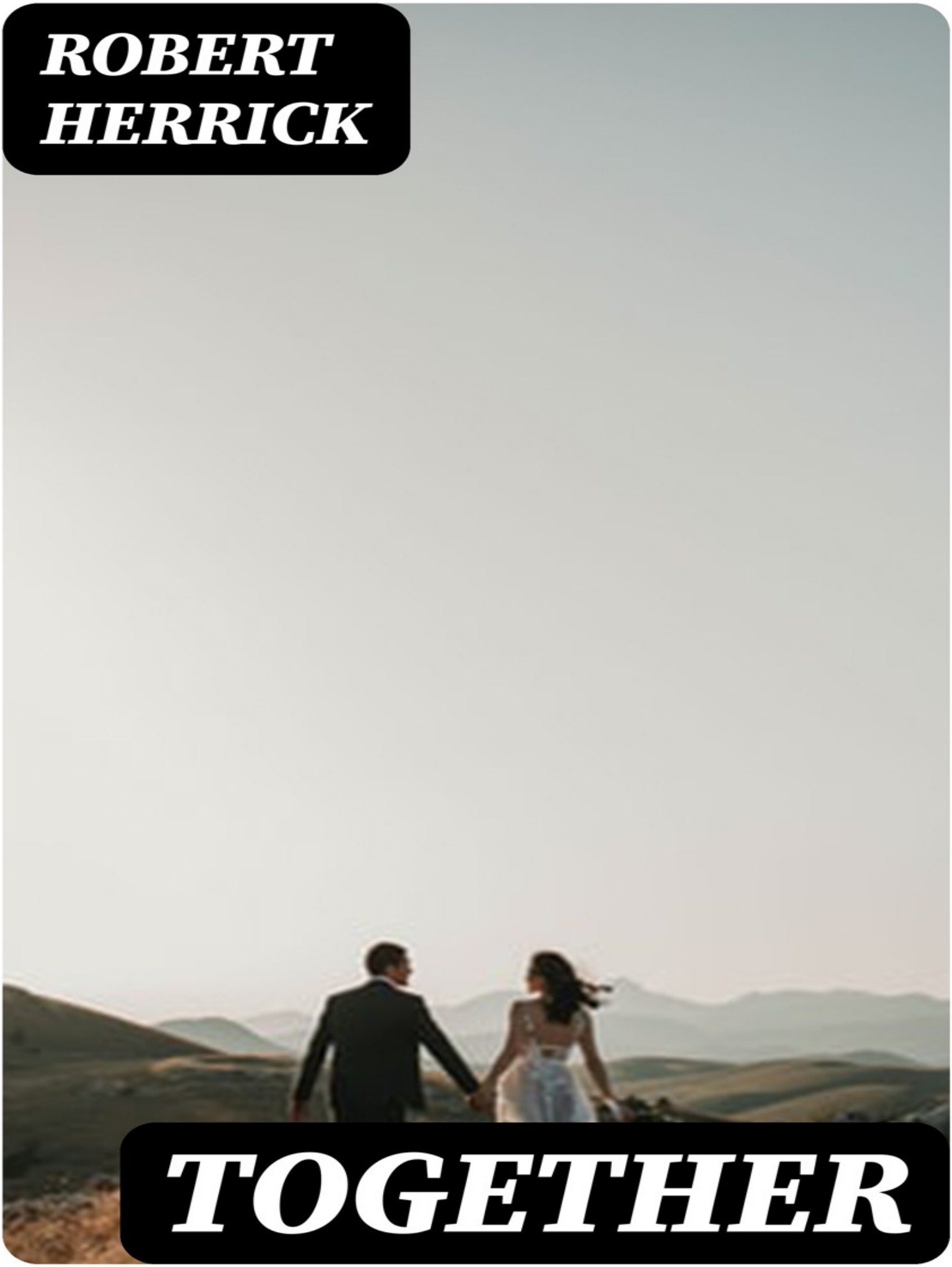
ROBERT HERRICK



TOGETHER

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Together

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PART ONE

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CHAPTER I

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She stood before the minister who was to marry them, very tall and straight. With lips slightly parted she looked at him steadfastly, not at the man beside her who was about to become her husband. Her father, with a last gentle pressure of her arm, had taken his place behind her. In the hush that had fallen throughout the little chapel, all the restless movement of the people who had gathered there this warm June morning was stilled, in the expectation of those ancient words that would unite the two before the altar. Through the open window behind the altar a spray of young woodbine had thrust its juicy green leaves and swayed slowly in the air, which was heavy with earthy odors of all the riotous new growth that was pushing forward in the fields outside. And beyond the vine could be seen a bit of the cloudless, rain-washed sky.

There before the minister, who was fumbling mechanically at his prayer-book, a great space seemed to divide the man and the woman from all the others, their friends and relatives, who had come to witness the ceremony of their union. In the woman's consciousness an unexpected stillness settled, as if for these few moments she were poised between the past of her whole life and the mysterious future. All the preoccupations of the

engagement weeks, the strange colorings of mood and feeling, all the petty cares of the event itself, had suddenly vanished. She did not see even him, the man she was to marry, only the rugged face of the old minister, the bit of fluttering vine, the expanse of blue sky. She stood before the veil of her life, which was about to be drawn aside.

This hushed moment was broken by the resonant tones of the minister as he began the opening words of the sacrament that had been said over so many millions of human beings. Familiar as the phrases were, she did not realize them, could not summon back her attention from that depth within of awed expectancy. After a time she became aware of the subdued movements in the chapel, of people breaking into the remote circle of her mystery,—even here they must needs have their part—and of the man beside her looking intently at her, with flushed face. It was this man, this one here at her side, whom she had chosen of all that might have come into her life; and suddenly he seemed a stranger, standing there, ready to become her husband! The woodbine waved, recalling to her flashing thoughts that day two years before when the chapel was dedicated, and they two, then mere friends, had planted this vine together. And now, after certain meetings, after some surface intercourse, they had willed to come here to be made one…

"And who gives this woman in marriage?" the minister asked solemnly, following the primitive formula which symbolizes that the woman is to be made over from one family to another as a perpetual possession. She gave herself of course! The words were but an outgrown form…

There was the necessary pause while the Colonel came forward, and taking his daughter's hand from which the glove had been carefully turned back, laid it gently in the minister's large palm. The father's lips twitched, and she knew he was feeling the solemnity of his act, that he was relinquishing a part of himself to another. Their marriage—her father's and mother's—had been happy,—oh, very peaceful! And yet—hers must be different, must strike deeper. For the first time she raised her shining eyes to the man at her side…

"I, John, take thee Isabelle for my wedded wife, to have and to hold … in sickness and in health … until death us do part … and hereby I plight thee my troth."

Those old words, heard so many times, which heretofore had echoed without meaning to her,—she had vaguely thought them beautiful,—now came freighted with sudden meaning, while from out the dreamlike space around sounded the firm tones of the man at her side repeating slowly, with grave pauses, word by word, the marriage oath. "I, John, take thee Isabelle," that voice was saying, and she knew that the man who spoke these words in his calm, grave manner was the one she had chosen, to whom she had willed to give herself for all time,—presently she would say it also,—for always, always, "until death us do part." He was promising it with tranquil assurance,—fidelity, the eternal bond, throughout the unknown years, out of the known present. "And hereby I plight thee my troth." Without a tremor the man's assured voice registered the oath—before God and man.

"I, Isabelle," and the priest took up with her this primal oath of fidelity, body and soul. All at once the full personal import of the words pierced her, and her low voice swelled unconsciously with her affirmation. She was to be for always as she was now. They two had not been one before: the words did not make them so now. It was their desire. But the old divided selves, the old impulses, they were to die, here, forever.

She heard herself repeating the words after the minister. Her strong young voice in the stillness of the chapel sounded strangely not her own voice, but the voice of some unknown woman within her, who was taking the oath for her in this barbaric ceremony whereby man and woman are bound together. "And hereby I plight thee my troth,"—the voice sank to a whisper as of prayer. Her eyes came back to the man's face, searching for his eyes.

There were little beads of perspiration on his broad brow, and the shaven lips were closely pressed together, moulding the face into lines of will,—the look of mastery. What was he, this man, now her husband for always, his hand about hers in sign of perpetual possession and protection? What beneath all was he who had taken with her, thus publicly, the mighty oath of fidelity, "until death us do part"? Each had said it; each believed it; each desired it wholly. Perversely, here in the moment of her deepest feeling, intruded the consciousness of broken contracts, the waste of shattered purposes. Ah, but *theirs* was different! This absolute oath of fidelity one to the other, each with his own will and his own desire,—this irredeemable contract of union between man and woman,—it was not always a binding

sacrament. Often twisted and broken, men and women promising in the belief of the best within them what was beyond their power to perform. There were those in that very chapel who had said these words and broken them, furtively or legally... With them, of course, it would be different, would be the best; for she conceived their love to be of another kind,—the enduring kind. Nevertheless, just here, while the priest of society pronounced the final words of union, something spoke within the woman's soul that it was a strange oath to be taking, a strange manner of making two living beings one!

"And I pronounce you man and wife," the words ran. Then the minister hastened on into his little homily upon the marriage state. But the woman's thought rested at those fateful words,—"man and wife,"—the knot of the contract. There should fall a new light in her heart that would make her know they were really one, having now been joined as the book said "in holy wedlock." From this sacramental union of persons there should issue to both a new spirit...

Her husband was standing firm and erect, listening with all the concentration of his mind to what the minister was saying—not tumultuously distracted—as though he comprehended the exact gravity of this contract into which he was entering, as he might that of any other he could make, sure of his power to fulfil all, confident before Fate. She trembled strangely. Did she know him, this other self? In the swift apprehension of life's depths which came through her heightened mood she perceived that ultimate division lying between all human beings, that impregnable fortress of the individual soul.... It was all over. He looked tenderly at

her. Her lips trembled with a serious smile,—yes, they would understand now!

The people behind them moved more audibly. The thing was done; the priest's words of exhortation were largely superfluous. All else that concerned married life these two would have to find out for themselves. The thing was done, as ordained by the church, according to the rules of society. Now it was for Man and Wife to make of it what they would or—could.

The minister closed his book in dismissal. The groom offered his arm to the bride. Facing the chapelful she came out of that dim world of wonder whither she had strayed. Her veil thrown back, head proudly erect, eyes mistily ranging above the onlookers, she descended the altar steps, gazing down the straight aisle over the black figures, to the sunny village green, beyond into the vista of life! ... Triumphant organ notes beat through the chapel, as they passed between the rows of smiling faces,—familiar faces only vaguely perceived, yet each with its own expression, its own reaction from this ceremony. She swept on deliberately, with the grace of her long stride, her head raised, a little smile on her open lips, her hand just touching his,—going forward with him into life.

Only two faces stood out from the others at this moment, —the dark, mischievous face of Nancy Lawton, smiling sceptically. Her dark, little eyes seemed to say, 'Oh, you don't know yet!' And the other was the large, placid face of a blond woman, older than the bride, standing beside a stolid man at the end of a pew. The serene, soft eyes of this woman were dim with tears, and a tender smile still lingered

on her lips. She at least, Alice Johnston, the bride's cousin, could smile through the tears—a smile that told of the sweetness in life.....

At the door the frock-coated young ushers formed into double line through which the couple passed. The village green outside was flooded with sunshine, checkered by drooping elm branches. Bells began to ring from the library across the green and from the schoolhouse farther down. It was over—the fine old barbaric ceremony, the passing of the irredeemable contract between man and woman, the public proclamation of eternal union. Henceforth they were man and wife before the law, before their kind—one and one, and yet not two.

Thus together they passed out of the church.

CHAPTER II

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The company gathered within the chapel for the wedding now moved and talked with evident relief, each one expressing his feeling of the solemn service.

"Very well done, very lovely!" the Senator was murmuring to the bride's mother, just as he might give an opinion of a good dinner or some neat business transaction or of a smartly dressed woman. It was a function of life successfully performed—and he nodded gayly to a pretty woman three rows away. He was handsome and gray-haired, long a widower, and evidently considered weddings to be an attractive, ornamental feature of social life. Mrs. Price, the bride's mother, intent upon escaping with the Colonel by the side door and rejoining the bridal party at the house before the guests arrived on foot, scarcely heeded the amiable Senator's remarks. This affair of her daughter's marriage was, like most events, a matter of engrossing details. The Colonel, in his usual gregarious manner, had strayed among the guests, forgetful of his duties, listening with bent head to congratulatory remarks. She had to send her younger son, Vickers, after him where he lingered with Farrington Beals, the President of the great Atlantic and Pacific Railroad, in which his new son-in-law held a position. When the Colonel finally dragged himself away from the pleasant

things that his old friend Beals had to say about young Lane, he looked at his impatient wife with his tender smile, as if he would like to pat her cheek and say, "Well, we've started them right, haven't we?"

The guests flowed conversationally towards the door and the sunny green, while the organ played deafeningly. But play as exultantly as it might, it could not drown the babble of human voices. Every one wanted to utter those excitable commonplaces that seem somehow to cover at such times deep meanings.

"What a perfect wedding!"

"How pretty it all was!"

"Not a hitch."

"She looked the part."

"Good fellow—nice girl—ought to be happy ... Well, old man, when is your turn coming? ... Could hear every word they said ... looked as though they meant it, too! ..."

In an eddy of the centre aisle a tall, blond young woman with handsome, square shoulders and dark eyes stood looking about her calmly, as if she were estimating the gathering, setting each one down at the proper social valuation, deciding, perhaps, in sum that they were a very "mixed lot," old friends and new, poor and rich. A thin girl, also blond, with deep blue eyes, and a fine bony contour of the face, was swept by the stream near the solitary observer and held out a hand:—

"Cornelia!"

"Margaret!"

"Isn't it ideal!" Margaret Lawton exclaimed, her nervous face still stirred by all that she had felt during the service,

—"the day, the country, and this dear little chapel!"

"Very sweet," the large woman replied in a purring voice, properly modulated for the sentiment expressed. "Isabelle made an impressive bride." And these two school friends moved on towards the door. Cornelia Pallanton, still surveying the scene, nodded and said to her companion, "There's your cousin Nannie Lawton. Her husband isn't here, I suppose? There are a good many St. Louis people."

The guests were now scattered in little groups over the green, dawdling in talk and breathing happily the June-scented air. The stolid man and his placid wife who had sat near the rear had already started for the Colonel's house, following the foot-path across the fields. They walked silently side by side, as if long used to wordless companionship.

The amiable Senator and his friend Beals examined critically the little Gothic chapel, which had been a gift to his native town by the Colonel, as well as the stone library at the other end of the green. "Nice idea of Price," the Senator was saying, "handsome buildings—pleasant little village," and he moved in the direction of Miss Pallanton, who was alone.

Down below in the valley, on the railroad siding, lay the special train that had brought most of the guests from New York that morning. The engine emitted little puffs of white smoke in the still noon, ready to carry its load back to the city after the breakfast. About the library steps were the carriages of those who had driven over from neighboring towns; the whole village had a disturbed and festal air.

The procession was straggling across the village street through the stile and into the meadow, tramping down the thick young grass, up the slope to the comfortable old white house that opened its broad verandas like hospitable arms. The President of the Atlantic and Pacific, deserted by the Senator, had offered his arm to a stern old lady with knotty hands partly concealed in lace gloves. Her lined face had grown serious in age and contention with life. She clung stiffly to the arm of the railroad president,—proud, silent, and shy. She was *his* mother. From her one might conclude that the groom's people were less comfortably circumstanced than the bride's—that this was not a marriage of ambition on the woman's part. It was the first time Mrs. Lane had been "back east" since she had left her country home as a young bride. It was a proud moment, walking with her son's chief; but the old lady did not betray any elation, as she listened to the kindly words that Beals found to say about her son.

"A first-rate railroad man, Mrs. Lane,—he will move up rapidly. We can't get enough of that sort."

The mother, never relaxing her tight lips, drank it all in, treasured it as a reward for the hard years spent in keeping that boarding-house in Omaha, after the death of her husband, who had been a country doctor.

"He's a good son," she admitted as the eulogy flagged. "And he knows how to get on with all kinds of folks…."

At their heels were Vickers Price and the thin Southern girl, Margaret Lawton. Vickers, just back from Munich for this event, had managed to give the conventional dress that he was obliged to wear a touch of strangeness, with an

enormous flowing tie of delicate pink, a velvet waistcoat, and broad-brimmed hat. The clothes and the full beard, the rippling chestnut hair and pointed mustache, showed a desire for eccentricity on the part of the young man that distinguished him from all the other well-dressed young Americans. He carried a thin cane and balanced a cigarette between his lips.

"Yes," he was saying, "I had to come over to see Isabelle married, but I shall go back after a look around—not the place for me!" He laughed and waved his cane towards the company with an ironic sense of his inappropriateness to an American domestic scene.

"You are a composer,—music, isn't it?" the girl asked, a flash in her blue eyes at the thought of youth, Munich, music.

"I have written a few things; am getting ready, you know," Vickers Price admitted modestly.

Just there they were joined by a handsome, fashionably dressed man, his face red with rapid walking. He touched his long, well-brushed black mustache with his handkerchief as he explained:—

"Missed the train—missed the show—but got here in time for the fun, on the express."

He took his place beside the girl, whose color deepened and eyes turned away,—perhaps annoyed, or pleased?

"That's what you come for, isn't it?" she said, forcing a little joke.

Noticing that the two men did not speak, she added hastily, "Don't you know

Mr. Price, Mr. Vickers Price? Mr. Hollenby."

The newcomer raised his silk hat, sweeping Vickers, who was fanning himself with his broad-brimmed felt, in a light, critical stare. Then Mr. Hollenby at once appropriated the young woman's attention, as though he would indicate that it was for her sake he had taken this long, hot journey.

* * * * *

There were other little groups at different stages on the hill,—one gathered about a small, dark-haired woman, whose face burned duskily in the June sun. She was Aline Goring,—the Eros of that schoolgirl band at St. Mary's who had come to see their comrade married. And there was Elsie Beals,—quite elegant, the only daughter of the President of the A. and P. The Woodyards, Percy and Lancey, classmates of Vickers at the university, both slim young men, wearing their clothes carelessly,—clearly not of the Hollenby manner,—had attached themselves here. Behind them was Nan Lawton, too boisterous even for the open air. At the head of the procession, now nearly topping the hill beneath the house, was that silent married couple, the heavy, sober man and the serene, large-eyed woman, who did not mingle with the others. He had pointed out to her the amiable Senator and President Beals, both well-known figures in the railroad world where he worked, far down, obscurely, as a rate clerk. His wife looked at these two great ones, who indirectly controlled the petty destiny of the Johnstons, and squeezed her husband's hand more tightly, expressing thus many mixed feelings,—content with him, pride and confidence in him, in spite of his humble position in the race.

"It's just like the Pilgrim's Progress," she said with a little smile, looking backward at the stream.

"But who is Christian?" the literal husband asked. Her eyes answered that she knew, but would not tell.

* * * * *

Just as each one had reflected his own emotion at the marriage, so each one, looking up at the hospitable goal ahead,—that irregular, broad white house poured over the little Connecticut hilltop,—had his word about the Colonel's home.

"No wonder they call it the Farm," sneered Nan Lawton to the Senator.

"It's like the dear old Colonel, the new and the old," the Senator sententiously interpreted.

Beals, overhearing this, added, "It's poor policy to do things that way. Better to pull the old thing down and go at it afresh,—you save time and money, and have it right in the end."

"It's been in the family a hundred years or more," some one remarked. "The
Colonel used to mow this field himself, before he took to making hardware."

"Isabelle will pull it about their ears when she gets the chance," Mrs. Lawton said. "The present-day young haven't much sentiment for uncomfortable souvenirs."

Her cousin Margaret was remarking to Vickers, "What a good, homey sort of place,—like our old Virginia houses,—all but that great barn!"

It was, indeed, as the Senator had said, very like the Colonel, who could spare neither the old nor the new. It was

also like him to give Grafton a new stone library and church, and piece on rooms here and there to his own house. In spite of these additions demanded by comfort there was something in the conglomeration to remind the Colonel, who had returned to Grafton after tasting strife and success in the Middle West, of the plain home of his youth.

"The dear old place!" Alice Johnston murmured to her husband. "It was never more attractive than to-day, as if it knew that it was marrying off an only daughter." To her, too, the Farm had memories, and no new villa spread out spaciously in Italian, Tudor, or Classic style could ever equal this white, four-chimneyed New England mansion.

On the west slope of the hill near the veranda a large tent had been erected, and into this black-coated waiters were running excitedly to and fro around a wing of the house which evidently held the servant quarters. Just beyond the tent a band was playing a loud march. There was to be dancing on the lawn after the breakfast, and in the evening on the village green for everybody, and later fireworks. The Colonel had insisted on the dancing and the fireworks, in spite of Vickers's jeers about pagan rites and the Fourth of July.

The bride and groom had already taken their places in the broad hall, which bisected the old house. The guests were to enter from the south veranda, pass through the hall, and after greeting the couple gain the refreshment tent through the library windows. The Colonel had worked it all out with that wonderful attention to detail that had built up his great hardware business. Upstairs in the front bedrooms the wedding presents had been arranged, and nicely

ticketed with cards for the amusement of aged relatives,—a wonderful assortment of silver and gold and glass,—an exhibition of the wide relationships of the contracting pair, at least of the wife. And through these rooms soft-footed detectives patrolled, examining the guests....

Isabelle Price had not wished her wedding to be of this kind, ordered so to speak like the refreshments from Sherry and the presents from Tiffany, with a special train on the siding. When she and John had decided to be married at the old farm, she had thought of a country feast,—her St. Mary's girls of course and one or two more, but quite to themselves! They were to walk with these few friends to the little chapel, where the dull old village parson would say the necessary words. The marriage over, and a simple breakfast in the old house,—the scene of their love,—they were to ride off among the hills to her camp on Dog Mountain, alone. And thus quietly, without flourish, they would enter the new life. But as happens to all such pretty idylls, reality had forced her hand. Colonel Price's daughter could not marry like an eloping schoolgirl, so her mother had declared. Even John had taken it as a matter of course, all this elaborate celebration, the guests, the special train, the overflowing house. And she had yielded her ideal of having something special in her wedding, acquiescing in the "usual thing."

But now that the first guests began to top the hill and enter the hall with warm, laughing greetings, all as gay as the June sunlight, the women in their fresh summer gowns, she felt the joy of the moment. "Isn't it jolly, so many of 'em!" she exclaimed to her husband, squeezing his arm gayly. He took it, like most things, as a matter of course. The

hall soon filled with high tones and noisy laughter, as the guests crowded in from the lawn about the couple, to offer their congratulations, to make their little jokes, and premeditated speeches. Standing at the foot of the broad stairs, her veil thrown back, her fair face flushed with color and her lips parted in a smile, one arm about a thick bunch of roses, the bride made a bright spot of light in the dark hall. All those whirling thoughts, the depths to which her spirit had descended during the service, had fled; she was excited by this throng of smiling, joking people, by the sense of her role. She had the feeling of its being *her* day, and she was eager to drink every drop in the sparkling cup. A great kindness for everybody, a sort of beaming sympathy for the world, bubbled up in her heart, making the repeated hand squeeze which she gave—sometimes a double pressure—a personal expression of her emotion. Her flashing hazel eyes, darting into each face in turn as it came before her, seemed to say: 'Of course, I am the happiest woman in the world, and you must be happy, too. It is such a good world!' While her voice was repeating again and again, with the same tremulous intensity, "Thank you—it is awfully nice of you—I am so glad you are here!"

To the amiable Senator's much worn compliment,—"It's the prettiest wedding I have seen since your mother's, and the prettiest bride, too,"—she blushed a pleased reply, though she had confessed to John only the night before that the sprightly Senator was "horrid,—he has such a way of squeezing your hand, as if he would like to do more,"—to which the young man had replied in his perplexity, due to

the Senator's exalted position in the A. and P. Board, "I suppose it's only the old boy's way of being cordial."

Even when Nannie Lawton came loudly with Hollenby—she had captured him from her cousin—and threw her arms about the bride, Isabelle did not draw back. She forgot that she disliked the gay little woman, with her muddy eyes, whose "affairs"—one after the other—were condoned "for her husband's sake." Perhaps Nannie felt what it might be to be as happy and proud as she was,—she was large, generous, comprehending at this moment. And she passed the explosive little woman over to her husband, who received her with the calm courtesy that never made an enemy.

But when "her girls" came up the line, she felt happiest. Cornelia was first, large, handsome, stately, her broad black hat nodding above the feminine stream, her dark eyes observing all, while she slowly smiled to the witticisms Vickers murmured in her ear. Every one glanced at Miss Pallanton; she was a figure, as Isabelle realized when she finally stood before her,—a very handsome figure, and would get her due attention from her world. They had not cared very much for "Conny" at St. Mary's, though she was a handsome girl then and had what was called "a good mind." There was something coarse in the detail of this large figure, the plentiful reddish hair, the strong, straight nose,—all of which the girls of St. Mary's had interpreted their own way, and also the fact that she had come from Duluth,—probably of "ordinary" people. Surely not a girl's girl, nor a woman's woman! But one to be reckoned with when it came to men. Isabelle was conscious of her old

reserve as she listened to Conny's piping, falsetto voice,—such a funny voice to come from that large person through that magnificent white throat.

"It makes me so happy, dear Isabelle," the voice piped; "it is all so ideal, so exactly what it ought to be for you, don't you know?" And as Percy Woodyard bore her off—he had hovered near all the time—she smiled again, leaving Isabelle to wonder what Conny thought would be "just right" for her.

"You must hurry, Conny," she called on over Vickers's head, "and make up your mind; you are almost our last!"

"You know I never hurry," the smiling lips piped languidly, and the large hat sailed into the library, piloted on either side by Woodyard and Vickers. Isabelle had a twinge of sisterly jealousy at seeing her younger brother so persistently in the wake of the large, blond girl. Dear Vick, her own chum, her girl's first ideal of a man, fascinatingly developed by his two years in Munich, must not go bobbing between Nan Lawton and Conny!

And here was Margaret Lawton—so different from her cousin's wife—with the delicate, high brow, the firm, aristocratic line from temple to chin. She was the rarest and best of the St. Mary's set, and though Isabelle had known her at school only a year, she had felt curiosity and admiration for the Virginian. Her low, almost drawling voice, which reflected a controlled spirit, always soothed her. The deep-set blue eyes had caught Isabelle's glance at Vickers, and with an amused smile the Southern girl said, "He's in the tide!"

Isabelle said, "I am so, so glad you could get here, Margaret."

"I wanted to—very much. I made mother put off our sailing."

"How is the Bishop?" she asked, as Margaret was pushed on.

"Oh, happy, riding about the mountains and converting the poor heathen, who prefer whiskey to religion. Mother's taking him to England this summer to show him off to the foreign clergy."

"And Washington?"

Margaret's thin, long lips curved ironically for answer. Hollenby, who seemed to have recollected a purpose, was waiting for her at the library door.... "Ah, my Eros!" Isabella exclaimed with delight, holding forth two hands to a small, dark young woman, with waving brown hair and large eyes that were fixed on distant objects.

"Eros with a husband and two children," Aline Goring murmured, in her soft contralto. "You remember Eugene? At the Springs that summer?" The husband, a tall, smooth-shaven, young man with glasses and the delicate air of the steam-heated American scholar bowed stiffly.

"Of course! Didn't I aid and abet you two?"

"That's two years and a half ago," Aline remarked, as if the simple words covered a multitude of facts about life. "We are on our way to St. Louis to settle."

"Splendid!" Isabelle exclaimed. "We shall have you again. Torso, where we are exiled for the present, is only a night's ride from St. Louis."

Aline smiled that slow, warm smile, which seemed to come from the remote inner heart of her dreamy life. Isabelle looked at her eagerly, searching for the radiant, woodsy creature she had known, that Eros, with her dreamy, passionate, romantic temperament, a girl whom girls adored and kissed and petted, divining in her the feminine spirit of themselves. Surely, she should be happy, Aline, the beautiful girl made for love, poetic, tender. The lovely eyes were there, but veiled; the velvety skin had roughened; and the small body was almost heavy. The wood nymph had been submerged in matrimony.

Goring was saying in a twinkling manner:—

"I've been reckoning up, Mrs. Lane. You are the seventh most intimate girl friend Aline has married off the last two years. How many more of you are there?"

Aline, putting her arms about the bride's neck, drew her face to her lips and whispered:—

"Dearie, my darling! I hope you will be so happy,—that it will be all you can wish!" After these two had disappeared into the library, where there was much commotion about the punch-bowl, the bride wondered—were *they* happy? She had seen the engagement at Southern Springs,—the two most ecstatic, unearthly lovers she had ever known.... But now? ...

Thus the stream of her little world flowed on, repeating its high-pitched note of gratulation, of jocular welcome to the married state, as if to say, 'Well, now you are one of us —you've been brought in—this is life.' That was what these smiling people were thinking, as they welcomed the neophytes to the large vale of human experience. 'We have

seen you through this business, started you joyously on the common path. And now what will you make of it?' For the occasion they ignored, good naturedly, the stones along the road, the mistakes, the miserable failures that lined the path, assuming the bride's proper illusion of triumph and confidence.... Among the very last came the Johnstons, who had lingered outside while the more boisterous ones pressed about the couple. Isabelle noticed that the large brown eyes of the placid woman, who always seemed to her much older than herself, were moist, and her face was serious when she said, "May it be all that your heart desires —the Real Thing!"

A persistent aunt interrupted them here, and it was hours afterward when Isabelle's thought came back to these words and dwelt on them. 'The real thing!' Of course, that was what it was to be, her marriage,—the woman's symbol of the Perfect, not merely Success (though with John they could not fail of worldly success), nor humdrum content— but, as Alice said, the real thing,—a state of passionate and complete union. Something in those misty brown eyes, something in the warm, deep voice of the older woman, in the prayer-like form of the wish, sank deep into her consciousness.

She turned to her husband, who was chatting with Fosdick, a large, heavy man with a Dr. Johnson head on massive shoulders. One fat hand leaned heavily on a fat club, for Fosdick was slightly lame and rolled in his gait.

"Isabelle," he remarked with a windy sigh, "I salute my victor!"

Old Dick, Vickers's playmate in the boy-and-girl days, her playmate, too,—he had wanted to marry her for years, ever since Vick's freshman year when he had made them a visit at the Farm. He had grown very heavy since then,—time which he had spent roving about in odd corners of the earth. As he stood there, his head bent mockingly before the two, Isabelle felt herself Queen once more, the—American woman who, having surveyed all, and dominated all within the compass of her little world, has chosen the One. But not Dickie, humorous and charming as he was.

"How goes it, Dickie?"

"As always," he puffed; "I come from walking or rather limping up and down this weary earth and observing—men and women—how they go about to make themselves miserable."

"Stuff!"

"My dear friends," he continued, placing both hands on the big cane, "you are about to undergo a new and wonderful experience. You haven't the slightest conception of what it is. You think it is love; but it is the holy state of matrimony,—a very different proposition—"

They interrupted him with laughing abuse, but he persisted,—a serious undertone to his banter. "Yes, I have always observed the scepticism of youth, no matter what may be the age of the contracting parties and their previous experience, in this matter. But Love and Marriage are two distinct and entirely independent states of being,—one is the creation of God, the other of Society. I have observed that few make them coalesce."