

***WILL  
IRWIN***

***THE READJUSTMENT***

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# **The Readjustment**

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# CHAPTER I

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After luncheon they walked over from the ranch-house—more indeed a country villa, what with its ceiled redwood walls, its prints, its library, than the working house of a practical farm—and down the dusty, sun-beaten lane to the apricot orchard. Picking was on full blast, against the all too fast ripening of that early summer.

Judge Tiffany, pattern of a vigorous age, seemed to lean a little upon his wife as she walked beside him, her arm tucked confidently into his; but it was a leaning of the spirit rather than of the flesh. She, younger than he by fifteen years, was a tiny woman, her hair white but her waist still slim. She seemed to tinkle and twinkle. Her slight hands,—the nail of the little finger was like a grain of popcorn—moved with swift, accurate bird-motions. As she chattered of the ranch and the picking, her voice, still sweet and controlled, came from her lips like the pleasant music of a tea bell. He was mainly silent; although he threw in a quiet, controlled answer here and there. One could read, in the shadowy solicitude with which she regarded him now and then, the relation between that welded old couple—she the entertainer, the hoarder of trivial detail from her days; he the fond, indulgent listener.

“I think Eleanor must be back from the city,” Mrs. Tiffany was saying, “I notice smoke from the big chimney; and I suppose she’ll be over before noon with the sulphur samples. It’s amusing and homey in her—her habit of flying to her own little nest before she comes to us. She’ll inspect

the house, have dinner ordered, and know every blessed detail of the picking before we catch a glimpse of her." Mrs. Tiffany smiled sadly, as though this industry were somewhat tragic.

"I wonder how long Eleanor will be contented with such a way of life?" put in Judge Tiffany.

"I've worried over that," answered his wife. "Suppose she should settle down to it? It isn't as though Eleanor hadn't her chance 3 at travel and society and the things a girl of her breeding should have. This is all her deliberate choice, and I've done nothing to help her choose. Perhaps I should have decided for her. It's curious the guard that girl keeps over her deeper feelings. How unlike she is to her mother—and yet how like—" Her thought shifted suddenly with the direction of her eyes. "Hasn't Olsen overloaded that little team?" she said.

The cutting-shed stood midway of their course. Twenty women and girls, their lips going as rapidly as their knives, sat on fruit crates at long tables, slicing the red-and-gold balls apart, flicking out the stones, laying the halves to dry in wooden trays. A wagon had just arrived from the orchard. Olsen, the Swedish foreman, was heaving the boxes to his Portuguese assistant, who passed them on into the cutting shed. Further on stood the bleaching kilns; still further, the bright green trees with no artistic irregularities of outline—trees born, like a coolie, to bear burdens. Now the branches bent in arcs under loads of summer-gilded fruit.

Long step-ladders straddling piles of boxes, beside this row or that, showed where picking 4 was going forward. Mrs. Tiffany halted under one tree to call pleasantries up to a

Portuguese, friend of many a harvest before. Judge Tiffany proceeded on down the row, pausing to inspect the boxes for any fruit gathered before it was ripe.

The first picker was a Chinese. His box, of course, showed only perfection of workmanship. The Judge called up familiarly:

“Hello, Charlie!”

A yellow face grinned through the branches; the leaves rustled as though some great bird were foraging, and the answer came back:

“Hello you Judge!” The Judge picked over the next two boxes without comment; at the third, he stopped longer.

“Too much greenery, young man!” he cried at length. The branches of this tree rustled, and a pair of good, sturdy legs, clad in corduroys, appeared on the ladder; then the owner of the legs vaulted from four feet high in the air, and hit the ground beside his box.

He was a stalwart boy of perhaps two and twenty, broad, though a bit over-heavy, in the shoulders. That approach to over-heaviness characterized his face, otherwise clean-cut and fair. His eyes, long, brown and ingenuous, rather went to redeem this quality of face. Under his wide and flapping sombrero peered the front lock of his straight, black hair. Even before he smiled, Judge Tiffany marked him as a pleasing youth withal; and when he did smile, eyes and mouth so softened with good humor that stern authority went from the face of Judge Tiffany. He stood in that embarrassment which an old man feels sometimes in the presence of a younger one, struggled for a word to cover his slight confusion, and said:

“You are one of the college outfit camped down by the arroyo, aren’t you?”

“I am,” said the youth. “I also picked the fruit too green. I am here to take my beating.”

Judge Tiffany, who held (he thought) an old-fashioned distaste for impudence, smiled back in spite of himself.

“If you don’t attend to business in small matters, how can you hope to succeed when you go out into life?” he asked with some pomposity. He had intended, when he opened his mouth, to say something very different. His pomposity, he felt, grew out of his embarrassment; he had a dim feeling that he was making himself ridiculous.

“I can’t,” said the youth with mock meekness; and he smiled again. At that moment, while the Judge struggled for a reply and while the youth was turning back to the ladder as though to mount it and be done with the conversation, two things happened. Up from one side came Mrs. Tiffany; and from the other, where ran a road dividing the Tiffany orchard from the next, approached a buckboard driven by a lolling Portuguese. Beside him sat a girl all in brown, dust-resistant khaki, who curtained her face with a parasol. Mrs. Tiffany ran, light as an elderly fairy, down the rows.

“Eleanor!” she called.

“Dear, dear Aunt Mattie!” cried the girl. Judge Tiffany, too, was hurrying forward to the road. The youth had his hand on the ladder, prepared to mount, when the parasol dropped. He stopped short with some nervous interruption in his breathing—which might have been a catch in his throat—at the sight of her great, grey eyes; stood still, watching. Mrs. Tiffany was greeting the girl with the pats

and caresses of aged fondness. 7 Out of their chatter, presently, this came in the girl's voice:

"And I was so excited about getting back that when Antonio left the corral gate open I never thought to speak to him. And Ruggles's Dynamo—they've let him run away again—just walked in and butted open the orchard bars and he's loose now eating the prune trees!"

"Edward, you must go right over!" cried Mrs. Tiffany; and then stopped on the thought of an old man trying to subdue a Jersey bull, good-natured though that bull might be. The same thought struck Judge Tiffany. Antonio, the Portuguese, lolling half-asleep against the dashboard, was worse than useless; the nearest visible help was a Chinaman, incompetent against horned cattle, and another Portuguese, and—

"Let me corral your bull," said the easy, thrilling voice of the boy who stood beside the step-ladder. Judge Tiffany turned in reproof, his wife in annoyance, the girl in some surprise. The youth was already walking toward the buckboard.

"I guess that lets you out, John," he said to the Portuguese. 8

Something in him, the same quality which had made the Judge smile back through his rebuke concerning the green apricots, held them all. The Judge spoke first:

"Very well, Mr.—"

"Chester—Bertram Chester," said the youth, throwing his self-introduction straight at the girl.

"Mr. Chester is one of the University boys who are picking for us this summer," said Judge Tiffany.



“Yes?” replied the girl in a balanced, incurious tone. Her eyes followed Mr. Chester, while he took the reins from the deposed Antonio and waited for her to mount the buckboard. As she sprang up, after a final caution from Mrs. Tiffany, she perceived that he was going to “help her in.” With a motion both quick and slight, she evaded his hand and sprang to the seat unaided.

Mr. Chester slapped the reins, clucked to the horse, and bent his gaze down upon the girl. He had seated himself all too close. She crowded herself against the iron seat-rail. It annoyed her a little; it embarrassed her still more. She was slightly relieved when he made a beginning of conversation.

9

“So you’re Judge Tiffany’s niece, the girl who runs her ranch herself. I’ve heard heaps about you.”

“Yes?” Embarrassment came back with the sound of her own voice. She could talk to Judge Tiffany or to any man of Judge Tiffany’s age, but with her male contemporaries she felt always this same constraint. And this young man was looking on her insistently, as though demanding answers.

“They say you’re one of the smartest ranchers in these parts,” he went on.

“Do they?” Her tone was even and inexpressive. But Mr. Chester kept straight along the path he was treading.

“And that you’re also the prettiest girl around Santa Lucia.”

“That’s very kind of them.”

“I haven’t seen your ranch, but about the rest of it they’re dead right.”

To this, she made no answer.

"I'm just down for a few weeks," he went on, changing the subject when he perceived that he had drawn no reply. "I'm a Senior next year at Berkeley. Ever been over to Berkeley?"

"Yes." 10

"Ever go to any of the class dances?"

"No."

"Thought you might, being in the city winters. I'm not much on dances myself. I'm a barb."

He peered, as though expecting that this last statement would evoke some answer. But her eyes were fixed on the little group of buildings—a bungalow, a barn and a corral—which had just come in sight around a turn of the orchard road. For the first time, she spoke with animation.

"There's the house—and there he is, just back of the stable!"

Dynamo, the bull, a black and tan patch amidst the greenery, stood reaching with his tongue at an overhanging prune branch, bowed to the breaking point with green beads of fruit. As they watched, he sucked its tip between his blue lips, pulled at it with a twist of his head; the branch cracked and broke. Dynamo, his eyes closed in meditative enjoyment, started to absorb it from end to end.

"Oh, dear, he'll ruin it!" she cried. "Do hurry! Hadn't you better send for help?"

"I figure I can handle him," said Bertram Chester, bristling at the imputation. "Just 11 give me that halter and drive in back of the corral, will you?"

"Please don't let him trample any trees!" she called after her champion as he vaulted the fence.

Dynamo, seeing the end of his picnic at hand, galloped awkwardly a few rods, the branch trailing from his mouth. Then, with the ponderous but sudden shift of bull psychology, indignation rose in his bosom. He stopped himself so short that his fore-hoofs plowed two long furrows in the soft earth; whirled, lifted his muzzle, and bellowed. One fore-hoof tore up the dirt and showered it over his back. He dropped to his knees and rubbed the ground with his neck in sheer abandonment to the joy of his own abandoned wickedness. He rose up in the hollow which he had dug, lowered his horns, and glowered at the youth, who advanced with a kind of awkward bull-strength of his own.

“Chase yourself!” cried Bertram Chester, flicking the halter. For a second, Dynamo’s eyelids fluttered; then, unaccountably, his bull pride rose up in him. He stopped midway of a bellow; his head went down, his tail rose up—and he charged. The girl across the fence gave a little scream. The youth, stepping aside with a quickness marvelous considering the size of his frame, avoided the charge. As Dynamo tore past him, he struck out—a mighty lash—with the halter. The bull tore on until he smashed into a prune tree. The green fruit flew like water splashing from a stone; and Dynamo checked his course, turned again, began to paw and challenge as the preliminary to another charge.

“Oh, let him go—please!” cried Eleanor. Whether he heard her or not made little difference to the youth. Taking advantage of Dynamo’s slight hesitation, he sprang in close, caught him by the horn and the tender, black nose; and back and forth, across the ruins of the prune tree, which went flat at the first rally, they fought and tugged and

tossed. Through the agonized half-bellows of Dynamo, Eleanor caught a slighter sound. Her champion was swearing! Raised a little above her fears by the vicarious joy of fight, she took no offence at this; it seemed part of the picture.

No one can account for the emotional processes of a bull. Just as suddenly as it rose, Dynamo's courage evaporated. Once more 13 was he brother to the driven ox. He ceased to plant his fore feet; his bellow became a moan; he gave backward; in one mighty toss, he threw off his conqueror, turned, and galloped down the orchard with his tail curved like a pretzel across his back. Behind him followed the youth, lashing him with the halter as long as he could keep it up, pelting him with rocks and clods as the retreat gained. So, in a cloud of dust, they vanished into the Santa Clara road.

When Bertram Chester came back panting, to return the halter, Antonio had arrived and was unhitching the bay mare from the buckboard. Eleanor stood by the corral gate, her Panama hat fallen back from her brown hair and a little of the excitement left in her grey eyes. Bertram approached, grinning; he wore a swagger like that of a little boy who has just turned a series of somersaults before the little girls. Eleanor noticed this. Faintly—and in spite of the gratitude she owed him for turning a neighborly service into a heroic deed—she resented it. Also, Dynamo and Mr. Chester, between them, had wholly ruined a good prune tree in the prime of bearing. 14

“Say, we didn't do a thing to that tree,” said Bertram Chester, with the air of one who deprecates himself that he

may leave the road wide open for praise.

“It doesn’t matter. It—it was very brave of you. Thank you very much—are you hurt?”

“Only mussed up a little.” He blinked perceptibly at the coolness in her tone. Then he leaned back against a fence-post with the settled air of one who expects to continue the conversation. She swayed slightly away from him.

“Kind of nice place,” he said, sweeping his eye over the shingled cottage whose rose-bushes were making a brave fight against the dry summer dust, over the tiny lawn, over the Lombardy poplars.

“It’s nice of you to say so.”

Bertram turned his eye upon her again.

“Say,” said he, “I don’t believe the Judge expects me back right away! Anything more I can do around the place?”

Eleanor smiled through her slight resentment.

“I don’t think I care to take the responsibility.” 15 In that moment, the butcher-wagon, making the rounds from farm-house to farm-house, appeared quite suddenly at the bend of the road. Maria, wife of Antonio and cook for Eleanor’s haciendetta, ran out to meet it.

“Oh, Maria—tell Mr. Bowles I want to see him!” cried Eleanor, and hurried toward the house. Bertram Chester stood deserted for a moment, and then;

“Good bye!” he called after her.

“Good bye and thank you so much!” she answered over her shoulder.

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Two minutes later, Mr. Bowles, driver of the meat wagon, was saying to Eleanor:

“Which was it—rib or loin for Saturday, Miss Gray?”

“Was it?” said Eleanor, absently; and she fell to silence. Maria and Mr. Bowles, waiting respectfully for her decision, followed her eyes. She was looking at a dust cloud which trailed down the lane. When she came out of her revery and beheld them both watching, silent and open-mouthed, she flushed violently.

Bertram Chester, swinging between the green rows, was whistling blithely: 16

“Say coons have you ebber ebber seen ma  
Angeline?  
She am de swetes’ swetes’ coon you ebber  
seen.”

## CHAPTER II

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Every Sunday afternoon during the picking season, Mrs. Tiffany served tea on the lawn for the half-dozen familiar households on the Santa Lucia tract. That was the busy time of all the year, affording no leisure for those dinners and whist parties which came in the early season, when the country families had just arrived from town, or in the late season, when prune picking grew slack. Night finds one weary in the country, even when his day has brought only supervision of labor. These town-bred folk, living from the soil and still but half welded to it, fell unconsciously into farmer habits in this working period.

The Goodyears and the Morses, more formal than their neighbors, did indeed give a dinner once or twice a summer to this or that visitor from San Francisco or San Jose. Otherwise, the colony gathered only at this Sunday afternoon tea of Mrs. Tiffany's. Her 18 place lay about midway of the colony, her lawn, such as it was—no lawn flourishes greatly in that land of dry summers—was the oldest and best kept of all; further, they had acquired the habit. Already, these Californians were beginning a country life remotely like that of England; a country life made gracious by all the simple refinements, from bathtubs to books. They had settled, too, into the ways of a clique; small and informal as their entertainments were, minor jealousies of leadership had developed already.

By a kind of consent never yet made law by any contest, the Goodyears were leaders and dictators. He, Raleigh Goodyear, was passably rich; his wife was by birth of that

old Southern set which dominated the society of San Francisco from its very beginning. Until their only daughter married into the army and, by her money and connections, advanced her husband to a staff position in Washington, Mrs. Goodyear had figured among the patrons to those cotillions and assemblies by which the elect, under selection of a wine agent, set themselves off from the aspiring. Then the colony treated with familiar deference. 19

Mrs. Tiffany, whose native desire to please and accommodate had grown with her kind of matrimony, held social leadership of a different kind. Her summer house was the boudoir of this colony, as her town house was the centre for quiet and informal entertainment just tinged with Bohemia. Hers was the gate at which one stopped for a greeting and a chat as one drove past on the road; she was forever running to that gate. She knew the troubles of all her neighbors, both the town dwellers of her set and the humbler folk who made fruit farming more of a business. That rather silent husband of hers—a man getting an uncomfortable peace from the end of a turbulent and disappointing life which had just escaped great success—told her that she had one great fault of the head. She must always make a martyr of herself by bearing the burdens of her world.

The Judge and Mrs. Tiffany sat now, in the early afternoon of a summer Sunday, under the gigantic live-oak which shadowed their piazza. She was crocheting a pink scarf, through which her tiny fingers flew like shuttles; he was reading. Out beyond their hacienda, the American “hands,” fresh-shaved 20 for Sunday, lolled on the ground



over a lazy game of cards. From the creek bottom further on, came a sound which, in the distance, resembled the drumming of cicadas—a Chinese workman was lulling his ease with a moon-fiddle. Near at hand stood the tea things, all prepared before Molly, the maid, started for her Sunday afternoon visit to the camp of the women cutters. Factory girls from the city, these cutters, making a vacation of the summer work.

Mrs. Tiffany glanced up from her yarns at the leonine head of her husband, bent above “The History of European Morals,” opened her mouth as though to speak; thought better of it, apparently. Twice she looked up like this, her air showing that she was not quite confident of his sympathy in that which she meant to bring forward.

“Edward!” she said at length, quite loud. He lowered the book and removed his reading glasses, held them poised—a characteristic gesture with him. He said no word; between them, a glance was enough.

“You remember the young man who went over with Eleanor to drive away the Ruggles bull?” 21

Judge Tiffany gave assent by a slight inclination of his head.

“I went over to the camp of those University boys yesterday,” she went on, running loops with incredible speed, “and I don’t quite like the way they are living there. They associate too much with the cutting-women. You know, Edward, that isn’t good for boys of their age—and they must be nice at bottom or they wouldn’t be trying to work their way through college—”

She stopped as though to note the effect. The ripple of a smile played under Judge Tiffany's beard. She caught at her next words a little nervously.

"You know we have a responsibility for the people about the place, Edward—I couldn't bear to think we'd let any nice college boy degenerate because we employed him—and it is so easy at their age."

"Which means," broke in the Judge, "that you have asked this Mr. Chester up here to tea."

"If—if you wish it, Edward."

"I can't very well countermand your invitation and tell him by the foreman not to come. But I warn you that this social recognition will serve as no excuse if I catch him picking any more green apricots."

Mrs. Tiffany, unturned by this breeze of criticism, ran along on her own tack.

"His manners *are* a little forward, but he has a nice way of speaking. I'm sure he is a gentleman, at bottom. You can't expect such a young man, who has been obliged to work his way, to have all the graces at once. They've brought down their town clothes—I saw them last Sunday—so you needn't be afraid of that. I've asked Mr. Heath, too."

"Is that by way of another introduction?" asked Judge Tiffany. His eyes looked at her severely, but his beard showed that he was smiling gently again. Half his joy in a welded marriage lay in his appreciation of her humors, as though one should laugh at himself.

"Oh, there's no doubt that *he's* a gentleman. He is less loud, somehow, than Mr. Chester, though he hasn't his

charm. It seems there is the most wonderful boy friendship between them.”

“Where did you get all this insight into the social life of our employees?” asked Judge 23 Tiffany; and then, “Mattie, you’ve been exposing yourself to the night air again.”

“Over at their camp last evening,” said Mrs. Tiffany. “Well, and isn’t it my business to look after—after that side of the ranch?” she added.

The Judge had dropped the book now; his senses were alert to the game which never grew old to him—“Mattie-baiting” he had named it.

“Mattie,” he said, “with a pretty and marriageable, dowered and maiden niece on your hands, a new era is opening in your life of passionate self-sacrifice. It used to be orphan children and neglected wives of farm hands. Now it is presentable but neglected bachelors. Your darling match for Eleanor, I suppose, would be some young soul snatched from evil courses, pruned, trimmed, and delivered at the altar with ‘Made by Mattie Tiffany’ branded on his wings. Spare, O spare your innocent niece!”

“Edward, I never thought of it in that light!” cried Mrs. Tiffany; and she bent herself to furious crocheting. After a time, and when the Judge had resumed his book, she looked up and added: 24

“It might be worse, though, than a young man who had made it all himself.”

Judge Tiffany burst into laughter. Then, seeing her bend closer over her pink yarns, he grew grave, reached for the hand which held the needles, and kissed it.

That was her reward of childless matrimony, as the appreciation of her humors was his.

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While they sat thus, in one of their comfortable hours, the guests were come. The Morses appeared first. He was a pleasant, hollow-chested little man; his delicacy of lung gave him his excuse for playing gentleman farmer. She, half-Spanish, carried bulk for the family and carried it well. The Andalusian showed in her coy yet open air, in her small, broad hand and foot, in a languorous liquidity of eye. Their son, a well-behaved and pretty youth of twelve, and their daughter, two years older, rode behind them on the back seat. The daughter bore one of those mosaic names with which the mixed race has sprinkled California—Teresa del Vinal Morse. A pretty, delicate tea-rose thing, she stood at an age of divided appreciations. 25 In the informal society of the Santa Lucia colony, she was listening half the time to her elders, taking a shadowy interest in their sayings and opinions; for the rest, she was turning on Theodore, that childish brother, an illuminated understanding.

The Goodyears arrived with a little flourish. Their trap, which she drove herself and which was perhaps a little too English to be useful or appropriate on a Californian road, the straight, tailor lines of her suit—all displayed that kind of quiet, refined ostentation which, very possibly, shrieks as loud to God as the diamond rings on a soiled finger. Mrs. Tiffany, who had met the Morses on the lawn, tripped clear across the rose-border to meet the Goodyears; did it with entire unconsciousness of drawing any distinction. As by right, Mrs. Goodyear appropriated the great green arm-chair