

Willum's Vanilla

By Edwina Stanton Babcock

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The letter came while Mr. Pawket was chopping wood. His ax rested on a stump and piles of white chips breathed fragrance around him as he stood watching the buckboard of the Rural Free Delivery wind down the country road.

The Rural Free Delivery consisted of a white horse, a creaking buckboard, and a young woman of determined manner. A Rough Rider's hat sat with an air of stern purpose on the Rural Free Delivery's dark head, and a pair of surgeon's gauntlet gloves heightened her air of official integrity.

As the buckboard approached the group of tulip-trees opposite Mr. Pawket's residence he shoved back his hat and pulled a blue-spotted handkerchief out of his hip pocket; passing the handkerchief over his face, he greeted the Rural Free Delivery:

"Hot enough fer yer?"

It was really not so very hot, but if Mr. Pawket had not asked this question he would have felt lacking in geniality. He did not, however, go forward to intercept possible mail. There was the little iron box with his name on it nailed to the tulip-tree; there was the red signal to be adjusted. It pleased Mr. Pawket to realize that the government had all this planned out for his special convenience and he was careful not to upset régime. He watched the Rural Free Delivery climb down from the buckboard, go to the little box on the tree, deposit one letter, lock the box, and set up the signal. When the ceremony was concluded Mr. Pawket came out from behind the barn. Walking with

the heavy, bent-kneed tread of the life-long farmer, he leaned upon the bars by the cow-sheds.

"Many gitten 'em to-day?" he inquired.

The Rural Free Delivery climbed back into the buckboard; she pulled on the gauntlets, replying with black-eyed reserve:

"Finn's folks had two--a asthma circler and a letter from that son they thought was drowned. Mis' Sweetser's got a paper--- the one her daughter is a manicurer sends her. And there's a box yet for the Grant girl--her graduatin'-dress, I expect--seems she's too high-toned to wear anything but machine-made."

The Rural Free Delivery whipped up the white horse and the stern contours of the Rough Rider hat disappeared down the winding, shadowed road. At last Mr. Pawket, rousing from the reverie induced by news of the resurrection of Finn's boy, took down the bars and crossed the road to the post-box. Dragging from his pocket a cluster of huge barn keys, he sought among them for the infinitesimal key of the box. This small key had the appearance of coquetting with Mr. Pawket--it invariably disappeared behind the larger keys and eluded his efforts to single it out; it seemed to him flirtatious, feminine; and as he stood like an old Druid invoking the spirit of the tulip-tree, he addressed this small key with benevolent irony.

"You'm a shrimp, that's what you are," Mr. Pawket said to the key. "Nothin' but a shrimp.... Why in tarnation don't they have a key you can see?... I'd hate to lose you on a dark night, I would," eying the key severely.

But the shrimp key at least did its work, and Mr. Pawket with unconcealed feelings of wonder and concern drew forth from the box the letter. It was a large, rich-looking letter. The envelope was thin and crackly, embossed with purple designs of twisted reptiles coiling

around a woman's face, and in one corner were small purple letters forming the words "Hotel Medusa." The handwriting on the envelope was bold and black, and the dark seal bore impress of a small winged form that Mr. Pawket took to be a honey-bee. He regarded the letter suspiciously, studying it from every position as he entered the kitchen door.

"Say, Mother, here's a letter. What'll I do with it?"

Mrs. Pawket came sighing from the washtub. She wrinkled her forehead as one harried by the incessant demands of the outside world. Wiping her hands on her wet apron, she took the letter, regarding it contemptuously.

"Leave it be on the parlor mantel," advised Mrs. Pawket. "The twins is comin' up the road. I can hear them hollerin' at that echo down by the swamps. Leave it be; they'll attend to it."

Mr. Pawket, having carried out this injunction, stood by the door considering whether it was worth while to go back to his chopping. The sun was in the middle of the sky; he sniffed odors of the kitchen and discerned a rich atmosphere known to his consciousness as "dinner-time."

"Now I'm here I may as well stay," he remarked to his wife. He sat heavily down in a Turkey-red-covered rocking-chair, quoting facetiously:

"Ef yer never want to be sad and sorry Just keep away from hurry and worry."

"The Rural says Finn's folks has heard from that young feller was drowned."

Mrs. Pawket raised a disapproving face from contemplating a small kettle of Irish stew, remarking, severely: "Much the Rural knows about it. She's into everybody's business."

Mr. Pawket demurred. "Well, carr'in' the mail and all, she's liable to sense a good deal. Some says she's always been foreknowledgeed. 'Twuz the Rural foretold the blizzit last winter; 'twuz the Rural found out Hank Jellaby's nephew was married. Wasn't it her knowed all the time who sot Mullins's barn afire? There's a good many depends on the Rural for keeping up with things."

Soon the sun was a green glare through the tulip-trees; that meant it was half past twelve, and the twins raced in. They were hoarse from intriguing with the echo in the swamp; but as they entered the gate (careful to swing it the wrong way and squeeze through) they discussed a tingling problem in mental arithmetic.

"If Mrs. Fenton gave her son two wapples" (snuffle), "and her nephew one napple" (snuffle), "and two wapples to her son's friend, reservin' one napple for herself and conservin' four rapples for the household, what would be the sum of these given napples multiplied by four?"

Reciting this appalling chorus, the twins faced their grandfather, who, poising his battered sun-hat on his knees, from the depths of his arm-chair looked proudly, if fearfully, upon them.

"Say, Gramp', kin' you answer it?" demanded the twins.

Standing before him in the kitchen doorway, they mouthed it, curly-headed, croaking synchronous challenge. They scraped their shoes on a scraper near the door; one peered furtively under a covered dish on the table while the other washed hands and face in a tin basin under the grape-arbor. Together they made strange "snorting" noises of repressed masculinity as, seizing knife and fork from the pile in the

center of the table, they took seats, elbows on plates, instruments waving in air.

"Kin you answer it?"

Mr. Pawket hedged. He also drew a chair up to the table and, spearing a slice of bread with his knife, bent bushy brows.

"Kin I answer it?' Well, that's a nice question. Would yer teacher like me to answer it? No, he wouldn't. It's for your learnin', ain't it? Not for mine. I'm all finished with them conundrums. Of course," went on Mr. Pawket, airily--"of course I never done figurin' like that when I was a boy. Them apples, now. Seems to me it all depends on the season. Ef the lady was a widder, like as not she was took advantage of. I mistrust she wouldn't be no judge of apples; not bein' a farmer, how could she know that there's years when apples is valleyble, and other years when you insult the pigs with 'em? But then--you talk about apples--Well, as for a fine apple, whether it's Northern Spy or Harvest Moon...." Thus Mr. Pawket skilfully directed the conversation into channels more familiar.

At last the twins, in a fine, concerted action of chewing, balanced large slices of buttered bread on the flats of their hands, eyed their grandparents, and, after swallowing with peculiar heavy efforts of the epiglottis, remarked, simultaneously:

"Willum is comin' home."

Mr. Pawket started. He reached for his spectacles, solemnly polished them, and put them on. Mrs. Pawket, bearing a large leaning tower of griddle-cakes toward the table, halted as one petrified.

The twins bent over their plates, humped their shoulders, observing, "That's what they all say down to the Center."

"Mr. Sykes heard it into the feedstore."

"Mis' Badger says it."

"They was all talkin' about it into the undertaker's."

"He's going to build a new house."

"His wife thinks she's goin' to like it here."

Mr. Pawket took off his spectacles. His wife! Willum with a wife?

The twins, now devouring griddle-cakes, turned on him with unmoved faces.

"It's going to be a show-place. The butcher can tell yer all about it--a grand house like a big railroad station, all gold pipes and runnin' water."

One twin turned the syrup-jug upside down; there ensued a slight scuffle between the two, each ardently attempting to hold his plate under the golden falling globules.

"They'm goin' to have five ottermobiles, and one for the cook to run herself around in; there's goin' to be one room all canary-birds, and there's goin' to be a g'rage with painted winders and a steeple like a church."

Mrs. Pawket sat down. She fanned herself with her apron.

"Set up to the table and eat, Mawther," feebly advised Mr. Pawket.

The twins, rapidly and scientifically consuming griddle-cakes, jaws working, unemotional eyes watching the effect of their statements, continued:

"They goin' to build on Cedar Plains."

"She's got the ideers."

"He's got the money."

"Just their ice-box alone is goin' to cost 'em two hundred dollars."

Mr. Pawket, with sudden irritation: "Now, now, now, that ain't sensible, that ain't. Willum had ought to have talked it over with me. I'd like to 'a' reasoned with him. I could have showed him catalogues.... And them two buildin' on Cedar Plains--it's onreasonable. It'll come hard on his wife. She won't have no near neighbors; and look at how far they'll have to go for weddin's and fun'ral's and all."

Mrs. Pawket, suddenly bethinking her, rose and went into the "front" room, or parlor, where, from a large mantelpiece ranged with sugary-looking vases stuffed with brilliantly dyed grasses she plucked the recently arrived letter. Looking at it upside down and with nonchalance of disapproval, she put the letter before the twins, commanding:

"Do as Grammar tells you and read it."

"That's right," said Mr. Pawket, spooning up gravy. He retucked a kitchen towel in his neck, approving: "I don't know but what we ought to read it. There may be sumpin' in it somebody wants we should know."

The twins handled the letter casually; they attacked the superscription with glib unconcern.

"Hot-hell Medusa." began one twin, confidently.

He was instantly corrected by the other twin. "Yah--it is not Hot-hell--it's Hotel Medusa, It'ly. Yah!"

"It'ly? It'ly?" mused Mr. Pawket. "Well, I made out the I T, all right. Now I ought to 'a' guessed the rest, It'ly bein' a place I'm familiar with."

The twins were in conference.

"Medusa--you know who she was," remarked the elder twin by four seconds.

"Don't, huh? Snakes for hair--hey? Look at you and you turn into stone--hey?"

"Shut up! She did not!"

"Shut up! She did!"

But the other twin busied himself with the post-mark.

"A. Malfi," he painfully deciphered....

"Say, Gramp', what's a Malfi?"

His brother remained engrossed with the embossed head of Medusa.

"Snakes for hair--turned 'em to stone--cut off her head," he chanted, in blissful retrospect.

Mr. Pawket, reaching across the table, seized this student by the collar. "Now, now, now! Whose head you cuttin' off?"

"Hern," explained this bloodthirsty twin. "She was a bad woman."

"Hey! Hey! Hey!" roared Mr. Pawket, with sudden severity. "None of that talk here! You mind your own business, young man. Don't you give us none of that gab." He turned to Mrs. Pawket: "What did I say about that new young feller that's come to teach school? He ain't here for no good--that's what I said!" Mr. Pawket studied the face on the envelope with a sort of curious horror, concluding, "Ef she's what you say she is, see to it that you don't take no more notice of her capers."

The twins now registered aggrieved expressions; they scratched curly heads with perturbed spoons. "Medusa's hist'ry." They roared it in hurt explanation.

After some discussion of the curious anatomical outline of the supposed honey-bee on the seal, Mrs. Pawket finally slit the envelope with a dinner-knife, and the twins, holding the letter between them, gave a dashing, if slightly incorrect, reading.

"AMALFI--IT'LY--HOTEL MEDOOSA.

"DEAR MR. AND MRS. PAWKET,--This letter is from William Folsom, the little orphan boy for whom you did so much. What do you think? This boy who boarded with you summers is coming back to America with his wife, an Italian lady you are both sure to love! On account of unforeseen business necessity, Mrs. Folsom and I are forced to give up our charming ... vill ... villain ... villy...."

Here one twin ran down. The other twin looked over his brother's shoulder, breathing thickly.

"Vanilla," he chewingly instructed.

"Vanilla ... our charming vanilla, and on account of recent dev-dev-devil-elope-ments we are leaving It'ly at once. You remember the fine old property my father owned, called Cedar Plains? As I remember, it

was not far from your farm where I spent so many happy summers. It is on Cedar Plains that Mrs. Folsom and I plan to erect our new home, an I ... talian van ... vill ... v...."

"Vanilla." This time it was Mr. Pawket who blandly supplied the word.

"I shall count on you as good friends and neighbors and I am anxious to have my wife meet you. We have placed the building of our new home in the hands of an architect friend of mine who is to be on the spot until all is completed. Our beloved household furnishings have already been shipped to America and we are living for the present in this hotel. We shall come home by a somewhat cir-cus-to-us route, not arriving until our new home is ready for us. Won't you two good friends take Mr. Badgely as a boarder, and do give him that stunning old room I used to have?"

"With the kindest good wishes to you both,

"Your boy,

"WILLIAM FOLSOM."

The twins, having completed what had been for them a daring undertaking, now looked about for release from an atmosphere grown suddenly boresome. The elder by four seconds went to the door and, affecting intense maturity, spat out from it. The younger, dipping his head in the water-butt near the leader, took a small comb from his pocket and, using the disturbed water-butt as a mirror, began parting into ideal smoothness his upward-turning locks.

The first twin, seeing his brother's back turned, dug into his pockets and, having brought out with an air of modest pride a fish-line, a morsel of gingerbread, a bit of resin, human tooth, part of a human bone, a kitten's skull, a chewed piece of gum, and an incredibly

besmirched Sunday-school card, extracted from these omens a large rusty screw, which he proffered to his grandmother, muttering, "For your Everything Jar." With a sudden shame at having been seen sympathizing with the interests of a woman, this twin then seized his hat and fled whooping down the road to school, followed by his brother, who, holding between his vision and the sun a small bit of crimson glass, exulted in the contemplation of a deep red universe.

Mrs. Pawket, bundling the dinner-dishes into a pan and pouring hot water from the teakettle over them, sighed. Mr. Pawket, having again retired to the Turkey-red-covered chair, watched his wife somewhat dazedly; he was still thinking of the contents of "Willum's" letter.

"Comin' home by a cir-cus-to-us route," he soliloquized ... "and devil-elopements. I suppose he knows what he's doin', but it all sounds kindy resky to me. Did you get it that A. Malfi was his wife's maiden name? Don't it sound sorter like a actress to you? One of them sassy, tricky furriners, I'll bet. 'N' a vanilla--what call has Willum got to build a vanilla, his age? A mansion, now--I could onderstand how the boy would hanker for a mansion--he always had big feelin's, Willum had--but a vanilla! Say, you ever seen one of them there contraptions?"

Mrs. Pawket, washing the dishes, hung up the soap-shaker and cast her eyes upward as in an effort of memory. She reached for a dish-towel, replying, somewhat evasively, "Where my mother come from they had 'em a-plenty; there was one on every street."

Her husband regarded her with deep respect. "Ye don't say?"

Mrs. Pawket squeezed out the dishmop with a thoughtful air; she cast a hasty, authoritative glance at the range, banging the door shut with a decision that made Mr. Pawket jump as she snapped:

"Just the same, this here ain't no place for a vanilla. A vanilla around these parts would be the same as if you was to wear your Sunday silk hat out a-plowin'. They hain't got good judgment, them two hain't."

The old farmer regarded his wife with serious attention. Lighting his pipe, he lay back in the Turkey-red chair, puffing in silence. At last he laid the pipe down and, laboriously pulling off his boots, hummed an air which had for its sole motif the undynamic suggestion:

"By and by By and by By and by. By and by. By and by."

At last the thumping of stocking feet ceased with the drone of the drowsy voice; a bit of sunlight filtering first through the tulip-trees, then through the little low kitchen window, let it be seen that Mr. Pawket had lapsed into slumber. His wife looked at him with an expressionless face. Wringing her hands out of the dish-water, she carried the pan to the door; with contemptuous words of warning to some chickens near by, she flung the contents on the grass. Going further into the door-yard she dragged up some bleached clothing and stuffed it into a clothes-basket. Choking the range full of coal, wrenching into place a refractory coal-scuttle, she turned the damper in the stove-pipe and set the stove-plates slightly a-tilt. Then she seized the tin wash-basin, and, setting up a small mirror against the window, loosened her hair and dragged her face and head through a severe toilet whose original youthful motive of comeliness had been lost in habitual effort of tidiness. This done, Mrs. Pawket donned a clean white apron and draped around her neck a knitted orange tie which she pinned with a scarlet coral breast-pin.

Having thus dressed for the afternoon and for the feared, desired, but seldom experienced visitation called "company," Mrs. Pawket took from her pocket the screw her grandson had bestowed upon her. Suddenly, with the expression of one who in the interests of art performs dangerous acrobatic feats, she dragged a chair in front of a cupboard. Climbing, with many expressions of insecurity, on this

chair, Mrs. Pawket reached a bony hand into the cupboard, groping on the top shelf for an object which her fingers approached tremulously. This object with considerable care Mrs. Pawket brought down to earth and set upon the kitchen table. It was a short, stumpy bowl or jar, upon which curious protuberances of all kinds clustered. The protuberances encircled the jar in something like the way fungus circles a tree hole, in strange and various patterns.

Mrs. Pawket, the light deepening in her eyes, took from her apron pocket the screw; holding it very daintily in one work-worn hand, with the other she dove into further recesses and produced, wrapped in an oily bit of newspaper, a large lump of putty.

Now a solemn ritual began. Breaking off a bit of the putty, Mrs. Pawket welded it on the jar near the other protuberances; while the putty was soft she fixed in it the screw, arranging that implement by a method best calculated to display its screw characteristics. Then Mrs. Pawket's eyes grew darker, a flush came into her wrinkled cheeks; she wrung the moisture from her brow in a sort of agony of creative pleasure. As one who performs an action sacred in its heightened detachment and mechanical efficiency, she rummaged with desperate insistence on another and higher shelf of the cupboard, this time bringing forth a very small vial of gilt varnish and an equally small paint-brush with which to apply it. Mrs. Pawket then observed that her hand was shaking and chid herself severely:

"Look at me! Soon as I see how pritty this here Everything Jar is gettin' to be, I go and get excited. If I'm goosefleshed now, what'll I be when the Everything is finished?"

But the Everything Jar was a long way from finished and the unsatisfied ache of the creative artist made heavy Mrs. Pawket's breast. She surveyed the ceramic, half-erupt with a medley of buttons, screws, safety-pins, hooks, knobs, all covered with their transforming gilt, and tried to imagine how it would seem to have it completed.

Then the ultimate anxiety beset her--when completed, should the Everything be bestowed upon the minister's family or--this a recent and daring inspiration--should it be conferred upon Willum's wife, the mistress of the proposed vanilla? Mrs. Pawket was fairly tortured by uncertainty. She shook the sleeping Mr. Pawket by the shoulder.

"Say, look at the Everything. I just now put on that last screw. Ain't it handsome?"

As he blinked at the fantastic jar gleaming with golden excrescences, a deep sense of beauty thrilled Mr. Pawket.

"Hey, Maw," he chuckled. "That's the best yet. My! ain't it pritty? It beats that lamp-shade ye made out er the tinfoil. Now the question is, who ye goin' to give it to?"

"It's fer the vanilla," returned Mrs. Pawket, calmly.

Mr. Pawket put up his hand and wrung out his ear; he thought he could not have heard aright; such aplomb, such dashing assurance as was his wife's! His gray beard vibrated with curiosity.

"For the vanilla," the artist repeated, firmly. "I take it Willum's wife won't be too proud to accept a notion or two fer her parlor. 'Tain't likely that she, being so long in a furrin country, has had much chance to go through the stores and pick out bric-à-brac. I don't know but what she would be thankful for an ornament or so."

"Ornaments?" Mr. Pawket dwelt reverently upon the word.

"Ornaments? I dunno but what you got it right, though I wouldn't never have thought of it myself." He leaned over the table the better to gloat upon the golden jar. "Well," he summed up--"well, wimmen do beat all for mind-readin'. First she sets up house-keepin', it's ornaments she's goin' to hanker fer--something fer the center-table

most likely; and here you, who she 'ain't never see, stands all ready with an Everything fer her!"

A few days after the excitement produced by Willum's letter the architect arrived. He was a tall, old-young man with the preoccupied air of having reduced all human existence to exact diagrams. He was, however, strangely intoxicated by the quiet and beauty of his country surroundings. On the evening of his arrival he installed himself happily in the spare room of the Pawkets' farm-house, acting, as Mrs. Pawket marveled, as "if he hadn't never lived up in them classy city beehives."

Mr. Badgely, however, seemed to the farmer and his wife unnaturally ecstatic over the ordinary manifestations of the physical universe. He would stand for hours looking off over soft sunrise country; he would hang over the bars by the cow-sheds, staring down the red road or gazing pensively up at the ancient outlines of the Pawkets' homestead. When the old farmer went up to him with knockkneed, rheumatic tread, inquiring, "Well, how goes it?" the architect would reply:

"Oh, heavenly! Such depth! Such substance! Such integrity!"

When Mr. Pawket, fearing such brain lesions as he could not diagnose, saw that these epithets were directed toward his own home in its tulip-tree setting, he would range himself alongside of the architect, eye his residence critically, and expectorate as he avowed:

"It wants roofing. Come vacation I'm goin' ter put the twins to scrapin' them pesky mossback shingles; then I may go with the tide and buy me a fancy tin roof."

Mr. Badgely would sweep him with an unseeing look. He would stretch five very long fingers toward the façade of the farm-house, muttering, "Of course not the dormers; they obtrude, I think, and the note is pseudo-foreign. We should try to evolve something absolutely

American, don't you think? But the pilasters, the door paneling, positively Doric in their clean sobriety! The eastern development, now; there may have been reason for the extreme slant toward the east--it orients well, but with a certain shock...."

"Shock? I guess yes," Mr. Pawket would reply. "'Twuz struck by lightnin', tore down considerable." Then Mr. Pawket would remember that Willum had asked him to be all the help he could to the architect, so he would cast his eyes up to the sun as one who dovetails multitudinous engagements, remarking: "What say we go down to Cedar Plains now? Fool around a little. Kindy block the thing all out, as it were."

Once Mr. Pawket had added, "Ef we can't do nothin' else, you can tell me ef you want any of them trees left a-standin'."

The dreaming architect had turned on him like one under sudden electric compulsion; he shook himself into unbelievable alertness.

"The--er--trees? Left standing?"

Mr. Pawket smiled indulgently. He scratched a match on the seat of his overalls and lighted his pipe, answering between puffs: "I guess you 'm new to the business, ain't ye? Don't ye know, boy, the fust thing ye do when ye set out to build a house is to lay all the trees low? Some does it with dunnamite; some does it with mules and swearin'--anything to root out the pesky things."

An extraordinary look of terror had swept the architect's face.

"Nervous," noted Mr. Pawket, "nervous! Maw'll have to feed him up with buttermilk and put drops into his coffee. Them city people is always nagged into nerves." The old man continued in fatherly fashion:

"Now, you wantin' to make all clear for anything as sizable as a vanilla, fust thing we do is to 'scratch off the trees.' I can git you plenty fellers handy with ax and saw, but when it comes to them cussed roots, why, then, you 'm goin' to want dunnamite."

The architect bowed his head thoughtfully. As the two took the little bronzed path leading to the natural park-land dark with tapering cedars, he gave a puzzled look at the old farmer. At last he seemed struck by an idea and said, slowly:

"Do you know, Mr. Pawket, we architects are often a little vague; we need so much to--er--confer--and--er--ahem!--consult. Now, really, I should be so interested. Just what are your personal preferences with regard to the construction of an Italian villa?"

Mr. Pawket was for the moment slightly dazed. He surmised that the question placed him somewhat at a disadvantage; yet, somehow, it seemed to him that he knew a good deal about Italian villas. Gathering together certain impressions derived from the conversation of the twins, from a picture seen on a calendar, from the one lurid film of his experience, and from certain opulent descriptions of the building of the Tabernacle, it seemed to him that he knew a little something about occult species of architecture. He not immodestly presented his ideas.

"I take it"--squashing ruminatively through puddles--"I take it that the vanilla idee is kinder intricate, ain't it?--somethin' fancy and grand like a castle? Two or three cupolos, er course, and all run around with stoops and balconies; marble staircases inside." Mr. Pawket added this carelessly as one used to the larger handling of details. "High sideboards set out in silver in the dinin'-room--a reel handsome phonygraft into the front room and statoos on the gateposts."

The architect receiving this preliminary sketch with such silent respect, Mr. Pawket gained courage and resumed:

"Wall-papers I ain't so sure about." The old farmer took out a large clasp-knife and, paring his thumb-nail, continued, somewhat loftily: "I presume that is as the lady of the house commands. Some favors blue, but there's a many as is great hands for red. I see a house once had dead animals, stuffed codfish, and shot ducks all over the wall-paper into the dinin'-room; 'twuz reel tony! As fer the yard--well, I mistrust that Willum, bein' sociable and always interested into the open air, would want circular seats around whatever trees was left standin'. Ye could paint 'em red, white, and blue, ye know. And he'd like a pond, maybe, with a white swan shovin' back and forth."

* * *

At last came the day when vans of imported laborers arrived and began quick breaking of ground and laying of foundations on Cedar Plains. Parts of the superb heating system, the installing of which was the architect's special care, numerous white bath-tubs--these things were deposited before the eyes of the excited Mr. Pawket, who, in the absence of the owner of the proposed villa, felt that he must be very vigilant in overseeing. Every day the old man appeared at Cedar Plains, boots spattered, overalls greased and clayey, making his anxious comments to the architect, who received them thoughtfully, with the air of putting all suggestions into immediate execution.

So the building of the "vanilla" proceeded, but it proceeded under the stigma of an outraged countryside. The "show-place" confidently predicted seemed not to evolve; outside of insane expenditures for heating and bathing and the sanitary care of laundry and food, there were few evidences that the villa was to be magnificent. Development after development not only puzzled the neighboring farmers, but incensed them. Men driving by "Willum's vanilla" pointed it out, tongue in cheek, with derisive whip; their women folks, veiled and taciturn, leaned forward in curious wonder to condemn silently. Such complacent agriculturists as owned "ottermobiles" came from miles away to view the thing; they halted their machines by the roadside and

went in parties up through the tapering cedars to where stood the slowly rising square white walls, which they stared at with patronizing guffaws. It was the fashion for the youth of Brook Center to spend Sunday afternoons down in Cedar Plains, where among the dark trees they found the rosy trail of arbutus; where strawberries hung in the rank green grass, and where, of autumn days, wandering over the sweet stubble, they confessed to each other those innocent melancholies of beings that have never known sorrow.

On the edge of the plains where the russet path met the highway was an old well. Here the brooding boys and girls were accustomed to bring their loves and quarrels; here they hoisted the bucket from its glittering black depths, poured water on tight bunches of anemone, fern, and Dutchman's breeches, took long, gasping country drinks, and played all the pranks youth plays when relaxed beside its subtle, laughing ally--water. As the Sunday sun went down the boys and girls discussed the strange phenomenon of the new house whose enigmatic walls gleamed through the fields of their once free roving. They uttered dark hearsay: "Some says them two is crazy; that's why they been chased out er It'ly." The twins, playing stick-knife in the soft turf that edged the road, flatly contradicted this:

"They are not crazy, neither; they 'm as common sense as you are."

"Well, ef they ain't crazy, why they goin' to have stone floors? Why they got them big old stone jars that come yesterday? Why ain't they goin' to have no stair carpets? Why ain't they goin' to have no window-curtings?"

"They are, too, crazy, and they gone and built that old vanilla right on where we used to pick checkerberries, and he's goin' to put a outlandish Dago top right on this here well, the kind they have in It'ly where they all wear rags and eat lemon-skins."

"Nobody won't keep me from drinkin' out of this well when it's got a Dago top."

"Nobody won't never stop me from goin' on Cedar Plains if I've got a mind ter. I got as good a right as they got."

"I'd just as soon heave a rock right now at that there vanilla. I don't care for it. I ain't afraid of no tin-faced I-talian dudes."

At last came a letter announcing the proposed arrival of the villa furniture. The buckboard with the white horse halted again under the tulip-tree and this time Mr. Pawket with unwonted sense of haste intercepted the letter. The Rural, whose Rough Rider hat was now discarded for a black-velvet tam-o'-shanter adorned with a coquettish pink rose, rigidly resigned it to his eager grasp.

Mr. Pawket, for all his preoccupation, was not blind to the pink rose; he quickly got its sense and made the usual deduction.

"When does the weddin' take place?" he asked, facetiously.

The rigidity around the corners of the Rural's mouth did not lessen as she replied with the evasion Brook Center found piquant, "Next day after Never."

Having successfully warded off inquiry as to personal plans, the Rural returned to her rightful prerogatives of newsmonger, demanding:

"How's Mis' Pawket's Everything gittin' along? I got a couple shoe-buttons fer her. She'd better hurry up and finish it; I hear there is four more in town startin' Everything Jars. Seems there's a sort of rivalry of who's goin' to be the first to get a Everything into the vanilla."

A look of calamity shaded Mr. Pawket's face, but he accepted the two shoe-buttons with dignified reserve.

"All she needs now is a harness buckle and a couple peanut-shells," he explained, nonchalantly. "I can get them fer her easy enough; the twins have been helping her some, one with a sinker and the other with a hook and eye. 'Tain't likely any one can git their jar in afore hern. I wouldn't advise nobody to nerve themselves up to it. There's been rumors," added Mr. Pawket, gravely--"there's been rumors as some one is tryin' to git up a rockery fer the vanilla. Now I wouldn't advise 'em to. The lady will want to tinker with that herself. But if everybody is itchin' to help, why don't they take up a nice collection er white door-knobs to trim up the garden paths?"

The mail maiden smiled a contemptuous smile; her black eyes held like sediment the look of repudiation.

"Ah, door-knobs!"--scornfully. "What's the use Of givin' up your curios and souvenirs to folks like that? They don't know how to appreciate it! I got a better use for my door-knobs. They 'm peculiar, them two is; they don't know nothin'. You heard that about the bedrooms, I presume?"

Mr. Pawket, a worried look settling on his kind face, peered up at the Rural; he took off his sun-hat and fanned himself with it.

"The bedrooms?" he questioned, falteringly. "D' ye mean that comical cage-like where they goin' to sleep outdoors?"

The Rural smiled scornfully; she adjusted the pink rosebud with a haughty, gauntleted hand.

"I mean the walls," shortly. "Plaster walls. Yes, sir, that's what I mean and I know what I'm talkin' about--rough walls, plaster, like a cellar. I know what I'm talkin' about, for it's my intended has the job; he's 'most crazy about it, my intended is, it's gone all over the Center and every one laughin' and teasin' him about it.... She's wrote it herself in a

letter with that same honey-bee onto the envelope. 'I want the bedroom walls to be rough plaster,' that's what she's went and wrote, 'of a pale yellow colorin' Mr. Badgely will choose. Please allow him to mix the color' (ain't it awful?) 'and put it on very rough' (she says). 'I want the grain especially coarse and rich' (she says). 'Coarse and rich!'" The Rural lifted dramatic eyes, inquiring again, "Ain't that terrible?"

Mr. Pawket hesitated. An idea of loyalty possessed him; he made a feeble attempt at seeming to support the unknown lady's taste.

"Er course, as I look at vanillas--" he began, weakly.

But the Rural interrupted him with a vicious clip of her lean brown jaws. "Vanillas?" with scornful inflection. "Vanillas?" She lashed the white horse into a sprawling stagger as she snapped, "She don't know nothin' about vanillas!" and rattled confidently away, calling back, scornfully; "She don't know nothin'; she 'ain't never had no instruction; she don't reelize that there's such things as wall-papers. 'Coarse and rich,'" sneered the Rural. She peered back over her trim young shoulder, adding: "They say their furniture has come. Everybody is down to the junction, studyin' it. I'm glad it ain't mine."

It was true that the furniture had arrived. Braving the vicissitudes of sea routes; badly shipped by an Italian warehouse, and roughly handled at an American port, still the furniture had arrived. It had been dumped out of its crated cars at the little Brook Center station. To the lover of Flemish and Spanish carving, to the connoisseur of Genoese cabinets and Italian intarsia, to the student of time-fumed designs and forms, the coming of this furniture might well have been an event; for by a freak of destiny, on the little platform of an obscure country junction were assembled the hoardings of centuries of tradition, the adored heirlooms of a long line of ancestry. One huge case, half wrecked, showed the gleam of Florentine brasses; another, crated and roped, revealed faded Genoese brocades; slender broken

legs and edges of carved flaps protruded from battered sheathings. To some minds all this might have spelled a certain sort of poetry; to the curious group assembled at the junction it spelled eccentricity and, what was worse, a fixed and immoral shabbiness of existence!

The junction agent pointed out a half-crated table standing by itself; it looked inconceivably old and was of a timber unknown to Brook Center. Its rickety four legs, wrapped separately, tapered off into carvings of opulent nymphs and the wild, laughing faces of dryads and fauns--these legs were observed by the curious groups at the junction to be badly worn and honeycombed with worm-holes.

"For the vanilla," it was whispered from one to another; the junction agent, hand over mouth, bowed himself backward in mirth. "They say it's all from her home, and this is the dinin'-room table. My! My! My! ain't it awful, all them old, ancient things?"

Mr. Pawket, affecting a connoisseurship unconsciously copied from the architect, bent over the table, examining it; with vague puzzlement he passed his hand over its cut and hacked surface--surface on which hundreds of monks of the time of Clement III had whetted their restless knives.

"I don't onderstand it; I don't onderstand it"--the old farmer feebly shook his head--"unless it's she ain't used to nothin' better and he's kep' his mouth shut. 'Twould be like Willum to pertend he didn't care; he was always biddable. M' wife could feed him anythin' from pot-cheese to pork; he was always a great hand to keep the peace."

The junction master watched in leering silence the brittle collection of household fittings being lifted into carts. "Well, I guess I'm glad it ain't me is goin' to have 'em for neighbors," he observed, feelingly. "They 'll fall back on you a good deal, one thing and another; they 'm pretty well broken down in pocket--you can see that."

Mr. Pawket in dumb disappointment climbed up into his wagon and stooped to take the reins. For a few moments he chewed violently with his front teeth before he spat desperately into the junction geranium-bed, asserting with dignity:

"Oh, I guess you got no call to worry. 'Tain't as if they didn't have no friends in this country. Willum's sort of son to me, my own boy bein' long dead. Ef the worst comes to the worst I don't know but what I could make a fist to help him out. Whoa, there!" Mr. Pawket, rising in his seat, backed his team truculently. "Ef anythin's needed," he observed, superbly, "I shall see to it myself--'twould n't take me long to buy him a dining-room table and a few little fixin's so's he could hold up his head in the world."

All the way home Willum's friend pondered the thing. Once when the horses stopped to drink at a wayside trough he slapped his knee fiercely and said: "That's the ticket! Yes, sir, that's the size of it!" At dinner, after the twins had taken their departure, he suggested his plan to his wife; to his immense relief she met the thing in his own spirit.

"A golden-oak dinin'-table, anyway," argued Mr. Pawket. "One or two fancy fixin's so they can hold up their heads in the world."

"And shut people's mouths," agreed his wife. "That hotel-keeper's girl, now, I never see any one more sassy--she with an Everything only half done and sayin' she's goin' to be the first to get one into the vanilla, and yet talkin' something terrible behind them and their furniture's backs."

"How's your Everything?" asked Mr. Pawket, suddenly; a grim determination shot into the eyes under his hairy brows.

For answer his wife rose. Unwrapping some white mosquito-netting, she presented to view a large, bulbous object encircled with protuberances, excrescenced with golden knobbiness--this object,

strangely sticky, smelled something like bananas; it was the Everything, completed and unveiled. Mr. and Mrs. Pawket gazed upon it in silent admiration. As they stood lost in contemplation of its conglomerate goldiness, there came the sound of a sprightly whistle and light step, and the architect appeared in the doorway.

Mr. Badgely had by this time become an intimate member of the farm household. The two old people beamed upon him; Mr. Pawket waved him excitedly toward the table, announcing:

"Well, sir, it's finished. Take it or leave it; I don't know as you could find one any handsomer."

Mr. Badgely started theatrically. He was clad in white flannels and a white silk shirt; a golden-brown tie matched the brown of a dreaming fire in his eyes, and there were brown silk socks upon his shapely calf-skinned feet. The Pawkets, even in their absorption, noted that, if not really young, the architect suggested something very like youth. His dapper figure now bent reverently over the kitchen table on whose red-and-white-checked cloth reposed the gold jar; he drew a long breath.

"The--er--Everything!" he murmured. After a long and careful scrutiny of the golden object, he turned to Mr. Pawket.

"Really--it--it defies description--it is so--er--genuine! I confess I never have seen anything quite like it--anywhere. Mrs. Pawket, I do congratulate you."

"There's a rage for 'em now," explained Mr. Pawket, proudly, "but 't was she started the first one. She began the hull thing; we was foolish enough to mention ourn to the hotel-keeper's daughter, and now, as fur as I can gather, there's six Everythings started right here in Brook Center."

Mr. Badgely showed deep emotion. "Really, six Everythings? You surprise me. I had no idea the community boasted such--er--creative feeling."

The old farmer looked at the young man, then at his wife. "Tell him what you goin' to do," he commanded. Mrs. Pawket, however, twisted nervously at the end of the white mosquito-netting and said she felt too shy. Mr. Pawket with manly decision relieved her of the burden of explanation.

"Seems she's had it in her mind to finish that there Everything in time to have it on the center-table in the vanilla," he said; "and now she's gone and got me so het up with interest that I got to take a hand, too. Now, fer instance, the furniture--" The old man hitched himself nearer to the architect, saying in sepulchral tones of parental anxiety: "'Tain't fer me to interfere, but I seen the stuff. I been down to the junction and see what they got. Well, say, ain't it pitiful, all that old, ancient furniture?"

Mr. Badgely nodded his head with another sort of concern. "Perfectly rotten carelessness. But I've sent to town for a corking man who handles these things; he's coming out to-morrow with his staff. After all, it's merely a question of understanding period, and American restoration is diabolically clever."

But the old farmer waved the younger man grandly aside. "That's as may be; that's as may be," he said, hastily. "Put it in the kitchen or use it in the g'rage--I ain't one to advise waste; but see here, my young man"--he stared impressively into the architect's face--"I knowed Willum's folks. I know what he's used to and what he's got a right to expect. Ef he's lost money, that ain't none of my business, and ef he's married an Eytalian, that ain't no reflection on her. As I take it, they 'm all sorter down at heel in It'ly, and it seems they got now so they don't know no better. But I knowed Willum's folks. I know he should hold up his head in his own country."

A faint color stole into Mr. Pawket's gray-bearded face. Mrs. Pawket's eyes were fixed admiringly on her husband. Mr. Badgely bent his head in respectful listening. Mr. Pawket struck an attitude close to the Everything Jar. He was glad that the twins, with their habit of shrewd analysis, were not there as he said:

"I ain't rich--but," with a significant cough, "I ain't no one to stand by and see the hull Center pokin' the finger er shame at Willum and his furniture. The vanilla ... well, what's done is done, and it can't be helped: seems it's what they set their hearts on and some folks like to be strange-appearin', but the furniture--well, it don't suit, that's all! Willum's the kind should have what 's all the go--plush and satin and chenille-like." The old farmer looked at the architect meaningly; he felt himself suddenly a man of the world; he stood almost straight in his wrinkled boots, looking around the little kitchen fiercely and roaring: "Golden oak or bird's-eye maple! I got catalogues. Spare no expense. Get him what he needs. I'll back you!"

It was a moment full of significance. The architect, a man of many subtle perceptions, was quite aware of it. He himself had been worried over the general attitude of the country community toward the villa, which, he could see, had deeply disappointed and mortified anticipation. Rumors had reached him that the neighborhood not only repudiated the new building on the grounds of general distaste, but that a movement of ostracism had begun by which the intents and purposes of the occupants of the villa were to be balked and frustrated. Brook Center, so Mr. Badgely had divined, was keen for patronizing the newly arrived Italian lady with gifts of decorated umbrella-stands, lamp-shades, and door-mats; but, on the other hand, it had severely decided not to be patronized by the expected householders. Supplies of milk and cream could not be promised; fresh eggs, it appeared, were needed for home consumption; pranks were planned by the young people to further humiliate the supposedly downtrodden and financially embarrassed Willum. There had even

been talk of filling up the well--now topped by a graceful Italian canopy--with mud and stones; and one enterprising spirit had already chalked upon the bucket, "We don't want no Dagos to Brook Center." In short, it had begun to seem to the architect that the immediate atmosphere was unpropitious for a serene home-coming. Now, as he faced the eager old farmer, something like a solution dawned on him.

"Er--expense"--the architect repeated Mr. Pawket's word--"er--do I understand, sir, that besides that very rare and (ahem!) imposing specimen of Mrs. Pawket's handiwork--this Everything Jar--do I understand you to mean that you are so good as to wish to assist in the--er--interior furnishings?"

The old farmer eyed him with delight.

"That's the ticket," he roared. "You got it right; you're the man for my money." He struck an attitude of almost intoxicated satisfaction, roaring again: "Golden oak, that's what; none too good for such as him. Get him what he's used to. Him with that old, ancient furniture!" Mr. Pawket pressed a roll of extremely faded one-dollar bills into the architect's hand, repeating: "A golden-oak set fer the dinin'-room. I know where they have it slick and shinin'. Take yer catalogue and make yer pick. Cost! By the great gander! what do I care fer cost?" A fervor like that of a whirling dervish seized the old farmer. "Golden oak!" he roared. "Red-plush parlor suite." His gaze, falling upon the Everything, became radiant. He hitched his suspenders with broad effects of swagger, repeating once more, "It's what he's used to and the best ain't too good for how he was brought up."

* * *

At last arrived the morning of the day when the owners of the villa were expected, and it found the architect in a curious mixture of dread, amusement, doubt, and eagerness. The villa, its tiled roof melting softly through the filed tapers of dark cedars, was, he knew,

what it should be. He walked about the winding drives, his eyes dwelling upon clumps of imported cypress and rare fruit-trees, his approving glance sweeping over vistas landscaped by his own art, which clever art had set stone benches in lovely little dells or by pools where a mossy nymph sprayed the surrounding ferns.

Everything was as it should be. The walls of the white villa would soon be softened by young vines newly sprouting; the terraces had stretches of arcades and flowers; large terra-cotta pots filled with acacias and oleanders massed well against the white of the steps and the blue of the country sky. The whole scene was almost Italian--sunny, graceful, restful. The architect smiled happily and knew himself justified of his undertaking.

But within--within, where most he had dreamed mellowness--where most he had desired the sense of ripe and harmonious surroundings? Oh, the thing was too horrible, too outrageous! Could they possibly understand? Could William Folsom and this Italian wife of his ever be made to see how unavoidable, inevitable it had all been? Badgely, anxiously gnawing his lower lip, shook his head. "I'm a fool," he muttered; "and yet I vow I know of no other way. Talk about vendettas! they are queer here, really queer--if one were sufficiently to antagonize them!..."

The architect directed his steps to the big stucco garage, still a little raw-looking with its green shutters and tiles; there he encountered the head of the workmen who were engaged in restoring the much-suffering villa furniture. The alert, gray-clad man met him at the door and shook his head deprecatingly.

"Don't ask me about those heavenly things!" He waved despairing hands. "They are too lovely. I've been quoting Tasso to that little signorina of a writing-desk. But, dear man, we can't possibly install any of it for at least a month. These things are exquisite, priceless, but so antique they've got to be mothered like babies. The chests are about

the only things in condition, and they've lost their hinges and I've got to have the lovely brasses copied."

Stepping into the smartly cushioned car, Mr. Badgely sat himself down. He gave the order dreamily. With a perturbed yet dauntless expression he lay back on the soft cushions, gazing up to the whirling green of the trees as the car flew along the country road.

"It all depends on her--it really all depends upon her. If she's the real thing she'll understand and play the game; if she isn't--" He shook his head, put one long leg over the other, and groaned.

When, however, the train stopped at the Brook Center Junction and William Folsom, laughing, waved his hat, Mr. Badgely drew a long breath of relief, for at Folsom's side stood a tall, graceful cosmopolite, a being dark-eyed, daring, with the keen, lovable face of the aristocrat of the spirit--in short, a perfection of feminine understanding in very assured tailoring.

"She'll do," the architect told himself. His greetings were suave and deliberate, but of necessity, almost before the car sprang away from the junction, he began to explain that which was heavily on his mind. William Folsom leaned back in the car, his shining eyes dwelt upon old landmarks; he chuckled as he listened.

"You see, dear lady, your welcome is to be of the people--the forestiere--I wonder if I can make you understand in so short a time as we have? The entire countryside is at the villa now; they all told me they were coming to greet you--so"--he shot a look at Folsom--"I invited them."

The owner of the vanilla gave a mild war-whoop. "Oh, I say, this is enchanting! Badgely, old chap, I can picture your sufferings." Then, with a droll look at his wife: "She understands, bless her! She isn't the

idol of her own town for nothing!" Folsom turned and sketched the architect's perturbation to his wife.

"Have the goodness to mention the--er--Everything," insisted Mr. Badgely, grimly. "Have you ever seen one? No? Well, then, you needn't be so funny." He added desperately: "They are there now arranging the--er--golden oak and the (ahem!) the red-plush suite." He shuddered, reiterating: "Really, Billy, the thing was necessary. I didn't dare refuse. You've no idea how these people are antagonized by an Italian villa. It seems sort of shameful to them. They foam at the mouth. Why, unless I had been tactful you'd have had vendetta and Mafia and everything else wished on you."

Mrs. Folsom tried to comprehend. "The poor Littles!" She had a marvelous voice full of bird-like stirrings. Then she looked thoughtfully at the architect. "But we will say to them 'Forget it,'" adding, with a little pride, "I am learning William's slangs."

"Dear old gump, you forget that I was brought up in this very neighborhood." Folsom soothed the despairing architect, but he laughed immoderately. "His precious artistic sensibilities are having perfect duck fits," he shouted. "He's as mad as a wet hen."

But Mrs. Folsom leaned back, taking fresh breaths of air. "This is a green country," she announced, "and you have a little brown brook that winds, and great trees like cathedrals. Do you think that with all this around me I shall be staying to the salon remarking continuously upon the Jar of Everythings?"

Both men laughed and the architect kissed her hand.

When the car swept around the white shell drive and halted by the lower terrace, Folsom, with a whoop like a boy, sprang out; he ran joyfully forward, for there stood the old couple whose faces, to his home-coming sense, seemed like those of parents. Mr. Pawket

trembled slightly; he stood high-collared and coattailed, upon the glittering steps. Mrs. Pawket, in black silk, clove to his arm. The twins, in the heated wretchedness of Sunday clothes, stepped forward, and in the interests of sentiment stuck forth two wads of tightly bound pink roses. The Rural, blushing in a costume of very bright blue, wearing elbow mitts, and carrying a pink feather fan, introduced a sweet-smelling young man as "my intended."

Among the small groups of peering and excited neighbors was Mr. Fripp, the junction agent.

"Seems there's a good deal of excitement in the air. We 'ain't all been out like this sence the mad dog was shot down to Galloway's." When this gentleman was presented to Mrs. Folsom he drew himself up, looked at her suspiciously, and said, "Pleased to meet you." He cast the eye of a worldling over her quiet traveling costume and retired to nudge the Rural and remark: "Well, I see the furniture money 'ain't been spent on her back."

The lady of the vanilla looked about her with pure happiness. She met all introductions radiantly, sniffing rapturously at the twins' roses, lifting first one, then the other stodgy bunch.

"But you are all so kind!" The clear voice rippling with novelty and excitement gave a sense of thrill to the occasion. The mistress of the vanilla held Mrs. Pawket's perspiring hand.

"To know this lady--like the mother of Weeliam--and Mr. Pawket, my first American of the famous farmer trribes!"

The stranger's insecurity of English had its immediate triumph. The countryside had expected that she would chatter Italian like a predatory organ-grinder, but around this picturesque naïveté they clustered as they would around a lost child. Jessica Folsom met the

architect's eyes triumphantly, but he edged to her side and bent to whiff the roses, muttering, "The worst is yet to come."

However, the slender figure of Mrs. Folsom drifted from one to the other of her welcomers, unembarrassed, friendly, appealing. She put them immediately at their ease as she announced:

"We shall all at once have tea. On the terrace--my little festa! I, who find the home of my fathers in your new green country." A lovely color coming into her dark face, she burst into undulating Italian. "The first Dago she's spoke sence she's got here," commented Mr. Fripp, in an undertone. Once more he creaked up to the mistress of the villa, saying, loudly:

"Too bad about the furniture!"

The new-comer turned upon the junction agent liquid, long-lashed eyes. "Ah the garnitures of Bella Fortuna, they have been--how do you say it, Weeliam?--dislocated, smashed in traveling the great waves." She appealed anxiously to the junction agent. "I fear they are in great distress of breaking, but"--a light came into the appealing dark eyes--"but in your so practical country shall we not find the new?"

Mrs. Pawket, hearing this, suddenly nudged her husband, and Mr. Pawket realized that his moment had come. He took one or two ponderous steps forward, wiping his brow, clearing his throat. In his buzzing brain he sensed a great occasion, like a wedding or a funeral. He got a glimpse of Mrs. Pawket nodding her head urgently and mouthing his words after him as he roared:

"That's as may be; that's as may be." Again Mr. Pawket cleared his throat. He felt, as he afterward expressed it, "like he was grindin' a corn-hopper with nothing into it." Suddenly his gaze fell upon Willum, his boy, now a glad-looking man with a tender light in his

eyes and his arm around his dark-eyed wife. This, Mr. Pawket felt, was as it should be. It gave him sudden eloquence.

"I dunno," he said, and he bent a severe eye upon the Rural, Mr. Fripp, and the hotel-keeper's daughter--"I dunno but what we was gettin' a little sour-hearted, here in Brook Center. There has been some spites and a good many mean doin's and sayin's--namin' no names. What we didn't have was big feelin's. Everybody was nesty and nifty, and we all thought we know'd it all; but it seems that yet for all we didn't know much about vanillas nor that they could turn out so purty as this here vanilla has gone and turned."

William Folsom poked the architect in the ribs. "Hear! Hear!" he murmured, in a subdued voice.

Mr. Pawket mildly waited for these asides to conclude before he resumed: "Howsomever, it seems that one dear to us"--he fixed his eyes on Willum, but in spite of him his gaze wandered off to Willum's lady--"one dear to us has got back from foreign lands and built a vanilla." The old farmer turned to Mrs. Folsom with a burst of eloquence. "Sence that has happened, by gum! our whole lives is changed and we know more about It'ly than I ever thought we should; and so with regards to this here new vanilla house and a few little presents and one thing and another, why, all I can say is, Mrs. Folsom, we've gone and did as we'd be done by."

There was something very like a cheer at the conclusion of these remarks. Meanwhile, at a sign from the architect, the great carved doors of the villa swung open and the little group pressed in.

They stepped into the cool, dim court with its paved floors and delicately woven stairways. Mrs. Folsom clasped her hands with pleasure over a wide window-seat which gave on a western slope where the gold sun was speared by the tall black trees. But Folsom, to

whom the architect gave a nervous cue, hurried to the sala da mangiare, and thrust back its sumptuous Genoese curtains.

There under the iron candelabra of the Medicis stood a shining table of varnished splendor; on it, as if hoping to deaden its aggressive luster, was a marvelous strip of Paduan lace, while around its stodgy newness were six smug chairs of a very palpable "golden oak." Folsom threw up his hands in apparent joy and astonishment.

"Great Harry!" The young man's voice was extraordinarily exalted. He bent over and touched the varnished surfaces with a reverent hand. "A perfectly new dining-table--a present--a complete set of absolutely unused chairs! Oh, I say! This won't do--it's preposterous! Somebody has been getting gay." The young man first looked suspiciously at the architect, then turned and with severe eyes surveyed Farmer Pawket's shamefaced elation.

"So it's you, sir," he said. "Now look here!" Folsom strode up and put his firm hand on the old man's chest. "Brace up and tell what you know about this. Look me in the eye and tell me you didn't do it. No, you can't hide behind Mother Pawket." Folsom's grave glance reduced Mrs. Pawket to a helpless flutter. "She's probably put you up to it; she's a designing woman." Folsom went eagerly over to the dark-eyed Italian lady. "Jessica dearest, look at all this. Golden oak. Store furniture, by Jove! Mr. Pawket's gift to you and me."

The lady of the vanilla did not betray Mr. Badgely's hope of her. Widening her lovely eyes at the rich solidities before her, she slipped to the old man's side and seized his hands. A strange sense of fog enveloped Mr. Pawket; he stole a scared glance sidewise at the Rural. "It was all for me," the vibrant voice insisted. "This Weeliam he is favorito--he thinks the whole world is for his gift; but kind Signor Pawket thinks only of me; he knew"--with exquisite slow arrangement of accents--"how interested and happy I should be to at once understand the practical American ways--and he knew, with such

understanding, how I must save and guard the poor destructed--what you call them?--foornitures, of my own people."

"Now, now, now!" protested Mr. Pawket, feebly.

Mr. Fripp, however, nodded to the Rural. "Well, it seems she knowed all the while that that there furniture warn't no good."

At last, at the architect's somewhat desperate solicitation, they all turned their steps to the salon. Mr. Badgely, making pathetic dumb-show, dragged William Folsom to the rear.

"Nerve yourself," he whispered, "nerve yourself. I'm afraid it's going to be worse than I feared. It seems that there were actually six of them--only one is not quite finished. The competition was very tense--and they all arrived in my absence. Old man, hold me! I'm about all in!"

Mr. Folsom, with appropriate concern, put his arm about his friend. Together they braced to meet any shock. When at last they lifted their eyes it was to stand locked in awe and admiration. Over the shoulders of the group in front of them they could see into the salon. It was furnished with a sofa and six chairs upholstered in scarlet plush. There was also a center-table on which was spread a red plush cover. On this table, each with a card tied with a ribbon bow and bearing the name of its maker, stood ranged in solid splendor six golden "Everythings."