

**Gertrude Franklin Horn
Atherton**

*A Whirl
Asunder*

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CHAPTER I.

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As the train stopped for the sixth time, Clive descended abruptly.

“I think I’ll walk the rest of the way,” he said to the conductor. “Just look after my portmanteau, will you? and see that it is left at Yorba with my boxes.”

“O. K.,” said the man. “But you must like walking.”

Clive had spent seven days on the ocean, three in the furious energy of New York, and six on a transcontinental train, whose discomforts made him wonder if he had a moral right to enter the embarrassing state of matrimony with a temper hopelessly soured. As he had come to California to marry, and as his betrothed was at a hotel in the northern redwoods, he did not pause for rest in San Francisco; he left, two hours after his arrival, on a narrow gauge train, which dashed down precipitous mountain slopes, shot, rocking from side to side, about curves on a road so narrow that the brush scraped the windows, or the eye looked down into the blackness of a cañon, five hundred feet below; raced shrieking across trestles which seemed to swing midway between heaven and earth; only to slacken, with protesting snort and jerk, when climbing to some dizzier height. Clive had stood for an hour on the platform, fascinated by the danger and the bleak solemnity of the forests, whose rigid trunks and short stiffly pointed arms looked as if they had not quivered since time began. But he felt that he had had enough, moreover that he had not drawn an unaccompanied breath since he left England. If he

was not possessed by the graceful impatience of the lover, he reminded himself that he was tired and nervous, and had been obliged to go dirty for six days, enough to knock the romance out of any man; the ubiquitous human animal had talked incessantly for sixteen days, and his legs ached for want of stretching.

A twisted old man with a sharp eye, a rusty beard depending aimlessly from a thin tobacco-stained mouth, limped across the platform, rolling a flag. Clive asked him if he could get to the Yorba hotel on foot.

The man stared. "Well, you *be* an Englishman, I guess," he remarked.

"Yes, I am an Englishman," said Clive haughtily.

"Oh, no offence, but the way you English do walk beats us. We ain't none too fond of walkin' in Californy. Too many mountains, I guess. Yes, you kin walk it, and I guess you'll have to. There goes your train. Stranger in these parts?"

"I arrived in California to-day."

"So. Goin' to raise cattle, or just seein' the wonders of the Gold State?"

"Will you kindly point out the way? And I should like to send a dispatch to the hotel, if possible."

"Oh, suttently. We don't think much of English manners in these parts, I don't mind sayin'. You English act as if you owned God Almighty when you come out here. You forget we licked ye twice. Come after a Californy heiress?"

Clive felt an impulse to throw the man over the trestle, then laughed. "I beg your pardon," he said, "I am sorry my manners are bad but the truth is my head is tired and my legs are not. Come, show me the way."

Being further mollified by a silver dollar, the old man replied graciously, "All right, sir. Just amuse yourself while I send your telegram, and fetch a dark lantern. You'll need it. The moon's doin' well, but the tops of them redwoods knit together, and are as close as a roof."

Clive walked idly about the little waiting-room. The walls were decorated with illustrated weekly newspapers, and the gratuitous lithograph. John L. Sullivan, looking, under the softening influence of the weekly artist, as if sculptured from mush, glowered across at Corbett, who displayed his muscles in a dandified attitude. There were also several lithographs of pretty, rather elegant-looking girls. Clive noticed that one had a rude frame of young redwood branches about it, and occupied the post of honor at the head of the room. He walked over and examined it as well as he could by the light of the smoking lamp.

The head was in profile, severe in outline, as classic as the modern head ever is. The chin was lifted proudly, the nostrils looked capable of expansion. The brow and eyes suggested intellect, the lower part of the face pride and self-will and passion, perhaps undeveloped cruelty and sensuality.

"Who is Miss Belmont?" he asked, as the station agent left the telegraph table.

"Oh, she's one of the heiresses. That's our high-toned society paper. It's printin' a series of Californy heiresses. One of the other papers says as how it's a good guide book for impecoonious furriners, and I guess that's about the size of it. She's got a million, and nobody but an aunt, and she has her own way, I—tell—you. She'll be a handful to

manage; but somehow, although she keeps people talkin', they don't believe as much harm of her as of some that's more quiet. You'll meet her, I guess, if you're goin' to stay at Yorba, for she's got a big house in the redwoods and knows a lot of the hotel folks and the Bohemian Club fellers. I like her. She rides this way once a year or so, and we have a good chin about politics. She knows a thing or two, you bet, and she believes in Grover."

"How old is she? And why doesn't she marry?" asked Clive idly, as they walked up the road.

"She's twenty-six, and she's goin' to marry—a Noo York feller; one of them with Dutch names. She's had offers, I guess. Three of your lords, I know of. But lords don't stand much show with Californy girls—them as was raised here, anyhow. They don't give a damn for titles, and they scent a fortune-hunter before he's off the dock. They've put their heads together and talked him over before he's registered. This Dutchman's got money, so I guess he's all right. Be you a lord?"

"I am not. I am a barrister, and the son of a barrister."

"What may that be?"

"I believe you call it lawyer out here."

"O—h—h—a lawyer's a gay bird, ain't he? And don't he have a good time?" The old man chuckled.

"I never found them different from other men. What do you mean?"

"Ours are rippers. I've been in Californy since '49, and I could spin some yarns that would make your hair curl, young man. Lord, Lord, the old ones were tough. The young ones ain't quite so bad, but they're doing their best."

“California is rather a wild place, isn’t it?”

“It was. It’s quietin’ down now, and it ain’t near so interestin’. Jack Belmont, that there young lady’s father, was a lawyer when he fust come here, but he struck it rich in Con. Virginia, in ’74, and after that warn’t he a ripper. Oh, Lord! He *was* a terror. But he done his dooty by his girl; had her eddicated in Paris and Noo York, and never let no one cross her. He was as fine-lookin’ a man as ever I seen, almost as tall and clean made as you be, and awful open-handed and popular, although a terrible enemy. He’s shot his man twice over, they say, and I believe it. His wife died ten years before him. She was fond of him, too, poor thing, and he made no bones about bein’ unfaithful to her—they don’t out here. A man’s no good if you can’t tell a yarn or two about him. Well, Jack Belmont died five years ago, and left about a million dollars to his girl. He’d had a long sight more, but she was lucky to git that. They say as how she was awful broke up when he died.”

“You’re a regular old *chronique scandaleuse*,” said Clive, much interested. “What sort of a social position has this Miss Belmont? Is she received?”

“Received? Glory, man—why her father was a Southern gent—Maryland, as I remember, and her mother was from Boston. They led society here in the sixties; they’re one of the old families of Californy. That’s the reason Miss Belmont does as she damned pleases, and nobody dares say boo—that and the million. She’s ancient aristocracy, she is. Received! Oh, Lord!”

Clive, much amused, asked, “What does she do that is so dreadful?”

“Oh, she’s been engaged fifteen times; she rides about the country in boy’s clothes, and sits up all night under the trees at Del Monte talkin’ to a man, or gives all her dances to one man at a party, and then cuts him the next day on the street; and when she gits tired of people, comes up here without even her aunt. She used to run to fires, but she give that up some years ago. She travels about the country for weeks without a chaperon, and once went camping alone with five men. Sometimes she’ll fill her house up with men for a week, and not have no other woman, savin’ her aunt. Lately she’s more quiet, they say, and has become a terrible reader. Last winter she stayed up here for three months alone. I hear as how people talked. But I didn’t see nothin’. She’s all right, or my name ain’t Jo Bagley. Well, here you are, sir. Good luck to ye! Keep to the road and don’t strike off on any of them side trails, and you can’t go wrong. Evenin’.”

Clive went into the dark forest. What the old man had told him of Miss Belmont had quickened his imagination, and he speculated about her for some moments; then his thoughts wandered to his English betrothed. He had not seen her for two years. Her mother’s health failing, her father had taken his family to Southern California. A year later Mrs. Gordon had died, and her husband having bought a ranch in which he was much interested, had written to Clive that he wanted his eldest daughter for another year; by that time her sister would have finished school, and could take her place as head of the household. Lately he and Mary had felt the debilitating influence of the southern climate and had gone to the redwoods of the north. There

Clive was to meet them, remain a few weeks, then marry in San Francisco and take his wife back to England.

Clive was thirty-four, ten years older than Mary Gordon. He recalled the day he had proposed to her. She had come down the steps of her father's house, in a blue gown and garden hat, and they had gone for a walk in the woods. She was not a clever woman, and she had only the white and pink and brown, the rounded lines of youth, no positive beauty of face or figure; but with the blind instinct of his race he had turned almost automatically to the type of woman who, time out of mind, has produced the strong-limbed, strong-brained men that have made a nation insolently great. She reminded him of his mother, with her even sweetness of nature, her sympathy, her large maternal suggestion. He had known her since her early girlhood and grown fonder of her each year. She rested him, and had the divine feminine faculty of making him feel a better and cleverer man than he was in the habit of thinking himself else where.

She had accepted him with the sweetest smile he had ever seen, and he had wondered if other men were as fortunate. For two years he saw much of her, then she went to America, and he had plunged into his work and his man's life, not missing her as consistently as he had expected, but caring for her none the less. The Saturday mail brought him, unintermittingly, a letter eight pages long, neatly written, and describing in detail the daily life of her family, and of the strange people about them. They were calm, affectionate, interesting letters, which Clive enjoyed, and to which he replied with a hurried scrawl, rarely covering more