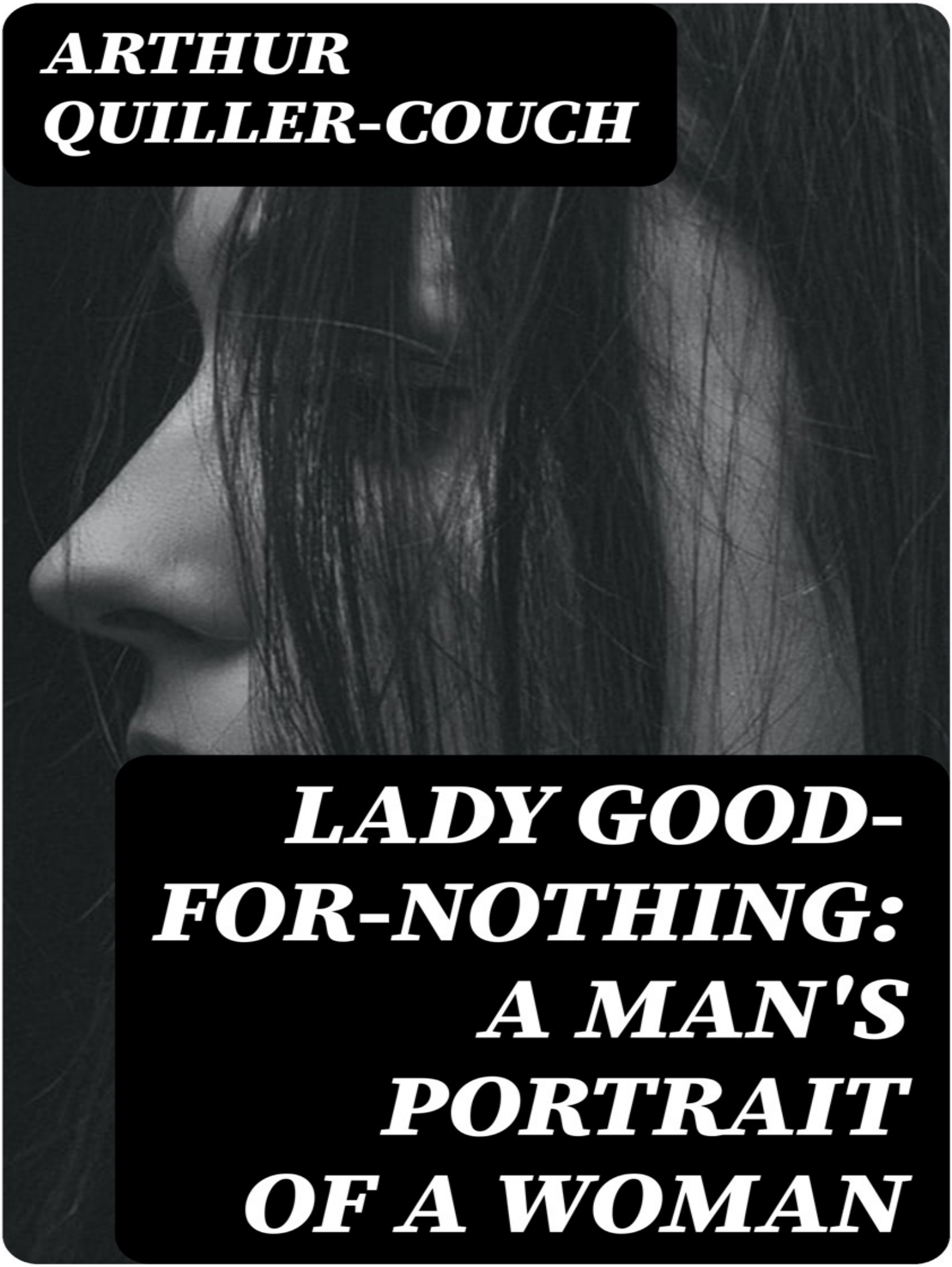

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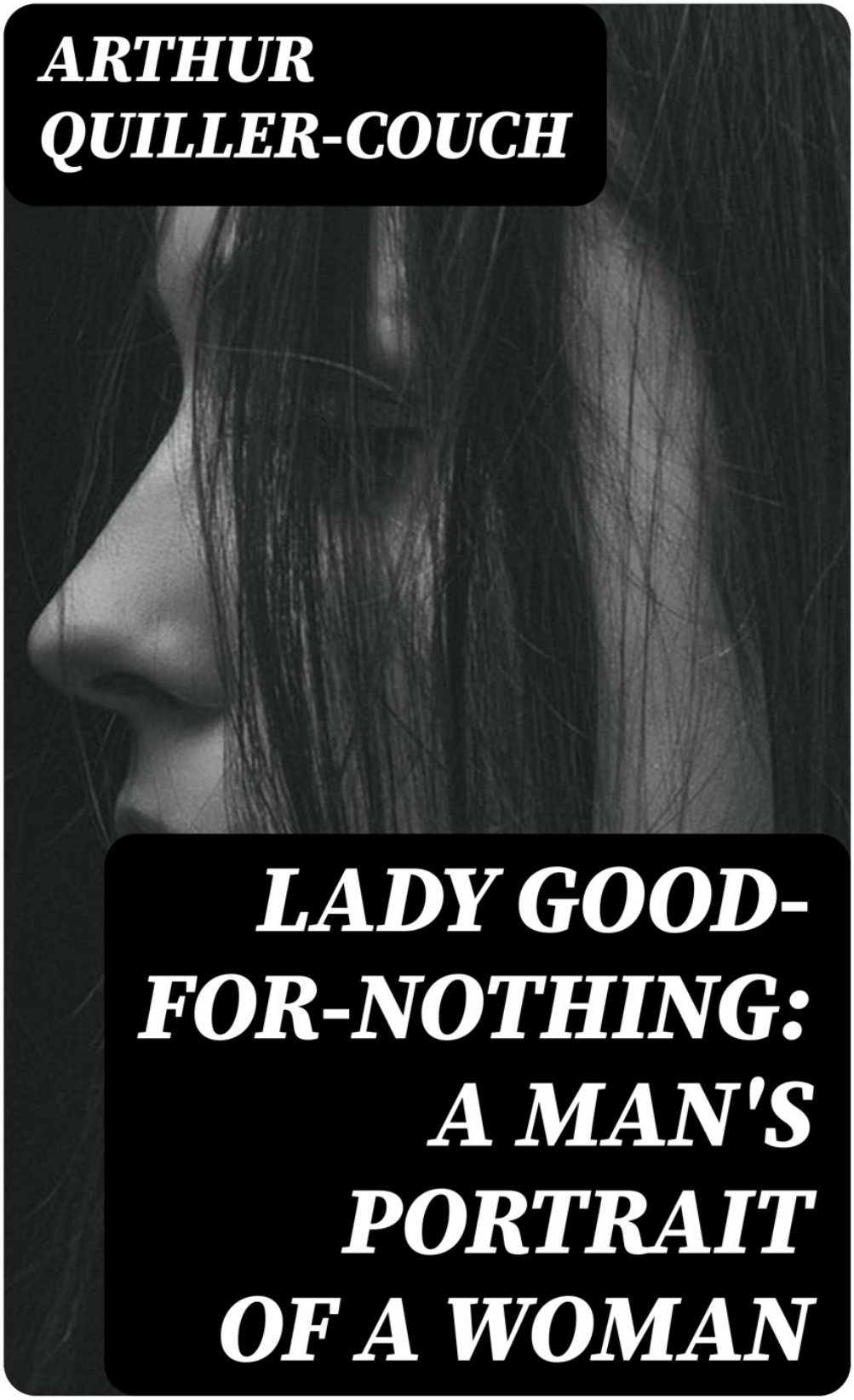

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LADY GOOD-FOR-NOTHING: A MAN'S PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN

Arthur Quiller-Couch

Lady Good-for-Nothing: A Man's Portrait of a Woman

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THE BEACH.

A coach-and-six, as a rule, may be called an impressive Object.
But something depends on where you see it.

Viewed from the tall cliffs—along the base of which, on a strip of beach two hundred feet below, it crawled between the American continent and the Atlantic Ocean—Captain

Oliver Vyell's coach-and-six resembled nothing so nearly as a black-beetle.

For that matter the cliffs themselves, swept by the spray and humming with the roar of the beach—even the bald headland towards which they curved as to the visible bourne of all things terrestrial—shrank in comparison with the waste void beyond, where sky and ocean weltered together after the wrestle of a two days' storm; and in comparison with the thought that this rolling sky and heaving water stretched all the way to Europe. Not a sail showed, not a wing anywhere under the leaden clouds that still dropped their rain in patches, smurring out the horizon. The wind had died down, but the ships kept their harbours and the sea-birds their inland shelters. Alone of animate things, Captain Vyell's coach-and-six crept forth and along the beach, as though tempted by the promise of a wintry gleam to landward.

A god—if we may suppose one of the old careless Olympians seated there on the cliff-top, nursing his knees—must have enjoyed the comedy of it, and laughed to think that this pert beetle, edging its way along the sand amid the eternal forces of nature, was here to take seizin of them—yes, actually to take seizin and exact tribute. So indomitable a fellow is Man, *improbus Homo*; and among men in his generation Captain Oliver Vyell was Collector of Customs for the Port of Boston, Massachusetts.

In fairness to Captain Vyell be it added that he—a young English blood, bearing kinship with two or three of the great Whig families at home, and sceptical as became a person of

quality—was capable as any one of relishing the comedy, had it been pointed out to him. With equal readiness he would have scoffed at Man's pretensions in this world and denied him any place at all in the next. Nevertheless on a planet the folly of which might be taken for granted he claimed at least his share of the reverence paid by fools to rank and wealth. He was travelling this lonely coast on a tour of inspection, to visit and report upon a site where His Majesty's advisers had some design to plant a fort; and a fine ostentation coloured his progress here as through life. He had brought his coach because it conveyed his claret and his *batterie de cuisine* (the seaside inns were detestable); but being young and extravagantly healthy and, with all his faults, very much of a man, he preferred to ride ahead on his saddle-horse and let his pomp follow him.

Six horses drew the coach, and to each pair of leaders rode a postillion, while a black coachman guided the wheelers from the box-seat; all three men in the Collector's livery of white and scarlet. On a perch behind the vehicle—which, despite its weight, left but the shallowest of wheel-ruts on the hard sand—sat Manasseh, the Collector's cook and body-servant; a huge negro, in livery of the same white and scarlet but with heavy adornments of bullion, a cockade in his hat, and a loaded blunderbuss laid across his thighs. Last and alone within the coach, with a wine-case for footstool, sat a five-year-old boy.

Master Dicky Vyell—the Collector's only child, and motherless—sat and gazed out of the windows in a delicious terror. For hours that morning the travellers had ploughed their way over a plain of blown sand, dotted with shrub-

oaks, bay-berries, and clumps of Indian grass; then, at a point where the tall cliffs began, had wound down to the sea between low foothills and a sedge-covered marsh criss-crossed by watercourses that spread out here and there into lagoons. At the head of this descent the Atlantic had come into sight, and all the way down its echoes had grown in the boy's ears, confusing themselves with a delicious odour which came in fact from the fields of sedge, though he attributed it to the ocean.

But the sound had amounted to a loud humming at most; and it was with a leap and a shout, as they rounded the last foothill and saw the vast empty beach running northward before them, league upon league, that the thunder of the surf broke on them. For a while the boom and crash of it fairly stunned the child. He caught at an arm-strap hanging by the window and held on with all his small might, while the world he knew with its familiar protective boundaries fell away, melted, left him—a speck of life ringed about with intolerable roaring emptiness. To a companion, had there been one in the coach, he must have clung in sheer terror; yes, even to his father, to whom he had never clung and could scarcely imagine himself clinging. But his father rode ahead, carelessly erect on his blood-horse—horse and rider seen in a blur through the salt-encrusted glass. Therefore Master Dicky held on as best he might to the arm-strap.

By degrees his terror drained away, though its ebb left him shivering. Child though he was, he could not remember when he had not been curious about the sea. In a dazed fashion he stared out upon the breakers. The wind had died down after the tempest, but the Atlantic kept its agitation.

Meeting the shore (which hereabouts ran shallow for five or six hundred yards) it reared itself in ten-foot combers, rank stampeding on rank, until the sixth or seventh hurled itself far up the beach, spent itself in a long receding curve, and drained back to the foaming forces behind. Their untiring onset fascinated Dicky; and now and again he tasted renewal of his terror, as a wave, taller than the rest or better timed, would come sweeping up to the coach itself, spreading and rippling about the wheels and the horses' fetlocks. "Surely this one would engulf them," thought the child, recalling Pharaoh and his chariots; but always the furious charge spent itself in an edge of white froth that faded to delicate salt filigree and so vanished. When this had happened a dozen times or more, and still without disaster, he took heart and began to turn it all into a game, choosing this or that breaker and making imaginary wagers upon it; but yet the spectacle fascinated him, and still at the back of his small brain lay wonder that all this terrifying fury and uproar should always be coming to nothing. God must be out yonder (he thought) and engaged in some mysterious form of play. He had heard a good deal about God from Miss Quiney, his governess; but this playfulness, as an attribute of the Almighty, was new to him and hitherto unsuspected.

The beach, with here and there a break, extended for close upon twenty miles, still curving towards the headland; and the travellers covered more than two-thirds of the distance without espying a single living creature. As the afternoon wore on the weather improved. The sun, soon to drop behind the cliff-summits on the left, asserted itself with

a last effort and shot a red gleam through a chink low in the cloud-wrack. The shaft widened. The breakers—indigo-backed till now and turbid with sand in solution—began to arch themselves in glass-green hollows, with rainbows playing on the spray of their crests. And then—as though the savage coast had become, at a touch of sunshine, habitable—our travellers spied a man.

He came forth from a break in the cliffs half a mile ahead and slowly crossed the sands to the edge of the surf, the line of which he began, after a pause, to follow as slowly northwards. His back was turned thus upon the Collector's equipage, to which in crossing the beach he had given no attention, being old and purblind.

The coach rolled so smoothly, and the jingle of harness was so entirely swallowed in the roar of the sea, that Captain Vyell, pushing ahead and overtaking the old fellow, had to ride close up to his shoulder and shout. It appeared then, for further explanation, that his hearing as well as his eyesight was none of the best. He faced about in a puzzled fashion, stared, and touched his hat—or rather lifted his hand a little way and dropped it again.

"Your Honour will be the Collector," he said, and nodded many times, at first as if proud of his sagacity, but afterwards dully—as though his interest had died out and he would have ceased nodding but had forgotten the way. "Yes; my gran'-darter told me. She's in service at the Bowling Green, Port Nassau; but walks over on Lord's Days to cheer up her mother and tell the news. They've been expectin' you at Port Nassau any time this week."

The Collector asked where he lived, and the old man pointed to a gully in the cliff and to something which, wedged in the gully, might at a first glance be taken for a large and loosely-constructed bird's nest. The Collector's keen eyes made it out to be a shanty of timber roofed with shingles and barely overtopping a wood pile.

"Wreckwood, eh?"

"A good amount of it ought to be comin' in, after the gale."

"Then where's your hook?"—for the wreckwood gatherers along this part of the coast carry long gaffs to hook the flotsam and drag it above reach of the waves.

"Left it up the bank," said the old man shortly. After a moment he pulled himself together for an explanation, hollowed his palms around his mouth, and bawled above the boom of the surf. "I'm old. I don't carry weight more'n I need to. When a log comes in, my darter spies it an' tells me. She's mons'rous quick-sighted for wood an' such like—though good for nothin' else." (A pause.) "No, I'm hard on her; she can cook clams."

"You were looking for clams?" Captain Vyell scrutinised the man's face. It was a patriarchal face, strikingly handsome and not much wrinkled; the skin delicately tanned and extraordinarily transparent. Somehow this transparency puzzled him. "Hungry?" he asked quickly; and as quickly added, "Starving for food, that's what you are."

"It's the Lord's will," answered the old man.

The coach had come to a halt a dozen paces away. The child within it could hear nothing of this conversation; but to

the end of his life his memory kept vivid the scene and the two figures in it—his father, in close-fitting riding-coat of blue, with body braced, leaning sideways a little against the wind, and a characteristic hint of the cavalryman about the slope of the thigh; the old wreck-picker standing just forward of the bay's shoulder and looking up, with blown hair and patient eyes. Memory recalled even the long slant of the bay's shoulder—a perfectly true detail, for the horse was of pure English race and bred by the Collector himself.

After this, as he remembered, some command must have been given, for Manasseh climbed down, opened the coach door and drew from under the seat a box, of which he raised the lid, disclosing things good to eat— among them a pasty with a crisp brown crust.

The wreck-picker broke off a piece of the pasty and wrapped it in a handkerchief—and memory recalled, as with a small shock of surprise, that the handkerchief was clean. The old man, though ragged enough to scare the crows, was clean from his bare head to his bare sea-bleached feet. He munched the rest of the pasty, talking between mouthfuls. To his discourse Dicky paid no heed, but slipped away for a scamper on the sands.

As he came running back he saw the old man, in the act of wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, suddenly shoot out an arm and point. Just beyond the breakers a solitary bird—an osprey—rose with a fish shining in the grip of its claws. It flew northward, away for the headland, for a hundred yards or so; and then by some mischance let slip his prey, which fell back into the sea. The boy saw the splash. To his surprise the bird made no effort to recover the

fish—neither stooped nor paused—but went winging sullenly on its way.

"That's the way o' them," commented the old wreck-picker. "Good food, an' to let it go. I could teach him better."

But the boy, years after, read it as another and different parable.

Chapter II.

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PORT NASSAU.

They left the beach, climbed a road across the neck of the promontory, and rattled downhill into Port Nassau. Dusk had fallen before they reached the head of its cobbled street; and here one of the postillions drew out a horn from his holster and began to blow loud blasts on it. This at once drew the townsfolk into the road and warned them to get out of the way.

To the child, drowsed by the strong salt air and the rocking of the coach, the glimmering whitewashed houses on either hand went by like a procession in a dream. The figures and groups of men and women on the side-walks, too, had a ghostly, furtive air. They seemed to the boy to be whispering together and muttering. Now this was absurd; for what with the blare of the postillion's horn, the clatter of hoofs, the jolting and rumbling of wheels, the rattle of glass,

our travellers had all the noise to themselves—or all but the voice of the gale now rising again for an afterclap and snoring at the street corners. Yet his instinct was right. Many of the crowd *were* muttering. These New Englanders had no love to spare for a Collector of Customs, a fine gentlemen from Old England and (rumour said) an atheist to boot. They resented this ostent of entry; the men more sullenly than the women, some of whom in their hearts could not help admiring its high-and-mighty insolence.

The Collector, at any rate, had a crowd to receive him, for it was Saturday evening. On Saturdays by custom the fishing-fleet of Port Nassau made harbour before nightfall, and the crews kept a sort of decorous carnival before the Sabbath, of which they were strict observers. In the lower part of the town, by the quays, much buying and selling went on, in booths of sail-cloth lit as a rule by oil-flares. For close upon a week no boat had been able to put to sea; but the Saturday market and the Saturday gossip and to-and-fro strolling were in full swing none the less, though the salesmen had to substitute hurricane-lamps for their ordinary flares, and the boy—now wide awake again—had a passing glimpse of a couple of booths that had been wrecked by the rising wind and were being rebuilt. He craned out to stare at the helpers, while they, pausing in their work and dragged to and fro by the flapping canvas, stared back as the coach went by.

It came to a halt on a level roadway some few rods beyond this bright traffic, in an open space which, he knew, must be near the waterside, for beyond the lights of the booths he had spied a cluster of masts quite close at hand.

Or perhaps he had fallen asleep and in his sleep had been transported far inland. For the wind had suddenly died down, the coach appeared to be standing in a forest glade—at any rate, among trees—and through the trees fell a soft radiance that might well be the moon's were it only a tinge less yellow. In the shine of it stood Manasseh, holding open the coach door; and as the child stepped out these queer impressions were succeeded by one still more curious and startling. For a hand, as it seemed, reached out of the darkness, brushed him smartly across the face, and was gone. He gave a little cry and stood staring aloft at a lantern that hung some feet above him from an arched bracket. Across its glass face ran the legend BOWLING GREEN INN, in orange-coloured lettering, and the ray of its oil-lamp wavered on the boughs of two tall maples set like sentinels by the Inn gateway and reddening now to the fall of the leaf. Yes, the ground about his feet was strewn with leaves: it must be one of these that had brushed by his face.

If the folk in the streets had been sullen, those of the Inn were eager enough, even obsequious. A trio of grooms fell to unharnessing the horses; a couple of porters ran to and fro, unloading the baggage and cooking-pots; while the landlady shouted orders right and left in the porchway. She deemed, honest soul, that she was mistress of the establishment, until Manasseh undeceived her.

Manasseh's huge stature and gold-encrusted livery commanded respect in spite of his colour. He addressed her as "woman." "Woman, if you will stop yo' cacklin' and yo' crowin'? Go in now and fetch me fish, fetch me chickens, fetch me plenty eggs. Fetch me a dam scullion. Heh? Stir yo'

legs and fetch me a dam scullion, and the chickens tender. His Exc'llence mos' partic'ler the chickens tender."

Still adjuring her he shouldered his way through the house to the kitchen, whence presently his voice sounded loud, authoritative, above the clatter of cooking-pots. From time to time he broke away from the business of unpacking to reiterate his demands for fish, eggs, chicken—the last to be tender at all costs and at pain of his tremendous displeasure.

"And I assure you, ma'am," said Captain Vyell, standing in the passage at the door of his private room, "his standard is a high one. I believe the blackguard never stole a tough fowl in his life. . . . Show me to my bedroom, please, if the trunks are unstrapped; and the child, here, to his. . . . Eh? What's this?—a rush-light? I don't use rush-lights. Go to Manasseh and ask him to unpack you a pair of candles."

The landlady returned with a silver candlestick in either hand, and candles of real wax. She had never seen the like, and led the way upstairs speculating on their cost. The bedrooms proved to be clean, though bare and more than a little stuffy—their windows having been kept shut for some days against the gale. The Collector commanded them to be opened. The landlady faintly protested. "The wind would gutter the candles—and such wax too!" She was told to obey, and she obeyed.

In the boy's room knelt a girl—a chambermaid—unstrapping his small valise. She had a rush-light on the floor beside her, and did not look up as the landlady thrust open the lattice and left the room with the Collector, the boy remaining behind. His candle stood upon a chest of drawers

by the window; and, as the others went out, a draught of wind caught the dimity curtain, blew it against the flame, and in an instant ignited it.

The girl looked up swiftly at the sudden light above her, and as swiftly—before the child could cry out—was on her feet. She caught the fire between her two hands and beat it out, making no noise and scarcely flinching, though her flesh was certainly being scorched.

"That was lucky," she said, looking across at him with a smile.

"Ruth!—Ruth!" called the landlady's voice, up the corridor.

"Here, a moment!"

She dropped the charred curtain and hurried to answer the call.

"Ruth! Where's the bootjack? His Honour will take off his riding-boots."

"Bootjack, ma'am?" interrupted the Collector, leaning back in a chair and extending a shapely leg with instep and ankle whereon the riding-boot fitted like a glove. "I don't maul my leather with bootjacks. Send Manasseh upstairs to me; ask him with my compliments what the devil he means by clattering saucepans when he should be attending to his master. . . . Eh, what's this?"

"She can do it, your Honour," said the landlady, catching Ruth by the shoulder and motioning her to kneel and draw off the boot. (It is likely she shirked carrying the message.)

"Oh, very well—if only she won't twist my foot. . . . Take care of the spur, child."

The girl knelt, and with her blistered hand took hold of the boot-heel below the spur. It cost her exquisite pain, but she did not wince; and her head being bent, no one perceived the tears in her eyes.

She had scarcely drawn off the second boot, when Manasseh appeared in the doorway carrying a silver tray with glasses and biscuits; a glass of red wine for his master, a more innocent cordial for the young gentleman, and both glasses filmed over with the chill of crushed ice.

The girl was withdrawing when the Collector, carelessly feeling in his pocket, drew out a coin and put it into her hand. Her fingers closed on it sharply, almost with a snatch. In truth, the touch of metal was so intolerable to the burnt flesh that, but for clutching it so, she must have dropped the coin. Still with bowed head she passed quietly from the room.

Master Dicky munched his macaroon and sipped his cordial. He had a whole guinea in his breeches pocket, and was thinking it would be great fun to step out and explore the town, if only for a little way. To-morrow was Sunday, and all the stores would be closed. But Manasseh was too busy to come with him for bodyguard—and his father's boots were off; and besides, he stood in great awe and shyness of his admired parent. Had the boots been on, it would have cost him a bold effort to make the request. On the whole, the cordial warming him, Master Dicky had a mind to take French leave.

Chapter III.

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TWO GUINEAS.

Though the wind hummed among the chimneys and on the back of the roof, on either side of the lamp over the gateway the maples stood in the lee and waved their boughs gently, shedding a leaf now and then in some deflected gust. Beyond and to the left stretched a dim avenue, also of maples; and at the end of this, as he reached the gate, the boy could spy the lights of the fair.

There was no risk at all of losing his way.

He stepped briskly forth and down the avenue. Where the trees ended, and with them the high wall enclosing the inn's stable-yard, the wind rushed upon him with a whoop, and swept him off the side-walk almost to the middle of the road-way. But by this time the lights were close at hand. He pressed his little hat down on his head and battled his way towards them.

The first booth displayed sweetmeats; the next hung out lines of sailors' smocks, petticoats, sea-boots, oilskin coats and caps, that swayed according to their weight; the third was no booth but a wooden store, wherein a druggist dispensed his wares; the fourth, also of wood, belonged to a barber, and was capable of seating one customer at a time while the others waited their turn on the side-walk. Here—his shanty having no front—the barber kept them in good humour by chatting to all and sundry while he shaved; but a

part of the crowd had good-naturedly drifted on to help his neighbour, a tobacco-seller, whose stall had suffered disaster. A painted wooden statue of a Cherokee Indian lay face downward across the walk, as the wind had blown it: bellying folds of canvas and tarpaulin hid the wreck of the poor man's stock-in-trade. Beyond this wreckage stood, in order, a vegetable stall, another sweetmeat stall, and a booth in which the boy (who cared little for sweetmeats, and, moreover, had just eaten his macaroon) took much more interest. For it was hung about with cages; and in the cages were birds of all kinds (but the most of them canaries), perched in the dull light of two horn lanterns, and asleep with open, shining eyes; and in the midst stood the proprietor, blowing delightful liquid notes upon a bird-call.

It fascinated Dicky; and he no sooner assured himself that the birds were really for sale—although no purchaser stepped forward—than there came upon him an overmastering desire to own a live canary in a cage and teach it with just such a whistle. (He had often wondered at the things upon which grown-up folk spent their money to the neglect of this world's true delights.) Edging his way to the stall, he was summoning up courage to ask the price of a bird, when the salesman caught sight him and affably spared him the trouble.

"Eh! here's my young lord wants a bird. . . . You may say what you like," said he, addressing the bystanders, "but there's none like the gentry for encouragin' trade. . . . And which shall it be sir? Here's a green parrot, now, I can recommend; or if your Honour prefers a bird that'll talk, this grey one. A beauty, see! And not a bad word in his

repertory. Your honoured father shall not blame me for sellin' you a swearer."

The boy pointed to a cage on the man's right.

"A canary? . . . Well, and you're right. What is talk, after all, to compare with music? And chosen the best bird of my stock, you have; the pick of the whole crop. That's Quality, my friends; nothing but the best'll do for Quality, an' the instinct of it comes out young." The man, who was evidently an eccentric, ran his eye roguishly over the faces behind the boy and named his price; a high one—a very high one— but one nicely calculated to lie on the right side of public reprobation.

Dicky laid his guinea on the sill. "I want a whistle, too," he said, "and my change, please."

The bird-fancier slapped his breeches pockets.

"A guinea? Bless me, but I must run around and ask one of my neighbours to oblige. Any of you got the change for a golden guinea about you?" he asked of the crowd.

"We ain't so lucky," said a voice somewhere at the back. "We don't carry guineas about, nor give 'em to our bastards."

A voice or two—a woman's among them—called "Shame!" "Hold your tongue, there!"

Dicky had his back to the speaker. He heard the word for the first time in his life, and had no notion of its meaning; but in a dim way he felt it to be an evil word, and also that the people were protesting out of pity. A rush of blood came to his face. He gulped, lifted his chin, and said, with his eyes steady on the face of the blinking fancier,—

"Give it back to me, please, and I will get it changed."

He took the coin, and walked away resolutely with a set white face.
He saw none of the people who made way for him.

The bird-fancier stared after the small figure as it walked away into darkness. "Bastard?" he said. "There's Blood in that youngster, though he don't face ye again an' I lose my deal. Blood's blood, however ye come by it; you may take that on the word of a breeder. An' you ought to be ashamed, Sam Wilson—slingin' yer mud at a child!"

The word drummed in the boy's ears. What did it mean? What was the sneer in it? "Brat!" "cry-baby," "tell-tale," "story-teller," these were opprobrious words, to be resented in their degree; and all but the first covered accusations which not only must never be deserved, but obliged a gentleman, however young, to show fight. But "bastard"?

He felt that, whatever it meant, somehow it was worse than any; that honour called for the annihilation of the man that dared speak it; that there was weakness, perhaps even poltroonery, in merely walking away. If only he knew what the word meant!

He came to a halt opposite the drug store. He had once heard Dr. Lamerton, the apothecary at home, described as a "well-to-do" man. The phrase stuck in his small brain, and he connected the sale of drugs with wealth. (How, he reasoned, could any one be tempted to sell wares so nasty unless by prodigious profit?) He felt sure the drug-seller would be able to change the guinea for him, and walked in boldly. His ears were tingling, and he felt a call to assert himself.

There was a single customer in the store—a girl. With some surprise he recognised her for the girl who had beaten the flame out of the curtain.

She stood with her back to the doorway and a little sidewise by the counter, from behind which the drug-seller—a burly fellow in a suit of black—looked down on her doubtfully, rubbing his shaven chin while he glanced from her to something he held in his open palm.

"I'm askin' you," he said, "how you came by it?"

"It was given to me," the girl answered.

"That's a likely tale! Folks don't give money like this to a girl in your position; unless—"

Here the man paused.

"Is it a great deal of money?" she asked. There was astonishment in her voice, and a kind of suppressed eagerness.

"Oh, come now—that's too innocent by half! A guinea-piece is a guinea-piece, and a guinea is twenty-one shillings; and twenty-one shillings, likely enough, is more'n you'll earn in a year outside o' your keep. Who gave it ye?"

"A gentleman—the Collector—at the Inn just now.

"Ho!" said the drug-seller, with a world of meaning.

"But if," she went on, "it is worth so much as you say, there must be some mistake. Give it back to me, please. I am sorry for troubling you." She took a small, round parcel from her pocket, laid it on the counter, and held out her hand for the coin.

The drug-seller eyed her. "There must be some mistake, I guess," said he, as he gave back the gold piece. "No, and you can take up your packet too; I don't grudge two-

pennyworth of salve. But wait a moment while I serve this small customer, for I want a word with you later. . . . Well, and what can I do for you, young gentleman?" he asked, turning to Dicky.

Dicky advanced to the shop-board, and as he did so the girl turned and recognised him with a faint, very shy smile.

"If you please," he said politely, "I want change for this—if you can spare it."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the man, staring. "What, *another?*"

"The bird-seller up the road had no change about him. And—and, if you please," went on Dick hardily, with a glance at the girl, "she hurt her hands putting out a fire just now. I expect my father gave her the money for that. But she must have burnt her hands *dreffully!*"—Dicky had not quite outgrown his infantile lisp—"and if she's come for stuff to put on them, please I want to pay for it."

"But I don't want you to," put in the girl, still hesitating by the counter.

"But I'd *rather* insisted Dicky.

"Tut!" said the drug-seller. "A matter of twopence won't break either of us. Captain Vyell's boy, are you? Well, then, I'll take your coppers on principle."

He counted out the change, and Dicky—who was not old enough yet to do sums—pretended to find it correct. But he was old enough to have acquired charming manners, and after thanking the drug-seller, gave the girl quite a grown-up little bow as he passed out.

She would have followed, but the man said, "Stay a moment. What's your name?"

"Ruth Josselin."

"Age?"

"I was sixteen last month."

"Then listen to a word of advice, Ruth Josselin, and don't you take money like that from fine gentlemen like the Collector. They don't give it to the ugly ones. Understand?"

"Thank you," she said. "I am going to give it back;" and slipping the guinea into her pocket, she said "Good evening," and walked swiftly out in the wake of the child.

The drug-seller looked after her shrewdly. He was a moral man.

Ruth, hurrying out upon the side-walk, descried the child a few paces up the road. He had come to a halt; was, in fact, plucking up his courage to go and demand the bird-cage. She overtook him.

"I was sent out to look for you," she said. "I oughtn't to have wasted time buying that ointment; but my hands were hurting me. Please, you are to come home and change your clothes for dinner."

"I'll come in a minute," said Dicky, "if you'll stand here and wait."

He might be called by that word again; and without knowing why, he dreaded her hearing it. She waited while he trotted forward, nerving himself to face the crowd again. Lo! when he reached the booth, all the bystanders had melted away. The bird-seller was covering up his cages with loose wrappers, making ready to pack up for the night.

"Hello!" he said cheerfully. "Thought I'd lost you for good."

He took the child's money and handed the canary cage across the sill; also the bird-whistle, wrapped in a scrap of paper. Many times in the course of a career which brought him much fighting and some little fame, Dicky Vyell remembered this his first lesson in courage—that if you walk straight up to an enemy, as likely as not you find him vanished.

But he had not quite reached the end of his alarms. As he took the cage, a parrot at the back of the booth uplifted his voice and squawked,—

"No prerogative! No prerogative! No prerogative!"

"You mustn't mind *him*," said the bird-seller genially. "He's like the crowd—picks up a cry an' harps on it without understandin'."

Master Dicky understood it no better; but thanked the man and ran off, prize in hand, to rejoin the girl.

They hurried back to the Inn. At the gateway she paused.

"I let you say what was wrong just now," she explained. "Your father didn't give me that money for putting out the fire."

Here she hesitated. Dicky could not think what it mattered, or why her voice was so timid.

"Oh," said he carelessly, "I dare say it was just because he liked you.
Father has plenty of money."

Chapter IV.

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FATHER AND SON.

The dinner set before Captain Vyell comprised a dish of oysters, a fish chowder, a curried crab, a fried fowl with white sauce, a saddle of tenderest mutton, and various sweets over which Manasseh had thrown the elegant flourishes of his art. The wine came from the Rhone valley—a Hermitage of the Collector's own shipment. The candles that lit the repast stood in the Collector's own silver candlesticks. As an old Roman general carried with him on foreign service, packed in panniers on mule-back, a tessellated pavement to be laid down for him at each camping halt and repacked when the troops moved forward, so did Captain Vyell on his progresses of inspection travel with all the apparatus of a good table.

Dicky, seated opposite his father in a suit of sapphire blue velvet with buttons of cut steel, partook only of the fried fowl and of a syllabub. He had his glass of wine too, and sipped at it, not liking it much, but encouraged by his father, who held that a fine palate could not be cultivated too early.

By some process of dishing-up best known to himself (but with the aid, no doubt, of the "dam scullion") Manasseh, who had cooked the dinner, also served it; noiselessly, wearing white gloves because his master abominated the sight of a black hand at meals. These gloves had a fascination for Dicky. They attracted his eyes as might the intervolved play of two large white moths in the penumbra beyond the candle-light, between his father's back and the dark sideboard; but he fought against the

attraction because he knew that to be aware of a servant was an offence against good manners at table.

His father encouraged him to talk, and he told of his purchase—but not all the story. Not for worlds—instinct told him—must he mention the word he had heard spoken. Yet he got so far as to say,—

"The people here don't like us—do they, father?"

Captain Vyell laughed. "No, that's very certain. And, to tell you the truth, if I had known you were wandering the street by yourself I might have felt uneasy. Manasseh shall take you for a walk to-morrow. One can never be sure of the *canaille*."

"What does that mean?"

Captain Vyell explained. The *canaille*, he said, were the common folk, whose part in this world was to be ruled. He explained further that to belong to the upper or ruling class it did not suffice to be well-born (though this was almost essential); one must also cultivate the manners proper to that station, and appear, as well as be, a superior. Nor was this all; there were complications, which Dicky would learn in time; what was called "popular rights," for instance—rights which even a King must not be allowed to override; and these were so precious that (added the Collector) the upper classes must sometimes fight and lay down their lives for them.

Dick perpended. He found this exceedingly interesting—the more so because it came, though in a curiously different way, to much the same as Miss Quiney had taught him out of the catechism. Miss Quiney had used pious words; in Miss Quiney's talk everything—even to sitting upright at table—