

masculine skill, her severe high hat and entirely correct riding boots and gloves. The conventional riding skirt in Hillsborough was a flowing dark skirt, an anomalous waist, and any sort or condition of hat varying according to the whim or disposition of the rider, from a yacht cap to a dress bonnet. Lottie's outfit was a sort of compromise, the silk hat being replaced by a soft felt travelling cap of her husband's, which looked a trifle incongruous with her tailor-made habit.

When they reached the mouth of the mine where Carroll was waiting for them, Helen could hardly repress a cry of delight in his appearance. Nothing could have been more perfect, she told herself. There were the dark-blue blouse, slightly open at the throat, the fustian trousers, half hidden in the high top-boots, and the slouch hat he doffed as he came to help her dismount was the one thing needed to give the finishing touch to his costume. She felt like applauding, as she might have done the entrance of some favourite actor in a particularly successful make-up; and her dramatic nature revelled in the strong picturesque figure with its thoroughly harmonious setting—the high, steep hills in the background, the open shaft yawning beside him, and the grimy miners swarming about him like the chorus in an opera.

If Helen was pleased with Carroll's appearance, it was certain that he was equally charmed with her own—though it could hardly have been on the ground of its harmony with her surroundings, for in spite of the strict suitability of her attire, Helen's blonde fairness was as much out of place in that rugged scene as would have been a rare bit of cut-glass amid the coarse furnishings of a kitchen table.

Lottie, with amiable self-abnegation, proceeded to efface herself, leaving Dick free to devote himself to Helen. It was not without some trepidation that Helen entered the yawning cavity, looking a trifle gruesome even in the light of the bright June day; and when in the sudden darkness she felt a strong grasp on her arm, and heard Carroll's voice in a reassuring murmur a delightful thrill of dependence went through her.

Down in the mine Carroll was at his best. In the weird half-light of the miners' lamps, with lurid shadows falling on his handsome face, he looked like a painting by Rembrandt, and

as he explained the processes, in language simple yet vivid and strong, Helen forgot to observe certain little idiosyncrasies in his speech, and grammatical lapses that ordinarily would have grated upon her now passed unnoticed. Even when they went up again to the light of day the glamour had not quite faded, and with rather more than her wonted graciousness she granted Dick permission to call on the following evening.

The next afternoon Dick's sister and a friend, Miss Duckwall, called on Helen. Nellie Carroll struck Helen as possessing all Dick's imperfections without his redeeming picturesque-ness. She was essentially commonplace and unrefined, and Helen observed at once that she was making a minute mental inventory of the details of her costume. Miss Carroll talked in a high, nasal tone, quite monopolising the conversation, to which her friend (a delightfully pretty, smirking little creature, in a muslin gown and much befowered hat) contributed only an occasional convulsive giggle. She, too, covertly studied Helen, who was sure both girls could have given a graphic description of every detail of her dress, the arrangement of her hair and the disposition of her draperies at the end of their lengthy call, which Helen found a trifle fatiguing. However, the disagreeable impression caused by this interchange of civilities had faded by the time Dick came that evening, and was only faintly renewed when he asked for a trite, popular air that was her special detestation, after she had sung for him, in her beautiful cultivated soprano, the Schubert's 'Serenata' and a quaint old English ballad with an exquisite setting.

The days went by swiftly and, in the main, pleasantly. The kindly housewives of the town vied with one another in entertaining Mrs Parkhurst's city guest, and numerous invitations to 'spend the day' and to 'come to tea' poured in upon them. Dick Carroll was almost a daily visitor at the Parkhurst cottage, and when Lottie's husband returned from a business trip he chaffed Helen unmercifully about the conquest she had made.

Hillsborough was unusually gay that summer. There were church sociables and parties innumerable, to all of which functions Dick escorted Helen; church suppers at which the young ladies of the congregation in impracticable aprons of Paris muslin adorned with bows of blue and pink, served to those misguided persons who were present for 'sweet charity's sake' collations of sour strawberries and half liquid ice cream. The parties were even more of a tax upon Helen's urbanity. There was no dancing at these entertainments, and the guests, seated in couples about the walls of the room, indulged in conversation that was only interrupted when some local musician was led, blushing and protesting to the ubiquitous parlour organ, there to render in a voice quite free from any attempt at cultivation some worn out popular song of the day. Another feature of these affairs was the singing of a male quartet, upon which musical organisation Hillsborough people looked with a rather questionable feeling of pride. The leader of the church singing 'carried the air'; the village druggist, a meek, hisping little man, with a small, piping voice, was the tenor; the baritone was completely inaudible, and therefore inoffensive; and Dick, alas! enthusiastically 'sang bass.' He would come out strong upon the last two words of each phrase, in insistent iteration and a deep, sepulchral voice that made Helen shudder, and did more to dispel her illusions concerning him than any atrocity he could have committed.

But Helen tried heroically not to smile at the crudities of the social conditions of Hillsborough, remembering the kindly attention that had been showered upon her as a guest, and the hospitalities that were freely offered to her, a stranger in their midst.

Each day brought her increased strength and new pleasure; and the long walks with Dick beside the narrow river, or up the steep mountain paths, were all strangely, sweetly novel to her. Her flirtations, heretofore, had been carried on in crowded drawing-rooms or brilliantly-lighted ball-rooms, where tender speeches were likely to be cut short by the approach of importunate partners; but here, under the open skies, high upon some grassy cliff overlooking the turbulent little river that scooped and fretted in its narrow bank, the little town lying beyond, picturesque in this

remote perspective, here, indeed, each word had a new and tender value, each glance was fraught with a meaning new and strangely sweet.

One day, in early June, there was a picnic at a lovely, ideal spot, on a cliff far down the river, and all Hillsborough was in attendance. The young people went in a large wagon, drawn by four sturdy mules, and driven by a loud voiced, facetious young farmer whose flashes of wit called forth screams of laughter from the gay crowd massed together in a shrieking, chattering babel in the huge wagon bed. Helen had heard with dismay of this arrangement, being extremely averse to noise and crowds; and she could have showered fervent blessings on Dick when, on the appointed day he drove up in a dilapidated barouche—the one carriage the local stables afforded—and suggested that they, with Mr and Mrs Parkhurst, should drive out together. Dick was amply rewarded by the evident pleasure of the ladies, though Mr

Parkhurst's humorous allusions to 'a purely family party' brought a flush alike to Dick's brown cheek and Helen's fair face.

Dick drove slowly, so that when they reached the picnic grounds they found the others already there. The ladies were beginning to set out a substantial if not dainty lunch, and the men were feeding a fire over which old Mrs Davis, the village oracle and news-monger, had hung a coffee pot on two crossed sticks in a most delightfully gypsyish fashion. Dick and Helen were soon in the midst of the crowd, and, to her secret dismay, Helen soon found herself shrieking and chattering as loudly as the rest. Nellie Carroll seized upon her with a sort of possessive, half-patronising pride, which Helen was at a loss to understand, and which secretly annoyed her. To escape this she offered her services to old Mrs Davis, who received her with marked cordiality, and at once began to comment with

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