

***FRANK RICHARD
STOCKTON***

***MRS. CLIFF'S
YACHT***

Frank Richard Stockton

Mrs. Cliff's Yacht

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PLAINTON, MAINE

CHAPTER I

ALONE WITH HER WEALTH

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On a beautiful September afternoon in a handsome room of one of the grand, up-town hotels in New York sat Mrs. Cliff, widow and millionaire.

Widow of a village merchant, mistress of an unpretending house in the little town of Plainton, Maine, and, by strange vicissitudes of fortune, the possessor of great wealth, she was on her way from Paris to the scene of that quiet domestic life to which for nearly thirty years she had been accustomed.

She was alone in the hotel; her friends, Captain Horn and his wife Edna, who had crossed the ocean with her, had stayed but a few days in New York and had left early that afternoon for Niagara, and she was here by herself in the hotel, waiting until the hour should arrive when she would start on a night train for her home.

Her position was a peculiar one, altogether new to her. She was absolutely independent,—not only could she do what she pleased, but there was no one to tell her what it would be well for her to do, wise for her to do, or unwise. Everything she could possibly want was within her reach, and there was no reason why she should not have everything she wanted.

For many months she had been possessed of enormous wealth, but never until this moment had she felt herself the absolute, untrammelled possessor of it. Until now Captain

Horn, to whom she owed her gold, and the power it gave her, had been with her or had exercised an influence over her. Until the time had come when he could avow the possession of his vast treasures, it had been impossible for her to make known her share in them, and even after everything had been settled, and they had all come home together in the finest state-rooms of a great ocean liner, she had still felt dependent upon the counsels and judgment of her friends.

But now she was left absolutely free and independent, untrammelled, uncounselled, alone with her wealth.

She rose and looked out of the window, and, as she gazed upon the crowd which swept up and down the beautiful avenue, she could not but smile as she thought that she, a plain New England countrywoman, with her gray hair brushed back from her brows, with hands a little hardened and roughened with many a year of household duties, which had been to her as much a pleasure as a labor, was in all probability richer than most of the people who sat in the fine carriages or strolled in their fashionable clothes along the sidewalk.

"If I wanted to do it," she thought, "I could have one of those carriages with prancing horses and a driver in knee breeches, or I could buy that house opposite, with its great front steps, its balconies, and everything in it, but there is nobody on this earth who could tempt me to live there."

"Now," said Mrs. Cliff to herself, as she turned from the window and selected a fresh easy chair, and sank down into its luxurious depths, "there is nothing in this world so delightful as to go back rich to Plainton. To be rich in Paris or

New York is nothing to me; it would simply mean that I should be a common person there as I used to be at home, and, for the matter of that, a little more common."

As the good lady's thoughts wandered northward, and spread themselves from the railroad station at Plainton all over the little town, she was filled with a great content and happiness to go to her old home with her new money. This was a joy beyond anything she had dreamed of as possible in this world.

But it was the conjunction of the two which produced this delightful effect upon her mind. The money anywhere else, or Plainton without it, would not have made Mrs. Cliff the happy woman that she was.

It pleased her to let her mind wander over the incidents of her recent visit to her old home, the most unhappy visit she had ever made in all her life, but everything that was unpleasant then would help to make everything more delightful in the present home-coming.

She thought of the mental chains and fetters she had worn when she went to Plainton with plenty of money in her purse and a beautiful pair of California blankets in her handsome trunk; when she had been afraid to speak of the one or to show the other; when she had sat quietly and received charity from people whose houses and land, furniture, horses, and cows, she could have bought and given away without feeling their loss; when she had been publicly berated by Nancy Shott for spending money on luxuries which should have been used to pay her debts; when she had been afraid to put her money in the bank for fear it would act as a dynamite bomb and blow up the

fortunes of her friends, and when she could find no refuge from the miseries brought upon her by the necessity of concealing her wealth except to go to bed and cover up her head so that she should not hear the knock of some inquiring neighbor upon her front door.

Then when she had made this background as dark and gloomy as it was possible to make it, she placed before it the glittering picture of her new existence in Plainton.

But this new life, bright as it now appeared to her, was not to be begun without careful thought and earnest consideration. Ever since her portion of the golden treasure had been definitely assigned to her, the mind of Mrs. Cliff had been much occupied with plans for her future in her old home.

It was not to be altogether a new life. All the friends she had in the world, excepting Captain and Mrs. Horn, lived in Plainton. She did not wish to lose these friends,—she did not wish to be obliged to make new ones. With simple-minded and honest Willy Croup, who had long lived with her and for her; with Mrs. Perley, the minister's wife; with all her old neighbors and friends, she wished to live as she had always lived, but, of course, with a difference. How to manage, arrange, and regulate that difference was the great problem in her mind.

One thing she had determined upon: her money should not come between her and those who loved her and who were loved by her. No matter what she might do or what she might not do, she would not look down upon people simply because she was rich, and oh, the blessed thought which

followed that! There would be nobody who could look down upon her because she was not rich!

She did not intend to be a fine new woman; she did not intend to build a fine new house. She was going to be the same Mrs. Cliff that she used to be,—she was going to live in the same house. To be sure, she would add to it. She would have a new dining-room and a guest's chamber over it, and she would do a great many other things which were needed, but she would live in her old home where she and her husband had been so happy, and where she hoped he would look down from heaven and see her happy until the end of her days.

As she thought of the things she intended to do, and of the manner in which she intended to do them, Mrs. Cliff rose and walked the floor. She felt as if she were a bird, a common-sized bird, perhaps, but with enormous wings which seemed to grow and grow the more she thought of them until they were able to carry her so far and so high that her mind lost its power of directing them.

She determined to cease to think of the future, of what was going to be, and to let her mind rest and quiet itself with what really existed. Here she was in a great city full of wonders and delights, of comforts, conveniences, luxuries, necessities, and all within her power. Almost anything she could think of she might have; almost anything she wanted to do she might do. A feeling of potentiality seemed to swell and throb within her veins. She was possessed of an overpowering desire to do something now, this moment, to try the power of her wealth.

Near her on the richly papered wall was a little button. She could touch this and order—what should she order? A carriage and prancing pair to take her to drive? She did not wish to drive. A cab to take her to the shops, or an order to merchants to send her samples of their wares that here, in her own room, like a queen or a princess, she might choose what she wanted and think nothing of the cost? But no, she did not wish to buy anything. She had purchased in Paris everything that she cared to carry to Plainton.

She went and stood by the electric button. She must touch it, and must have something! Her gold must give her an instant proof that it could minister to her desires, but what should she ask for? Her mind travelled over the whole field of the desirable, and yet not one salient object presented itself. There was absolutely nothing that she could think of that she wished to ask for at that moment. She was like a poor girl in a fairy tale to whom the good fairy comes and asks her to make one wish and it shall be granted, and who stands hesitating and trembling, not being able to decide what is the one great thing for which she should ask.

So stood Mrs. Cliff. There was a fairy, a powerful fairy, in her service who could give her anything she desired, and with all her heart she wanted to want something that minute. What should she want?

In her agitation she touched the bell. Half frightened at what she had done, she stepped back and sat down. In a few minutes there was a knock, the door opened, a servant entered. "Bring me a cup of tea," said Mrs. Cliff.

CHAPTER II

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WILLY CROUP DOESN'T KNOW

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The next afternoon as the train approached Plainton, Mrs. Cliff found herself a great deal agitated as she thought of the platform at the station. Who would be there,—how should she be met? With all her heart she hoped that there would not be anything like a formal reception, and yet this was not improbable. Everybody knew she was coming; everybody knew by what train she would arrive. She had written to Willy Croup, and she was very sure that everybody knew everything that she had written. More than this, everybody knew that she was coming home rich. How rich they were not aware, because she had not gone into particulars on this subject, but they knew that the wealthy Mrs. Cliff would arrive at 5.20 that afternoon, and what were they going to do about it?

When she had gone home before, all her friends and neighbors, and even distant acquaintances,—if such people were possible in such a little town,—had come to her house to bid her welcome, and many of them had met her at the station. But then they had come to meet a poor, shipwrecked widow, pitied by most of them and loved by many. Even those who neither pitied nor loved her had a curiosity to see her, for she had been shipwrecked, and it was not known in Plainton how people looked after they had been wrecked.

But now the case was so different that Mrs. Cliff did not expect the same sort of greeting, and she greatly feared formality. If Mr. Perley should appear on the platform, surrounded by some of the leading members of his congregation, and should publicly take her by the hand and bid her "Welcome home!" and if those who felt themselves entitled to do so, should come forward and shake hands with her, while others, who might feel that they belonged to a different station in life, should keep in the background and wait until she came to speak to them, she would be deeply hurt.

After all, Plainton and the people in it were dearer to her than anything else in the world, and it would be a great shock if she should meet formality where she looked for cordial love. She wanted to see Mr. Perley,—he was the first person she had seen when she came home before,—but now she hoped that he would not be there. She was very much afraid that he would make a stiff speech to her; and if he did that, she would know that there had been a great change, and that the friends she would meet were not the same friends she had left. She was almost afraid to look out of the window as the train slowed up at the station.

The minds of the people of Plainton had been greatly exercised about this home-coming of Mrs. Cliff. That afternoon it was probable that no other subject of importance was thought about or talked about in the town, and for some days before the whole matter had been so thoroughly considered and discussed that the good citizens, without really coming to any fixed and general decision upon the subject, had individually made up their minds that,

no matter what might happen afterward, they would make no mistake upon this very important occasion which might subsequently have an influence upon their intercourse with their old, respected neighbor, now millionaire. Each one for himself, or herself, decided—some of them singly and some of them in groups—that as they did not know what sort of a woman Mrs. Cliff had become since the change in her circumstances, they would not place themselves in false positions. Other people might go and meet her at the station, but they would stay at home and see what happened. Even Mr. Perley thought it wise, under the circumstances, to do this.

Therefore it was, that when Mrs. Cliff stepped down upon the platform, she saw no one there but Willy Croup. If Mrs. Cliff was a little shocked and a good deal surprised to find no one to meet her but that simple-minded dependant and relative, her emotions were excited in a greater degree by the manner in which she was greeted by this old friend and companion.

Instead of rushing toward her with open arms,—for Willy was an impulsive person and given to such emotional demonstrations,—Miss Croup came forward, extending a loosely filled black cotton glove. Her large, light-blue eyes showed a wondering interest, and Mrs. Cliff felt that every portion of her visible attire was being carefully scanned.

For a moment Mrs. Cliff hesitated, and then she took the hand of Willy Croup and shook it, but she did not speak. She had no command of words, at least for greeting.

Willy earnestly inquired after her health, and said how glad she was to see her, but Mrs. Cliff did not listen. She

looked about her. For an instant she thought that possibly the train had come in ahead of time, but this, of course, was absurd—trains never did that.

"Willy," she said, her voice a little shaken, "has anything happened? Is anybody sick?"

"Oh no!" said Willy; "everybody is well, so far as I know. I guess you are wondering why there is nobody here to meet you, and I have been wondering at that too. They must have thought that you did not want to be bothered when you were attending to your baggage and things. Is anybody with you?"

"With me!" exclaimed Mrs. Cliff; "who could be with me?"

"Oh, I didn't know," replied the other; "I thought perhaps you might have a maidservant, or some of those black people you wrote about."

Mrs. Cliff was on the point of telling Willy she was a fool, but she refrained.

"Here is the baggage-man," said Willy, "and he wants your checks."

As Mrs. Cliff took the little pieces of brass from her purse and handed them to the man, Willy looked on in amazement.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed. "Seven! I guess you had to pay for extra baggage. Shall I get you a carriage, and where do you want to be driven to—to your own house or the hotel?"

Now Mrs. Cliff could not restrain herself. "What is the matter with you, Willy? Have you gone crazy?" she exclaimed. "Of course I am going to my own house, and I do not want any carriage. Did I ever need a carriage to take me

such a short distance as that? Tell the man to bring some one with him to carry the trunks upstairs, and then come on."

"Let me carry your bag," said Willy, as the two walked away from the station at a much greater pace, it may be remarked, than Willy was accustomed to walk.

"No, you shall not carry my bag," said Mrs. Cliff, and not another word did she speak until she had entered the hallway of her home. Then, closing the door behind her, and without looking around at any of the dear objects for a sight of which she had so long been yearning, she turned to her companion.

"Willy," she cried, "what does this mean? Why do you treat me in this way when I come home after having been away so long, and having suffered so much? Why do you greet me as if you took me for a tax collector? Why do you stand there like a—a horrible clam?"

Willy hesitated. She looked up and she looked down.

"Things are so altered," she said, "and I didn't know—"

"Well, know now," said Mrs. Cliff, as she held out her arms. In a moment the two women were clasped in a tight embrace, kissing and sobbing.

"How should I know?" said poor Willy, as she was wiping her eyes. "Chills went down me as I stood on that platform, wondering what sort of a grand lady you would look like when you got out of the car, with two servant women, most likely, and perhaps a butler, and trying to think what I should say."

Mrs. Cliff laughed. "You were born addle-pated, and you can't help it. Now, let us go through this house without

wasting a minute!" Willy gazed at her in amazement.

"You're just the same as you always was!" she cried "Indeed I am!" said Mrs. Cliff. "Did you clean this dining-room yourself, Willy? It looks as spick and span as if I had just left it."

"Indeed it does," was the proud reply, "and you couldn't find a speck of dust from the ceiling to the floor!"

When Mrs. Cliff had been upstairs and downstairs, and in the front yard, the side yard, and the back yard, and when her happy eyes had rested upon all her dear possessions, she went into the kitchen.

"Now, Willy," she said, "let us go to work and get supper, for I must say I am hungry."

At this Willy Croup turned pale, her chin dropped, a horrible suspicion took possession of her. Could it be possible that it was all a mistake, or that something dreadful had happened; that the riches which everybody had been talking about had never existed, or had disappeared? She might want to go to her old home; she might want to see her goods and chattels, but that she should want to help get supper—that was incomprehensible! At that moment the world looked very black to Willy. If Mrs. Cliff had gone into the parlor, and had sat down in the best rocking-chair to rest herself, and had said to her, "Please get supper as soon as you can," Willy would have believed in everything, but now—!

The grinding of heavy wheels was heard in front of the house, and Willy turned quickly and looked out of the window. There was a wagon containing seven enormous trunks! Since the days when Plainton was a little hamlet, up

to the present time, when it contained a hotel, a bank, a lyceum, and a weekly paper, no one had ever arrived within its limits with seven such trunks. Instantly the blackness disappeared from before the mind of Willy Croup.

"Now, you tell the men where to carry them," she cried, "and I will get the supper in no time! Betty Handshall stayed here until this morning, but she went away after dinner, for she was afraid if she stayed she would be in the way, not knowing how much help you would bring with you."

"I wonder if they are all crack-brained," thought Mrs. Cliff, as she went to the front door to attend to her baggage.

That evening nearly all Plainton came to see Mrs. Cliff. No matter how she returned,—as a purse-proud bondholder, as a lady of elegant wealth with her attendants, as an old friend suddenly grown jolly and prosperous,—it would be all right for her neighbors to go in and see her in the evening. There they might suit themselves to her new deportment whatever it might be, and there would be no danger of any of them getting into false positions, which would have been very likely indeed if they had gone to meet her at the station.

Her return to her own house gave her real friends a great deal of satisfaction, for some of them had feared she would not go there. It would have been difficult for them to know how to greet Mrs. Cliff at a hotel, even such an unpretentious one as that of Plainton. All these friends found her the same warm-hearted, cordial woman that she had ever been. In fact, if there was any change at all in her, she was more cordial than they had yet known her. As in the case of Willy Croup, a cloud had risen before her. She had

been beset by the sudden fear that her money already threatened to come between her and her old friends. "Not if I can help it!" said Mrs. Cliff to herself, as fervently as if she had been vowing a vow to seek the Holy Grail; and she did help it. The good people forgot what they had expected to think about her, and only remembered what they had always thought of her. No matter what had happened, she was the same.

But what had happened, and how it had happened, and all about it, up and down, to the right and the left, above and below, everybody wanted to know, and Mrs. Cliff, with sparkling eyes, was only too glad to tell them. She had been obliged to be so reserved when she had come home before, that she was all the more eager to be communicative now; and it was past midnight before the first of that eager and delighted company thought of going home.

There was one question, however, which Mrs. Cliff successfully evaded, and that was—the amount of her wealth. She would not give even an approximate idea of the value of her share of the golden treasure. It was very soon plain to everybody that Mrs. Cliff was the same woman she used to be in regard to keeping to herself that which she did not wish to tell to others, and so everybody went away with imagination absolutely unfettered.

CHAPTER III

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MISS NANCY SHOTT

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The next morning Mrs. Cliff sat alone in her parlor with her mind earnestly fixed upon her own circumstances. Out in the kitchen, Willy Croup was dashing about like a domestic fanatic, eager to get the morning's work done and everything put in order, that she might go upstairs with Mrs. Cliff, and witness the opening of those wonderful trunks.

She was a happy woman, for she had a new dish-pan, which Mrs. Cliff had authorized her to buy that very morning, the holes in the bottom of the old one having been mended so often that she and Mrs. Cliff both believed that it would be very well to get a new one and rid themselves of further trouble.

Willy also had had the proud satisfaction of stopping at the carpenter shop on her way to buy the dish-pan, and order him to come and do whatever was necessary to the back-kitchen door. Sometimes it had been the hinges and sometimes it had been the lock which had been out of order on that door for at least a year, and although they had been tinkering here and tinkering there, the door had never worked properly; and now Mrs. Cliff had said that it must be put in perfect order even if a new door and a new frame were required, and without any regard to what it might cost. This to Willy was the dawn of a new era, and the thought of it excited her like wine.

Mrs. Cliff's mind was not excited; it was disquieted. She had been thinking of her investments and of her deposits, all of which had been made under wise advice, and it had suddenly occurred to her to calculate how much richer she was to-day than she had been yesterday. When she appreciated the fact that the interest on her invested property had increased her wealth, since the previous morning, by some hundreds of dollars, it frightened her. She felt as if an irresistible flood of opulence was flowing in upon her, and she shuddered to think of the responsibility of directing it into its proper courses, and so preventing it from overwhelming her and sweeping her away.

To-morrow there would be several hundred dollars more, and the next day more, and so on always, and what was she doing, or what had she planned to do, to give proper direction to these tidal waves of wealth? She had bought a new dish-pan and ordered a door repaired!

To be sure, it was very soon to begin to think of the expenditure of her income, but it was a question which could not be postponed. The importance of it was increasing all the time. Every five minutes she was two dollars richer.

For a moment she wished herself back in Paris or New York. There she might open some flood-gate which would give instant relief from the pressure of her affluence and allow her time to think; but what could she do in Plainton? At least, how should she begin to do anything?

She got up and walked about the room. She was becoming annoyed, and even a little angry. She resented this intrusion of her wealth upon her. She wanted to rest quietly for a time, to enjoy her home and friends, and not be

obliged to think of anything which it was incumbent upon her to do. From the bottom of her heart she wished that her possessions had all been solid gold, or in some form in which they could not increase, expand, or change in any way until she gave them leave. Then she would live for a week or two, as she used to live, without thought of increment or responsibilities, until she was ready to begin the life of a rich woman and to set in motion the currents of her exuberant income.

But she could not change the state of affairs. The system of interest had been set in motion, and her income was flowing in upon her hour by hour, day by day, steadily and irresistibly, and her mind could not be at rest until she had done something—at least, planned something—which would not only prevent her from being overwhelmed and utterly discouraged, but which would enable her to float proudly, on this grand current of absolute power, over the material interests of the world.

Mrs. Cliff was a woman of good sense. No matter how much money she might possess, she would have considered herself its unworthy possessor if she should spend any of it without proper value received. She might spend it foolishly, but she wanted the worth of her money. She would consider it a silly thing, for instance, to pay a thousand dollars for an India shawl, because few people wore India shawls, and she did not care for them; but if she had done so, she would have been greatly mortified if she found that she had paid too much, and that she might have bought as good a shawl for seven hundred and fifty dollars.

Since she had been in that room and thinking about these things, enough interest had come to her to enable her to buy a good silver watch for some deserving person. Now, who was there to whom she could give a plain silver watch? Willy Croup would be glad to have it, but then it would be better to wait a few hours and give her a gold one.

Now it was that Willy came into the room with a disappointed expression upon her countenance.

"I was just coming in to tell you," she said, "that I was ready now to go up and help you open the trunks, but here comes that horrid Miss Shott, and dear knows how long she will stay!"

Nancy Shott was the leading spinster of Plainton. In companies where there were married ladies she was sometimes obliged to take a second place, but never among maidens, old or young. There were very few subjects upon which Miss Shott had not an opinion; and whatever this opinion might be, she considered it her first duty in life to express it. As a rule, the expression was more agreeable to her than to others.

When Mrs. Cliff heard that Miss Shott was approaching, she instantly forgot her wealth and all her perplexities concerning it. Miss Shott had not called upon her the previous evening, but she had not expected her, nor did she expect her now.

On her previous visit to Plainton, Mrs. Cliff had been shamefully insulted by Miss Shott, who had accused her of extravagance, and, by implication, of dishonesty, and in return, the indignant widow had opened upon her such a volley of justifiable retaliation that Miss Shott, in great

wrath, had retired from the house, followed, figuratively, by a small coin which she had brought as a present and which had been hurled after her.

But Mrs. Cliff knew that her acrimonious neighbor could never be depended upon to do anything which might be expected of her, and she was not quite so much surprised as she was annoyed. Of course, she had known she must meet Nancy Shott, and she had intended to do nothing which would recall to the mind of any one that she remembered the disagreeable incident referred to, but she had not expected that the meeting would be in private.

She knew that Nancy would do something decidedly unpleasant. If she had stayed away because she wanted a chance to re-open the previous quarrel, that would be bad enough; but if she had determined to drop all resentment and had come prepared to offer honey and sugar, and thus try to make a rich friend out of one she had considered as a poor enemy, that would be still more disagreeable. But by the time the visitor had entered the parlor, Mrs. Cliff had made up her mind to meet her as if nothing unpleasant had ever happened between them, and then to await the course of events. She was not at all pleased with the visit, but, notwithstanding this, she had great curiosity to know what Miss Shott had to say about the change in her circumstances.

Nancy Shott was different from other people. She was capable of drawing the most astounding inferences and of coming to the most soul-irritating conclusions, even on subjects which could not be otherwise than pleasant to ordinary people.

"How do you do?" said Miss Shott, offering her hand. "I am glad to see you back, Mrs. Cliff."

Mrs. Cliff replied that she was quite well and was glad to be back.

"You are not looking as hale as you did," said the visitor, as she seated herself; "you must have lost a good many pounds, but that was to be expected. From what I have heard, South America must be about as unhealthy a place as any part of the world, and then on top of that, living in Paris with water to drink which, I am told, is enough to make anybody sick to look at it, is bound to have some sort of an effect upon a person."

Mrs. Cliff smiled. She was used to this sort of talk from Nancy Shott. "I am better than I was two years ago," she said, "and the last time I was weighed I found that I had gained seven pounds."

"Well, there is no accounting for that," said her visitor, "except as we grow old we are bound to show it, and sometimes aging looks like bad health, and as to fat, that often comes as years go on, though as far as I am concerned, I think it is a great misfortune to have more to carry, as you get less and less able to carry it."

Mrs. Cliff might have said that that sort of thing would not be likely to trouble Miss Shott, whose scantily furnished frame was sure to become thinner and thinner as she became older and weaker, but she merely smiled and waited to hear what would come next.

"I do not want to worry you," said Miss Shott; "but several people that were here last night said you was not looking as they had hoped to see you look, and I will just say to you, if

it is anything connected with your appetite, with a feeling of goneness in the mornings, you ought to buy a quassia cup and drink the full of it at least three times a day."

Miss Shott knew that Mrs. Cliff absolutely detested the taste of quassia. Mrs. Cliff was not annoyed. She hoped that her visitor would soon get through with these prefatory remarks and begin to take the stand, whatever it might be, which she had come there that morning to take.

"There has been sickness here since you last left," said Miss Shott, "and it has been where it was least to be expected, too. Barney Thompson's little boy, the second son, has had the diphtheria, and where he got it nobody knows, for it was vacation time, and he did not go to school, and there was no other diphtheria anywhere in all this town, and yet he had it and had it bad."

"He did not die?" said Mrs. Cliff.

"Oh no, he got over it, and perhaps it was a bad case and perhaps it was not; but you may be sure I did not go near it, for I considered it my duty to keep away, and I did keep away, but the trouble is—"

"And did none of the other children take it?" asked Mrs. Cliff.

"No, they didn't. But the trouble is, that when diphtheria or anything like it comes up suddenly like this, without any reason that nobody can see, it is just as likely to come up again without any reason, and I am expecting to hear every day of another of them Thompson children being stricken down; and I was very sorry indeed, Mrs. Cliff, to see, this very morning, Willy Croup coming out of Barney Thompson's house and to hear from her afterwards that she had been to

order him to come here to put up a new kitchen door, which I do not suppose is absolutely needed, and even if it is, I am sure I would wait a good while before I would have Barney Thompson come into my house with diphtheria, that very minute, perhaps, in the throats of one or maybe more of his children; but of course, if people choose to trifle with their own lives, it is their own business."

"It was not real diphtheria," said Willy Croup, who happened to be passing the open door at this moment; "it was only a bad sore throat, and the child was well in two days."

"I suppose, of course," said Miss Shott, "that if the disease did get into this house, Willy Croup would be the first to take it, because she is such a spongy person that she takes almost anything that is in the air and is not wholesome; but then you would not want to lose her, and after a funeral in the house, no matter whose it may be, things is always gloomy for a long time afterwards, and nobody can feel easy if it was a catchin' disease that the person died of."

Mrs. Cliff was naturally desirous to hear all the domestic news of the town, but she would have liked to have had something pleasant thrown in among the gloomy tidings of which Miss Shott had made herself the bearer, and so she made a little effort to turn the conversation.

"I shall be glad to go about and see my old friends and neighbors," she said, "for I am interested in everything which has happened to them; but I suppose it will be some days before I can settle down and feel ready to go on in the old way. It seems to me as if I had been on the move ever

since I left here, although, of course, I was not travelling all the time."

"I suppose nobody has told you," said Miss Shott, "that Edward Darley has ploughed up that little pasture of his and planted it with young apple trees. Now, it does seem to me that for a man like Edward Darley, who comes of a consumptive family, and who has been coughin' regularly, to my certain knowledge, for more than a year, to go and plant apple trees, which he can't expect to live to see bear fruit, is nothing more or less than a wicked waste of money, time, and labor. I suppose if I was to go and tell him so he would not like that, but I do not know as I ought to consider it. There are people in this world who'll never know anything if they're not told!"

Five other topics of the town, each of a doleful nature and each indicating an evident depravity in a citizen of Plainton, were related by Miss Shott, and then she arose to go.

"I hope you'll remember what I told you about Thompson's children," she said, as she walked to the front door, "and if I was you, I'd have that kitchen fumigated after he has put the door in!"

"There now!" said Miss Shott to herself, as she proudly walked down the street. "The Widow Cliff can't say I've done any toadying; and, no matter what she's got, and what she hasn't got, she can't say to herself that I consider her any better able to give me twenty-five cents than she was when she was here before; or that it makes any difference to me whether she has much or little!"

CHAPTER IV

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A LAUNCH INTO A NEW LIFE

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It required the greater part of two days for Mrs. Cliff and Willy to open the seven trunks, and properly display and dispose of the various articles and goods, astonishing in their variety and beauty, and absolutely amazing when the difference between the price paid for them and what they would have cost in New York was considered.

During these fascinating operations it so happened that at one time or another nearly all of Mrs. Cliff's female friends dropped in, and all were wonderfully impressed by what they saw and what they heard; but although Miss Shott did not come there during the grand opening, it was not long before she knew the price and something of the general appearance of nearly everything that Mrs. Cliff had brought with her.

Among the contents of the trunks were a great many presents for Mrs. Cliff's friends, and whenever Miss Shott heard of one of these gifts, she made a remark to the effect that she had not a doubt in the world that the Widow Cliff knew better than to bring her a present, for she would not want the thing, whatever it was, whether a glass pitcher or a pin-cushion, flung back at her after the fashion that she had set herself at a time when everybody was trying their best to be kind to her.

It was clearly a fact, that through the influence of the seven trunks Mrs. Cliff was becoming a very popular woman, and Miss Shott did not like it at all. She had never had any faith—at least she said so—in those lumps of gold found in a hole in some part of the world that nobody had ever heard of; and had not hesitated to say that fortunes founded on such wild-goose stories as these should not even be considered by people of good sense who worked for their living, or had incomes which they could depend on. But the dress goods, the ribbons, the gloves, the little clocks, the shoes, the parasols, the breast-pins, the portfolios of pictures, the jewelry, the rugs and table covers, and hundreds of other beautiful and foreign things, were a substantial evidence that Mrs. Cliff's money was not all moonshine.

It was very pleasant for Mrs. Cliff to bring out her treasures to display them to her enthusiastic friends, and to arrange them in her house, and to behold the rapturous delight of Willy Croup from early morn until bed-time.

But the seven empty trunks had been carried up into the garret, and now Mrs. Cliff set her mind to the solution of the question—how was she to begin her new life in her old home? It must be a new life, for to live as she had lived even in the days of her highest prosperity during her husband's life would be absurd and even wicked. With such an income she must endeavor as far as was possible to her to live in a manner worthy of it; but one thing she was determined upon—she would not alienate her friends by climbing to the top of her money and looking down upon them. None of them knew how high she would be if she