth had for once, at least, forgotten the "article." He was staring, with a sudden chill of awe, into the darkness there under those tattered old curtains. Could aged and dying eyes see so much better than his own, standing too as he was with back to the waning fire? He spoke with stammering effort: "Yes, I — I've come, sir. It — it's come at last."

The figure that he dimly made out was sitting upright, free of the pillows. Two clawlike hands went up, flash-quick, strong with exultation.

"Ah-h-h! I thought if we stuck it out — long enough — there'd be new life for — new life" —

Let us hope there was!

The neighbors were having their own way with things. There was due enjoyment, though due solemnity, both in that back room where chill silence reigned and in the front one amid decorous whisperings round the fire. Rhoda Tebbys was not interfering. As she sat there outside on the topmost step, alone in the dark, the drizzling rain, face on her knees, and hands clasped around them, she did not seem even to hear or heed Vender, as, returning from the village where he had left Stanforth for the night, he came up and stood beside her.

"Rhoda!"

There was no reply. Her head sank lower. Her shoulders began to quiver.

"Child!" The other's voice was quivering, too. "Don't cry! Is n't he better off as well as you? Don't you want to hear more about — the fortune?"

"Fortune! Don't you say fortune to me!"

She had lifted her head fiercely. She

dropped it again. Vender stood there looking down, hesitating. Should he wait awhile, or tell her all now? His own little fight last night, this morning, had been hard; but he had conquered. Why not go on to the end? He began at last, slowly, with a mighty effort.

"Not your fortune," said he, "not any old claim come true. It was well for him — I wanted him to die thinking so. It was only truth that Mr. Stanforth told, and he took it that way; but it's a little different. If I were to tell you there was nothing in the old claim, that the lawful heir had been found and his right proved, that this was only a younger branch of the same family, and the good fortune we told him of, though coming indirectly through Mr. Stanforth, just something coming to the town, to all of us alike, would you be sorry? That would not be quite all, maybe. I might say that

after a while, the town not needing me any more, I might take you, if you would go, away with me, clean away from" —

"Oh! I see now, — I see!" She sprang to her feet, caught hold of him with trembling hands. "It's the iron stuff, the mine we found. Ah-h-h! It's turned out somethin', after all! You'll be glad, all of you! And I'm glad, too, though not for myself. Don't think about me. I don't want — don't deserve anything. Let me go to hire out as a servant, hide anywhere out of yo' sight. 'T is n't because I want — care so much now for the change, all that — but after the way I've treated you, after the way you've taken it, how can I ever look you in the face — in the face" —

There was no need for it just then, out there in the darkness, with both his arms around her.

*A. M. Ewell.*

## A COLONY OF THE UNEMPLOYED.

### I.

IF the world of work has its interest for the social economist, no less has the world out-of-work for every student of social aims and conditions. It may be divided like the earth into two great hemispheres, — the one half that will not work, and the other half that cannot work "because no man has hired them." One of these hemispheres I had explored in several countries. I had found its inhabitants in England, Germany, and America thoroughly committed to the theory of living without work, choosing rather mendicancy or degradation. I became irresistibly drawn to the other half, and resolved on as practical a study of the man out of work by no fault of his own as I had made of the tramp who is accustomed to boast

that he can live better without work than with it.

Being in Germany, I began on the spot. Thanks to a good philanthropist, and fortunately for my purpose, there was accessible an institution which offered me an immediate opportunity for studying the out-of-work at close range. It is called *die Arbeiter-Kolonie*, and there are at present twenty-seven colonies scattered throughout the empire. Pastor von Bodelschwing, the philanthropist referred to, the superintendent of the large Epileptics' Hospital near Hanover, started the first one about fourteen years ago in the town of Bielefeld in Westphalia. At that time Germany was literally overrun by tramps. Two hundred thousand were arrested every year, and the poor-houses and shelters were full to overflowing. In 1882, von Bodelschwing con-