

JANUARY, 1914

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YOUNG'S MAGAZINE



THE TIN STAR

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By Inez Thompson

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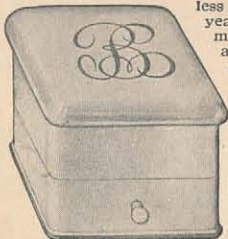
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YOUNG'S MAGAZINE

Volume XXVII

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Yearly Subscription, \$1.50 in advance. Single Copies, 15 cts.

Entered at the New York City Post Office as second-class mail matter

Published Monthly by **COURTLAND H. YOUNG**

Office, 124 East 25th Street, New York City

NOTE.—The Editor will be pleased to consider stories of from 1,500 to 5,000 words and novelettes of from 25,000 to 40,000 words; where stamps are enclosed, every effort will be made to secure their safe return in case of rejection. All MSS. should be typewritten or in very clear handwriting.

Dashing, Daring, Defiant,
Dainty, Delightful, Disdainful

Diana of the Man Hunt

By FORREST HALSEY

In February

YOUNG'S MAGAZINE

A CAPTIVATING girl, reared with the expectation of luxury, finds herself hounded by creditors owing to her father's failure to make good. Her ambition turns toward achieving a husband but for some subtle reason quarry after quarry eludes her. At length she finds a willing prey but scorns his inferior past. The disentangling of this love affair creates an absorbing novelette.

THE TIN STAR

By Inez Thompson

(Author, of "Herself," "This Queer Life," "Calla," etc.)

THE gardener had decorated the small platform with a bank of tubbed white chrysanthemums, wonderful in themselves, but open to criticism as a background. When Maura Wayne, whose song opened the program, moved up the three steps and turned, outlined blackly against the mammoth, pallid blooms, there was an instant, vibrant silence as though the school saw her for the first time. She smiled vaguely down as she waited through the prelude, then straightened and clasped her hands behind her as she took breath for her first note.

A very black cross went down against her name in Miss Riggson's Notes on Department. Miss Kittrick, Directress of Physical Culture, made a like mark, and Miss Hollaway, across the hall from them, underlined the one she made; while Madame LaRoche, sitting apart in solitary state, kept her lorgnon centered for a full half-minute on this particular pupil.

Misses Riggson, Kittrick and Hollaway, observing the lorgnon, exchanged carefully blank glances, and felt emboldened to make concerted attack when they were gathered for tea and conference in Madame's sitting-room.

"With the standard of the school in mind," Miss Riggson began, "I wish to ask——"

"You mean to ask about Maura Wayne," interrupted Miss Hollaway, unpardonably; "and you are about to make the usual excuses for her. But I am exasperated to the point of asking if we haven't laid too much stress on her good qualities? May we not, this once, discuss her without sentiment? I would like to know what the matter *is* with Maura Wayne!"

Madame LaRoche said nothing, but

her smile was encouraging; and an unmistakably eager expression about the mouths of the tea-taking teachers told Miss Hollaway, who was half scared at her own unprecedented speech that her proposal was welcome.

"Take her smile," she added. "What *is* there so irritating about her smile?" Miss Kittrick put down her empty cup with a click.

"Her smile expresses what her body expresses," she declared. "Did you notice her standing attitude? And the very school noticed her—her abandon of body—against those flowers. I have drilled her privately on position—have criticised her in class——"

"And her voice!" broke in Miss Hollaway again. "I have come to the conclusion that I cannot get her to speak with a proper inflection, ever. She uses the same inexpressibly intimate, caressing, coaxing tone to all of *us* and to Jane who polishes the hall floors! I was obliged to admonish her on that point this morning, and she was impudent beyond words. She said that she could not and would not think eternally of her voice or her words or her manner; that she had decided that our definition of 'lady' was a polite evasion of 'liar,' and that she wouldn't be proper or good because it was correct to be so, but because she wanted to be; and if she wanted to be improper and the other thing she would be *that*—but that whatever she was she would be honest. And she ended by informing me that we all—*all* of us—made her 'tired!'"

"I defy anyone," said Miss Kittrick solemnly, "to look at that girl without thinking of the body under her clothes. It is a superbly healthy and graceful body, I grant, but I find a sad significance in the fact that her poses are so instinctively — inescapably — suggestive,

in spite of her youth and innocence. In the last six months it has become noticeable. She can no more restrain her movements than a—*a* panther. There is some powerful natural tendency there, I fear—inherited, no doubt—”

There was an inquiring pause. They all looked at Madame LaRoche. That personage, with her inimitable manner of gracious condescension, passed her cup to Miss Riggson, and by a downward glance conveyed to Miss Holloway that she desired the footstool placed more comfortably under her beautifully shod feet. Then, in her cool, soft, distant voice, she enlightened them as to Maura Wayne.

“It goes without saying that I informed myself as to the antecedents of this pupil, as is my invariable custom. Her father was of distinguished ancestry—the untitled branch of the Middlesex Digbys. The mother, well, I fancy it was a case of infatuation and hasty marriage. Sir Maury Digby, who seems to have had a fondness for his misguided kinsman, wrote, in reply to my inquiries, assuring me of the correctness of the information that had been given me, but making it very clear that neither he nor any of the family would acknowledge the relationship beyond admitting it. The girl is named for him—Maura—and he made a handsome settlement on the father, I believe. Both father and mother died in the child’s infancy, and she was placed here by her aunt. I think that the aunt may explain what we find—er—difficult in our young charge. I recall her as an amazingly handsome young woman, of sufficiently good appearance, but hopelessly American, of course. She seemed to have a fitting appreciation of what was due her niece’s superior blood, and agreed to my rather humiliating conditions very readily. I stipulated that she was to see her niece on the Christmas holidays, only, and that the child’s summers were to be spent in quiet places of my choosing, where the aunt might visit her weekly if she so desired. I doubled my tuition fee for the first five years. It has been paid regularly. The standard of our school is a costly simplicity in dress—and my extras

have never been questioned. But I agree with you that there seems an ineradicable something. In short, I mean to try what a change in dress and an earnest talk will do toward subduing the unfortunate tendencies we have remarked. The Christmas holidays are approaching, and the change to her aunt’s mode of life may serve to shock Miss Wayne into an appreciation of our code. If all fails, of course—” She gestured daintily, and Maura Wayne was consigned to oblivion with that two-inch movement of the aristocratic hand.

“She is tall—perhaps to lengthen her skirts would be wise,” agreed Miss Kittrick, with the magic of Sir Maury Digby’s name hampering her tongue; “and a remonstrance from *you*, Madame—”

And Madame inclined her slightly gray coiffure with the marquise-of-the-old-régime air that was not her least valuable asset. And when the door was shut between the clever under-teachers and her clever self she held her slim arms up in the air as though appealing for some burden to be lifted from her. At times the orthodoxy and inch-wide conventionality of her assistants drove Madame into a Gallic fury. But they never knew it.

They never knew, and wouldn’t have understood if they had known, the manner of her straightforward talk with the subject of their complaints. Maura answered the summons to Madame’s sitting-room without fear and without suspicion. She had an enormous admiration for that delicately cold lady, and an unquenchable belief in the kindness of Fate, that the pin-prick attacks of the assistants had not even slightly disturbed. Moreover she expected to be asked—as indeed she was—into Madame’s dressing-room, with the subtle, exquisite wraiths of scent in the air, and the rose shades on the lights, and the delightful cleanliness and order and restrained luxury suggesting as near an approach to intimacy as Madame would ever allow. There were perhaps a half dozen girls who were able to boast that they had been “interviewed” in Madame’s dressing-room while that gentle autocrat reclined in a cushioned chair and took her

chocolate; and the privilege puzzled them even while they boasted. But Madame unerringly knew in what surroundings she could accomplish certain results.

Lili, the swarthy, fat Provençal maid who was as silent and discreet and attentive as Madame's shadow, was attending to the superlatively perfect nails as Maura tapped her confident way in past study and sitting-room. The gray light of the sleety December afternoon wavered back from the muslin and rose silk-hung panes, a merry little fire snapped on the bright hearth, the lights shimmered soft and warm through their rose shades, and a vase of scarlet carnations added spice to the faint scent and a high note of gay color to the cozy room. Maura made her too brief, too friendly curtsey, and then beamed about the four walls with a frank approval that would have driven Miss Riggson to chill speechlessness. Madame, on the contrary, nodded appreciation of the unspoken delight.

"One's living-place, like one's body, should have its heart," she said cordially. "Come, then, into this heart of my home, and—Lili, put the tabouret with the sweets over to that chair. Now then, we may talk. You welcome the Christmas season that takes you to your aunt?"

Maura looked up in candid surprise from the silver-papered box over which she was bending. Save for an occasional perfunctory inquiry, Madame had never recognized the existence of that aunt who, even to Maura, seemed to belong to a separate life.

"Why, thank you—yes," she said, a trifle uncertainly; and then as her recollection of her only home came to her more warmly, she smiled in the way Miss Riggson found so objectionable, and her lithe body relaxed to a comfortable slouch in the easy chair. "Yes," she said again, "it is so jolly with Aunt Claudia!" She might have been speaking to a classmate, but Madame, coolly observant of the smile and the relaxing and the manner, overlooked the lapse.

"When you leave us finally," she asked, "what are you intending—to make your home with your aunt?"

The relaxed young body tensed itself quickly and the black-pupiled, hazel eyes

darkened to brown. The up-curving, very red mouth straightened and a quiver of intensity trembled the lower lip. With two such features it had been sheer prodigality in Nature to add silver-yellow hair with a loose wave brightening its Saxon fairness, a skin as white as milk, and wonderfully regular features redeemed from a suggestion of heaviness by the quickening and abbreviating of the American mother's blood and contours. Just where a hint of coarseness came in it was impossible to say; perhaps because it was so deeply within. But the mouth—beautiful as it was—had never pleased Madame; and there was a trace of sharpness in her voice as she answered the appeal of its tender unsteadiness.

"Is it that you are sorry because your future is so uncertain? Or sorry that you have been so heedless as to have given it no thought?"

Quick pink stained the oval face. Not the scarlet of anger nor the flush of shame, but the lesser color of a transient emotion.

"I had not thought," she said, "that I need question as to my future. There is enough. Aunt Claudia has told me so. We shall go abroad, probably, where living is more easily managed on a small income. But I had supposed—I had intended—to stay here for as long as might be. I have three more——"

Madame LaRoche withdrew her fingers from under Lili's buffer. As noiselessly as a ballooning cloud, that observant attendant rose and went out.

"Come closer, child, here." Madame gestured to the cushioned stool that Lili had vacated. "Give me your hand and look at me, and search me so that you may know I speak from my heart to you. And open yours to me. Child, you will not come back to us, and it is you who tell me so. Every look, every smile of yours, for six months past, has told me so. You are innocent, still, but no longer ignorant. Vaguely you know that you are asking questions of Life, though you do not put those questions into words. What will be answered, what Life is to give you, neither I nor any other can tell; but what you are to pay—the easily paid

and yet never paid price that will be asked of you, few can foresee more clearly than I. Attend to me."

She put her other hand over the slim white ones she held, and briefly, kindly, mercilessly, she destroyed the last gauzy veil between the questioning eyes and Truth.

"Maura Wayne has reached the weeping stage," observed Miss Kittrick a few days later, with the cynicism of one familiar with the psychology of the maturing girl.

"But tears are becoming to her," Miss Hollaway retorted, cattishly, "else she wouldn't indulge in them."

It was perfectly true. With the dissecting curiosity of her age and sex Maura had studied herself in grief, and had found that her great eyes looked like amber and jet glimmering up through crystal pools when she cried; that her small nose was pathetic when daintily pink at the tip, and that the droop of her scarlet lips was so pathetic that she almost wished to kiss and console their mirrored appeal. But when she looked at her pleasing sorrow long enough it seemed to dissolve and to leave her face to face with a consciousness unknown yet hatefully familiar, mysterious yet sickeningly real. It was the Self that Madame had revealed to her in such fashion that never again could its existence be forgotten or ignored; and Maura Wayne wept more or less continuously for two weeks *not* because the visage of Truth was so terrible, but because she could no longer deceive herself as to what lay under her own exquisite color and form and seeming candor. And to know one's self is to become aware of a sleepless foe within the citadel who must be endlessly circumvented because he can never be expelled.

"You have subdued Miss Wayne so amazingly," ventured Miss Riggson to Madame, "that one is forced to wonder whether a change so decided can be permanent. The very fact that she never lapses makes her perfect conduct seem a pose. She is engrossed with being plain-tive and reproachful."

"As yet," said Madame, "she has encountered no one so interesting to her as

she is to herself. Her egotism is a thing that time will correct."

"To be sure," Miss Riggson conciliated, "she is but a child." And in payment for that hypocrisy Fate elected that it should be Miss Riggson who encountered a distinguished feminine figure in the dusk of the corridor outside Madame's room, and who genuflected to it in the belief that the elder sister or successfully young mother of some pupil had come for a conference with the Head under pretext of chaperoning on the holiday journey home.

"Can I be of service? Do you wish to find Madame LaRoche?" The inquiry was in the manner of tonal simplicity and instinctive dignity that Miss Riggson strove to impart to her young ladies.

"Yes, I—thank you so much, Miss Riggson—but if you would ask Madame if she will spare me a moment," faltered the Unknown; and Miss Riggson gasped in wrath.

"Maura Wayne?"

"Yes, Miss Riggson. These are my new things that Madame has been superintending—they've just come and I thought she'd wish to see them on me. Do you think I might knock?"

Indignation strove with curiosity in the woman heart of Miss Riggson, and curiosity won. She turned back and tapped the knocker against its metal plate.

"May I bring in Maura Wayne for a moment?" she asked, stepping inside at Madame's summons. The lorgnon lifted to assist in Madame's brief penetrating look, and Miss Riggson felt that her indignation, her curiosity and her subterfuge were as apparent as though her body were glass.

"But certainly," said Madame with the faintest of smiles as she closed her book. Pink and prickly, Miss Riggson stood aside and waved the transformed girl through the doorway with what she hoped was a condescending gesture, and turned, with avid eyes, to see what artifice had so deceived her critical senses.

But there was no artifice. There was but the revelation of the Maura Wayne who had been extinguished under the one-piece blue serge frock and turn-over white collar that was the compulsory

dress of the school. Miss Riggson saw, all at once, that the simplicity of it had been more artificial than the modish attire Madame had selected. Diana, made mortal, could be made ridiculous by commonsense shoes and a Windsor tie; and the long lines and graceful contours that had defied the restraint of the characterless costume, subsided in their individual setting most decorously. Madame's unerring taste was evidenced in every detail: one got but an impression of richness, of costly restraint, of perfection in every hidden accessory, all subordinated to the culminating point of the face under the quaintly simple hat. Miss Riggson found herself against her will recalling Sir Maury Digby of the Middlesex Digbys, as she marked the carriage of head and slim shoulders accented by the skilled cut of broadcloth; but her captious scrutiny seized on the flaw she felt, rather than saw, in the flower-like face in its setting of piquantly tilted brim and gleaming furs. The Digby blood should have tightened those scarlet lips, lifted the perfect lids a hair's breadth, cooled the too eager shine of the extraordinary eyes, and steadied the softly rounded chin. Beauty—even loveliness of an unusual sort, she acknowledged; but with an intuition that amounted to confidence she felt that the flaw concealed in that exquisite mechanism would one day mar the whole, and she was sorry that she could not feel sorrier for the prophecy, even while her never-appeased heart contracted with bitterness that one face should be so dowered and another so denied.

"It is very well done," said Madame, lowering her lorgnon, her deliberate scrutiny finished. "Is it not quite perfect, Miss Riggson?"

Affecting to study the ensemble she had already noted in each detail, Miss Riggson had a curiously detached sense of the contrast her own face made, seen opposite that rare loveliness. Her own sallowness, her spectacles, her thin brown hair and pallid mouth stung her in separate and combined memory, and she ceased to be sorry for the flaw in Maura Wayne.

"It is quite perfect," she agreed stiffly. "Of course it alters Miss Wayne's ap-

pearance materially, and its effect on the discipline of the school——"

"These things are for traveling, and are not to be worn until the day of departure for the vacation," Madame interrupted, taking up her book. "They are not to be shown, my dear, nor discussed."

Two gracious nods sent them both out instantly. Miss Riggson made pretense of turning to the right, but stepped back into the corridor to watch the tall, regally moving figure going its incongruous way to dormitory and discipline. She was puzzled at such a departure from custom as she would have called impossible. Madame's restrictions in the matter of dress extended even to the home life of her pupils, and her attitude on the Psychology of Attire had earned for her the respectful attention of educators. Neither Miss Kittrick nor Miss Hollaway was able to advance any satisfactory explanation of her departure; but then, neither of them knew Maura's Aunt Claudia!

II

Maura was pleasantly conscious of her heart beats as she followed her porter's red cap toward the train gate through a jostling, noisy crowd, with the exciting, unwonted noise of the great clamorous terminal in her ears, and her cheeks still tingling from the experiences of her just-finished journey.

At the Junction where she had left the special car from the school, the chaperoning teacher had put her in her seat of the Pullman, informed the conductor that she was one of Madame's young ladies, tipped the porter to insure attention, seen to her every want, provided her with an approved novel, and then left her, with polite farewells and the usual formula of season's wishes.

Novels, sparingly allowed throughout the year, were permitted by Madame on journeys, as a counter-attraction to the excitement of traveling. But Maura had been awakened to the degree of self-knowledge and expectation that makes the most romantic fiction a pallid thing beside the vivid actuality that any hour may bring.

Instead of plunging at once between

the alluring red covers, she had swung her chair about and looked up and down the opposite aisle; a thing expressly warned against by the chaperoning teacher. And it had been as enlivening as watching a spark travel along a sprinkled trail of gunpowder. Men and women, meeting her eyes, had stared; but with a difference! The women had looked at her as Miss Riggson so often looked; but there had been a young man with ardent brown eyes and another with very bright blue eyes, and a middle-aged, interesting, iron-jawed man, who had hardly taken their gaze from her for the rest of the way. One after another they made errands forward in the car to speak to the conductor or to go for a very brief stay in the smoking compartment; and then they would walk back the aisle toward her, very slowly, staring shamelessly and so intently that her head seemed dragged about for a fleeting answering glance. Once she had dropped her book and the two young men had leaped for it and had struck their heads together as they bent. In spite of her flutter that had set her school-bred nerves to tingling, she had giggled outright, and they had bowed haughtily and had kept in their seats for fully five minutes afterward.

The middle-aged man hadn't made her feel so fluttery but had given her a not unpleasant sensation of fear. He narrowed his eyes and set his jaw most thrillingly when he met her look, just as the most intense matinee hero would have done, had matinee heroes happened in real life; and once she had thought that he meant to stop and speak, but the conductor had come up to ask if she wished anything from the buffet, and then had stayed talking of his little grandchildren, and afterward had come back to point out interesting bits of scenery, and the pastime of the three admirers was at an end. The blue-eyed young man had crowded very close to her on the way out of the car, but the conductor had appeared again, had put her specially in charge of a station porter, and had stopped the blue-eyed young man to ask if he hadn't made a mistake in the bag he had taken from the pile the train porter gave out.

Maura found herself palpitating, all at once, with a realization of what a fearsome thing it would have been had the young man actually spoken to her. It was nice to be looked at in such fashion—so pleasant that it certainly could not be among the myriad forbidden things that Madame had rehearsed to her; but to think of speech with one of the unknowns was like hesitating with the key in the lock of Bluebeard's forbidden chamber: it was precisely because she did not know to what it might open that she was afraid.

She dodged through a knot of people and half ran through a cloud of escaping steam from the panting engine, purely from instinct of concealment; but it was as much evasion of the new self that threatened her as of an outer alarm.

Through the mass congealed beyond the high gates she saw a tall figure in black, noticeable even at that distance. Aunt Claudia always wore black, and her hats always seemed to have an upstanding, trig, spirited effect, however closely after the mode they were. Maura felt a contraction in her throat, a rush of feeling that swept away her past week's unhappiness, her present sophistication, and every fluttering recollection of her first adventure. She remembered, all at once, that it was Christmas week, that there would be wonderful things to eat and pretty house things to wear, and something too wonderful for words at her plate Christmas morning; and ignoring her lengthened skirt and her quite grown-up effect, she began to run on tiptoe toward the stately black figure standing back a little from the center of the crowd.

The trig hat turned toward her as the people between made way, and her eyes met Aunt Claudia's full, and so near that she saw how startling the bright pink and white of her aunt's face seemed under the wide, very black meshes of a tight-drawn veil; and then, with no sign of recognition, the hat turned front, away to the stream of arrivals still lagging through the gate.

Maura felt a constriction in her throat that was half hurt and half self-accusation. Somehow, although she had al-

ways meant to ask to see Aunt Claudia between the holiday visits, the full year continued to pass, and there was always the oddly constrained business of getting acquainted; but not to be recognized was new. She stumbled forward.

"Oh, Aunt Claudia, I'm inside these grown-up things! And I'm so glad to see you—so glad!" Wet-eyed she flung herself against the Persian lamb coat, burying her face in the scented softness, and so missed her aunt's look. But her arms were gripped by hands that hurt.

"Maura!" The tone rather than the hold brought her head up: she hadn't remembered such a rasp in Aunt Claudia's voice. Through the broad meshes of the veil the handsome bright brown eyes were staring down at her exactly as Miss Kittrick had stared, and the scarlet mouth was set precisely as Miss Riggs's colorless one used to set.

"Who got those things for you!"

"Why—Madame did. I've grown so tall, you see. Don't you like them, Aunt Claudia?" The queer tightness of the questioning mouth did not soften.

"What did Madame say when she got them for you? Didn't she send any message to me? Anything at all?"

"No, nothing. It was just that I was so tall—and they're only to be worn when I travel. I didn't dream you'd dislike them——"

Red flushed all over the plump, firm cheeks, and the tense mouth forced itself up in a sickly smile.

"Oh, I don't! You took me by surprise—and it changes you so. For pity's sake don't look as though I meant to eat you, child! Give me your checks—come along."

She turned and walked very fast toward the baggage-checking window. For a quarter of a second Maura stared after her with a curious tingling sensation in her face, not at all like the warm confusion she felt when Madame La-Roche corrected her. She was actually angry. And it didn't seem to be anger at Aunt Claudia but at an unknown woman whose voice was disagreeable and who hadn't been sufficiently well-bred to greet her as one should greet a guest. With immense dignity she threw

her fur neck-piece across her shoulder, muffling her unsteady chin, and walked slowly after the brisk figure in black.

Someone brushed her elbow in passing—brushed it again so lengthily that the contact could not have been accidental. She looked up into the face of the middle-aged, interesting man who had looked at her so closely in the Pullman. He looked down, so reassuringly that she was instantly conscience-stricken that she should have thought his touch rudely intentional; and at the pleasant almost paternal smile he gave her, she smiled back, shyly.

"Rather a crowd, isn't it?" he commented; and then, casually: "Have you been met? Your people, your friends? Can I be of any assistance?"

"Thank you, no—my aunt is seeing to my baggage——" Her voice took on, involuntarily, the shyness that characterized Madame's young ladies so charmingly, in their early association with the unknown masculine. The man looked at her again, sharply, and then ahead in search of the aunt. The tall, black figure faced about at that instant and saw him. It seemed to Maura that a smoke-shrouded flame streamed down on her, and she felt her wrist grasped almost viciously by the capable, black-gloved hand.

"I told you to come with me!" Aunt Claudia snapped. "How did he come to speak to you? Was he on the train? Did he speak to you before?"

Speechless, burning with mortification, Maura dragged her apologetic eyes around to the inoffensive middle-aged man on her right. He had disappeared. A pink-nosed, worried woman with small children beyond counting was jostling her on that side; but far ahead she saw a tall, impressive-looking figure that she recognized, walking fast.

She faced about to her aunt, feeling that odd tingling in her face again, and instinctively resorted to an imitation of Madame's own cold tone of displeasure.

"No, he did not speak to me on the train, and he merely offered his services, now, in case my people had not met me. You are hurting my wrist."

In her throat a throb of fear at her

own daring pulsed painfully; but she fought that it should not show in her face. The meshes of Aunt Claudia's veil showed blackly against a turgid red, and she released the wrist she held.

"I'm so nervous I'm most ready to jump out of my skin!" she said vehemently. "I got up with the worst sick headache this morning—Minnie'll tell you so. Let's get home as soon as we can. You've got to be careful who you let speak to you—a girl can't take any chances, nowadays. Keep right with me."

And she was to stay with this woman three weeks! Shocked at her disdainful phrase Maura looked sidewise at the effective figure in black to correct her mental revulsion, and instead of correcting, deepened it. She found herself recalling a phrase that Leila Hilford, the most worldly-wise of her class, had used in criticising a famous beauty of society.

"Nobody is really afraid of her," Leila had said loftily, "because she won't last. In a very few years she'll be the washer-woman type—I heard Aunt say so to Mother. There's a plebeian strain in her, and she's too much everything; too big eyes, too red mouth, too much laugh and tears and all that; and even now, no matter what she wears, one is conscious of her corset."

It fitted Aunt Claudia. There was too much chin, as she bent through the window giving her address, too much bright color in face and lips, too unmistakable evidence of powder, too noticeable veil, too obviously trim figure. In negligee one knew that those released curves would sag to unpleasant flaccidity. Maura looked down her own slim length from waist to ankle, as the modish blue broadcloth suggested it. Comparison would not have suggested itself to her six months before. Even now it was a hardly comprehended result of her resentment. But as she lifted her eyes they met the bright brown eyes turned on her with an expression that drove the last shred of complacency from her mind and left her very young and very much afraid of something she didn't understand. Yet on that very breath the look altered. Aunt Claudia's round white

chin quivered and the bright eyes filled with tears. She put out her black gloved hand.

"Come home—come home with your cross old aunt, dearie," she said unsteadily, "and put on your little dress with the turnover collar and be her little girl again." Maura felt her throat contract.

"Oh, you're not cross, you're dear! only I'm a selfish, horrid little beast. And I—I'm sorry I'm so grown-up, Aunt Claudia. I want—I want to be your little girl—more than ever, at Christmas."

Cuddled close to the scented fur shoulder, she lay back happily in the taxicab and chattered. With no intent to deceive she told of the simple side of school life: how hateful Miss Hollaway was, and how Leila Hilford had snubbed Miss Riggson, in class, and how they had the spread in Cora Morris' room after it had been discovered and forbidden in another girl's, and how perfectly stunning Madame had looked that morning as she stood in the library against the tapestry of Fontainebleau and said good-by, and how lazy Irma Williston had actually finished dressing after they were in the special Pullman. Such things seemed to please Aunt Claudia and she found herself dwelling on them avidly because they made that terrible interview with Madame seem unreal. By keeping it unreal long enough, and by keeping her mind persistently on the silly, innocent things of everyday, she hoped to forget it. And anyway, she was sure that Madame had exaggerated the picture she drew in order to impress it upon her mind.

"Have you got Minnie? Yes, of course, you spoke of her. And Pompon? And did you have the dining-room done over in fumed oak? And did you ever get that black lace over apple-green that I wanted you to have?"

Aunt Claudia's chin quivered again even as she smiled.

"So you remember those things, do you? I told Minnie you had forgotten all about the things you did with us, because you never spoke of them after one or two letters." Maura flushed.

"There were so many things happening," she apologized, "and my letters

seemed to fill up so. But I always remembered to send my love to Minnie."

Minnie, her aunt's black maid, who seemed always to have been with them, came suddenly to her mind as another she hadn't meant to neglect or forget; and yet, once away from Aunt Claudia and all that pertained to her, it was as though she stepped into a new world from which the other was not even remotely visible.

"Don't the girls ever ask where I live, or how, or anything?" asked Aunt Claudia with an almost childish intonation of hurt. Maura sat away from the fur sleeve with a wince of distaste.

"Oh, they used to ask—but at school it's taken for granted that one is from the right sort of place; and I've been there so long. When they made sure my underwear was hand-made that seemed the principal thing; and most of the girls are from New York, or from the far West, so they don't know much about this city, and—I told them, once, that you were an invalid and couldn't have the care of an establishment, and never saw people; and anyway, they think we're English. Leila Hilford kept at me until she found that I was named for Sir Maury Digby, and after that——"

Her half-defiant confession trailed off in apologetic silence; but instead of showing pique at being denied, Aunt Claudia nodded proudly.

"Well, that's true enough, you *are* named for him. And some day, when your education's finished, we'll go to England and look him up. He was awfully fond of your father, and you look like your father—except the eyes." She studied the girl's face with new keenness, her own animated. Maura felt herself stirred by an entirely new excitement. The alluring hodge-podge that comprised her knowledge of England began to ferment in her optimistic brain.

"Oh, Aunt Claudia, wouldn't it be simply *great!*" she sighed ecstatically. "To see those ducky thatched-roofed cottages—and the hedges blossoming—and to live in a castle, with old plate and family servants, and tea on the lawn, and

titles as thick as blackberries on your visiting-list——"

Aunt Claudia made a queer joyous sound, swooped forward and kissed her.

"Will you do it, Maura?" she asked excitedly, her chin quivering again, her eyes too big and bright. "Will you plan for it with me, and stick to it? Because you could, Aunt's handsome baby could, if she'd just make up her mind to it; and I'll save and get enough ahead——"

The taxi jerked and stopped. They were in front of an ornate apartment-house, with granite-pillared entrance, a silver-buttoned black boy running down the steps to them, a gleam of marble tiles and bronze elevator grille and the tropical note of potted palms inviting through the plate glass of the massive doors. From the girl's mind slipped the last faint homesickness for the stately school set on its hill acres, with the chaste snow drawn to its sills, the regularly grouped trees like sentinels set about, and the evergreen hedges lying dark and straight like a fur trimming on the white garment. This gay exterior filled her fancy with suggestions of entrancing forbidden things to eat and forbidden things to do, and lazy, happy days of holiday-making.

She ducked her cheek against the Persian lamb shoulder as they went up in the sumptuous elevator.

"Oh—to be here!" she sighed ecstatically. "You're so good to me!"

"You'll pay it all back, and more, then," murmured her aunt with an affectionate pat. She was still thinking of England, Maura concluded, after a puzzled second.

As they stepped off at the third floor the door of the front apartment was opened by a thin, good-looking yellow woman, white-capped and aproned, who stood craning out and beaming.

"Minnie—you dear!" Maura reached both hands as she went forward. She saw the broad smile vanish, a scared look take its place, then a sickly grin that was a mere showing of white teeth. This time she understood and found herself not displeased.

"Minnie—you too! I thought you'd know me if no other did!" The jet eyes darted a glance over her shoulder to the

taller figure, then traveled swiftly from her hat-top to shoe-tips, the lean face relaxing to its first whole-hearted grin.

"Well—well, I cert'nly am taken by s'prise!" she patted the small hands she held, lovingly. "A grown-up young lady sure enough—but jes' as welcome as the li'l girl I was expectin'. Come right along into yo' own room an' lemme ten' you, Miss Dearie. Miss Claudia, ma'am, they's a—a lady waitin' to see you on impo'tant business, she says."

A delicious blending of fragrance wafted out as Maura whirled around to link her arm with Aunt Claudia's before they entered.

"Incense—the same as you used to burn!" she cried happily, eyes squeezed shut and small nose wrinkled, sniffing; "and the leastest smell of that awfully expensive perfume, and—and a heap of carnations, somewhere—and—Oh! you blessed old Minnie! You've made spice cake and new little rolls for tea! I'm home, I'm home, I'm home!"

She dropped her aunt's hand, pirouetted dizzily across the polished floor and Bokhara rug of the small entrance-hall, and whirled in through the portieres of the dining-room before Minnie saw her intent and uttered a sharp remonstrance that went unheeded or unheard.

"Fumed oak!" she shrilled, and stopped short. Around the high back of the handsome chair that she had thought unoccupied and had grasped to turn about for inspection, came a slow-moving magenta rose, followed by a purple rose, a glitter of jet, a fuzz of pongee-colored hair, and a globular pink mass that she knew to be a face even as she made startled search for the slits of eyes, the dab of nose, and the odd red pucker that was the mouth.

"I—beg—a thousand pardons!" she gasped, staring, fascinated, at the curious glimmering eyes behind those unbelievable lids; "but I didn't know——"

"Maura!" said her aunt, almost angrily, "go to your room, with Minnie, please."

"Just a minute—how d'do, Claudia; you don't mind my making myself at home I hope? Just a minute, my sweet little lady——"

The extraordinary caller had been surging in her chair as she spoke, and succeeded in grinding it about on the heavy rug till she sat half facing them. She was magnificently dressed, Maura saw that even as she felt a qualm of nausea at such corpulence as she had never beheld. The short, bloated body was encased in rich, purple cloth, and the skirt, hitched up by the massive knees in sitting, showed a wonderful embroidered, magenta silk petticoat. Diamonds glinted in the gold-threaded chiffon about the crease that was the creature's neck, and her shapeless, stubby hands were congested by the dozen conspicuous rings she wore. A decanter of wine was before her on the table, a half-emptied glass beside it.

"Now I wonder if this is the little girl I've heard about," she went on in her indescribable voice, a voice that suggested a worn-out mechanism, oiled to dripping, but still wheezing and skipping; "because if it is, she's the luckiest little sweetheart——"

"This is my niece. My *niece!*" Aunt Claudia swept forward and put her arm about the surprised girl. "She is just with me for the holidays, and then goes back to school. There's some mistake. Minnie, take the child to her room, and make her bath ready. And take off these ridiculous grown-up things and put on one of her school dresses. Now, Maura——"

The strange rasp that Maura had heard for the first time an hour previous was in her voice again, and she had lost her brilliant color. Unmistakably she didn't like this caller who made free with her wine and whose manner was so offensively familiar. Maura made a stiff little bow and whisked out after Minnie with no attempt at concealing her aversion. With the door that separated the bedroom corridor from the hall hardly shut between them, she ejaculated her disgust.

"That dreadful, sickening *mountain!* How dare she make herself so at home?"

"Miss Claud'll sen' her about her business," assured Minnie evasively. "Yo' shet yo' eyes, Honey Miss, an' don't open 'em tell I say so!"

"Oh, goody—what, Minnie? Say quick!" With her eyes wrinkled shut again and her insatiable little heart fluttering, she instantly forgot the gross creature she had left. She heard Minnie open a door—her bedroom door; felt the strong yellow hand guide her across the threshold and face her about; and with a childish gasp of expectancy she opened her eyes, going off at once in a rapturous, tiny squeal. Her severe white bud of a room had been transformed to a splendor of deep-toned ivory and lemon that seemed to have taken its note from the gorgeous mass of great chrysanthemums in a jar on a squat tabouret between the windows. The effect was that of cool-filtered sunshine, and curiously like the warmest light in the mass of fair hair that Minnie patted, admiringly, as she removed the hat of Madame's selection.

"It's ab-so-lutely perfect!" breathed the girl. "I used to think that Madame—at the school, you know, had the most perfectly wonderful rooms anyone could imagine; but hers are not one whit lovelier than this. But how can I ever leave it and go back to that dormitory! Isn't it perfect, Minnie?"

An electric light sputtered on as Minnie opened the closet door. It illumined a wonderful silken thing hung in solitary glory on one silk-padded hanger of the metal cross-bar. After a gape and a gasp Maura rushed to it and took it reverently down.

It was a kimono of the palest lemon, lined with blue of spring-morning sky color, that rolled back to form the huge loose cuffs and revers; and scattered over both lustrous silken surfaces were sprays of cherry blossoms, delicately hued, wonderfully wrought, with a few great butterflies poised amid the blossoms, and miraculously done in every shading of their spread wings—lemon, orange, white, scarlet splotched, black-streaked, shimmering green.

Maura's shoulders lifted with her intaken breath.

"Hands never did it!" she declared. "Fairies made it and by some accident dropped it here. Oh—I *must* get at Aunt Claudia——"

Minnie moved before her and stretched a lean arm across the door.

"No—no, Missy Lamb, please don't bother Miss Claudya jes' now. She got some business with that fat 'ooman an' she jes' nachrully couldn't put it off to talk. Honey, yo' jes' let me fill the barth tub an' put in some of this nice smellin' stuff an' give yo' a rub-down like I do yo' aunty, an' then we'll put on this yer han'some dud an' let her see how yo' does look."

"Well then—but hurry, Minnie—I want to see the rest of the flat. And, Minnie! I'm going to let my nails grow long and awfully pointed, like Aunt's and shine them glittery, like hers. They look so wickedy and Oriental. They never let us do anything we're dying to do at school, and I'm just going to revel here."

She chattered incessantly while Minnie worked her magic of elaborate cleanliness. It was so natural to be bubbling and childish with good old adoring Minnie that the corroding memory of Madame's revelation was forgotten save for one instant when she found herself smiling, vaguely, at her own gleaming white, golden-haired reflection. Like a gruesome shadow there flashed through her mind the warnings against infatuation with her own beauty and she turned from the cheval glass with an impatient frown. But when she was fragrant and frosty in lingerie, with Minnie standing behind her chair and brushing out the long strands of shining hair, she talked to the reflection of that beaming yellow face, as she saw it in the dressing-table mirror, and ignored her own allurements, below it. The crashing of a door, without, cut her short.

"That woman has gone!" she twisted in her chair. "Open the door, Minnie, give me the kimono, quick, so I can show——"

The door was opened—torn open—by Aunt Claudia. Such a changed Aunt Claudia! Her hat was askew, the veil pushed up over it as though she had thrust it so, hastily, and she fumbled at the high collar of her Irish lace waist, tearing the mesh again and again as she tugged. Her face was scarlet, congested, furious.

"Minnie—take this damned thing off me! I'm choking! Get me—get me something, quick—I'm being torn to pieces by this cursed heart of mine. Feel it thump! Good business if it would burst and done with it, and I—Minnie, *Minnie!*" The word came out like the scream of a frightened child.

Instantly Minnie had the fumbling hands in one of her own, and had loosened the torn collar and put a steadying arm about the tall figure as it wavered.

"Don' yo' be scared, Miss Honey," she said fast, over her shoulder, "yo' Aunty she jes' got a li'l flutteration, 'cause she been goin' too fas', an' she's worried. Yo' jes' look eround an' I'll be right out—'tain't nothin' yo' can do. Don' be scairt."

Maura sat transfixed. The door of her aunt's room closed on the two, but it did not shut out the terrible burst of weeping, nor the crooning of Minnie's voice and its occasional peremptory sharpness as though she were commanding when soothing failed.

With a shiver of nervous chill, Maura pulled on the gorgeous kimono, giving not a glance to the effect, and ran out from her room and from the corridor, to get where that distressing noise would not torture her ears. Her mind was a muddle of distaste, real concern and incomprehensible fright.

She wandered to the dining-room, but drew back at the suddenly vivid recollection of the dreadful woman who had confronted her there. Her aunt's fur coat was flung across a chair, her gold mesh bag dropped to the floor and there was the heavy sweetness of port wine in the air. There seemed, all at once, too much heat and perfume and incense, also. She still glowed from her bath and massage, and her lungs, accustomed to the carefully ventilated air of the school, and constricted by her nervousness, craved ozone.

She crossed the hall to the drawing-room and thrust aside the double hangings—sage green brocade without, delicate rose within. The changed aspect of the room diverted her, transiently, for it was quite as perfect as her changed bedroom. A silken Persian rug, the color

of dried roseleaves, covered the shining floor; the handsome mahogany pieces were upholstered in the same shade, the daylight entered tinged with the rose-hued silk that hung over the costly lace at the windows, and there were masses of roses all about—blush and pink and scarlet. A crystal bowl of Killarneys, on a stand near the screened radiator, stirred a trifle as a gust of heat swept out, and a handful of petals dropped, noiselessly. It suggested stifling oppression, and she hurried across to the window nearest, unfastened and opened it wide.

For a second there was an out-surge of silk and lace and perfumed heat, then the icy northwest wind swooped in against the draught. It was as though a swift invisible sword cut through the atmosphere; but her lungs welcomed it, and drawing the wadded silk close she stepped into the freezing swirl. The fierce sharpness of the assault made her gasp and shut her eyes, but her opened lips caught at and inhaled it eagerly. Her soft hair was caught up from about her hips and whipped out behind her in a tangle. The noise of the street came up to her: the honking and sirens of motors, the pad-pad of hoofs on the asphalt, and the co-mingled rumble that was the city's undertone.

"I beg pardon!" said a voice behind her—a man's voice; and she wheeled as though the wind had blown her about. It took her a second to put aside the blinding mass of her hair, and in that second he had moved to the window and closed it. It was like the shutting out of a clean, wild spirit that had been kin to something in her blood.

"That's a reckless thing to do," said the man, but not as though he meant it; and coming back from the window he stood beside her; a very tall, very broad figure in his fur-lined coat, of which the broad collar of Persian lamb oddly matched his black, tightly curled hair. His dark, smooth-shaven face was deeply lined, but his rather fine black eyes were contradictorily young and bright, and his full lips smooth and smiling. At the consternation in her face he smiled with unmistakable relish.

"Am I to believe that you are the niece Miss Claudia is so fond of?"

Maura found her voice.

"Yes, I—Miss Herford is my aunt. I am sorry that I—I fancied myself alone. With the window up I did not hear your ring."

His eyes had not left her face as she spoke, and he deliberately moistened his lips with his tongue. It was as horrible as the flicker from a snake's fangs, although for her life she could not have told why.

"I did not ring. The door was unfastened, so I ventured—is Miss Herford out?"

"No—oh, no!" she made answer so hurriedly that she stammered. "They are both—my aunt and Minnie—here, but my aunt is not well. You wished to see her?"

"Er—not necessarily. To be quite plain, I came to see—you. My curiosity was aroused—I have heard so much of you." And he licked his lips again, still staring into her face, his eyelids crinkling with his broadening smile. "I am your aunt's—er—man of affairs, you see," he added; and laughed, softly, under his breath, his broad shoulders shaking. That mirth could be menacing, Maura had not known till she watched this man's silent, contented enjoyment. So absolutely did her intuition convince her, that she resented the matter-of-fact acceptance of him that her reason urged.

He shrugged the great coat off one shoulder, pulled his arm free, and lazily pushed off the other sleeve, tossing the coat to a chair. It brushed a mass of roses as it fell, and sent a shower of petals to the rug. It was afternoon, there were people all about and Minnie was within call; yet she was afraid! He was her aunt's man of affairs—a frequent caller; yet she was afraid! He was an eccentric person, amused at her plight and her gaucherie and confusion; yet she was afraid! Without his coat he was still tall and broad, but lean and slightly stooped; but he moved easily, though slowly, and anything about him that hinted at age was set at naught by as many evidences of surviving youth. And she had not imagined that a man,

in man's restricted attire, could convey such an impression of sybaritic grooming.

"Suppose that we—er—talk," he suggested, lapsing to his first moderate smile once more. "Tell me what you have done, and why I haven't chanced on you before, and what you mean to do, for you've finished school, of course? And I want to hear what you like and dislike—and all about you generally."

He let himself, not ungracefully, down on a small sofa before the window, and gestured for her to take the other end. Gestured! And seated himself while she was standing! A quick mounting anger swept away the curious lethargy of inexplicable dread with which she watched him.

"You are very good to feel interest in me—there's nothing to justify it, really; and I must dress. I will let my aunt know that you are here."

"Don't go," he said, when she had taken three steps. He spoke quietly, but she stopped and looked over her shoulder at him quickly. She half expected to find him crouched to spring after her, there had been such velvet menace and intensity under his quiet; but he sat as she had left him—only he was not smiling. Inexplicably she began to tremble. He smiled again and moistened his lips with his tongue. It was assured insolence that flicked alive her resentful anger again. She turned.

"I tell you not to go!" From the tone his smile had disappeared again, but she did not look to make sure. She caught the loose silk folds of her kimono close and ran from the room, hearing, as she brushed through the portières, the little creak of the sofa as he got up from it. At that she fled, literally, toward the door that shut off the sleeping room corridor, stumbling against it as Minnie opened from the other side.

"Why—Missy Lamb Baby——" Minnie began, wonderingly—and then stiffened as she looked, involuntarily, over the girl's shoulder, and saw the man who had come out in the hall.

"Wait till I 'splain to this gen'leman that Miss Claudya ain't seein' anybody. I'll be right in. Go 'long, Dearie Miss!" Her hand on Maura's shoulder gave a

caressing pat, but Maura saw that the brownish red lips were drawn tight and that the jet eyes glittered. So Minnie didn't like this man of affairs! Feeling all at once protected, she let herself be thrust through the door, and then grew nervous again, ran through her own door, closed and locked it.

She amazed herself by flinging off the wonderful kimono as though it had been contaminated by that interview—or, rather, responsible for it; and with trembling fingers she braided the rebellious hair tightly and wound it close about her head.

"What a silly you are!" she scolded herself in the mirror as she fumbled for hairpins. "You were not to blame for anything—and that man understood that you were just a little ignoramus—a simpleton—a schoolgirl! And he only meant to tease you a bit. He didn't mean to be rude, really—he felt that his age excused——"

Someone rapped and she cried out, faintly, in terror that gave the lie to her specious reasoning, her hands flying to a chair back with some wild notion of self-defense. But defense against what?

"It's only me, Honey One!" Minnie said softly. "Come erlong out an' get yo' tea. 'Tain't nobuddy but jes' yo' an' me goin' ter have it."

To her own disgust and mystification Maura began to cry as she got the door open. Minnie's strong arms reached out and gathered her close.

"Don' get all nervoused, Honey Pet. Dat man he—he come erbout money trouble an' I sent him on he way aflukin."

Minnie's place was done over, also, in buff and white enamel, with shining aluminum utensils and a new, much-nickeled gas range, and scarlet geraniums and parsley and chives, flourishing in pots on a shelf before the window, and the tiniest of wicker rocking chairs in the tiniest of spaces alongside. Maura dried her eyes, sniffled a little, contentedly, and looked about.

"I think this kitchen is the duckiest place I was ever in!" she declared in a fervor of enthusiasm. "I'd perfectly adore standing on that weeny little mat and reaching to the four walls for every-

thing I wanted—and it's so spicy, scrubbed and shining clean! I wish I could cook! Can't I help now?" Minnie went off into rapturous chuckles as she conjured a tea tray and doilies and silver, and egg-shell china from nowhere in particular. She brought forth a starched white bib apron from somewhere and put it over the dressing jacket. The very rustle of it made one feel domestic and brisk. Then, together, they boiled water, after mastering the lighting of a gas range, and scalded the teapot, and measured the costly leaves, and set them to "making" under the elaborate cozy; and for the first time the small white hands made themselves useful in the practical side of tray arranging: shook out the cress, placed the butter balls upon it artistically, separated the crusty little tea rolls that had been kept hot all the while, and sliced cake. With every movement the incident of the man of affairs, and of Aunt Claudia's alarming seizure, receded into the background of her mind. After all, nothing had happened and tea getting was fun. When she found herself laughing naturally, she was so overjoyed that she kept on, laughing at everything that could serve as pretext, in a hysterical giggle that her years made tolerable. She was sitting sideways on the small serving shelf, the tea tray conveniently near, her foot swinging tomboy fashion while she ate and drank and jabbered and laughed, when Aunt Claudia appeared noiselessly in the doorway; and for the third time it was a different Aunt Claudia.

She was becomingly pale, her handsome eyes misty, with slightly dilated pupils, her plumpness concealed by quite the most wonderful hand-wrought muslin negligee that Maura had ever seen, and her dark hair hidden by a delectable boudoir cap of muslin and lace and pink rosebuds. She was as unlike the domineering Aunt Claudia of the station, and the profane Aunt Claudia of a few hours back as one could imagine; precisely the sort of aunt to fly upon and kiss and mumble over and serve with tea and chatter to and be thankful for.

"And you're not going to have whatever it was the matter with you again,

are you—you handsomest thing!" Maura demanded finally. A little flush came into Aunt Claudia's pale cheek.

"No—don't worry; I haven't had an attack before for ever so long. I'm quite all right now. We're going to the theatre to-night—and please, chiddy, humor your old aunt and wear a school frock. So many young people are home for holidays that it won't seem out of place—and I detest those grown-up things."

"As if I minded clothes!" Maura swooped forward to hug her again. "All I care for is to go—and to go through the giddy shops another day, and to have luncheon at one of those wonderful tea places, and to pick out pounds of candy in a swagger place, and to have hot chocolate at Carlotta's—and oh, *am* I to go to the Opera?"

"You really are—and to-morrow; and all the rest of it." Aunt Claudia's eyes had lost their mistiness as she looked up at Minnie. "She is our little girl, Minnie, just as she was last Christmas and all the other years."

"Yass'm," agreed Minnie, fervently, "she am dat." And so for three days she was.

There was all the old thrill about the Christmas city. She throve on the childish stimulants of crowded, humming stores, and packed, jostling tea rooms, and the snail-moving crowds in the narrow streets; grew giddy with the riches of the jeweler's where she chose for herself a twisted, triple string of seed pearls, almost identical with the one Madame permitted Leila Hilford to wear at the school parties; pinched herself to make sure that it was she who dawdled luxuriously through the revelations of a Turkish bath that outdid, for costliness, all she had read of the Romans' indulgences; shivered deliciously in her chair when the stage curtain rose, showing the feet of a fairyland chorus, or the beyond-date settings of a sentimental first act; and went quite off her head at the bewilderment of Opera, with Aunt Claudia in black and gold, and herself in school-girl, cobwebby white, with ranks of bare white, bejeweled shoulders and tiers of coruscating shirt fronts vying with the magic of the performance; and to crown

all, there was Christmas coming every day nearer until she woke late one gray morning to find holly wreaths in both her windows, the very snowstorm that she had hoped for feathering the world without, and Minnie smiling down on her across the silver breakfast tray.

"Bes' hang up yo' two stockin's ter-night an' no mistake. Know what day dis is?"

"It's the most exciting day of this perfectly crazy week!" she smiled back exultantly. "It's the day before Christmas! And to-morrow—well, it will be simply the *most* wonderful Christmas I ever knew!"

But it was a long time before she understood that her prophecy had been true.

III

From the janitor's tiny parlor one looked up to the sidewalk through an ornate iron grille, and judged the passers by their foot gear and gaits and skirt bottoms. To correct or to verify these impressions it was necessary to scrouge one's self close up to the high sill, and peer at as much of their profiles as luck afforded.

The janitor's wife was a tidy, brisk little person, sandy, rather pink nosed, but white skinned and the possessor of unusual, honest gray eyes; and while her tongue clacked busily to set her unexpected Christmas guest at ease, those candid eyes revealed pity and bewilderment, and admiration and disapproval, and whole-hearted, unqualified, womanly tenderness.

From the wreck of her sheltered, luxurious little world Maura stared, dully, and felt that tenderness creep, close and warm, to the very center of the sluggish, aching thing that was her heart.

Just before midnight—on Christmas Eve—after a child's day of hurry and flurry and happiness and frivolling, Minnie had shaken her awake—roughly, even fiercely—and had clapped a stifling hand over her mouth when she had murmured drowsy protest. Fear, never slow to respond to fear, had waked in her as she blinked sufficiently awake to see Min-

nie's rolling eyes and bared teeth, and to hear the hissing breaths she drew. Shivering with chill and fright she had lifted herself, clutching the brown wrists, her lips trying to form a noiseless whisper; and then she had heard the paralyzing snarl, half animal, half human, from the hall beyond the short corridor, that was as unmistakable as the ravenous whine of a charging tiger. She had tried to spring from bed, but sheer terror numbed her, and Minnie had dragged her up bodily, held her on her feet and pulled her forward inches before she roused herself to the necessity for walking. Then, supporting her with one hand, Minnie had begun to undress herself with incredible swiftness with the other.

The chill of the bathroom floor tiles under her bare feet made her wince bodily. Minnie had caught her under the arms, lifted her, and swung her, with a stifled grunt of strain, over the edge of the half-sunken tub, and had thrust her behind the pushed-back curtain of the shower; had crushed her back cruelly against the pipe and twitched the rubber curtain before her, flattening it so that it seemed to swing slightly and naturally out from the wall; and all the time she had hissed: "Still, fo' Gawd's sake—still, still, still!"

Instinctively Maura had reached back and grasped the cold nickel pipe against which she was pressed, and as that did not afford support, twisted her supple arm tendril-fashion about it, and gripped the wrist with her free hand, straining herself upright and hard back. That painful linking seemed all that had kept her from slipping down in a nerveless huddle when her ordeal had but commenced. It seemed the working of a protective impulse apart from her intelligence.

Minnie had slid across the floor, the light had snapped off, and all the nerves in her body had begun to come alive. Someone was moving heavily through the hall—scuffling, she had made out next instant—as though one body dragged against another; and with such suddenness that she jerked violently through every tense muscle, her aunt's voice, hoarse, rasping, stifled, like the

ineffectual agony of one striving to speak through a nightmare, had burst through the shuffling and dragging:

"I can't—Maura! Maura! Wake up—get something! Fight—fight! I can't hold him! Maura——" And then, louder and more vicious the snarl ripped through the rasping cry, there had come the slide and thud of a weighty body hurled aside and striking with sickening force against a wall; and then a quick, soft step through the corridor without, and a throaty, soft, devilish little chuckle. "Pretty—pretty little sweet! Wake up!" And she had grown rigid with deathly apprehension as she recognized the voice of her aunt's man of affairs.

He had paused on the threshold of her room, and must have gathered himself, animal-like, for a leap, because there came a sleepy, yawn-broken "Huh?" from Minnie, and the chuckling snarl and the soft sliding of a rug under the blow of feet leaving the floor altogether. Then a yelp from Minnie, her angry, but still sleepy voice in a babble of scolding, and the smack of a slap that had brought the snarl again murderously.

"Dis yer ain't Miss Claudya's room!" snapped Minnie. "What yo' doin' goin' round so tipsy yo' don' know wheah yo' at? G'long out'n heah, now, 'fore I lose mah temper an' bat yo' good'n plenty!"

"Minnie—Minnie!" A husky wail from the hall implored, "take care of her—get Maura out—call the police! Oh, God, let me die!"

"Miss Claudya!" A thud of bare feet and Minnie had raced out to the feeble voice. "Dat man hurt yo'? Ef he have he ain't goin' ter live——"

And all the while had sounded the low, sickening snarl, breaking into dreadful cursing and blasphemy and subsiding again to its sound like the deadly worrying of a dog, while doors opened, lights snapped on, chairs were pushed aside, and the soft tread of the man circled nearer as he hunted ceaselessly. He had not been loud and destructive; it would have been easier to bear had he been in that stage. But he seemed fiendishly cautious, careful and stealthy as he moved, his maniacal rage seething in him like the boiling of oily water too deep

and thick to foam over and splutter off in relieving steam.

He had gone to Aunt Claudia's room, lighted that and searched; in closets, moving couches, opening a carved chest. And then to the bathroom.

"Maura—Maura—Oh, where is she, where is she, Minnie?" At the rasping croak from the hall he had turned and sped out. Maura had felt her heart surge, check and surge again as it caught at its half-stilled labor.

"What yo' want o' dat child?" Minnie yapped. "She comin' back all right in 'er mawnin'. She gone with a passel o' young ladies fum school what come in a ottermobile dis evenin' an' taken her to a party out er town—I got the place wrote down some wheah—dat Madame Whatever was with 'em. Dat's why I slep' in her baid so's to tell yo' when you got in, Miss Claudya—don' yo' be worried—"

At that Aunt Claudia had cried out, gaspingly, had caught her breath in an hysterical sob and had begun to cry. And the man had begun to curse. Epithets that carried their own meaning, although she had never heard them before, Maura heard heaped on Aunt Claudia, on Minnie, on the place, on the money that clothed and fed them, on the very air they breathed and on the fate that had made them stumbling blocks to his will. It had been such a blighting torrent as it seemed should have withered the brain that conceived and palsied the tongue that uttered it.

"If you're lying, you yellow devil, I'll cut you in inch pieces," he rumbled at Minnie. "I'll find her if there's length to my life and money for the making! So you may as well out with the truth now—I'll have her sooner or later—you hear?" He had seemed to move, suddenly, but Minnie had grunted in menace as animal-like as his own.

His snarl had sounded again, but he had felt the defiance to be earnest, and he moved off on his unsatisfied quest. There had been a clish of rings on portière poles as he stumbled into the drawing-room, and a faint bass hum from the piano as he brushed its keys, probably in groping under it; then he had entered

the dining-room, then Minnie's kitchen; and the door from the kitchen shut behind him as he padded through the back halls. Maura heard Minnie's sharp command to her aunt, and then they two came slowly through the corridor and into the bathroom. Without a whisper or movement toward the curtain of the shower, Minnie set the water running in the bowl and began to take off her mistress's waist.

"Hol' yo' haid over," she ordered. "Yo' got a bad bump on yo' forehead. Stop cryin'—yo' gotter be well on Chris'mus when Miss Lambie gets home." At which Aunt Claudia had burst out anew in thankfulness, and Minnie had scolded and splashed in the water. There had come the shutting of the kitchen door again, and a muffled step on the rug without.

"Don' yo' go off in any tantrum now—stop that shiverin'!" Minnie had bade disgustedly; and there had come a gush from the faucets into the great tub.

Maura felt a warm swirl about her feet and it had seemed to send a warm, sick ripple up to her heart as she felt the bottom of the curtain move slightly. Before the next tortured heartbeat the lead-weighted hem had settled again, and the thin nightdress she wore had begun to soak up water. She set her teeth as the fabric weighted and clung to her, the clammy wetness rising bit by bit, the folds of the rubber curtain hugging closer as they touched the soggy cloth; but there had been some glimmer of gratitude in her stupefied brain that her locked arms held behind her, that her body was so slender, and that—if it came to the worst—Minnie had a little knife hung around her neck.

"Look at me!" the man's voice had come, so close and so dreadful that her senses slipped a little further from her mental grasp in their involuntary withdrawal. "You can't make your eyes lie to me, Claudia—if you know where she is I can see it. Look at me!" There had been the cruel strike of his palms on bare shoulders and Aunt Claudia's gasp of pain; and then a silence.

"Damnation! Then if she isn't here, I'll stay till she comes!" He had flung

himself across the floor to the window. "The fire-escapes are the only places you could have gotten her to—you Hell's nigger, you——"

Window by window he had made sure but had come back again snarling. Had he been a trifle less master of himself he would have laid hands on Minnie to hurt the truth from her; but the memory of her little knife seemed to stay with him. Now and then he had chuckled, and it was almost worse than his snarl.

His horrible voice had begun a rhapsody on Maura's charms, and broken with snarls and chuckles it had gone on and on like the utterance of some con-ning demon. Her eyes shut, a cold sweat trickling under the saturated filminess of her nightdress, her leaden body locked to the pipe that held her upright, Maura had heard her fate foretold as though it were irrevocable; heard every hideous detail gloated over by the madman who could have stretched out his hand and grasped her through the smothering folds. Before he had finished, Aunt Claudia was huddled on the floor, moaning and crying, and Minnie was breathing heavily as she labored to get her mistress undressed and into the warm bath. When human endurance was strained to its uttermost he stopped, with his indescribable chuckle.

"D'you know what brought me here to see her? It was you, Claudia. You said too much to mislead me! You said too often that she was a plain, poor thing, and gawky and young and pitiful. It didn't go with your anxiety to have her think you a decent woman; it didn't go with the room you fitted up for her, nor with the money you got out of me to fix the place over. You've got yourself to thank for anything that happens to your lovely little niece, my dear. Tell your nigger to get me a drink. Bring it to me here!"

Minnie had gone out instantly, and the man had turned his sardonic attention wholly to the groveling woman on the floor.

"Such a stupid Claudia!" he sneered, "to think she could outwit *me*. Haven't you waked to the fact that it was I who sent old Nancy to be here when you got

home with the girl the first day? There isn't a keener eye for beauty in the trade to-day than Nancy's, and when she reported to me that the girl was worth any money I had to pay I knew I guessed right. And you, poor fool—swallowed the yarn that old hag fed you about being commissioned to get the girl by some unknown man who had seen her some unknown place. I used to think you were clever, Claudia; but you are losing your quickness as you are losing your looks. You are fat, and a fool! Your niece is probably a fool, too—but she is young, divinely, deliciously young, and slim and sweet, and I want her. Where's that nigger! If she's up to any trick——"

He had come back from his stealthy rush out to the kitchen, chuckling and snarling.

"Such a clever pair!" Then he had cursed them both. "Your yellow devil had a nice, hot brew for you, Claudia dear, in a separate glass so that you shouldn't drink from the decanter she meant for me. So I have taken your glass, and you are at liberty to drink from the decanter. It would serve you right if I made you do it! You'd probably go very sound asleep immediately and sleep so long that you'd miss greeting your niece when she arrives; but I shall not permit myself to be cheated out of such pleasure as I anticipate. To your health, my dear! Minnie—I drink to your confusion!"

And he had laughed at them, had drained his glass and let it break on the tiled floor. With a sullen grunt Minnie had dragged her mistress up and forced her from the room. Suspiciously the man had followed; had thrust himself into the bathroom again when Minnie at last succeeded in getting the hysterical woman into the hot bath; and then on another impulse had searched the other rooms again, as though some dulled sixth sense had warned him that he was being deceived. Yet not by touch nor murmur had Minnie reassured the cause of it all.

Feeling had left the girl's limbs gradually. Aunt Claudia had stepped into the water obediently, and out again as Minnie bade, and the tub was drained,

the light turned off. The cramped arm twisted about the pipe had seemed like a dead limb that still could feel, gnawed by innumerable tiny, blunt-toothed crawling things; the evaporation of her thin gown chilled her aching, tensed body so that uncontrollable little shivers shook her in spite of all her desperate endeavor at control. From fear lest she could not stay upright she had found herself drifting to a leaden despondency that made it of small consequence whether she stayed hidden or dropped and let the man have his way, because all her pretty world of illusion had been shattered in her hearing, and she dreaded the foul chaos she must face when she stepped from concealment. But even dread had come dully—mind and heart shared the queer numb stolidity of her body. Vaguely she had recalled that it was Christmas Eve, only Christmas Eve, and not many years since her delicious waking of that morning! She recalled, later, that she had heard bells and a far-away music at some time, while she listened so acutely; and that must have been the dawn of Christmas morning—Christmas morning! Her wonderful Christmas! She had tried to feel the tragedy of it, but her eyes had stayed dry. She had wondered, weakly, how it would be possible to live the rest of her life without feeling anything—ever again. And then she had heard the man's stealthy step just outside the bathroom door.

He was muttering about her drunkenly and vengefully; and sick fear had seized her again to give the lie to her hope that feeling had left her. The man had stopped muttering and seemed to listen; and that was when her terror reached its climax. Her heart thudded in what seemed to her a thunderous beat and a nervous shiver beset her so that the wet inner surface of the curtain rubbed slightly, with a sound as of friction on silk, against her bare arms. He had stepped forward and she opened her lips to scream. And he had yawned—a reassuring, unmistakable yawning aloud that seemed to come from a man fairly drugged with sleep. He tried to speak, but another yawn seized him.

"Cl—Claud—ia——" he had said stu-

pidly, and crossed to the door, dragging his feet—and stopped to yawn gigantesquely. Then he had seemed to lean against the wall as he moved on, making the excessively wearied noises at intervals till he crossed the threshold of her room. She had heard the scraping of a chair that he struck against—then silence.

Minnie had slipped into the bathroom, noiseless as a shadow, and pulled away the rubber curtain. She had ungripped the right hand from the wrist it held, and had untwisted the paralyzed arm that was twisted about the pipe. She had not spoken, but in a dazed, shamed, sidelong look Maura had seen that the lean face was wet with tears.

Silently Minnie had sponged her off with hot water and alcohol; had brought dry things, moving carefully but not fearfully. From the ivory and yellow room had sounded the rattling snoring of a man fatigued nearly to death, or very drunk—or drugged. In her fresh nightdress and warm bathrobe, with fleecy slippers on the feet that Minnie had rubbed to life, Maura had stolen past her own door, guided by the faithful hand, and out to the tiny kitchen where the kettle sang cheerily on the bright nicked range. She had dropped into the small chair and stared at the blue flame and the funnel of steam, and had wanted to cry at the homelike scene and the peace of such things after—after what had been; but she could not cry. Silently Minnie had prepared a cup of malted milk and some crisp toasted crackers, and had brought them to her on a shining tray. She had turned away her head.

"Drink it," Minnie had whispered, "drink it, Honey Lamb. Yo'—got to!" So she had swallowed the hot, tastily seasoned beverage, and then had stood, obediently, as Minnie slipped a hand under her elbow. She had admonished herself that she should do—something; but in all her life she had never acted for herself, and the double hopelessness crushed everything—even resentment. They had traveled downstairs and downstairs and downstairs till they had come to the huge pillars of the building's basement. Past black funnels and huge boil-

ers that hissed faintly Minnie had led her; along a floor littered with packing boxes and empty long pasteboard boxes with the names of florists stamped huge on the corners, and so, in the dim light, to a plain door set in a board wall, with an electric bell to the right of the knob. Minnie had rung long, and presently the door had opened and a tall, sleepy, brusque-voiced man had thrust his head out.

"Now wot!" he had demanded. "Ain't there a bell hin yer apartmint but you must be a-comin'——" There he had blinked awake sufficiently to make out Maura standing back and staring at him, and he had stopped short and grown apologetic.

"Wot's up? Anythink the trouble?" And then, at a murmur from Minnie, "The Missis? W'ye, Hi ain't wishin' to call 'er unless——" Then he had glanced toward the girl again, and with a curt, "Vurry well," had disappeared. In a remarkably short time his wife had appeared, her hair in curling papers, and a comfortable red bathrobe held about her person; and Minnie had beckoned her one side and spoken fast and low.

"Dear heart!" the woman had said thrice over. Amazingly contented, Maura had waited, watching her. Their accent—man and woman's—reminded her so strongly of the gardener at school and his wife, the assistant housekeeper, that the four fused, ridiculously, in her thought. She had thought she should never sleep again and yet with every instant she had felt sleep like a weight pressing down upon her; and all at once her jaws had stretched in a prodigious yawn. She had heard "sickness" and "danger" and then "Sir Maury Digby" in the murmur of words; and then a whispered bit from Minnie that made the woman cross to her and take her hand. She had smiled faintly and drowsily, and the woman had ejaculated "Dear heart!" again and had patted her. And then there was an extraordinary bed that dropped down from the wall, and showed itself made up atop of what had been a wardrobe front with a large mirror. It hadn't mattered that it was queer; nothing had mattered save that she should

be permitted to sleep—to sleep all that she wanted; and her last recollection had been of Minnie's face bending over her, and Minnie's hand patting the covers.

And when she had opened her eyes it was Christmas morning, in the janitor's parlor, with the sun edging in between the great iron grilles, and feet jumbling along the sidewalk above, as she could see through the mesh of the coarse lace curtains. At first she had thought it merely interesting; then it had grown mystifying; and then a sluggish trickle of recollection had begun to seep into her mind; and as though she had felt the wakening need of reassurance, Minnie had come into the room, with fresh linen over her arm, and one of the school dresses; and she had said—in spite of everything—huskily, "Me'y Cris'mus, dear li'l Missy Love! Me'y Cris'mus!"

After all, the tears hadn't come; they had surged mightily within, but had seemed to break against an impassable barrier and to sink back bitterly to their source. She had flung herself back on the pillow, her arm across her eyes, her teeth in her lower lip.

"Missy—Missy Lamb——" She had felt Minnie's pat on the coverlet over her feet. "Don' yo' go a-breakin' yo' li'l heart, Honey Pretty! T'ain't no time t' talk now, but jes' yo' keep yo' courage up, an' yo'll be took care of some place. How'd yo' like goin' t' Englan' t' see yo' pa's folks? On'y jes' fo' t'day yo' stay heah with these kin' folks an' try ter ferget things. Ol' Minnie'll watch out, Dearie Lamb! An' now yo' got to write a paper fo' me, Honey."

From some unexplained source she had secured paper and envelopes of the city's best hotel; and because she was willing to be directed by this one creature who had proved honest Maura wrote a few lines to her aunt.

"Tell her yo' been told all about what sorter woman she been," Minnie had prompted; "tell her yo' got it f'm that Madame which runs the school yo' been to; an' tell her Madame's goin' to start yo' fo' Englan' some time soon, an' how yo' ain' never comin' back, nohow." Un-

der the circumstances it had been easy to write, and she wished wretchedly that it were true. As to the use that would be made of it, or the consequences to herself she had asked nothing. Only when Minnie reappeared with a breakfast tray did she think of a thing that had puzzled her.

"You gave me something in that malted milk to make me sleep, didn't you?"

"Yes, Honey Lamb," Minnie had answered without apology.

"And that—you gave *him* something, too?"

"Yes, Missy Dear. I reckoned he'd jes' nachully take the contrary one f'm what I tried to give him," and Minnie's face set savagely. "Yo' dinner'll be sent down—a reg'lar Chris'mas dinner fo' all o' yo'. An'—Lambie—jes, yo' try an' make these folks glad they took yo' in. Don' yo' go a-spoilin' Chris'mus Day fo' nobuddy else, an' mebbe the Lord He'll credit yo' fo' it sometime."

It had been good advice, Maura recognized. Vaguely it reminded her of Miss Riggson's "Pray do not fancy that others are interested in your grievances; preserve a decent reticence in such matters." And so, although she brooded over the misery the last hours had brought her, she kept the surface of herself calm, that this strange haven wherein Chance had tossed her should not be disquieted by her presence.

The janitor's wife had appeared in the doorway as Minnie went out with the tray, and wished her "Merry Christmas" with such sincerity as to be almost convincing; and had appeared again, very soon, to put the red plush album and a Complete Manual of Etiquette at her disposal, along with a pile of ragged magazines.

"They send 'em down in the wyste barskets," she enlightened her guest, "an' you carn't think wot a treat it is to get good readin' for nothink."

At intervals from without there would come the rattle of coal, the scrape and thud of running feet on the concrete passage, and occasionally a tremendous dull bumping as though several weighty persons had fallen down many flights of

stairs. It occurred to the janitor's wife to enlighten her.

"All that coalin' is Wilkes boomin' up the boilers, Miss," she gave her information from the doorway. "An' that runnin' is the delivery boys from the shops with one thing an' another—bein' 'oliday they're rushed somethink terrible; an' that bumpin' as you may 'ave heard, that's the garbidge cans a-bein' drugged down the back stairs from the upper floors. It mykes a good bit o' noise but when you're well used to it it's nothink."

"Thank you—I don't mind. It's good of you to explain," Maura made herself answer civilly; and Mrs. Wilkes' unusually fine eyes narrowed a little in a keen look of interest as she bobbed, smiling, and withdrew, carefully closing a door that shut out the sound of her domestic activities. It was no time at all before she opened the door again and came to the threshold with a little rush of determination.

"Beggin' your pardon, Miss, but it do seem so sort of agen the spirit of this blessed dye to 'ave you sittin' in 'ere all alone, an' worried, an' the sun is leavin' these winders an'll be round to the back in no time, an' I'm makin' bold to say that I'd be proud an' pleased to 'ave you make use of my kitchen if you feel so to do at any time, which there is a chair for you out o' the way of spat-terin', an' Willyum can go out with his farther."

"Thanks—you're very kind——" As she half turned in the creaking plush chair Maura saw herself in the mirror. She had tried to avoid that reflection, because she knew that once she looked at it full there would come such an acute realization of her position as she had not yet suffered. To her still numbed senses, hazed as they were by the lingering opiate, there seemed a separation between the Maura Wayne, who had lived through a century of horror, and herself, sitting stupidly in an underground parlor and conjecturing as to the passers by whose feet obstructed her daylight. But once she looked close and long into the eyes of the girl in the looking-glass, she felt that their humiliation would be hers unbearably. She stood abruptly to

get away from the possibility that would become a compelling fascination once she had contemplated it. "I'll come now if I may, please," she almost besought.

Maura stood at the kitchen door and drew a long breath. It was a kitchen twice the size of Minnie's and every whit as clean. There was no enamel, no flashing silver or aluminum, to be sure; but on one side, close by the black shining range, were rich gleaming coppers and mellow brown jugs and speckless stew-pans that had unmistakably crossed the water with Mrs. Wilkes. The wooden chairs were set in primly under the stiffly ironed linen tablecloth that, in all probability, had been one of the linen pieces in her dower chest, and the chest itself—fine, shimmering, worn brown oak—stood in the place of honor under a high-silled window where red geraniums blossomed bravely in the slanting sun that was just feeling its way in across them. The curtains were of crisp muslin, freshly laundered; the three cheap splint armchairs were gay with clean chintz cushions and head rests; and between them, signifying the separation of living and cooking actions, was laid a strip of gay green carpet on the white, scrubbed floor.

"If you'll suit yourself with a chair, Miss—an' I 'ave a cup o' beef tea ready, because I'm knowin' to it that you ate nex' to nothin' this mornin'; but first if you'll excuse me I'll just be gettin' Wilyum off to 'is farther so as you'll not 'ave 'im worritin' round, Miss. Wilyum, come 'ere."

There was silence for the space of a half minute; then, as though he chose the lesser evil, William scuffed softly from his shelter behind a chair on the further side of the table, and stood before them, both pudgy pink hands outspread to cover his eyes and as much of his face as might be.

Cupid, in the smallest possible blue overalls and white cotton flannel shirt, with over large rubbers on his stubby feet, would look very like William Wilkes at the moment of his appearing before the young lady he dreaded. His loose rings of hair were fairer than her own; and the radiant cleanliness of him, from

pink cheeks to square toes, was irresistible.

Maura made an overture toward friendliness, but the child backed off and crawled under the table.

"'E'll come right in no time," his mother assured her apologetically.

"I know," Maura smiled. "You're very comfortable here."

Her glance about the room was unmistakably admiring. Mrs. Wilkes beamed.

"We are that, Miss, an' grateful accordin'."

Involuntarily Maura looked at the square kitchen table that was so whimsically enriched with hand-woven linen and daily thanksgiving. Mrs. Wilkes misunderstood.

"Your dinner's to be served to you in the parlor, Miss," she gave hasty correction, "with everythink sent down as you was to 'ave it——"

Impulsively Maura opened her lips to protest, remembered the baby under the table, and closed them again on an inexplicable pain. There came a queer, muffled knocking at the door.

"Bless us if I don't believe the words 'ave been taken out o' my mouth!" Mrs. Wilkes exclaimed, bustling to open. They had. With his arms claspng as much of a huge packing box as they could compass, Wilkes edged his way through the door, rolled his eyes wildly at the young lady before whom circumstances constrained him to pass covered, tottered halfway into the room and eased his burden to the floor, then straightened and snatched off the offending cap, ducking repeatedly.

"Not knowin' as you was 'ere, Miss," he apologized with an indignant glance at his wife, "not bein' told as you were in this room——"

"Lawks! The young leddy saw as 'ow you 'ad yer 'ands full!" cut in Mrs. Wilkes with the permissible excitement of a housewife in the presence of food that called for attention. "Lend a 'and, Wilkes, an' look alive!"

Wilkes was totally unable to look alive, his countenance being of the one-expression sort: much chin, pugnacious nose, eyes as changeless as discs of blue

china and a tight mouth. His few emotions he expressed by variation in tint of his ruddy complexion and the faintest up or down quirk to his lips; but he put at his wife's service two wonderfully capable and dexterous hands, that relieved her of everything save directing, in the unpacking of his weighty box.

The kitchen filled slowly with the blended fragrance of roasting and baking and spices and fruit. Wilkes dived fast, producing prodigious green and purple grapes, huge oranges and ruddy apples, gold-sealed bottles, a gold-corded box of candies, a basket of nuts and raisins, a pineapple, two tins that opened to show hot crusty rolls, and a quart thermos bottle which he had been advised contained black coffee. Then a layer of cardboard, and more packages. "Oh, there's enough for all of us!" cried Maura.

Mrs. Wilkes stood back, a pucker between her fine eyes, the tip of her nose very pink.

"It's vurry fine," she said in a voice not quite steady, "an' I'll do my best to finish it orf proper for the young ledly, likewise serve it *hup*. But as for keepin' anythink for ourselves—when we were glad an' proud to take in the young ledly——" She shook her head determinedly.

Wilkes opened his mouth in blank dismay, stared at her fishily a second, passed an arm across his damp forehead, shut his mouth and turned miserable eyes on the abundance that he was to be denied. From under his brows he shot a hesitating glance at the young lady herself, and was cast down to observe that she was not paying them the slightest attention. Her gaze was fixed under the table as though she saw something there that interested her.

The soles of two small rubbers had worked their way into sight under the hem of the linen cloth, and third way up a shining fold was pushed out in a tiny peak that could be accounted for only by supposing an ardently sniffing nose to have approached as closely as it dared to the excitement and alluring smell.

Rising swiftly Maura seized an orange,

an apple, and twisted a spray of luscious purple grapes from a mammoth bunch, then knelt and lifted the cloth just enough to allow her laden right hand to pass in beside the absorbed occupant of the space under the table. The rubbers became agitated and hitched back from sight. Breathless she stayed still, while Mrs. Wilkes and her husband craned across to stare down at her. Silence under the table; then a feather's weight touch on her finger—a lightening of the treasure in her hand; and she knew that the grapes had been taken. A tiny hand brushed hers and the orange was accepted. The apple offered difficulties to his laden small fists so he calmly knocked it off her palm and fell over upon it to prevent its escape.

Maura sat back in a graceful huddle on the white floor and looked up into the attentive parent faces. She was wholly unaware that the sun made an aureole about her fair braids, lighted her clear skin to an almost translucent marvel and glittered in the tears that clung to her thick lashes, enhancing the black and amber wonder of her eyes.

"He—your baby—took fruit from me," she told them in an ecstatic voice. "He wouldn't mind then—if you were willing—I know one doesn't like a stranger in one's family on an intimate day like this—but if you would let me——"

Mrs. Wilkes turned pale, then pink. Wilkes straightened, deep red and deeply moved.

"Elizer," he said solemnly, "do you 'ear wot you are bein' arst? 'Ave you forgot the day it is an' your Christ'an dooty?"

"I ain't thinkin' of my Christ'an dooty!" Mrs. Wilkes broke out with most amazing energy. "I'm thinkin' wot a beastly ungrateful one I am, arfter my fine talk o' Chris'mas an' all! I 'ad a proud heart about acceptin' all this grand feast instead of knowin' that our 'Eave-enly Father would like me to take it as a part o' 'Is lovin' kindness on 'Is dear Son's birthday."

With a scramble and a rush Maura was up and had her arms about the plump gray calico shoulders.

"Oh, thank you," she cried eagerly.

By the time Wilkes returned, shaven and scrubbed and awkward in his Sunday best, the table was laid for four, the roasted goose proclaimed itself by a pervading savoriness, the shining stove was filled thick with busy cooking utensils, and on a side table the gold-topped bottles flanked the colorful mounds of fruit, the smug abundance of nuts and the unwonted spectacle of three sorts of cheese. Wilkes grew congested above his glittering collar.

"W'ere's Buster?" he demanded, as one whose surfeit must be shared. The splint rocking-chair swayed a signal. Wilkes made sure his son was the source of the motion, and cast a dubious eye on his active wife.

When at last they were all gathered about the heavily laden table and grace had been said, Mrs. Wilkes spoke gently to Maura to break her deep absorption.

"The old country'll be new to you, I take it, Miss?" she asked hesitatingly. Maura seized on the opportunity to avow her separation from the "clarss" to which Wilkes had referred during the day—a "clarss" unmistakable.

"I've been at school all my life—all that I can remember; and my father died before I was old enough to hear of his home. It will—yes, it will be new to me."

With her face still suffused with shame she felt the lifting of the old optimism in her heart. Things always had been arranged, somehow; since England had been spoken of, why not expect to go there, and why not hope for the favor of Sir Maury Digby and forgetfulness of this Christmas Eve that would in time fade to the forgotten horror of all nightmares? She looked up with a brightness that made Mrs. Wilkes stare in amazed relief.

"Tell me about it, your home that was and mine that is to be!"

During the rest of the meal the impromptu hostess babbled happily of her girlhood's Surrey.

After dinner Wilkes combined his proper Christmas punch, while Mrs. Wilkes got the main burden of the dishes off her mind, and then they sat in a semi-

circle about the clean and newly-shining stove, and had their nuts and raisins and sipped the punch, while William languidly cuffed his ball about the floor and gazed at the plethora of goodies he had not been able to eat.

"Get your accordion, Father, do," urged Mrs. Wilkes.

"'Oo wants to 'ear that ol' growler!" he objected, visibly flattered.

"We all do," Maura assured him; and thereupon Mrs. Wilkes brought it from the inexhaustible chest.

He thrust his fingers through the end straps, grumbling about his lack of practise and the blighted contrariness of certain keys and his inability to play after dinner anyway; but with the first wail of sound from the reeds he forgot his pretense and employed himself in expressing his carefully hidden soul through his marvelously deft fingers and the antiquated instrument. Reels and hymns and jigs and folk songs, scraps of operas he had heard somehow, somewhere, popular songs and heart-breaking old ballads he contrived to coax into sound and enliven with feeling. William drifted up to observe the miracle of his father's fingers making music, and abstractedly leaned against the young lady's chair. When he had shifted from one foot to the other four times, and his intent blue eyes had winked slowly, thrice, she dared put out her arm stealthily, and draw him toward her. He looked around at her quickly, but she kept her eyes on the accordion, and he looked that way to see what he might be missing. Between his absorption and his growing drowsiness she managed to lift him to her lap; and after a stiff moment he relaxed, and lay back against her shoulder, lulled by the music and the swaying of the rocker. And so at last she held him, the enticing, flanneled Cupid; felt the adorable softness of his little body in her arms; had the round, fragrant, soft-curled head against her shoulder, and the hunger that had seized her on her first sight of him was appeased.

"'Ee'll be too 'eavy," murmured Mrs. Wilkes, touched beyond words. Maura shook her head impatiently. Wilkes, after a sighing chord, let his tired fingers

relax, and as the music ceased the drowsy baby eyes opened wide. Purely from desire to keep him soothed and in her arms, Maura took up the whispering note of the air and began, very softly, to weave it into a lullaby. Wilkes looked up sharply, and his wife's mouth opened. Just as the musicianly fingers had strayed, so she sang; quiet songs, strains the accordion had taught her, quaint ballads that her music master had drilled her in—all subdued to the sleepy time. But there came to her, as she observed the breathless attention of the elders, a recollection of her last song at school when the girls had accorded her such unusual attention. If they could see her now—or if these people could have seen her then! She drew a deeper breath and started the song she had sung on that occasion; but the heavy little head on her breast stirred with the first piquant run and she broke off in a tuneless crooning. It seemed more important than all else that William Wilkes should stay with her. Very slowly, in a mere sweet whisper, she droned the old lullaby from "Erminie" through, and half through again. The nestling head dropped against her throat, the chubby little hands relaxed, the long lashes lay sealed in a dusky semicircle on the flushed cheeks, and the siege was won.

For a long time they sat silently, looking at the little bright rim of fire that showed under the warped cover of the stove, basking in full-fed, music-lulled, unthinking, fire-gazing calm. Then Wilkes sighed, contentedly, got up and tiptoed to the chest with his accordion, tiptoed back and halted with his hand on his wife's shoulder.

Suddenly the door opened behind Maura's chair, and someone came in.

For a second the girl stayed rigid, her foot outthrust to check the swing of the chair, and the baby clutched to her so tightly that he squirmed in muscular resentment; then she turned, slowly, as she rose.

It was Minnie, even as she had guessed. Minnie, smiling and bowing and congratulatory, freshly starched and reassuring enough, in view of her loy-

alty, but the sight of her served to recall sharply that this peaceful day had been but hiding after all; that yesterday had been illusion, and to-morrow—

"Well, I cer'nly am glad to see yo' makin' the bes' o' things, Missy Honey," she purred. "Yo' Aunty is better some, an' she wish' to see yo' upstairs, direckly. Jes' say good-by to these folks an' thank 'em, an' le's not waste no time. I dunno but mebbe yo' goin' start fo' New Yawk on a late train, so's to be all ready to take the ship soon's yo' Aunty can git up an' pack."

Maura stayed as she was, sullen, suspicious, resentful. She believed not a word of that smiling assurance, and her throat felt tight and hot with the repression of tears that even Christmas Day should be broken in upon by some necessity for evasion. The grotesque folding-bed in the parlor seemed infinitely desirable, the placid hearty tea seemed the chief feast of the day, now that it was to be denied, and William—

William began to whimper and then to cry and flounder in her arms. Wilkes took him, and Mrs. Wilkes, the tea-caddy in her hands, bade him hush.

"Not leavin' without tea?" that hospitable soul demanded; "and of all things to be started a-journeyin' on a Christmas!" She spoke to Minnie, and her tone held the veiled asperity of a proper married woman, speaking to the servant of one of the "clarss" to which Wilkes had blunderingly referred.

"Yes, ma'am," Minnie evaded blandly, "it's too bad; but we ain't got no time to waste, Missy Lamb."

Vivid remembrance of the good reason Minnie had for haste when she had urged it not so many hours back started Maura from her illogical stubbornness.

"I—I'm quite ready," she said hastily, putting out both hands to Mrs. Wilkes. "You've been very kind to me—I shan't forget it—and please don't forget me. Promise you won't—both of you—" She swung to Wilkes, who, embarrassed at her proffered hands, motioned William clumsily toward the arms of his mother. William, rudely wakened and irritated,

resented the proposed exchange with lusty screaming.

"Oh, please!" Maura exclaimed. "Willy, Billy boy, don't spoil the picture I take away of you! Stop it, stop it—please, and say good-by to me."

With an adoring babble, Maura kissed him all over his moist face, and gave him to his mother.

"Good-by—good-by, you dear people—good-by!" Somehow she and Mrs. Wilkes came together and kissed. Wilkes crushed her fingers, and she swooped down on William for a farewell embrace; and then she and Minnie were going up the dimly-lighted back stairs, and the Wilkes were becoming, with every step, a dear, desirable, impossible background for the interview with Aunt Claudia. Outside their own kitchen door Minnie stopped her.

"Yo' Aunty she been mighty upset, mighty so. She b'lieve that li'l note 'bout yo' goin' away. She jes' nachally had to b'lieve it, 'cause ef she knew wheah yo' was she couldn't keep f'm showin' it. An' she had a time when she foun' out yo' was heah. Now don' yo' talk none, Missy Lamb. Yo' don' want'er ferget she taken mighty good care o' yo' all this long while. Yo' jes' mind that."

Aunt Claudia *was* upset. When the noisy, breathless half hour was ended abruptly by Minnie, who declared that the time for talking was over and that the taxi would be at the door in fifteen minutes, Maura found herself relaxing from that storm of words as from a physical buffeting. But she had remembered Minnie's admonition.

The yellow hand rested on her shoulder tenderly, a second, as the invaluable one whipped the traveling suit into place with miraculous deftness.

"S'll right, Missy Baby—it's goin' ter be all right," she whispered; "yo' chirk up an keep yo' courage. Gimme yo' han' heah tell I put yo' glove on."

Maura put out her right hand, almost stupidly. Things happened so fast that it was numbing. Minnie had to tell her again to open her fingers. With a curious little shock of homesickness she went down to the waiting car.

IV

Mrs. Corey thriftily lived in the back parlor of her lodging-house; but it was such a comfortable, even luxurious, back parlor that it did not occur to one to think of her as cramped or self-denying until she enlarged, cheerfully, on how very comfortable it was.

That, if anybody had thought of it, marked Mrs. Corey as a character worth analyzing.

She could tell you delightedly what she had treated herself to for her solitary dinner, and you would decide to stop in at the provision store next day and send her a porterhouse steak or a guinea-hen, so that she would know what a real treat was. She would joyously put a dab of costly perfume on your nose from the infinitesimal trial bottle that she had gone without something to buy; and you would see to it that next day she found another on her table—or a full-sized one, if you were in funds. Mrs. Corey, in short, could cast a crumb on the waters, in her beaming, infantile way, and it would return to her a full-sized loaf, fresh-baked—and buttered.

There were things one disapproved of in Mrs. Corey, to be sure; but she herself disapproved of them so candidly and humorously that it was disarming. She stated, frankly, that she was taking it easy because she had worked so hideously hard all her life, and her pale, merry eyes would fill with reminiscent tears and you would pity her for the hard past she had known, rather than resent the astounding indolence of her present. She was hearty in condemnation of her own insatiable novel-reading; but she remarked, with a whimsical, crooked smile, that she hadn't had any romance in her own life, and that she was just old fool enough to like to pretend that all the experiences of all the heroines had happened to her. Impartially she called herself an "old fool," likewise because she waved her scanty light hair, and polished her nails endlessly, and reveled in frilly negligees and girlish kimonos and cosmetics, and because she worshiped matinees and whipped cream. Even if

one couldn't disagree with her, one couldn't utterly condemn her after that; and she had a deeper side, decidedly. Lounging on her soft cushions, in her sweet-smelling, warm, prettily lighted one room, it seemed the most natural thing in the world to drift into confidences that wouldn't seem indiscreet till one recalled them afterward; partly because human nature loves to analyze itself, partly because it was absolutely certain that one would receive sympathy and understanding—because Mrs. Corey was never "shocked" even to the degree of shaking her head sagaciously; and partly because she babbled so frankly of people and happenings in her own past that she seemed to have nothing to conceal and no reservation. It took more serious reflection than one was apt to give her to discover that her interesting and rather spicy anecdotes revealed nothing at all of her own past beyond the general preface of "in one of my lodgings." One gathered that she had always lived in a back parlor and had always been the recipient of confidences. Life in all its phases was an open book to her, but she seemed always to have read from the book and never to have memorized nor to have applied any of its teachings. Her mental workings seemed all on the surface; her predilections harmless, foolish, natural.

If you had never seen Mrs. Corey's like before, and were comfortably certain that you should never see her nor her like again, you would doubtless have accepted her as Maura Wayne accepted her—tolerantly, compassionately, but with undeniable interest. And there was, moreover, a strong element of gratitude to be reckoned with.

It is mercifully ordained that the full consequences of a calamity are not perceived at the instant of its happening. If it were so—or in the happily few cases when it is so—life would and does cease. So, although she perceived dimly that all she had thought of her life had been illusion, that all that was to come was vague beyond imagining, and that she had been saved from a horror so black that she would never be able to visualize it, Maura had not known how

impassably she was cut off from her old manner of existence until her taxi bumped and skidded through the snowy city streets on that Christmas night after her scene with her Aunt Claudia.

She had found a heavy-breathing, silk-rustling and carnation-scented black woman awaiting her in the car; an apish-faced woman who had murmured, gutturally, with a flash of white teeth intended to be conciliating, at Minnie's quick assurance that "This frien' o' mine'll see you safe on the way, Honey Miss—jes' as safe as I'd do it." But beyond a "Yes'm, I will, Miss," the unknown protector had made no attempt at conversation. It would, indeed, have been impossible, for the panes of the cab might have been windows opening on destiny, so absorbing, so enviable, so agonizing were the glimpses they revealed.

Maura saw a lighted limousine full of sparkling, wonderfully cloaked and coiffured women and silk-hatted men; a white-capped maid drawing the curtains at lace-hung, holly-wreathed windows; a butler, massed black against an outpouring of ruddy light, opening the door of a sumptuous private club; a group of diners-out going up the steps to a hospitably wide door that showed the standard of the newel-post light bound with greens and scarlet ribbon; faces caught here and there—in cars, at crossings, under arc lights—faces of groups, of pairs, of single pedestrians, hurrying, leisurely, laughing, talking earnestly; and everything and everyone, normal, secure, sane, moving in a world from which she was shut out by no act of her own. Her gloved hands gripped together in her muff as the unanswerable injustice of it quickened her comprehension. It was so preposterous that her mind refused to grapple with it at once.

"I'm Maura Wayne—Maura Wayne——" she said over and over in a wordless rhythm that punctuated the whirring engine. If she could but get back to the old significance of Maura Wayne, the "permanent" pupil at Madame LaRoche's School for Young Ladies, all this intolerable nightmare she was having would vanish. And then her nostrils were assailed by a stronger gust of carnation

as the silk bulk beside her stirred and coughed discreetly. And it was no nightmare.

"Why can't I cry, why can't I cry?" she felt herself wondering, excitedly. "If I cry and make a scene, I can stop this craziness that is carrying me so far from everything right and decent. I never did anything to anyone—I shouldn't be punished for other people's wickedness, and things like this simply don't happen if one has courage to fight, and appeal to anyone for help. I'm only a girl, it is my right to cry—to scream out to these people, to be taken from this woman, to be protected rightly, to cry out this hurt and ache that is eating me—" But with another half of herself she knew that she wouldn't and couldn't. Unwittingly she had touched the steel in her make-up.

"Fore we get there, Missy, will you please to put this veil on? Minnie she give it to me fo' yo'." As the woman spoke she deftly flung a huge, brown chiffon square over the trig hat of Madame's choosing and swept its surplus fullness in a swathing fold about the girl's chin. Through that thickness and color the striking fairness might have been Minnie's own yellow.

Maura sat perfectly still, her thoughts congealing under a chill fear. Was her danger greater than she could guess?

"We're goin' in the day coach, Missy," the soft guttural went on. "Minnie she say to. Not so many folks in there. You can lay back in er corner an' nap, an' I got a lunch in mah bag; an' then yo' c'n sleep to-morrow."

Maura wondered where she would sleep. But already she had learned to fear what the future might hold; she who had radiantly demanded and expected! She understood that there would be less likelihood of recognition in the common car, in case . . . She did not finish even in her own mind. She shrank back in a corner of the unaccustomed seat, after their hurried crossing of the station, and the negress protectingly crushed in beside her, looming between her and the passengers that clumped up the uncarpeted aisle. When they were under way she turned over the

seat ahead and sat facing her charge. She was very black, very stout, elaborately dressed and evidently rather delighted with her dramatic role; but under the surface of facile good nature Maura guessed an animal-like ferocity. She had tin boxes of delicious-looking sandwiches, a tin of small cakes, two thermos bottles of chocolate, fruit and sweets in her bag; and after Maura had refused all of them, she sat back and devoted herself to eating, with lady-like restraint but with vast enjoyment. Time after time Maura roused with a start from the doze into which she had drifted; and always the huge eyes rolled, wide-awake and reassuring, to meet hers, and the square white teeth shone in a smile before they resumed the cud-like chewing. And so the hours passed, and Maura seemed to wake from a heavier doze than usual to find chill gray dawn dragging frosty fingers through the smoky darkness of the window. Weariness, cold and hopelessness silenced her. It was a dreary world, a dreary city, a dreary day, and what was to be would be.

Their cab stopped before the door of a dreary, red brick, high-stooped house; one of a dreary row in a dreary street. Door numbers and window draperies were all that enabled one to distinguish between them. And then the door of No. 27 opened to them, and Mrs. Corey, who seemed to be awaiting their arrival, became the chief factor in the hodge-podge of the new experiences.

Mrs. Corey was puffy-eyed from early rising, and shapeless in her dishabille; but she was past middle age and smiling, and she wore a pink-ribboned mob-cap over whatever hair she had, and her lingerie was lacy and white, and her kimono coquettish; and she put a welcoming arm about the slight, lagging figure of her uncertain guest and swept her through a cold hall and a cold front room, into a warm, snug back parlor, friendly with broad couch and gay cushions and puffy chairs and a big gilt mirror that doubled the dark red walls and crisp curtains, and a gas log in the old-fashioned grate doing its blue best to simulate a crackling fire, and sending

out gusts of heat that stirred the faint, pleasant perfume in the air. Left alone while this new acquaintance, without doubt, discussed her with the black traveling companion, Maura threw off the heavy veil, took a low chair near the log, and leaned toward the blaze, as cold and lonely humans do instinctively. Apathy was heavy on her. Here was a home-like room and warmth: so far she was passively grateful and beyond she would not inquire.

When she heard Mrs. Corey enter, however, she stood, instantly, in the manner prescribed at school; and the girlish deference and her first sight of the face that the veil had hidden, brought a crow of delight from that impulsive lady.

"Well, if you ain't just a little girl—an' I thinkin' all the time you was a haughty young person, in all that blue broadcloth an' big furs! An' I can no more keep from callin' you Beauty than I can fly! Because you are. I suppose I'm the craziest thing over good looks that ever was; probably because I never had any of my own. You don't want to mind me, for I'm likely to say anything that comes into my head, but I don't mean any more harm than a fly! But there, you're tired to death, ain't you, dearie? An' you shall have a little somethin' to eat an' then be put to bed for a good long sleep. I guess I'll take another nap myself, so's to be wide awake when you get up. I had my girl call me, because I got your aunty's telegram sayin' to be on the lookout for you, first train. How is your aunty, nicely? She an' me used to be real good friends, but I ain't seen her for years. An' so you an' she's goin' abroad! Ain't that elegant? An' you'll marry a duke first thing you do, or I'll miss my guess. Here's your woman to say good-by."

The very black person was wiping her mouth hastily on her hand, as she entered, and an aroma of coffee and bacon floated in with her rustling silks. Maura put out both hands in sudden gratitude and a forlorn regret that this loyal creature was leaving her. Everyone seemed to be leaving her.

"You've been so good," she said

huskily. "I can't tell you how grateful——"

The woman whipped a clean handkerchief from her sleeve and put it between her pudgy brown palm and the white hand.

"'Tain't nothin', Missy," she avowed, her eyes glistening. "I'm proud to a-been called on, 'deed 'n' I am. Yes'm. Minnie she's got my address, an' if ever you want me fo' anything whatever, you ain't only got to sen' word fo' me to come. Yes'm. I wish yo' the best o' good luck, Missy, I cert'n'ly do."

And then there was only Mrs. Corey between herself and loneliness. But Mrs. Corey was as good as a wall.

A comely colored girl appeared with a laden tray as the black protectress left, and Mrs. Corey fussed happily over arranging it on a convenient small table.

"Now you're going to eat like a good little girl," she bade, shaking out a snowy napkin and whisking it across the blue broadcloth lap; "here's a nice brown chop an' toast the way I like it—crisp an' brown an' buttery—an' some marmalade an' a grapefruit, whichever you like best, an' a pot of tea. I shan't let you have coffee because you got to go to sleep. You look tired, dearie, but it's becoming to you. It sort of makes your eyes look misty an' far away, an' your complexion is somethin' perfectly grand, ain't it. What's the use of denyin' anything that everyone can see, I say! An' it's natural—anybody could tell that. As I was sayin' you got to take a nap an' then we'll get real well acquainted. This is a lodgin' house, an' I don't take mealers, but I'll make a exception of you, o' course, an' you shall eat right here with me, an' I'll try to make you comf'table while you stay. There's only women in the house—all workin' people. I don't take anyone there's the slightest question about. I got to know where they work an' then go see 'em there. An' the house is clean, if I do say it, an' I was lucky to have a little bit of a room to put you in; but you won't mind, because when you're up you can use this room of mine. I don't keep but one for myself—the front parlor is gen'ral; but I'm real cozy an' contented an' thankful I got this much."

Her babble was impersonal and soothing, the breakfast delectable, the silver good, the china thin, the gas-log a flickering comfort. Maura felt herself relax, beginning with unsuspected little tensions in her body and ending with a loosening of the innermost fiber of her will.

Exhaustedly, after the feeblest of protestations, she climbed the stairs after the colored girl, meeting two fresh-looking, attractive, stenographer-seeming lodgers on their way out; and with the most casual of glances at her tiny, very bare, very clean hall bedroom, she let herself be undressed and tucked into a sweet-smelling, small bed, warmly blanketed; and she heard her door closed as though it were extraordinarily far away.

She woke to see Mrs. Corey, fuzzily blonde, and flamboyant in a cerise house-gown, smiling down at her.

"If you don't look like a great baby!" And the plump, obviously just-manicured hand patted the pillow beside the flushed cheek. "I been standin' here wonderin' whether to wake you up or let you sleep; but you'll rest better to-night if you get up now. Nobody's in the house but us, so you let me slip this kimono I brought up right over you an' run down. Tea's ready an' you'll feel better for a cup. Now you do 's you are told an' take things easy the way you ought to. I b'lieve in bein' comfortable."

That was her creed; and her excuse was that she had only one life to live. As a philosophy it was as seductive and as unhygienic as a feather bed, but for a time it served mercifully to pad Maura's bare nerves.

How successfully that result was accomplished she discovered for herself in true feminine fashion.

It was late afternoon of a day of wind and sleet and snow that she tapped on the panel of the side-door entrance to the back parlor, and was answered by an excited: "Come 's quick 's you can an' help me to decide!" Before the gilt-framed old pier-glass stood Mrs. Corey, surrounded by square boxes with a milliner's name slanting in quarter-inch thick letters across the tops. On her head was a decidedly jaunty, black and white

creation that she was studying with many prods and shifts and turnings.

"I was goin' to send up for you. I want to know whether this is too young lookin'," she greeted the girl with the perturbed inflection of hat-choosing time. "One of my new lodgers works for this milliner, an' I got her to have a few slight mournin' styles sent up for me to try. It's somethin' sickenin' to haf to stick to black an' white because you look like the old Harry in anything else, when you're dyin' to wear a color. But this shape has got a lot of *shick* to it, somehow—if only it ain't too young lookin'. Still, I ain't got but one life to live——"

Maura went into the room a few stiff steps.

"A—*spring* hat!" she said blankly. Mrs. Corey missed the tone.

"It's the wings that makes it look sort of heavy, but I could get a lighter weight one when it gets warmer; an' somehow this just takes my——"

Annette, the colored girl, tapped and entered with the familiarity of the privileged servant.

"Gen'leman to see you, Mis' Corey, in the front parlor. Somep'n about the house—he's from the agents, he says."

Mrs. Corey pivoted slowly about.

"From the agents?" She looked oddly agitated. "Why—there's two months more before the lease——" And then, putting the hat quickly aside, she caught up her trailing house-dress in front and hurried out gesturing Annette ahead and closing the door after her. Maura crossed to the couch and sat, heavily, leaning on a propping arm. A *spring* hat!

The day after Christmas she had come to Mrs. Corey's, and now it was time for spring hats! What of the time between? What had she been doing, thinking, all the many days? Her mind traveled back, bewildered.

Chiefly she recalled Turkish baths. Mrs. Corey depended on massage to keep herself in condition, and Maura found it fascinating to dawdle away a day in moving from scrubbing to shower, to plunge and divers rubs, to facial treatments, to manicuring, to hairdressing, to lurching: an infinitely lazy, lux-

urious round, enlivened with social intercourse of a sort Mrs. Corey adored. Safe in the disguise of sheet togas, towed heads and cream-plastered faces, the habitués mingled with frank curiosity and a democratic freedom. It occurred to her for the first time, that she had known no other social life than this mingling "with the bars down." Matinees were another of Mrs. Corey's passions, and there had been many; and on other days, aimless tours of the department stores, tea in any one of a dozen "rooms" where there was fair music and endless opportunity for observing one's sisters of interesting sorts. Evenings had been spent at home, mostly, at novel reading without restriction; novels that made one gasp and thrill and flush and dream and soar and grovel; and all the gaps seemed filled with Mrs. Corey's curiously entertaining gossip of people; gossip that often seemed like pages taken from the most realistic of novels. And then there was always a long time devoted to meals, for Mrs. Corey was frankly a gormandizer; and always the late retiring and very late rising. Rarely she had yielded to her body's clamor for air and exercise, and had gone for a walk around the dreary block at dusk; and always she had been glad to get back to the ruddy room and the reading light and the new novel and Mrs. Corey's expansive smile of anticipation as she carved their chicken or divided the steak at the small, white-clothed table laid for them before the gas-log. Nothing wrong, nothing worse than idle and unthinking had those days been; but what about the future? Where was Aunt Claudia?

Weekly there came a thick envelope enclosing a blank sheet folded about one or two twenty-dollar bills. Usually the address was in Minnie's careful writing, but that had meant nothing because it was understood that Aunt Claudia would be very busy selling her things and settling affairs before the flight to England. Maura recalled that she, herself, had written once, in detail, of her surroundings, as Minnie had bade her do; but no reply had come and it had been easy not to write again; because despite the feverish explanations of their last conversa-

tion, she and Aunt Claudia could never resume that old trying for intimacy that had marked their relations. Her face scorched with a blush as she faced the fact that money was the one tie that held her, even in thought, to the woman she had called aunt, but that she had taken the continuance of the supply for granted. The yellow bills had been bits of paper that were the equivalent for food and shelter, and that made possible the bath and teas and taxis home, to say nothing of the endless small attentions it had seemed, for some reason, necessary to show Mrs. Corey. And like a cold trickle through the stir and shame of her first serious consideration of her situation, crept the consciousness that all the numerous twenties had melted somehow, and that she had—no spring hat!

A tap on the door brought her up alertly. Annette thrust in her head.

"Heah's a lady to see Mis' Corey an' I'm bringin' her right in heah, Mis' Maura. She's a old frien' o' Mis' Corey's—yo' won't mind, will you, Mis'?"

A chinking, a rustling and tapping and an asthmatic wheezing were audible from the hall. Slowly a dark green, furred and feathered bulk propelled itself across the threshold, assisted by the tapping umbrella; and with chinking chatelaine and a gold vanity bag and a gold lorgnon coming together in one finishing clash, the enormous bulk subsided with a tremendous thud in a big arm-chair near the center table.

"I'll take something for my throat, girl," bade a voice that sounded like a mechanism worn out but oiled to dripping. "Port if it's good. Where's the young lady you spoke to? I hope I'm not intruding, my dear—" The sentence broke on a wheeze of incredulous surprise. Maura stood immovable as she had risen in her first horror of recognition, staring at the bloated pink face under the two-toned mass of green plumes. The shocked nerves in her face and scalp began to recover themselves with an unbearable crawling tingle. This woman was the "Nancy" she had seen in her aunt's dining-room!

An indescribable choking gurgle of

merriment came from the bulk in the big chair.

"Bless and save us! If it isn't enough to scare a body the way I was thinkin' of you again, only this day, and wonderin' what had become of you, and here I take it into my head to drop in on Dolly for a minute—and run onto *you!* Well, dearie! How'd you come here an' how long you been here? You remember me, all right, I see. How's Auntie? I kep' away from her, for I knew I shouldn't be any help to her, and those detectives pick up the least scrap o' nothin' and foller anyone to the day o' their death, badgerin' 'em about it! How'd you get away so neat without anybody knowin' there was such a person? You needn't be afraid o' me—Barron only got what was comin' to him; and he was crazy as Bedlam and had been for months, and he'd a-had to been shut up if he'd lived. The wickedness that man has done I hate to think of! Did he scare you, dearie? I've wondered and wondered what went on, and whether he saw you, and how you come out. I ain't askin' any questions, but he made a mistake when he kept aggravatin' that yellin' Minnie the way he did. I never whispered it though—"

Maura lifted a heavy hand to her throat where a quick, painful throbbing had seized her between breaths.

"What are you—what do you—what—" she stammered; but with the first stab of that pulsation she had guessed. With a creaking of strained corset the obese creature in the chair leaned toward her, eyes glimmering between their puffy lids, in devouring curiosity.

"Well, upon my soul I believe you didn't know! And who'd a-thought it! Claudia said you was as innocent as a baby, but I hardly believed her. But you are! You saw Barron, didn't you? Tall and dark, he was, but you couldn't hardly tell whether he was old or young; and a queer habit he had of wettin' his lips with his tongue. Yes, I guess you must have seen him, all right, you got a face that gives things away too easy, dearie. Well you can't have looked at a newspaper for they all of 'em had it. Got into his limousine at his own door to be drove to the station, on the evenin' of Christmas day—

nobody knows where he was goin' nor nothin'—and the only way to explain it is that someone sneaked into the car as it stood waitin' for him an' it bein' dark the chauffeur didn't notice. Anyway, when he pulled up at the station there was Barron leanin' back in the corner of the car dead as a door nail. Not a sign—nothin' but a little thin, sharp knife—don't look so sick, dearie, you didn't have no more to do with it than I did! There was folks enough that had it in for him; but all I say is he was a fool to make Minnie hate him so. He hit her once and she never forgive him; and she had her own crowd that all stands in together and wouldn't think any more of puttin' a man like Barron out o' the way than they would of eatin'. Of course there was some private inquiries—it got found out that he was very good friends with your Aunt Claudia, and they pestered her till she had to move; an' Minnie she kind of dropped out of sight till things blew over. Mind you, I don't believe Minnie *did* it—"

Maura stepped back weakly to the couch and sat, her head in her hands. She felt actual nausea, so vividly the horror of that Christmas Eve came back to her. It was as though the blurred imprint of the first shock and impression had been smoothed away so that this second shock should stamp itself clear and permanently on her memory. Yet instead of the paralysis of the first horror, she felt a gathering of her faculties, a quickening of perception.

"My aunt—she is in no danger?" she asked, not uncovering her eyes. She heard a thickened wheeze that conveyed a derisive amusement.

"Claudia always falls on her feet!" said the woman with dreadful familiarity. "No—she ain't in danger. I don't want to butt in, dearie, but I've done Claudia many's the good turn and she ain't never showed a proper gratitude. Why, Dolly here—that's Mrs. Corey—she sent Claudia over to me with a note askin' that I befriend her, and what I did for that girl—it's years ago, now,—I couldn't begin to tell you. And she told me to my face she hated the sight of me and wished I'd never show myself near

her again. Now what do you think of that! And so I don't know as I'm under any obligation to hold my tongue when you ask me a question. Claudia's got an elegant place, a house to herself, her own limousine and three servants, and she's taken off as much as a dozen pounds and she looks young and bloom-in'. It's an opportunity that don't come ev'ry day, but Claudia's lucky; and probably she couldn't take up with this chance before on account of Barron. Still, now things is all right, why don't she have you back again? Or, to say the least, why ain't she told you anything about her good luck? You're too pretty to be shut up here with Dolly. I wonder where that nigger is with my port? I've talked myself hoarse as a crow!"

Annette came in, on that last word; came in with a sudden opening of the door and a stumbling rush that was strikingly like an escape rather than an entrance. She had a glass and a decanter on a small tray, but she sped across the room from the person for whom it was intended, bent and thrust the whole under one of the red inner draperies of the window, and then fell to work on the milliner's boxes, tying them neatly, and stacking them, even wrapping the favored black and white turban in its tissue and making an elaborate business of packing it. Two people were heard descending the stairs, and Mrs. Corey's voice came breathlessly:

"That's all the house except my back parlor—there ain't a person here that don't work ev'ry day in the year except the one young lady 't had that small room, an' is here till she goes abroad, an' is the niece of a friend of mine an' will tell you the same. An' I let her use my back parlor because it's kind of cheerful—seein' as it's the one room I have for myself I feel privileged to make it so, because a little comfort is about all there is left to live for at my age, an' havin' worked hard all my life——"

She was at the threshold, her panting monologue bringing not the slightest murmur of response from whoever strode beside her. Maura had taken down her hands at Annette's curious coming in, and now sat looking toward

the door. But the apprehension and uncertainty that such an incident would have brought to her a few weeks back were replaced by a faint irritation that aggravated her abiding shame and hurt beyond enduring. She resented Mrs. Corey's confidences about her, resented the equivocal position in which she found herself again through no fault of her own, resented the very shame and hurt that caused resentment; and it was an emotion absolutely new. With an impatient toss of her head she stood, her hands shutting involuntarily, as Mrs. Corey trailed in, breathing hard, flushed, nervously dabbing her perfumed handkerchief at her cheeks and nose and neck. The green plumes of her caller's hat stayed twisted into view around the chair back in the uncomfortable attitude of expectancy they had taken at the first words from the stairs. Mrs. Corey started as she beheld them.

"Nan—why—how d' do!" she fumbled in open consternation. "When did you come to town? I'm jest showin' the house to a gentleman from the agents—some—some repairs I want——"

The gentleman from the agents stepped deliberately in after her. A small effigy in granite appearing to them could hardly have been less imperturbable or more gray. From his orderly hair to his spats he was fleckless, most immovably correct, and of varying tones of that depressing color: above the white line of his collar his face was in ashen harmony with his grayness of hair, clothes, gloves, and the stony eyes behind the glittering lenses of a nose-piece. The deep lines in his smooth-shaven, finely featured face seemed grayish carvings, the compressed mouth above his rather heavy chin was but a slightly warmed variation of the general hue. He was slightly under average height but of tremendous impressiveness; and he was either much younger than he looked, and prematurely aged, or much older than he looked and holding himself at an apparent fifty-five or so by an iron determination.

"Th—this is the back parlor; my room," Mrs. Corey repeated feebly; but the gray gentleman had already taken in the back parlor. Deliberately, with a

composure that would have been insolent beyond words had it not been so coldly impersonal, he appraised the room; furniture, rugs, puffy cushions, knick-knacks, the carefully busy colored girl and her boxes, the green-feathered head that studied him so intently around the high back of the big chair; and the humans seemed to mean no more to him than the furniture. One would have said that he completely missed the slim, frowning, defiant young person who faced him from the couch corner; but suddenly he centered his icy lenses full upon her and kept them so.

"This is the young lady—visitor?" he inquired, in a voice that was as bleak, as harsh, and as expressionless as his exterior would have led one to expect.

"Yes—the one that's goin' abroad," Mrs. Corey cringed. "Maura, dearie, this gentleman is kind of—kind of taking a list of lodgers for the agents that lets these houses. They're gettin' more partic'lar—though I'm perfec'ly willin' they should be far 's I'm concerned; but will you just tell the gentleman about how you come to be here, so 's he can see for himself—"

Maura looked not at all at the hunched, fawning, anxious pulp that merry Mrs. Corey had become. Unflinchingly her eyes stayed upon the cold, gray ones of the inquisitor, and she felt her brows draw lower and lower in resentment as uncontrollable as it was foreign to her. What she found most unendurable was the fact that the man was a gentleman, beyond mistaking. An ordinary agent's agent she would have found it possible to answer, curtly and convincingly; but this was the sort of man she had so often seen at school among the diplomats and educators and discoverers and endless notables that Madame so successfully cajoled into addressing the young ladies. With her mind on those days she spoke in a voice that had not the slightest trace of the caressing languor that her instructors had found so deplorable.

"I do not choose to recognize the authority this—this stranger claims for himself. In any case I should refuse to submit to such impertinent—"

"Dearie!" gasped Mrs. Corey. "You don't understand—"

"Let me explain," interposed the questioner, calmly, his gaze not leaving the defiant young face. "We—the agents that is—have been advised that in the interest of morality we should make a personal inspection of each house on our lists. There must be no discrimination, nothing left to opinion. This house, for instance, is unsuspected in certain grave respects—"

"Well, why couldn't you've said so!" Overcome by relief Mrs. Corey slumped into a chair. "Comin' cross-questionin' and—"

"Shut up, Dolly," said the huge woman in green, turning her plumes front as though she had absorbed all there was to know of the gray man. "It's up to them to prove what is, not for you to prove what ain't."

"But unfortunately," went on the harsh voice as though there had been no interruption, "there is an accusation of another sort. From a pitiable source we learn—"

"It's a lie, whatever you heard and whoever said it," Mrs. Corey shrilled passionately. "I ain't done a thing and nobody can prove I have!" Inflamed with anger, loose-lipped, evil-eyed, the fat, merry, harmless Mrs. Corey was metamorphosed into a creature horribly like the larger bulk of her caller. Maura stared at the revelation with a new uneasiness, and looked back at the gray man in anxious question. He continued evenly:

"It would almost seem that an insidious influence is at work here to turn young girls into a mode of life that—"

"It's a lie, a lie, a lie!" screamed the apoplectic woman he accused. "You—"

"Shut up, Dolly!" advised the other woman calmly; and Mrs. Corey burst into unlovely tears. The gray man did not give her a glance.

"A mode of life that means death in life. We find that all the lodgers received here have been young, attractive, and employed at small wages at trying work. The house is clean, and orderly, but it has been suggested that it was kept designedly bare. Suppose these girls to

be friendless, of good character, unsuspecting. They are naturally lonely. They drift to the one attractive room in the house, where it is made easy for them to give their confidences and to——”

“It’s a lie! Bring anyone to face me if you can——”

“I tell you to shut up!” The fat woman cut the blubbing defiance short. “You’ll talk yourself into trouble, Doll, if you don’t watch out.”

“Whatever has been done has been carefully done,” the dispassionate voice admitted. “But our opinion is based on our personal interview with a girl of character beyond the average, who gave her opinion as to the clever causes of her own downfall. Further, from the report of a secret Investigating Committee, we have discovered that among one hundred unfortunate girls questioned in one district, twenty-two gave as their last reputable address, this or some other house leased in the past by Mrs. Corey. It interests us to the point of asking what arrangement Mrs. Corey possibly has, and what percentage she is paid——” And there Mrs. Corey gulped and relaxed in a seeming faint.

“We are justified, at any rate, in terminating the lease,” he continued, unheeding; and the vivid house-gown bulged as its limp wearer sat up with a jerk and with such a snarl of vicious rage as made Maura wince.

“Terminate it, then!” she shouted, with a foul adjective. “But I’ll have the law on you, an’ we’ll see who makes good. Do you think you c’n hold me responsible for ev’ry rattle-headed fool that comes to lodge with me? You can’t prove nothin’, an’ I can bring as many to prove my good name. You ask my girl here if she ever saw——”

“She’s crooked, Doll,” cut in the woman in the big chair, tersely. “I bet you she knew this was goin’ to come off—she acted mighty funny when she let me in, an’ she was rubberin’ at what you an’ this man was talkin’ about, an’ come runnin’ in here just ahead of you. I been watchin’ her. This man is sure of himself. Better quit.”

At the unexpectedness of the accusation Annette stood petrified, her face dis-

torted with fear that betrayed guilt. Mrs. Corey, after one transfixed stare, howled vindictively and struggled up from her chair. The fat woman’s umbrella shot out and prodded her neatly but painfully back again.

“If you won’t keep quiet I’ll make you!” wheezed her adviser. “Let ’em go it. You should worry! You got enough to live on, you fool!”

“That,” commented the unmoved gray man, “we may well believe. We find that Mrs. Corey’s early energies were devoted to the management of an establishment the nature of which was unquestioned. And now, young lady, if you are satisfied as to my intention——” He paused and moved a little aside from the door.

With a rustle of starched apron Annette shot forward, past him and out. It touched a spring of realization in Maura and she stepped toward him.

“Nancy!” Mrs. Corey sprang up with the cry and spread her arms to bar the way. With a tremendous surge the big woman got to her feet and faced the gray man.

“None o’ that!” she menaced him in a tone of indescribable vulgarity. “You can talk all you please, but when it comes to takin’ a young lady away with you, I guess the police ’ll have somethin’ to say. I’ve seen your kind of a buttinsky before, an’ sometimes he got hurt because he wouldn’t go away when he was told to. Now you’ve got about a minute——”

She did not say for what. She stood expelling a long wheezing breath of consternation that seemed to drain her of all her assurance. Over the cerise shoulder of Mrs. Corey who twisted about to learn the cause of the breaking off and the green shoulder of the silenced one, Maura saw that the gray man held a shining metallic something to his lips.

“Decide,” he said curtly, “whether you’ll take the rest of the week to move in or be put out now. There are two plain clothes men in the basement for just this emergency. Your maid let them in after I entered. Sit down and be quiet or I’ll whistle. It doesn’t matter to me, you know.”

Between two cowering, stealthily

clutching and whispering women, Maura moved to the gray man. Still holding his whistle in readiness he prodded the door wide open for her with a thrust of his silver-topped cane; and then she was in the chilly, oil-clothed hall, and her limbs were shaking, most surprisingly, and she caught at the banister to steady herself. A hand came under her elbow from behind, and from the front parlor stepped a man—a pink-cheeked, well-dressed, business-like man, who removed his hat at sight of her, and looked over her shoulder to the gray man who supported her.

"Stand at this door and keep them in there—and quiet—till I give the word," the harsh voice ordered matter-of-factly. "Where's Bray?"

"Here sir." Maura looked down, with a start, for the voice had come from below her. Quarterway up the basement stairs, standing motionless in the half-darkness, was a man who might have been the twin of the front parlor man.

"Tend the front door. Get an account of whoever rings," snapped the brief order. "And now how long will it take you to pack, Miss——"

"Wayne," Maura supplied, mechanically. "Not long; I never fully unpacked."

"Well, make haste. Where's the colored girl, Bray? Not gone yet? Send her to assist this young lady." And he began to pace back and forth along the narrow passageway from front hall to back parlor door, his cane tap-tapping the oilcloth in regular accompaniment.

He was making, again, the turn at the foot of the stairs when Maura started down, pulling on her gloves. He stopped, adjusted his glasses and paid her the compliment of an enigmatical stare, that made her very ears turn hot with a conscious blush. He seemed to appraise the outer things of Madame's choosing at their precise worth, and to probe the inner depths with perfect understanding and tolerant contempt. With no change of expression he contrived to show her that her beauty found him callous and that he discovered nothing else worthy of his consideration.

"Trunk ready?" He gave a per-

emptory twitch of his cane toward the silent pink-cheeked man called Bray. "I've a cab outside. Now is there anything to attend to before you leave? Mail, for instance? Better leave directions with this man to be handed to the carrier about forwarding, because it won't be safe otherwise."

Maura went down three of the half dozen steps between them and stopped short, fumbling with her glove fastening, her eyes searching the adamant face imploringly. She had expected something to be suggested, expected that this capable, impersonal gentleman would take her out of her present intolerable situation and arrange another more desirable. Instead he was asking *her* for directions. A cab to take her where? Mail to be forwarded—where? In her dark blue leather wrist bag with its silver slides was a single crumpled dollar bill thrust into one of the silken side pockets with a wad of theatre programs and her paper powder book. In the small change purse was, perhaps, another dollar in silver. She had visualized it sharply when she had been startled by Mrs. Corey's spring hat, and the moneyless sensation had been a new fright. She felt the fright again now, and with it a dumb, hysterical helplessness, as though her thoughts were tortured in a vacuum.

"Why I——" She had to stop and cough huskily to rid her throat of a queer rigidity. "I don't know—where——" And all at once her lips trembled so that she could not shape them and unsteadiness swept over her from head to foot. She reached for the banister and rested on it heavily. The door of the back parlor squeaked open a crack and a strip of cerise housegown appeared in the oblong.

"I got to be allowed to speak," croaked Mrs. Corey. "That young lady ain't got a friend in the city nor any place to go, and you're layin' yourself liable to arrest if you take her away. Dearie, you stay here till your auntie comes; you can telegraph her, but then you wait right here. Because all that stuff you heard was lies, only I was so struck dumb I couldn't think what to say, and anyway what can one woman alone do against a put-up game like that?"

Maura searched the gray man's face with dilated eyes. His expression had not changed. Hadn't he understood?

"What she says is true," she faltered. "I'm quite alone—I don't know anyone." And then, as he still waited: "Perhaps—I'd better—stay here—just for a while," she added, with a sick tremor under the words.

The cold eyes regarding her were like granite chips under the icy lenses. A faint, sardonic twist dragged the corner of the grim lips slightly.

"That, of course, is for you to decide," he said with obvious impatience. "There are several worthy institutions where you could be received——"

"There, listen to that!" shrilled Mrs. Corey. "Char'table institutions is all you'll get from him! You might's well go to prison an' done with it, an' your aunt'll haf to go to law to get you out again. You stay here, dearie—you're of age an' you do's you want to for all o' him! You know I ain't never done or said anything but kindness to you, dearie, have I? An' I'll overlook the way you swallered his yarn if you'll come back now. You can telegraph your aunt, an' then we'll have a nice little steak for dinner, an' to-morrer we'll go to look for a nice little apartmunt somewheres where no lies'll be told, an' you an' I can jest take our comfort. Come on now, dearie."

It was like being shuttled between a granite wall and a feather bed. True, Mrs. Corey had done her no harm, and Aunt Claudia would be forced to come if she telegraphed, and there was but a single dollar crumpled in that expensive blue bag. And then, from behind Mrs. Corey came a stifled, wheezing cough. The other woman, that unwholesome creature so like a gross-bodied spider fattened on horrors! What was her association with Mrs. Corey, and why was she interested in keeping a penniless girl with them? Goaded by her extremity, her scared wits began to range themselves in working order. She strove to speak steadily and to look steadily at the impenetrable gray man.

"I don't want to stay here, but I dislike—an institution. I have been care-

less with my money, but more will be sent me; only just now it is necessary that I get assistance temporarily. I have just recalled that I might perhaps find someone to vouch for me among the relatives of some of my school friends. If you could tell me, or if you would help me to find a directory, I would like to try them before I—before I go to the place you suggest. You will be paid for whatever time or expense you let me cost you. I have a string of very small pearls that would bring enough to pay you and to tide me over if you would be good enough to help me dispose of them. But first, if I could find Mrs. Hilford—Mrs. Gage Hilford, or Mrs. Courtney Scoville—I met them both when they visited their daughters at school, and perhaps they would remember me and—and advise me—for the time——"

"Yes, that's right, brag of the swells you know!" burst forth Mrs. Corey, suddenly vicious. "An' tell how you come to know 'em, an' where the money come from that paid for your schoolin' an' wait an' see how much use they'll have for you when they find out who you are! Tell 'em what you know about Barron, for instance——"

"Shut that door," ordered the gray man disgustedly; and the pink-cheeked automaton who had waited his word thrust back the voluble Mrs. Corey, shut the door in her face, and held it shut, unheeding her wrathful tattoo on the panels.

"What is this about the Hilfords and Scovilles?" The interrogation was plainly skeptical, but Maura was no longer afraid. The curious indignation that this man had roused in her earlier in the afternoon was alive again, and with it now seemed to come a self-confidence that was wonderfully reassuring.

"I met both at Madame LaRoche's private school where I have been a pupil for—for the greater part of my life, in fact. It is true that I do not know their daughters socially; but Mrs. Hilford was always very kind to me, and I think that she would assist me, or at least shelter me for a few hours."

"The LaRoche school!" repeated the incredulous gray gentleman, his brows

puckered. Evidently he knew of the place. "You are prepared, of course, to explain to Mrs. Hilford satisfactorily how you came to be in a place so—er—decidedly unlike that in which she knew you?" The implied suggestion that he should see to it that she was forced to explain brought the scorching color to her cheeks; but that irrational anger mounted within her again sustainingly.

"I will explain," she answered, in a tone oddly like his own, "to Mrs. Hilford." And she had the satisfaction of seeing that he started to speak, checked himself, and looked at her with a new keen scrutiny in the instant before he gestured Bray forward.

"My coat, and help the cabman with the trunk. Then you stay here till you get word from me to leave. Those women are not to get out—understand?"

"Yes, sir." Bray opened the door wide and whistled; darted into the front parlor and came out with a handsome, fur-lined coat which he deftly held for his superior, while a shabby, fat-bundled cab driver waddled up the steps.

Through the open door Maura saw a postman run down the steps of the next house, and turn up to theirs, sorting letters from the thick pile in his hand. She found herself stumbling down the stairs, her hands outstretched in quaking hope, so eager that she neither understood nor resented the manner in which Bray stepped between her and the three envelopes that the man held out.

"Oh, see if there's one for me—Maura Wayne!" she besought; and Bray, first looking to the gray man for permission, gave her two letters before he followed the cabman upstairs.

One envelope was addressed in Minnie's painstaking writing, and she tore it open in excited eagerness that was made content by the glow of yellow inside the folded heavy sheet. There were two bills, a twenty and a ten. With her curious anger mounting inexplicably, she opened the second envelope that bore Aunt Claudia's characteristic heavily shaded scrawl. Folded in the note that she did not give a glance was a yellow bill—a hundred dollar bill.

She seemed unable to turn swiftly to

face the watching gray gentleman; there is a shock of relief that numbs as effectually as that of hurt. Slowly she pivoted about, money and envelopes crushed in either hand, and slowly she gathered words from the angry flood of exclamations that seethed within her, defeating themselves.

"I have money, you see—I need not trouble you—I shall leave here now, if I may have your cab, or I will call another—I knew nothing of what you say of this house. When you saw that, and saw that I wished to get away, you should have done all you could to help me. It doesn't matter whether I had the right to expect it or not; there is a right deeper than custom. But you made me decide, even though you must have seen that I hadn't strength or experience enough to decide wisely. You would even have left me here if I had not mentioned two names that interested you. You offered me a charitable institution. She, Mrs. Corey, offered me—kindness. It doesn't matter what lay behind her kindness; she *was* kind and always has been, and that is why there will always be lonely, ignorant, homeless girls who will prefer Mrs. Corey's sort to your indifferent, contemptuous respectability. If you can't be kinder you'd better keep away altogether, because if you take away a girl's only home and her only faith, and frighten her, without showing her something better to be gained by listening to you, I believe you'll only hurry her into the very things you say you mean to help her escape. And yet I—I thank you—for what—you have done and were to do for me."

The gray gentleman stood civilly attentive throughout, eyes on her face. She half thought that she had fancied the apoplectic flush that had darkened his changed countenance when she began, because he was so alarmingly gray when she finished. She added her thanks in half apology of the rudeness that her over-tensed nerves had inspired. She was not at all prepared for his surprising reply.

"Possibly you are right. I'll try to change my manner." He spoke as casually as though it was a detail of dress

he meant to alter. "If I offended, I ask your pardon; it was unintentional, really. And I propose that you let me take you to lodgings that are beyond question. It's hardly the thing for you to go to a hotel, you know. You may communicate with Mrs. Hilford or Mrs. Scoville, if you wish; you may question the cabman or a policeman or anyone at all, or I'll take you into the nearest bank to have myself vouched for; and then you can feel secure until your people get to you. Only I must ask you to make what haste you can if I am to accompany you. I have a—rather—pressing engagement."

For the time it took Bray and the cabman to thud halfway down the stairs she turned the alternatives over in her mind. Never before in her life had she so weighed any action for herself, and she felt a little thrill of pride as she found arguments for and against marshaling themselves obediently and logically in her unused mind.

"I will go with you, thank you," she decided, turning on the threshold. He bowed briefly. Side by side they went down the steps, and courteously he assisted her into the cold, dingy cab, then settled himself beside her, hands folded on the cane held upright between his knees, stared straight ahead and seemed to forget her. Maura, glad of his silence, looked unseeing out the gray smudgy window where the sleet clicked accompaniment to her swift thoughts. She was trying to become acquainted with herself—her new self. Something had happened to her in the incongruously important moment when she was shocked by Mrs. Corey's spring hat. Dimly she perceived that in that instant had been completed the awakening begun in Madame LaRoche's rose-hued boudoir on the December afternoon so short, and so long, a time ago. Then she had submitted to being shown Truth; now she knew herself to be seeking it.

The cab stopped with a skidding lurch, then swayed as their driver clambered hastily down. The sputter of a racing engine just ahead stopped abruptly. In the pale radiance of a street light a tall, great-coated figure showed gigantic as it stooped to peer in at the window of their

cab. The gray gentleman thrust his cane toward the glass, without moving his body, and rapped the silver head on the pane. At once the door was jerked open.

"I say!" The cab seemed instantly flooded with deep warm voice and faint blending of gasoline and lilac toilet water, as the intruding leather cap was brushed off by the low door; and the aroma of recent cigarettes contending with cold fresh out-of-doors. "Just got your note. What the deuce—oh, I beg pardon!"

The unknown's head, with its reminiscence of lilac and radiation of electric health and warmth had literally brushed Maura's huge fur shoulder piece as he craned in across her. It was instantly withdrawn with a jerk that rapped it agonizingly against the swinging door and brought a tempery grunt from the impetuous one.

"Attend to me!" rasped the gray gentleman, ignoring the awkwardness. "Take this young lady—ring the bell—have Mrs. Dockham come out here to me; and you come with her. Make haste!" He did not turn his head, but stayed rigidly facing front. Under his harshness sounded a quickening that one might with certainty have called the hurrying note of great pain, with difficulty mastered, and of fear defiantly faced.

"What—is anything the matter?" Maura ventured, alarmed. He did not turn.

"Get out—quickly, please. Go with this—this young man—it's just across the sidewalk. I'll attend to the driver. Quickly, please."

Startled and concerned she sprang out, the young man taking her elbow to help her to the slippery curb. Without a look at her he leaned past her into the cab, and she thought she heard a groan from the gray man. At once the unknown turned, ran across the sidewalk and up the steps of a house that might have been the double of Mrs. Corey's dreary brick abode, and rang the old-fashioned pull bell violently, then he sped back down the steps and up to her, breathing fast.

"I take it you're to go in here?" His

deep, hurried voice was abrupt but not unkind. "Just let me help you to the steps, the walk is icy. The woman will be out directly, no doubt." The door opened as they reached the foot of the stone flight, and a slatternly maid peered down at them, holding her blue checked apron aside from the limp white one it shielded.

"Send Mrs. Dockham out quickly, please. Mr. Faris wishes to speak with her and he's not well. Make haste. This young lady is to stay here, I believe."

He looked down at Maura for the first time as he gave her an involuntary slight thrust toward the steps; and she looked up at him with a murmured: "Thank you." The light from the hall above was full on her face; his was in shadow under the cap he had resumed. The cap moved quickly as he thrust his head forward in a second involuntary movement, and he stared at her so close that she caught the gleam of his eyes under the blackness of the visor, and saw an Indian lean cheek and jaw outlined as clearly as though a pencil of light had followed their curves ruddily.

"Who wants me—Mr. Faris?" The light was blotted out, the outlines disappeared. The unknown started with an ejaculation under his breath.

"Yes, please. Can you come out to the cab, Mrs. Dockham?"

The tall black figure looming in the doorway sighed prodigiously and sniffed. Maura was to learn that Mrs. Dockham always met requests, of whatever nature, in that fashion.

"Yes, I guess mebbe I won't get cold; I'll just get a shawl." The light streamed out again as she moved aside to a hall stand.

"Are you to live here?" demanded the deep voice, low and rapidly.

"I don't know. I suppose I am, for a little," Maura heard herself answering with infantile candor and simplicity; and the new Maura Wayne sprang defensively to the rescue. "For a very little, that is, only a day or two, in fact;" and she marveled at her own change of tone and the ease with which she managed it. "I do hope that Mr.—Faris, you call him—is not seriously ill? If you'll thank

him for me again, and I thank you, also. Perhaps I'd better go in now, if you'll be so good as to send the man along with my trunk. Thank you again."

She turned quickly up the steps, and saw, from the corner of her eye, that the visored cap was lifted deferentially. She yearned to look back and see what sort of face would be revealed with the full light on it, but she would not; and the mere fact that self-control had occurred to her gave her a fighting sort of joy that triumphed, heartlessly, over the babyish regret that her denial cost her. Her self-knowledge was intoxicating in the sense of freedom and capability it conferred. The fact that this departure had been of her own will, and that the shabby, smelly, lukewarm and half-lighted hall in which she found herself was, beyond all mistaking, the hall of an everyday, honest, uncomfortably respectable house weighed heavily for self-respect; and under all was the subconscious support of the three yellow bills tucked into the inner pocket of her wrist bag.

Mrs. Dockham came up the steps with a sigh and a shiver and a sniff, and turned curiously to inspect the new lodger, who waited with her back to the door. Long, lean, lachrymose, black-haired, black-gowned, Mrs. Dockham was as unmistakably respectable—and in much the same way—as her house.

"Mr. Faris says you'd like a room as transient," she said listlessly. "I dunno's what I got's good enough—it's third floor back and the heat don't get up there real good; and it needs paperin' but I ain't felt I could afford it; and while I intend to give good, clean food and that that's nourishin', now that livin' is so high, I can't brag of the table. I b'lieve in tellin' the truth beforehand instead of bein' drove to it."

It was a wise precaution, evidently. With whatever chill of disappointment her dreary "third-back" struck its prospective tenant, there could be no denial of the fact that Mrs. Dockham had told the truth about it—beforehand. But it would do, would do very nicely, Maura assured her, with brave disregard of the brown, tattered walls, the sparse, rickety

furnishings and the damp, stale-cookery-tainted air, because the thought that it was only a transient arrangement interposed a merciful haze between her eyes and actuality. Dinner, though, in a basement dining-room crowded with all the people who had peeped from doors, and stared on landings, and whisked past her in the dim halls, was an ordeal she decided to evade.

"I must get several things—stationery, ink, some toilet things," she explained, hoping she spoke casually; "so I'll just get something to eat at the nearest restaurant when I go out now." Mrs. Dockham looked at her quickly, with eyes like blackberries dropped on dough.

"We-ell——" she hesitated. "You want your key now, or will you ring when you get back?"

"I'll ring;" and not till many minutes later did it occur to Maura that the gray Mr. Faris might have warned the woman that it would be well to have an eye on her transient's comings and goings. With a fresh accession of independence, she turned in at the first restaurant she came upon in her seeking; a white-tiled Dairy Lunch place, where her independence was augmented by having a table to herself and a passable little steak served her, such as, she guessed, would have meant bankruptcy to Mrs. Dockham. At a periodical shop she bought paper, ink, pen and stamps and a daily paper. Competent, self-supporting women, she knew, read their daily paper as customarily as did men; and she had determined to be a competent, self-supporting woman.

She enjoyed the slatternly maid's obvious excitement at letting her in, and greeted Mrs. Dockham with cool understanding when that cautious person appeared at the third back, almost immediately, with two towels and a door key. Indeed, the new Maura Wayne showed a bewildering grasp of motives and affairs; the old Maura Wayne, who lingered parasitically, trembled and feared and admired this sudden evolution of herself.

It was the new Maura Wayne who wrote briefly and pointedly to Aunt Claudia, announcing her intention to be self-supporting, and disclosing the discovery

of Mrs. Corey's character with a chilling absence of comment or reproach that made the rest of the communication convincing. But it was the old Maura Wayne who drifted into a silly reverie, standing before the foggy, cracked looking-glass of the bureau. Ridiculously she recalled a hint of lilac and cigarettes, the vibration of a deep voice, the rough brushing of an unknown's head against the fur over her breast; the ruddy line of light on a firm jaw and a lean cheek that showed young and firm and fresh above the leathern collar. "Are you to live here?" he had asked.

The new Maura Wayne brushed the foolish remembering aside and yawned defiantly at the flower-fair image in the depths of the battered mirror. It had been an incident. An unwise incident. She was a self-supporting woman and a transient, and the old Maura Wayne would always be a fool.

V

The blotches of black and white that were so trying to look at and so disturbing to listen to gradually settled themselves into the image and likeness of Aunt Claudia, bending over the bed and crying hysterically. And to arrive at that conclusion the protesting body and brain labored to exhaustion and were submerged in sleep that was oblivion. Nevertheless it was not so difficult to understand the second appearing of the black and white noisy effect; and by the sixth time it occurred to the sluggish brain to wonder why it hadn't recognized Aunt Claudia at first, and why she was so eternally crying. It took some hours to answer that self-imposed question. Aunt Claudia was gone, and aching daylight was gone, and a soft glow from the hall light sifted through the ground glass transom into the quiet, dark room, and the Nice One had taken off her rusty, starchy white things and sat beside the bed in a lazy-swaying rocking chair, wearing her warm woolly bathrobe, and patting Maura's hand with a comforting touch.

"I have been sick," Maura made her brain direct her lips; but the lips didn't

answer, because between the two the simpsy little thread of voice lost itself. After a tiny panic at the failure she tried again, and tried so hard that the s in "sick" came out with a whispering hiss. Instantly the Nice One bent over her close.

"Hello—asking questions?" And the comforting hand, big and soft and cool, smoothed away the ache that was beginning to torture Maura's forehead. Stubbornly Maura tried to shape her sentence again, and succeeded with the "s." It was characteristic of the Nice One that she understood—always understood.

"Yes, you've been sick, dearie, and you're in a private hospital, and there isn't one single bit of a thing to worry about, and I've been with you all the while and shall stay with you. Anything else?"

There was a question that Aunt Claudia's tears suggested, and after a long hard try one word of the question came: "Die?"

"No, *sir!*" answered the Nice One emphatically. "I guess you know me well enough to believe what I tell you. You're getting well, and it's going to be like traveling up hill and stubbing your toes all the way; but things are going to be interesting for all that, if you make a good climb of it. For instance: 'Way up in New Hampshire I've got a whole pen full of buff Wyandotte hens; fat sociable, clucky, comfortable biddies, the color of wheat fields after the wheat is cut and the sun has warmed the stubble. And there's one particular hen who lays her eggs in the nest nearest the hen coop door, in a little sweet hollow scooped out of dried clover. And I've sent up word that the eggs from that nest are to be snuggled up in new white tissue paper and sent along to you by parcel post every other day. Think of having a crispy piece of toast and a new laid egg, and think of that fine fat hen that's going to be told to lay them for you! Bet a cooky you'll dream exactly how she looks."

It was ridiculous, probably, but it was agreeable not to think of its being ridiculous. And there was something rest-

ful and sleepy and comforting in thinking about the New Hampshire hen. The first brown egg, standing warm and snug in its little glass cup alongside a crisp square of hot toast, was so familiar and homey that the weak tears sprinkled all over it. But it tasted so very good that it was impossible to think of anything else, for all the hours between that and the next meal, except how the next egg would taste; and besides eggs there were chops and steaks and chickens and salads and ice-creams and all the delectable things if the Nice One would only exert herself a little to get them. But the Nice One only laughed and doled out her tantalizing bits. And when she laughed, and dabbled a thermometer in a glass of water, and gave orders about keeping her patient's mouth closed, and called Maura a silly baby for whimpering because there were ten million aches crowded into one brittle body—then she didn't seem so through and through familiar as she did at the cozy dusk times, in that clear-headed interval between the fretful afternoon nap and the splendid rub before the long night nap.

"I've been away from school a dreadful while!" Maura whispered petulantly, on a day when the uphill climb had brought the fever creeping back again a bit.

"Oh, no, not so very long," the Nice One reassured her; but that nagging question of time, once roused, wouldn't be stilled. She went back to it again in the nice hour when the comforting hand patted her helpless one, and there was no noise and no unbearable light to confuse her thoughts.

"It seems a good while anyway. And Madame hasn't been here. And no flowers from the girls. Even—Aunt Claudia—hasn't been here—for a—while. I've had—the—queerest dreams—about—being—somewhere—"

"Mercy me! Why I had one dream, in an hour, about a month ago, that seemed to have filled a year!" The brisk voice took up the thread her weary one dropped; and when the Nice One told a bedtime story it was sure to be all full of New Hampshire hills and hens and

apple trees and blue sky and spring winds and fascinating trifles. Nevertheless, next day the nagging question began again; and all through the dusk hour the queer dreams that came back so vividly knit themselves slowly, slowly, into a fabric that seemed real.

There came a day when the Nice One came in smiling over a broiled squab. And then there was a scrap of broiled steak, and a wee chop, and dabs of sherbet and frozen cream. And day by day, as the heavy sleepiness lifted a little, the slow knitting of dreams filled the hours.

The Nice One, fresh and rustly in clean white, with her homely, clean face pink and lovable under the nonsensical crispy little cap, was called out to the hall one sunshiny afternoon, and she put the glass of water she was carrying down on the chiffonier while she answered the soft tap. An air current bulged the lowered window shade, and a prying sunbeam shot in, struck the unsteady water, and instantly a pool of aching, quivering light was reflected on the ceiling over the white bed. On the supersensitive closed lids of the bed's occupant the unusual light acted as an irritant. She stirred, frowned, and sighed herself partly awake. A voice from the hall caught her dull ear; a man's voice, unused to modulation, harsher and more peremptory than the voice of any of the taciturn physicians or quiet internes. She found herself wider awake than she had been for a long time.

"... and as I shall be here daily, on this account, I'll be available whenever you think it wise for me to see her. She does not remember yet—you are sure?"

"Perfectly sure," answered the Nice One's low accustomed murmur; and after the briefest of adieus she came in noiselessly, and met the stare of fear-darkened, terribly intent eyes that burned in a delicate face too small for them.

And the Nice One smiled. As she came, trying not to hurry, toward the bed, her hand casually brushed the emergency bell and pressed it. But she kept on smiling.

"Tell me—tell me how long I've been here?" Maura stammered, fighting for the words through a fog that surged, red-tinged, before her eyes and through her brain.

"Six weeks. Lie still as you can, kiddy, and trust me. You heard that man speak outside the door, didn't you?"

"Yes, I—yes. Yes. I can't tell—who he is—but I know—I remember—*Nurse!*"

"Yes, all right, all right—don't hurry—take your time—"

"I must—hurry—I tell you—they haven't been dreams, they haven't! There was a room with brown paper and mice in the walls—and a woman who sniffed and queer people—and I sang—sang for a man—but it was a cabaret show he wanted me for, and I got frightened and he swore at me—and after that—the Employment Agency sign wasn't a dream. I went there—there was a gray man who told me to go—and that sick woman who made me read to her all night, and whose little dog ran away from me when I took him out, and the crowds in the street and the agency again, and the time—the time—Nurse, make me stop remembering, make me stop—"

A white-jacketed interne came in quietly. Holding the slight figure close, keeping it down with one strong arm, while her free hand unhurriedly smoothed the hot forehead, the Nurse nodded to him and spoke gently.

"Don't be afraid of remembering—I know all about it, every bit. The brown-papered room was in a lodging house, and there were mice in the walls, of course; and the cabaret show was enough to scare anyone—nasty, smoky, drinky place; and the gray man was Mr. Faris, and you'll remember him presently; it was he who spoke outside the door just now; and he gave you a note of introduction to the woman in charge of an Employment Agency of the upper class, and she gave you a beastly job with a peppery tempered invalid; and her nasty dog got away from you and you had words, and then there was another place with that society suffrage woman who sent you out to sell papers for the Cause,

and ought to be ashamed of herself, and the crowds scared you; and you had a bit of trouble with the woman at the agency over another place——”

“Yes, but—oh, Nurse, how long—how long ago was it? I can’t remember time! All I can remember is Christmas and a little boy like a Cupid, and something hideous that happened just before——”

The interne came up behind the nurse and held out an hypodermic syringe that he had been calmly and carefully filling. She nodded and began to slide her free hand down the writhing white shoulder and along the arm that twisted to loose itself from her restraining clasp.

“Not far out of the way, honey,” she said cheerily; “only I guess it’s Christmas a year ago that you’re thinking of. You been talking of it and of a little boy; I guess that’s the one. And never you mind what happened before that, because nothing is going to happen this time. It was the very first of spring that you went to the room with the brown paper, wasn’t it? That’s what Mr. Faris told me; and the summer was pretty hot. You drank some made-over milk at some place or other and got your germ right there. And afterward you kept about too long. It’s winter now—you’ll wake up to-morrow and find a holly wreath in your window. Because to-morrow is the day before Christmas—and something nice will happen on Christmas Eve——”

With a tortured gasp the frail body sprang a few inches from her unprepared arm—and dropped back again limply.

“Ah!” commented the interne, skilfully nipping the hypodermic from the fingers that would have let it fall. “Now I wonder is that good or bad? Tough luck it had to break on her this way, whatever it was. She’s apt to have that particularly devilish paralysis, or lose her speech, or pop off altogether. Beauty, too, what? A reg-lar peach! What’s old Faris——”

“Get out of here, you puppy!” yapped the nurse, most unprofessionally. And as he was a very young interne and she an established favorite he went.

VI

Aunt Claudia’s sables were thrown in an enticing heap on the trunk that served Maura for clothes chest, general repository, and center table; and one of the soft brown tails that dangled by way of trimming from the costly shoulder scarf lay within a sixteenth of an inch of a melting pat of orange-colored butter that had slid from a scorched, soggy piece of toast on a chipped soup plate, that held, also, a dab of hash and a baked potato skin. Maura had been lunching when her aunt arrived, and had reached from her chair by the window and put the heavy plate on the trunk just before the furs had been flung upon it. From that chair by the window it was possible to reach, also, the edge of the single couch bed. The bureau was only three steps beyond the trunk, and the door only four steps beyond the bureau. For a person so weakened by illness that walking was almost an impossibility, this top floor hall bedroom at Mrs. Dockham’s was convenient; but there was little else that one could, in honesty, say in its favor.

Some long-ago person with money to waste and a passion for cheerfulness had papered the walls red. Time and the morning sun and many tenants had changed the color to a pinkish drab, splashed with grease, gouged, patched, tack-holed, with squares and oblongs of such hues as never were on land or sea, where calendars and photographs and what not had occupied spaces and hindered the fading process for varying lengths of time. The couch bed was covered with a one-time portière of one-time green faded to yellowish-olive dinginess; a wispy, sagging sash curtain of cheese cloth intervened, mercifully, between the boxlike dimensions and the one outlook upon the blank brick side-wall of the next house; and a second similar curtain hung dejectedly across a corner, opposite the door, was intended to counterfeit a closet. The one chair at the window was a splint porch rocker, one leg spliced with pieces of wood unskilfully nailed on, and was without cushions. The pillow from the bed had been utilized as a back support and a folded gray blanket covered the broken seat.

Propped with one shapely, chiffon-swathed arm, Aunt Claudia sat as she had slumped on the springless bed on entering, and stared, dumbly, at everything from the gray ceiling to the strip of straw matting on the unpainted floor, and to the scrap of orange-dyed butter that menaced her sables. Suddenly she sat upright, but without a move to rescue that adornment, and stripped off her gloves as though she were about to set to work at something briskly; but as her sombre dark eyes flashed to her niece's face, half defiantly, they were met by a smile of complete understanding and placid impassivity that for some reason checked the activity abruptly. The quick red suffused Aunt Claudia's handsome, but a trifle over-full face, and she twisted the gloves into a soft rope between her white fingers.

From her infinitely *chic* advance-season hat to her superlatively modish shoes, she was in her favorite black; but black of evident costliness and of a "knowingness" of cut and fabric. Throat and shoulders glimmered, marble white, through dusky chiffon, overlaid with hand embroideries like the miraculously perfect shadows of delicate vines and leaves. Pinned to her corsage, and drooping carelessly through the bruising lapels of her coat, were four uncannily beautiful orchids, ivory, lemon-streaked, with scarlet splotches of one hue with the lovely mouth that pressed, alluringly, against the mesh of the lace veil. Aunt Claudia's mouth was, perhaps, her best feature.

From head to foot Maura appraised her relative with the all-comprehending but friendly slight smile on her own paler lips; and Aunt Claudia stared back, half fond and half furious, taking in every detail of the slight figure in the splint chair: the shining, silver-fair hair that swept about the small head in an almost too massive braid; the oval face, thinned and almost translucent in its pallor, the frail hands lying idly on the comfortable brown steamer rug laid over the relaxed limbs. And incongruity was the chief thing the dark eyes noted. The incongruity of that delicate beauty in that dreadful room; the incongruity of the

carefully dressed hair, brushed and tended as surely those feeble hands could not have managed; the immaculate ruffles of a muslin dressing jacket, frilling crisply out at neck and sleeves of the cheap red flannelette bathrobe, and the snowy handkerchief tucked into the small pocket, all bespoke plentiful laundering and frequent changing; and the manicuring of the idle hands that most certainly would have taxed their slight strength beyond endurance. On the battered window sill were piled six new novels, with a delicate ivory paper cutter atop, as many late magazines, a silver-papered box that could contain only expensive bonbons, and, on the floor beside the newspaper-covered soap box that served as foot rest, was a basket of violets, a large, shallow, pretentiously "rustic" basket, heaped with effectively careless masses of single exquisite blossoms on a bed of their own green leaves, up-pouring their adorable fragrance. The money represented by that costly February offering and by the trifles on the window sill would have refurnished and repapered the room.

By a fraction's quirk Maura's faint smile grew satirical.

"Flowers and candy and books and fruit are allowable gifts for a young man to make," she observed mildly, as though she were answering an objection. "The paper-cutter isn't proper, of course, but I let it go because it's so much easier to use than a hairpin on these stiff leaves; and the luxury wouldn't be so noticeable if the room weren't so dreadful. I keep the violets down in that corner because it's dusky and they don't swear so at the awful color of the place. When it gets dark I'll put them up on the trunk and enjoy them."

Aunt Claudia had flushed and paled and flushed again; and she spoke low and slowly as though she were trying to keep herself in hand.

"How long have you been in this hall bedroom? And who—if I may ask—is the young man?"

"The second question is the one you want answered first, isn't it?" Maura countered. "He is Ivan Barrison, and he is something or other to the gray man,

Mr. Faris, whom you have met. I saw him—Barrison, that is—the day Mr. Faris brought me here from Mrs. Corey's, but only for an instant. He called here next day and sent up his card but I wouldn't see him. I had no reason; I just thought I'd be suspicious for a change. And twice afterward I refused, and then I got work and he didn't know where I was. The afternoon of the day before Christmas he was brought to the hospital where Mr. Faris had had me taken. Mr. Barrison had been in an upset—his car had skidded—and he was badly hurt. The first day that Nurse took me in my wheel-chair to the sun parlor we passed his door and he was looking out and from his chair recognized me. And later we met in the sun parlor. And since I've been back he has sent things every day, but I haven't seen him. Sarah—that's Sarah Webb, my nurse—says he's of an old and enormously wealthy family. That's all I know, except that I like him and he has been kind to me. I was moved up here last week. It's cheaper; and the Charity Board that Mr. Faris interested in me only allows me a very small sum. Please don't offer me money, though, because we had that out before I left the hospital. And anyway I like this better than the brown, mousy room on the third floor. Mrs. Dockham gives me luncheon. Sarah Webb comes every afternoon late, and bathes me and brushes and manicures me and brings me all sorts of good things to eat that the rich hospital patients send back; and she makes me a thermos bottle full of chocolate that stays hot for my breakfast, and I cook eggs from her New Hampshire hens over my gas. She does it because she likes me, and I like her. Oh, yes, and she takes my things to the hospital laundry, and that's how I come to be so spick and frilly. That's all about me, Aunt Claudia."

Aunt Claudia had twisted the gloves to a leather wisp that dented her flesh. Her mouth looked weary.

"Maura I can't—can't stand it," she said laboredly. "I know I've forfeited all claim. But I—Maura, my food chokes me, knowing that you haven't

enough! Everything I possess curses me. Haven't you made me pay almost enough to square what you suffered through me? Remember that I didn't mean for you to suffer or to know. Always—from the very first—I planned that you should be educated in fashion to fit you to go back and win over your father's people; I decided on Madame LaRoche's school because I read that it was the one school in America that fitted young girls to enter continental society. And on the strength of your English connections she took you. All I dreamed of was to be near you and to know that you were contented and safe some day in England, where nobody knew of *me*, and where I could be—be respectable—and forget—my life here. That's the truth. I haven't been all—not *all* to blame, Maura."

The straight brows drew down over the cool amber eyes, and for a flash there was a marked resemblance between the girl and the woman; then the look disappeared in a slight smile.

"Let's not go over that again, Aunt Claudia. The trouble with you and me is that we lived on vague to-morrows so long that we lost our to-days entirely. You have confessed that my father's people don't want me. I suppose that if I went to them and sat on their steps—if I could get so near to an English estate as the steps—they'd come out and yank me into the house and keep me in an upper back room and feed me occasionally, just because one tiny trickle of their blood is in my veins. But the vital current of me is American, and it wouldn't submit to such patronizing. So that's why you sent me to Madame LaRoche, was it? Just to fit me to win my way into their good graces? Poor Aunt Claudia! If Madame LaRoche had only taught me one single way to earn a living! But that's one thing that was never referred to in that ridiculous—dear—old place! Madame makes *her* living in America by making American girls as unlike their ancestors as is possible; and the polish that she imparts needs to be rubbed up, almost incessantly, with—money."

Aunt Claudia's slim foot tap-tapped

short-temperedly on the matting. "There was money enough to do that in the beginning," she said half sullenly. "Your father's family sent him enough—sent him what his share of the inheritance would have been and more. That's one thing that your Madame LaRoche stickled for knowing. Where the money came from. And I told her your father's people had settled it on him and she wrote to England and found out it was so. What she didn't find out was that it had been thrown to the four winds within two years of the time your father got it. It was madness! He and your mother were children, and pampered themselves like children. Instead of taking the interest of his securities he realized on them and spent the money in traveling, in wild investments that were to bring him fabulous wealth, and on his eternal gambling. He would bet on anything, and thousands went on the races. He kept a stable, even, in a small way—and he was the sort of man who must have his valet. How it would have been had he lived to see the end of his resources I don't know. But you were born and your mother died in giving you birth. I told you that he died soon after. So he did. But with the loss of her, and the failure of all his pet schemes, and the crookedness of some of his American and Canadian friends who hoodwinked him into ruinous investments, he lost courage and—shot himself. I can show you the newspaper accounts of it. They lay great stress on his distinguished ancestry. I suppose the accounts reached his family and were one more disgrace for which they blame America and the woman he married. But that's the truth of it: he shot himself."

Slowly Maura lifted her thin right hand and slipped it inside the red bathrobe at the breast. Her fingers seemed to close firmly on something there. "That was—hard on you," she said, with a weary wistfulness. "I didn't know—things were quite so bad for you. My only excuse is that I really had nothing to do with being born or with being left to you. Aunt Claudia is there—anything else that you haven't told me? Any-

thing I should know? I'd like to know—the truth."

She had grown a trifle whiter, but eyes and lips were steady. It was Aunt Claudia who flushed and showed resentment as she understood.

"What are you thinking! *Everything* I've told you hasn't been a lie—it was a legal marriage if that's what you're worrying about. If it hadn't been, do you think your father's people would have let it pass so easily? They'd have come here and taken him back by force, I believe. That's another price I'm paying for having staked everything on your English ancestry. You take it for granted that you're to be ashamed of the other side! I'll have you know that your mother and I came of good stock. Your grandfather—your mother's father and mine—was a minister, as was his father before him. He was a hard man—narrow-minded, bigoted, cruelly stern—but a good man and a just man according to his light. He married a minister's daughter. He had a queer snobbish notion of 'class' in holiness; and yet I've always believed that Mother would have been a gay, almost a frivolous creature if she hadn't been so crushed and subdued by Father. I've always thought that Lottie—your mother—and I were the expression of all her inner rebellion and desire. There was a boy, the first child, who died; then your mother. And a prettier thing than Lottie was, as a girl, I never saw. She was all golden where I'm dark, and your eyes are like hers, and you sing a little as she did. But hers was a stronger voice, and might have made her famous. A wealthy eccentric old maid in Father's congregation insisted that Lottie be sent to the best conservatory in New England to have her voice trained for solo singing in the choir. Father didn't dare refuse, I suppose; but at any rate she was sent, and for a year we heard wonderful things of her. One night a half dozen conservatory girls went on in the chorus of an opera. They volunteered to do it, for the fun of it and the thrill of it and the experience, and to watch the star's methods. And Lottie went with them. I fancy it was the first 'wicked' thing she ever did in her life,

for Father had scared her as successfully as he had scared Mother, almost; and he gave her a whipping for crying for a set of furs two weeks before she left for the conservatory. Oh, he whipped us, yes—he was a hard man! Your father had landed in New York the day before, and was going through to Canada where the Digby younger brother had taken a tract. He, with some friends, had a box that night. He saw Lottie. Of all the people on the stage he saw her, and yet people say that such things don't happen. Well, he was at the stage door. Not rude nor assured—just forceful and determined. If he had stuck to other things as he stuck to his whims he'd have been a wonderful man! The doorkeeper interfered and told the young men who those particular girls were; and at that he gave Lottie his card and asked her name; and she was so frightened and so excited that she told him. Next day he called at the conservatory and asked her to whom he should introduce himself so that he might meet her properly. It wasn't a sordid flirtation; your father was a gentleman, though not a very good man according to orthodox notions. He didn't go to Canada. They were married in three days after he had cabled his people and been warned to go on. And Lottie brought him home, telegraphing ahead; and Father met them at the door and cursed her and cursed her husband, and shut them out, and crossed the registry of her birth from the Bible. She had married a stranger in three days and it was the work of the devil, according to Father. And I cried and he struck me, woman grown that I was. I got out the shed door that night, with some things in a bag, and walked four miles to the next village where there was a fairly good hotel. I guessed I'd find Lottie there and so I did; and she and I cried together, while your father walked the floor and growled, and they both told me that I should stay with them forever. And for two years they dressed me prettily and took me about and amused themselves with me and made life a heaven on earth for me, poor little country girl that I was." She had drifted from her first

resentment to a reminiscent tone; and her face, softened and saddened, showed its kinship with the younger face against the pillow in the splint chair. It was a look she shrugged off with a short impatient sigh at the futility of remembering.

"The rest isn't pretty. You had been put in an expensive private nursery. Everything that Lionel Wayne did was expensive. I couldn't do any better than let you stay there; and I thought something would turn up to make things as they had been. There was some money left—he left it to me; and a small, very small income from certain stocks that he supposed would do for us both. But I lived along, doing nothing save wear my pretty things and read novels, and going to play with you at visiting hours, and planning what I'd do when I got to it. I was only twenty. And one day they sent for me to call at the bank. My account was overdrawn. They were decent and took securities enough to cover them; and I came here to New York to look up some of the effusive people I had met in the prosperous two years. I was put off and put off and shifted about and snubbed, and most of the men tried to make love to me; and all the while I was eating up the income that belonged to you. I got a position at a glove counter in a department store, and one of the girls there told me of Mrs. Corey's—how clean and inexpensive it was. I went there. I took her cheapest room. It was a room much like this, only clean and bare. But there was a cozy back parlor and a welcome and sympathy whenever I needed it. I used to confess how discouraged I was. In six months I was so discouraged that she sent me, on the pretext that a friend of hers would find me a place as companion, to the fat woman you saw when you came home from school more than a year ago. And Nancy finished what Mrs. Corey had begun."

She sat a moment staring at space with wide, vacant eyes, as though her vision were turned inward and she saw the past again; but all at once she started and flushed as though a spoken word had stung her back to reality.

"As God is my witness, Maura, I thought you'd be safe there, at Corey's! You believe that, don't you? I thought she had changed; and it was only the girls without friends or money who were in danger at any time. I'm not beginning to excuse myself—I'm just human enough, though, to want to have the credit of my decency. I—I'd rather you died than to have you—as I am. And yet the curse of it is that I can't change. There's no going back for me. There's no going back for any woman, unless she's strong enough to make a new life and a new self out of the patches of the old self, and live down public opinion. I've known women who tried it, one who went to the other side of the world to begin over again; and someone there wrote to a friend here in America and had the friend look the woman up. They spent money and time just to run a suspicion into its hole and bring it out to damn one poor woman. And the laziness and luxury have eaten away any fibre I ever had. If I had followed you to Corey's and started to England as we had arranged, we'd have been poor. If your people hadn't taken us up, it would have meant starvation in a year; because you're not fitted to earn a living nor am I. And just then I was tempted again. More money than I had ever had, and a real affection—I believe; though not an honorable one, of course. I don't expect that! I knew you were bitter against me, and I—well, I did as I have always done: I did the easiest thing, trying to persuade myself that it was only to get money enough to make our venture safer when we finally should go. Because I didn't dare have you with me. I meant to take you away from Corey's in another week and try to get you back with Madame LaRoche. But I was so upset over the—the thing that happened to the man who caused all the trouble for us, that I was dazed for weeks and couldn't plan, couldn't think. The detectives were spying on me, constantly, for two months; and I used to give money to the negro elevator boy, who was Minnie's nephew, and have him get it to her, by stealth, so that she could mail it to you; because

my mail was watched and I didn't want them to know even of your existence. And then came your letter. It nearly killed me, but I deserved it. And after that came that gray man, Faris, and told me not to send you money, but to let you work out your own salvation. He half threatened to make trouble for me if I refused. And so I had to submit; and the next I heard was that your life was despaired of. Do you envy me—would anybody envy me my ease and my pretty clothes, knowing what my life is and has been?"

She choked back a sob of self-pity and despair, her eyes imploring; but the jet and amber eyes of the girl stayed soberly intent and cold. It was a composure so unnatural that it brought its own bewilderment.

"Deep inside me I feel all you've told me, Aunt Claudia; but it's like water trickling under thick ice. I can't show you that it's there. I can't even feel it all through me. I seem not to mind, any more, whether things are good or bad." The fair head drooped against the pillow with a relaxation infinitely hopeless. "There was a day in the hospital that I remembered too fast, and felt too horribly much, and it nearly killed me. Nurse Webb saved my life, but I haven't much beside life, it seems to me: no heart, no tears, no laughs, no caring. I sit here and let things go as they will. Perhaps when I gain strength everything will come back and I shall be normal, but things happened too fast. I learned too much of life all of a sudden, I think; now, all I ask is to sit here a while, and not be asked to think or to do anything. I'm really not unhappy. Sarah keeps me nice and clean——"

"Sarah!" The tight rolled gloves swished violently against the dingy couch cover in a stroke of released irritation. "I'm having hard work not to hate your Sarah, even though she did save your life! Why is it you'll take from her and not from me? I can't stand it any longer to be put aside so. I want you to let me find a room for you near me. I'll be perfectly honest, and tell you that I won't risk taking you to my—to my home: you're the sort that

attracts men without meaning to. I begin to see why Madame LaRoche got those grown-up clothes for you before that Christmas vacation. It was to show me how your body had developed, to wake me up to the fact of the danger she saw for you. I tried not to see it, tried to believe it wasn't so. But you—know what happened. You're a little girl soul in a beautiful woman body; and you're of my blood, partly, and my blood isn't of the enduring sort. What can you do? You've found out a little bit of what you're up against; and you're right enough in saying that school didn't teach you anything that will enable you to meet this sort of life. Be sensible, child. Let me take care of you till you're strong. Let me have you taught anything you will. Take up your music again—you've a voice worth cultivating. Give in a little now so that you may not give way completely—some day. I—I'm afraid of this Barrison man. And, Maura—I—I care for you. You're all I have. Let me take you back with me to-morrow, dear."

She had stirred the unnatural composure at last. The clear eyes clouded and the hand inside the red bathrobe, at the breast, seemed to fumble at something nervously.

"Oh, I don't know what to do—it seems like giving up too easily. And you've told me what comes from giving up. If I'd only been taught something useful——"

A thudding rap on the panels of the thin door started them both. Aunt Claudia got up hastily and opened it. A slatternly girl, with a blue kitchen apron caught aside to show a limp white one, thrust forward a box and a card.

"Flowers f'r Miss Wayne an' gen'leman says 'd like to see 'r f'r minute if she's receivin' callers," she rattled, as though it were a formula to which she was accustomed.

Aunt Claudia openly read the card before she turned. Her cheeks showed very red under the lace mesh across them, and her lips seemed thinned a bit.

"Mr. Barrison," she said; and waited.

"Thank Mr. Barrison, and tell him I am not seeing anyone, Maggie." Maura

spoke that sentence as though it were a formula, also; and as she closed the door Aunt Claudia looked over her shoulder with a nervous, shaky sound that was neither laugh nor sob. It was comprehension, and it was protest, and it was something more. It said, as plainly as words: "What's the use? Sooner or later—and let's be comrades and go the broad way together if it is coming to that. Only don't try to deceive me." But aloud she said: "Shall I open the box?"

"Thank you—yes, please." And with the cloud gone from her eyes Maura watched the white, unsteady fingers work at the silk tape. There were lilies-of-the-valley—a great sheaf of them—under the sea-green tissue; and the cool, firm, exquisitely sweet sprays pressed like tiny-bodied messengers from a far world of peace and innocence against the pale face that bent to them. Aunt Claudia unfastened her pearl veil pin, got out her powder papers, and leaned toward the smear of cracked mirror that hung over the trunk. Her lips were trembling, her eyes misty with tears, her face flushed; but despite the reality of her grief she seemed more like a child denied its whim than a woman horror-struck at the abyss before a loved one.

"I've never—never had any affection—that I wanted—in all my life!" she said brokenly. "If I had I might have done differently. But all I can say is that if you ever need me, and ever find out that your Sarah and your everybody else gets tired of doing for you, I'll come. And in the meantime you've got ten dollars a week coming to you, from now on——"

"I've got—what?" A white radiance from the flowers seemed to shine in the face turned to her swiftly. "Ten dollars?"

"Yes, ten dollars. Your own money. That's the income I told you about—it just about paid for the infant food they fed you; and afterward I forgot all about it, except that it went to you—I told Madame it was a pin money allowance. I had the brokers make a list and I sent it on to this Mr. Faris, and they had to let me come and tell you about it.

If you think I'm lying, as you probably do, ask him. The check will come from the brokers' monthly. Thank God you needn't take any more from charity, and it'll give you enough to keep you from starving. As for me, I'll go back to New England and try to forget that I was ever fool enough to hope that anything good could come into my life. I've got a heart trouble that'll kill me before many years, and I'm glad of it. Minnie used to have to give me narcotics, night after night. I guess Minnie is the only human being that cares for me, and I can't have her with me for fear they'll arrest her for murder. And I suppose my father would say I was getting just what I deserved and would get worse hereafter. Well, I'm going. I caught the midnight train, last night, from Boston, just to make one last try, and anyway, to give you your money. And I'm going back feeling I shan't see you again, ever, and with this Barrison man to worry about——" She caught her breath aggrievedly, half waiting for a denial. None came. Without a vestige of resentment or confusion in her face Maura sat looking at the lilies in her lap, her expression somehow conveying that she had heard, but that the hurt of the words was lost in the deep brooding that went beneath the noise of speech to the spirit that actuated it.

To the woman whose life had been an evasion of brooding, that abstraction was more baffling than any words. There came to her, sharply, a memory of the beautiful, laughing, silly, shallow girl in whom she had felt the admiring pride and ownership of one who has helped a butterfly from its cocoon. Youth seemed the only link between that memory and this too quiet, white moth that had usurped the poor butterfly's body. The splendid promising lines of that body seemed shrunken by more than illness; the thinned face seemed to possess an unearthly patience and purity, and the ineffaceable youth made the unnatural calm pathetic. Aunt Claudia perceived, all at once, that this was a child taking flowers for love of flowers, without a thought of the giver's intent; that the worldly wisdom and the dis-

concerting composure were defenses that the girl had instinctively put on, fashioned from the very evils that had assailed her. With a pitying, shamed sob, she knelt beside the splint chair flinging her arms about the listless figure.

"Dearie, dearie—Aunt's poor baby! I didn't mean to scold, I didn't mean that I believed you'd do anything wrong. But I'm jealous, I want you to let me take you away from all these folks that have come into your life, and take care of you. Maura, listen, dear! I've tried to improve myself so you wouldn't be ashamed of me when we went to England. I've tried to read good things, and to speak better, and not to—*not to* swear; and I've cut out drinking, and I've stopped taking things to make me sleep, and I've paid more attention to walking and to what I ate. I sound like a fool, but I'm trying to make you understand that you're the only living thing I've got to make me want to break away from the life I'm leading. You're not going to take away the only hope I've got, are you? It would give me some self-respect if I knew my money was doing some good in the world; and I'd save and we'd go away—if we didn't go to England we could go somewhere——"

Maura's smile stopped her short. It was the smile of calm comprehension that had disconcerted her at first; the smile of wisdom sick of its self knowledge.

"We wouldn't do it, Aunt Claudia. For you and me there's no breaking away some day: there's just a stopping short to-day. That's the only thing I've decided on and you can't change me. Somehow, at something, I must go on from this new sort of life I have chosen. If I go back—I'm not being superior and virtuous, I'm just—afraid, I guess. I sit here and dream of a bathroom with silver faucets, and linen and crystal, and meals served by a crispy-capped maid, and oysters and rare duck and steaks and plenty of whipped cream on the chocolate, and a glittery-keyed piano to play on afterward, with big bowls of roses dropping leaves every time I crash a chord. I dream things even to the monograms on my lingerie. And then I cry,

sometimes, over the mess Mrs. Dockham brings me and pity myself because I'm such a fool that I won't let myself have what you offer me. It would be so easy to go back. So easy to do everything except to stop thinking! That's the answer, after all. I've begun to think. I began about a year ago, when I found Mrs. Corey trying on a spring hat. I woke up to the fact that my pretty, nice, lazy body was mastering me, just as Madame LaRoche warned me that it would if I didn't take care. I never told you what she said to me, because I was ashamed and I didn't believe it, either. But she was right. My mouth and my eyes used to ask to be loved, and my voice used to coax, and my body used to promise. And while I was innocent, I wasn't ignorant, altogether. There's a difference. And Madame told me that the choice between the rulership of my body or my soul lay with me and with none other. And yet it was a spring hat that shocked me into knowing how insidious that rule of the lazy body could be. And then I grew angry with myself, and I've never stopped being angry. I won't give in to it again because it's too easy! And no human being has any real deep down love for anything or anybody that's too easy. The other way is hard, but it's interesting. If I end behind a counter and have to call this room home to the end of my days, still it will be more interesting than the other way; and I thank the Fortune that I've found that much out."

Aunt Claudia got to her feet, stumbling a little over the clinging folds of her black skirt. She turned to the mirror, wiped her face off carefully with a powder paper, threw the scented pellet into which she rolled it, on the tray, and quickly caught her sables away from the threatening butter, as though she saw that danger for the first time. It was a curious thing that her silence made one know that she was keeping back hysterical noisy weeping. The room seemed so tense with that repression that Maura's next words came half apologetically, as though she feared to let the storm loose and yet was constrained to continue.

"You're not to think that I mean to abandon you, Aunt Claudia; it's only that I must take the way I know to be my salvation. Won't you—couldn't you come here with me? You could furnish a room to suit yourself, and——" she shrank from mentioning the money, much or little, that might have accumulated—"my ten dollars will do wonders, till the right work turns up," she ended. Aunt Claudia tied the costly veil, pinned the fullness neatly close to the nape of her neck with the pearl pin, and smoothed it over her cheeks and chin with the universal gesture of women.

"Ten dollars!" she said, looking at herself in the smudgy glass. "I spent that this morning, for hairpins;" and she tried to laugh, but her voice shook so that the sound was a mirthless quaver. The failure seemed to goad her to an unbearable sense of her grievance for she flashed about, hands clenched, face flaming, rage making her tremulous from head to foot. "You talk to me of saving your soul!" she cried. "If I hadn't sold my body for you, you'd have had no such problem, I'm thinking. It is my shame that kept you alive, my shame that put cleverness enough into your empty little head to make you able to talk to me the way you have. Let me tell you this: that it's the decency I've tried for that has brought me all the misery I've known, and I'm done trying. When you've been a fool long enough, on your ten dollars a week, come back to me, and hold your tongue, and take the silver-fitted bath and the crystal and linen and maids and music that my shame can give you. My shame, indeed! If I had waited and been lucky enough to have sold myself with a little formality, there'd be no talk of shame. If a red-nosed politician that had delivered a hundred votes for the privilege of calling himself Justice of the Peace had grunted a few words over the bargain, that would have rendered it decent, would it? If some little white-livered, mercenary, mumbling half-man who was afraid to work with his hands and chose to make his living from scared women and church fairs, had only snuffed a

benediction over the bargain, that would have made it sacred, would it? I might have taken a dozen lovers, then, and have hated the man who owned me as a dog hates a brutal master—yet the magic three letters that my master permitted me to place before his name, would have made the whole thing usual and right and acceptable in the sight of creation! As it is, I've been honest! I've been true, absolutely, to the man who purchased me. I've filled my bargain, which is what your good wives don't do: I've given him a comfortable home, I haven't nagged, I haven't whined when I was sick, or neglected him for bridge whist and matinees or other men, and I've treated him as an independent being. I had to, of course. If I had married him I wouldn't have had to. That's one mighty big reason why a woman likes to be respectable; it gives her the privilege of being as lazy and disagreeable as she chooses, and the man will stand a heap of it before he leaves, and yet have to pay her alimony enough so that she can keep on being lazy and disagreeable. Damn such decency! I'll take my chances with such women before the Almighty; but just the same it hurts to have a little snip like you sit in judgment on me. What right have you to say what's good and what's bad, you fool of a baby that's never been tried?"

"I—I don't! Honestly I don't!" Weariness and nervousness made the answer come with a gasp that might have been fright. "I've never once said what was right for you; it's only what's right for *me* that I'm deciding. You've got to decide what's right for you; and we may both be wrong, but neither of us will have to pay for the other's mistake. And if you—if you loved——"

"Oh!" Aunt Claudia flung up her clenched hands and snapped them open, palms out, as though she surrendered her last hope. "So that's it! That's the maggot at the root of all this twaddle! You're nothing but a fool girl moping over that fool idea, eh?" She let her hands fall, and laughed. Laughed without the quaver, but also without mirth; and turned and caught up her sables.

"I might have known! Well, it makes me feel easier, a little, to find you're the same sort of human that I am; you're just a different type of fool, that's all. And remember that I'm not the sort to sneer or to look satisfied or to twit you with what's past, if ever you come to me and admit you've been a fool. I'll just be glad to see you. Kiss me good-bye. You pretty, pretty little idiot! You'll find love, all right, with that face—God help you!"

Under her acrid laugh the quaver of tears shrook again. She pressed her veiled lips quickly to the white forehead, caught up her gloves and rushed out, slamming the door behind her.

Maura set her teeth in her lower lip and held the lilies to her face, her eyes squeezed shut to keep back the admission of tears. Somehow when she opened her eyes and let the tears have their way it was almost impossible to stop them. If there had been a dim, soft-hued, graciously beautiful room to look upon through the dreary rain, it might have helped; but tears, in Mrs. Dockham's hall bedroom, merely made the ugly colors clash and jumble, and the dreadful furniture seem twisted and distorted, and insensibly one drifted into crying because things were so hideous; and on that basis one could weep indefinitely.

Someone rapped, so unexpectedly and peremptorily that it brought a husky "Come!" from Maura as she started.

Ivan Barrison opened the door.

There was every reason why Ivan Barrison shouldn't have done such a thing. So many reasons, in fact, that one could have played the old game "Alphabet" with repetitions, to itemize them all. He shouldn't have come with an A because it was Audacious and Aggressive and Awkward and many other A's. He shouldn't have come with a B because it was Bold and Boorish and Brazen—and Because! The principal C reason was that it was Compromising; and so on to the I's, when Indiscreet and Improper and Impudent would suggest themselves as truthful and applicable. And all these were reasons that

Maura had told herself and had acted upon; and every one of them was forgotten, instantly and completely, at the bodily presence of him.

There is no explaining this tremendous argument of personality.

He stood on the threshold, auto cap under his arm, drawing off his motor gauntlets, slowly, as though he intended to come entirely in and to stay; and leaning forward in her chair she stared at him, both of them quite ignoring the conventions of greeting.

When they had reclined, languid and convalescent, in wheel chairs side by side in the hospital sun-room, she had found herself studying, under her lashes, the Indian-lean cheek and chin that she had seen outlined in warm light from Mrs. Dockham's door, that momentous day of her waking. Just how photographically that memory had stayed with her she hadn't known till she saw the reality again; and it was satisfying to discover how exactly as she would have had them the lines were completed. The lean cheek merged into a reassuring forehead, with a well-set ear and a nose slightly Greek, slightly aquiline, and predominantly American. The mouth was generous-lipped but firmly closed: a mouth that one felt might lend itself over-easily to talking back, but never to any lie under man's size, and never at all to vulgarity. His eyes corroborated the mouth: deep-set, deep gray, black-lashed and pupiled, with a glint that would be equally ardent for merriment or aggression, as it chanced. In those days only a patch of brown hair had showed above his ears and at his left temple. The rest had been covered by a turban-like bandage made necessary by his scalp wounds. Now she saw that his hair was a thick, brown thatch, lustrous and alive, brushed straight back, circled with a dark, glossy rim where his cap had pressed. Now? The word and the fact of the present brought consternation with it.

"Why—what—how did you—" she began, dismissed.

He stuffed the gloves and cap into his great-coat pockets and came further into the room, half closing the door behind

him, and smiling at her the uneven, comradely, bad-boyish smile that had never failed to welcome the wheeling up of her chair beside his.

"I found it was getting a habit with me to come here every day, leave flowers, be dismissed, go away and grouch," he explained, casually, "and habits are evil things. So I came back and gave the maid two dollars to help me get rid of this one." His parted lips changed suddenly from smiling to the strained look of a man who had run himself breathless and parched. Three strides and he was beside her, looming over her, a queer pallor under the tan and glow of cold out-of-doors on his face. "Child! Do you know how long it has been since I've seen you?"

"It has been—some time," she admitted, letting herself back, slowly, to the support of her pillow. It was grotesque that at that instant she should want to cry because she hadn't been able to eat her luncheon. If there had been anything tolerable beside one small baked potato, she thought aggrievedly, she wouldn't feel so fluttery and floaty and ridiculous.

"It has been——" There he stopped so abruptly that she looked up into his face, quickly; and to her ineffable relief he smiled the familiar smile. He unbuttoned his coat, threw it back a little, and sat down on a corner of the newspaper-covered soap-box foot-stool. Few humans could have looked into his eyes, crinkled at the corners with whimsical good humor, and at the uneven line of wholesome white teeth shown by his comradely grin, and doubted his decency, even though the spirit of devil-may-care flicked every line and lurked under the twinkle.

"Me," he complained, "I graduated from the turban to a victor's wreath effect in a linen band about my temples, and I had myself wheeled in, proud as a prize baby, and waited for your chair to come alongside. 'Stead of that came your nurse, to tell me that you wished her to say good-by for you. Only by great self-control was I able to keep from saying things to her. After you and I had gossiped all the way back

from the Pearly Gates, was that a nice thing to do?"

She smiled as she hadn't since those gossip days. All she was able to think of was how good it was to see him again; as bracing as a northwest wind, he was, and apparently no more mysterious. His coming had been bad-boyish revolt, that his presence made her understand. He, of all the world, was the one soul who roused the play spirit in her; made her feel that some day she should run in great windy spaces, and laugh gloriously at nothing, and be riotously glad of life.

"What I've got to know, is whether you didn't want to see me, or whether it just happened so," he persisted; and the crinkled eyes narrowed to intensity. She stirred uneasily. She decidedly didn't want him intense.

"I'd better tell you exactly how it was. When I was taken ill here, Mrs. Dockham sent for your friend Mr. Faris; and they seemed to think my illness of a dangerous sort, and he had me taken to that private hospital where we met again. His impulse was of the kindest, but when I suspected the costliness of it, and made my nurse tell me, I simply couldn't let him go on paying the bills as he was. I knew I couldn't dream of paying him back, at that rate; and I got so fevered that Nurse Webb made them bring me back here. She comes to do for me, like the square and solid angel that she is."

"I don't like a pucker between your eyes," was his only comment; and she roused to her worried frown and smiled it away again. He nodded. "That's better. Now, since I skidded and cracked my head, I manage a car as respectfully as even the traffic regulations could wish me to do. And I'll take along anyone you say; your nurse or the maid of the two aprons who knows me so well here, or the landlady who snuffles. Only you're coming, soon and repeatedly, aren't you?"

"Oh, sometime, perhaps—thank you." She frowned again. If only he would be boyish and inconsequent and not force her to think of the future, nor even of his present offending! "Just now I want you to talk to me, of things out-

doors and people and anything that occurs to you. And in fifteen minutes you must go; and you must never do this again!"

He grimaced.

"There couldn't be greater incentive to a cheery entertaining chat! But my dangerous inclination to please besets me!" He leaned back, clasping his knees with his hands, and looked at her with an expression that she couldn't understand; but even as she wondered he smiled again, whimsically. "It's sloppy outdoors, and an east wind going. Even the prettiest girls are using their hankys, and there's no drastic change in the modes; so America—or this part of it—is uninteresting. Suppose we go to Italy for a little trip? It would set you up amazingly."

He could talk. While they two blinked through the sunbath hours he had droned to her droll observations of the patients and of themselves and creation generally; and in those hours she forgot, absolutely, all the unbelievable things she had remembered too soon; and words could give him no greater compliment. Now he set himself deliberately to entertain her; and after her first marveling at his uncanny faculty of understanding the sort of things she would like and the manner in which she would like them, she gave herself over, contentedly, to being diverted. In a *suite de luxe* of the hugest steamship afloat, she idled across the ocean in such luxurious fashion as a fairytale queen might have accomplished; and then, without effort, they drifted through the warm, blue and emerald land of her desire, as though they possessed the magically flying carpet of legend, glimpsing quaint and comic and tragic bits in their passing, reliving bits of the mighty past of Rome, fared happily through its enchanted Venice, tramped in high spirits its lesser known byways of the colorful present, ate daintily in palaces and shared the black bread and cheese and sour wine of the peasants; sailed its azure bay, mounted to the brink of its infernal crater, stood in the peaceful, dove-wooded solitude of a convent garden on hills above the misty olive groves—

Someone thudded up Mrs. Dockham's stairs, scratching matches on the landings and setting a blue glimmer of gas alive.

"What—why, where have I——" Maura came forward in her chair clutching the arms. Through the stealthy gray dusk that still thrilled with a low voice and was fogged with visions, she could just make out Ivan Barrison's eyes gleaming in a pallid blur that was his face, and the white line of his collar above the black bulk of his coat. That he could have made her forget his presence so completely was a terrifying thing! Where was her worldly wisdom, acquired through horror and agony? Where was her self-possession, her foreknowledge of dangers within and without? She had yielded like the veriest simpleton to this first innocent-seeming temptation; utterly forgotten the menacing suspicions of the earlier afternoon.

"Oh, for pity's sake, go!" she burst out, beating her hand down upon the lilies. He lunged and caught the frantic fingers hard.

"What is it? What startled you? Yes, of course I'll go, but what——"

"Oh, I can't explain, you mustn't ask. I've remembered—something—that I thought I should never forget. You shouldn't have come here, you shouldn't have forced yourself here. That is, I don't mean to be ungracious, and I was to blame quite as much as you. But go, now—go—please——" Her breathless appeal rose to an hysterical whimper. He stood, quickly, and bent over her.

"Child, be quiet! I'm going, at once, but this nervousness won't do. Is it the dark that frightened you? Because the dark comes early. Did you say that your nurse is coming?"

"Yes—she should be here now. She'll 'tend to everything. I know I seem nervous and queer, but I—can't tell you. Please go!"

"Yes—now. But remember this: I'm going to see you again. Make up your mind to that. Because I've got to see you——" He bent his head and crushed his lips against the hand he held. For an instant she forgot everything in a giddy drop back to the moment when his

head had brushed past her as she sat in the cab with the gray man on that momentous day of her breaking away from the old order of things. Now again she felt that pleasurable sense of half contact with youth and warmth and virility, and caught the wraith of lilac scent. His lips burned her palm. "Good night, little girl; good night—Maura!" And the room seemed vast in the tingling emptiness that engulfed her.

Far below, the front door crashed, and after an instant the draft puffed in on her. Presently it came again as the first to return among the lodgers opened it in the lengthy listlessness of a tired homecoming. Then the draft was almost a steady breeze as a bevy of the department store girls dawdled in, keeping the street door ajar while they sorted the mail on the hall stand. Weary steps and quick, middle-aged steps, and lighter, younger treads sounded on the thin-carpeted stairs and in and out the rooms; and snatches of their babble came up to her. At least they kept each other company in their barren, respectable existence at Mrs. Dockham's!

Sarah Webb had never been so late before. Suppose she wasn't coming? There would come a night, soon, when she wouldn't come, and life without Sarah Webb seemed ridiculously unthinkable. A smell of savory stew began to creep up from the basement, trickling through the stale cold of the halls. It wouldn't taste as well as it smelled, for Mrs. Dockham was not a good cook; but it would be hot and comforting. The scent of her lilies grew unbearably heavy and she brushed them from her lap. Ivan Barrison and even the pulsating spot on her palm grew as unreal as any of her fevered half-waking dreams. And he would never come again because she mustn't let him. And she was hungry, trembling with hunger. She stretched from her chair and grasped the cold, scorched toast; but the first mouthful nauseated her and she flung it back. It was something hot that she craved, to check the cold that was numbing her; something hot and easily swallowed, because there was an almost unpassable constriction in her throat.

In her temples a muffled hammer began to beat, slowly, compressing the slow blood agonizingly in her head. The wavering hall gas began to flicker monstrously before her half-closed eyes, and she seemed to be swinging in sickening fashion to and fro, in a gigantic arc. And her fear of so many things seemed to dwindle to a little girl's fear of the dark and of loneliness and pain.

Footsteps, among the many, began unmistakably to climb the stairs to her door. She held her breath. Sarah Webb usually came briskly, but these steps were slow and accompanied by a curious bumping and clinking; but then came a cheery familiar voice:

"The clover-nest hen was late in laying, but I'm here!"

And then, with a wail and a rush, came the tears.

VII

Like an unmanageable anchor dangling from a balloon, the body trails and bumps and drags along under the aspiring flights of the soul, hindering, misdirecting, catching at last in some stubborn obstacle, and forcing a descent to earth. The prejudice against cutting loose seems, however, to be founded on an instinct divinely implanted that it takes mighty desperation to ignore. Indeed, the faith that enables one joyously to anticipate a final flight without incumbrance and with no downdrag is called Religion. And the equanimity with which one, in its meantime, submits to the haulings down to earth is Philosophy.

These two essentials are possessed in varying degree by every human. Those who deny either or both are destined for a flight or a bump that will deprive them of all ideas save the ones they contradict.

So since there is no permissible way of cutting loose before the allotted time, the part of wisdom is to humor the nuisance instead of letting it drag one to a smash. A very little will coax the foolish thing along, after all. A soft cloth wrung out in cold water is a blessed relief to tear-blinded eyes, even though

the tears spring from the very travail of one's spirit. A woolly blanket, tucked close and warm about a shivery mortal bulwarked with pillows on a couch, will soothe and lessen the rending and tearing of bedeviled nerves. A little hot chicken broth, forced between quivering lips and teeth that bite and click on the spoon in spasms of sobbing, will somehow magic away the demons of grief. And if by great good luck there's a sensible soul in another body, to sit alongside and pet a little and scold a little, after rendering these services, and pat one's shoulder tenderly and understandingly, there comes quiet and blessed peace, and a foolish weak wish that crying didn't upset one so!

By such means did Maura emerge from the chaos of her collapse and look up in damp gratitude to her benefactor.

"Poor old—Nice One," she apologized, shakily. "I didn't—mean to."

"Nobody but an idiot would tear themselves to pieces that way on purpose," Sarah Webb accepted the apology. "But it'll do you good. You've been too perfect and patient ever since you got back here. Anything happen?"

"Aunt Claudia's been here, for one thing——"

"Huh! If there's more than one thing let's wait till after dinner. I've got the whole evening. Here's a clean hanky. I'll just turn your pillow and then put this infernal mess of luncheon outside the door. Some day, I'll tell that Dockham woman that piety begins with 'p' like pots and pans and other everyday things. To bring you *hash*——"

Sarah Webb was vigorous. That suggests that she was not refined, but it emphatically does not mean that she was coarse. Vigorous is the word: vigorous of speech and body, action, thought, emotion and honesty. Naturally, it was a vigor frequently tinged with impatience, because it is a world in which a vigorous person will find many causes for impatience. Vigor of thought, action and honesty not being the conventional lures, Sarah Webb had remained unsought; and save for a brief period of romantic curiosity at sixteen, had

wasted no thoughts on possible sentimental experiences. It is hardly necessary to add that she was not, and never had been, pretty. In her mellowed middle-age she was more attractive than she had been as a square, sandy, too pink, too quick-tongued girl. Her squareness was overlaid with ample curves, her ruddiness enhanced an effect of prodigious cleanliness, her quick tongue adapted itself to the pointed brevity demanded by surgeons, and her strength, sanity and honesty, combined with an amazing native intelligence, had won her a high place in her profession.

Only the convenient phrase "law of opposites" could explain the attraction between such a woman and Maura Wayne; but it is certain that they liked each other hugely, supplemented each other mentally, and disagreed amicably. Friendship asks no more.

With aching eyes half closed, Maura lay and contentedly watched the deftness with which Sarah put things straight, banished the soup plate, put the lilies in water to revive, and covered the trunk with a white towel over newspapers to serve as a base for culinary operations. It seemed that the whims of pampered convalescents had afforded more than was customary for her dinner, because the preparations were extensive. Sarah untied many strings and handled many parcels. Something big and glittering appeared on the trunk, and a circular blue flame sprang alive at the touch of a match. Maura felt only mild curiosity. Sarah's resources were so surprising that it was not profitable to continue to question them.

"We got a chafing dish?" she asked in placid acceptance.

"I've got one," Sarah corrected tersely. She lifted the shining cover and dropped into the pan something that sputtered and smelled delicious. Maura sniffed.

"Sarah, what would happen to you if you thieved from the hospital larder? And besides you solemnly promised you wouldn't spend money——"

"Haven't." Where one word sufficed Sarah never wasted two. She stooped to the corner and rose, stooped and rose,

darted at the chafing dish and turned what was cooking, stooped to the corner again. Maura dimly recalled the bumping and clinking that she had heard on the arrival and had forgotten in hysteria. There was a glorious new sputter and new fragrance, and Sarah began to chink silver and a plate. Maura sat up, feebly, absorbed in the unusual procedure. Sarah turned, whipped a napkin across the blanketed lap, and after a flurry of final seasoning turned, in repressed triumph, revealing her mystery. There was a light lacquered tray bearing thin gold-banded china and sparkling silver knife, fork and spoons; a hissing brown miracle on the plate, a salad miracle beside it.

"It's all so," Sarah gave grave assurance. "And you eat with your mouth, you know, not with your eyes."

Maura Wayne ate heartily. Afterward, propped on her elbow, she skimmed whipped cream from hot chocolate and watched Sarah Webb eat a share of melting berries. There had been a full quart. When the last crimson globe had been dipped in powdered sugar, she put her deferred question as succinctly as Sarah herself would have compressed it.

"Going to tell me?"

With an imperturbed nod Sarah put her plate aside and began to unlink the cuffs of her tailored shirtwaist. In street attire she copied the stronger sex to the point of strong-mindedness. Only in her uniform, with the surplice folds of her handkerchief crossed on her deep bosom, and the crispy white cap topping her sandy, soft hair, did she reveal her woman side.

"While I was about it I got a dish-pan," she said unexpectedly. "Everything else, most, packed into it very nicely. And I made the delicatessen people scald and scour the chafing dish and spirit lamp and china, so I could use it at once when I got here."

"Sarah, what are you——"

"Let me tell it in my own way. That young Barrison met me, as I was coming in at my usual time, and——"

"Sarah!"

With vigorous jerks Nurse Webb

twitched one sleeve and then the other up to her pink elbows, then placed her hands on her knees and glowered.

"Ever since I was sixteen, I've been at work paying off mortgages on that New Hampshire farm!" she began, sternly. "First, one that Father left, and from then on one after another that I put on to educate the boys. This present one seems to be the last. And then I guess I'll begin to save money to put up a Temple to Commonsense. There isn't any, anywhere. And it won't have to be a very big one, because there won't many people want to use it. And it would relieve my feelings a lot. That whippersnapper that never did a day's work in his life wanted to give you a few dollars' worth of sensible help instead of a good many dollars' worth of cut flowers and folderol. He was walking the pavement when I came up and he grabbed me. 'Look here, nurse,' said he, 'that girl is sitting up there in that cussed hole with a dab of cold hash and a piece of burned toast on a soup plate, and she's thin as a match, but I should be outraging all the gods of convention if I sent her porterhouse steak instead of violets. But I can offer it to you, can't I? And you've got sense enough to take it, haven't you? For God's sake, what's money for?' And I said: 'Well, hurry up and get that car of yours to going and get me where they sell meat that ain't embalmed, and why didn't you think of it before?' And I got a chafing dish and an alcohol kettle so you can set it on the trunk corner and make yourself malted milk; and he picked out an 'invalid set' of china and silver on a tray; and then we went to a provision store, and to a delicatessen shop, and left a permanent order at a certified milk place for a quart of milk and a pint of cream a day to be left here. All in my name. If it shocks you to death just console yourself with the notion that the gifts filter through me, and all the indecency is strained out of 'em, and only the good comes to you. Now instead of wasting all the strength of that steak in thinking up reasons why you shouldn't have eaten it, lie down and cultivate the seeds of reason you'll find in my remarks,

while I go get some hot water to wash these dishes."

When she came back Maura lay flat, staring up at the ceiling, her cheeks very pink. She did not speak. When the clearing away was finished, Sarah Webb pulled the rocking chair under the wall gas jet, and set down to work at the making of Irish crochet—an occupation that served as a diversion for many silent watching hours, and, incidentally, brought in extra dollars to clear away the succession of mortgages. Suddenly Maura spoke.

"He didn't seem to notice the room or anything."

"Decent," commented Sarah Webb. Silence again, till the next confidence:

"Aunt Claudia wants me to go back with her. She says I'm her one hold on self-respect, and that at least I should accept her money while I'm fitting myself for work. She thinks it my duty. I suppose——"

"I never heard of getting anyone out of a hole by jumping in with 'em," said Sarah Webb. "Better drop a rope *in* to 'em, and pull."

"But what if I can't pull?" Maura asked, uncertainly. "In other words, she says I'm too weak to keep—to keep—good, alone. She couldn't. To be sure, it was for my sake. And she says my mother was weak. Good blood, enough, Sarah, on both sides, but no iron in it. Mother married Father three days after she met him, and she didn't meet him—properly. And he, when things went to smash and he lost her, shot himself. And so I—you see——"

Sarah Webb faced about to the couch bed.

"Don't start on yourself till you've finished with your ancestors!" she snapped.

"You say heredity to me, and I'll swear! And I'm against profanity, too. That heredity business is as bad as riveting shackles and handcuffs and a pack on a child before you teach it to walk. But as far as that goes—look here! Did your aunt *have* to put you in a school where the tuition was enough to support a family on? Wasn't she strong and well, and didn't she owe your parents

gratitude and money enough so she should have gone into the country, where living was cheap, and take care of you herself? For pity's sake, where's your commonsense? And take your father. A good-looking young chap, hectoring to death all his life, probably, by talk of titles and propriety and what he should and shouldn't do. He gets away from it and sees a girl he loves. She loves him; and from what your aunt told me of your mother she was a pretty little thing, nagged to death; an artist soul born into a New England Puritan parsonage. I think they did nobly to wait three days. I think they were of splendid calibre to remember to get married at all! There, digest that, and stop blaming them for your silliness!"

She went on crocheting again. It was a full minute before Maura sat up, slowly, and stared at the priestess of homely wisdom with eyes so dilated that the black pupil hid the amber iris.

"Sarah! You're—you're *right!* Every word of that went deep in me, to the little trickle of truth that's at the core of my heart. They were all right and I haven't anything to be sorry for. And if they hadn't been, I still shouldn't have. I begin to see that what I'm afraid of, and have been afraid of, is myself. Sarah, you see through most people, see through me. What's the matter with me? What made me feel that I wasn't like the other girls at school even when I didn't know I didn't belong there? I felt it always. But I recall one day—the last musicale, before we left for Christmas holidays—when the thing made itself felt by everyone. I went up to the platform, and suddenly all the whispering and rustling and coughing stopped. Those girls that I had known so well seemed like people of another world staring at me. I felt all alone, horribly, hideously alone, and—different. But I kept on smiling. And it was after that that Madame LaRoche called me to her and talked to me about my soul and my body; things I didn't comprehend. And the under teachers seemed so bitter and critical; and the girls tried to be the same but they were not! I want to know what has been

the matter with me, what is the matter with me, if you can tell?"

The splint rocker stopped its swaying. For a space Sarah Webb sat looking down at the exquisite lace that had grown under her fingers, then pulled out a loop so that it should not unravel, folded her plump hands, and looked into space.

"That's what puzzled me, at first," she said slowly. "What was the matter with you, or what was the *difference* with you. I don't mean physically, but with the you that was *you*. And after I watched you a while, and listened to all your delirium told me and to all that your Aunt Claudia confessed, in her fright, and to all that Mr.—er—Faris could tell me, I began to understand. Your splendid promising body was the most perfect thing that I ever had under my hand. Perfectly developed so far as it should be at your age, and promising a wonderful womanhood. Yet when you spoke to me, when you appealed to me, and when I sometimes looked at you, you seemed the tiniest, frailest, least developed young thing I ever encountered. It's because there wasn't any you."

"You mean," said Maura doubtfully, as she paused, "that I was weak——"

"I mean there wasn't any *you* awake!" Sarah Webb declared with vigor. "There was a pretty body and face that your parents gave you, and the manners that your teachers gave you, and a singing voice that Professor Something-or-other trained so carefully because your healthy throat and lungs managed air rather better than the ordinary run; and there were thoughts that everybody gave you, and an impulse to wheedle and to lie that you picked up from your association with your Aunt Claudia. The life you had, even, was just ordinary human life, livening all that talking shell. And that life loved what belonged to it. You admired your own body and your own prettiness and your own singing and even your own little sorrows, I'll bet a cooky! So long as you were pleased and cared for and dressed and fed, you asked no more of existence; and your body throve and grew lovely

and took to itself all the energies it liked to nourish itself. And there probably wasn't a girl in the school, however rich or pampered, that hadn't more individuality than you. They had homes and associations, and people to tell them that little ladies of such and such name didn't do this or that, and that certain things were expected of them, and they heard the family matters spoken of, and encountered personalities of their own families, and began to feel certain things were expected of them *because they were themselves!* Nothing was expected of you, nothing was asked of you, except to copy people who had no love for you, and none of the kin spirit. And as your years increased you became conscious of that difference without understanding it. You were pagan: just body, animated, and as unlike those other girls, whose futures were planned from the cradle, as a virgin forest is unlike an Italian garden. Probably you matured fast, at last, and probably something happened, that you didn't understand, to wake you a trifle and make you wonder about yourself. That day you sang, probably the sheer animal perfection of you struck home to those artificial, excessively self-conscious young things, and the instinctive antagonism between your sorts sprang to life. I'll wager that Madame LaRoche understood what was the matter. What she said to you was like ripping through untouched ground with a sharp plow; and she tried to sow seed, but it was slow in growing. Then that man at your aunt's scared you. I believe it was a good thing. Not good in itself, but good in the total. It disturbed you again, like harrowing where Madame LaRoche had plowed. Then that Corey woman—the seed sprouted, there, didn't it? And the roots struck into your soul, and your soul stirred to answer the demand upon it, and all of a sudden blossomed Maura Wayne. And because Maura Wayne is so much younger than her body, sometimes you seem splendid and developed, and again you seem ridiculously young and immature; that's according to the mood you're in—whether you're showing physical force, or using your little

young personality. It's just imagining on my part, but it explains you as nothing else does. And you're suffering a good deal over yourself because growing pains aren't pleasant. And now, child, let's get back to things we can taste and touch and handle. I want you not to be afraid of yourself or anybody else. You drink this young Barrison's contribution from the dairy, and eat what I fetch you, and as soon as you're strong enough to travel I shall send you up to stay with the yellow hens till you've finished growing a soul. I've talked enough."

She picked up her work and began to sway the rocker. Maura stayed unmoving, staring straight through Sarah Webb and the wall and the present, into the days of her unthinking past. When she finally drew a deep breath it was like the waking of one who had slept and dreamed.

"Sarah, if what you say isn't so, at any rate there's no other answer. If I believe it to be so, it'll help me. I choose to believe it. Sarah, will you lend me thirty dollars?"

There could have been no more eloquent testimony as to Sarah Webb's attitude than her unhesitating "Yes."

"Thank you. I forgot to say that Aunt Claudia finds I have, and have had all along, an income of ten dollars a week from securities Father left; but you're a dispensation from Heaven, you dear, that you didn't need to be told I'd pay your thirty back. I rather think I'm not going to New Hampshire, Sarah. I think I'll stay here, and eat Ivan Barrison's offerings to you till I'm a bit stronger—for a week say. And then I want to fix up this room. It can be done, and I can make a ducky place of it, and I can live on my ten dollars, and pay you a dollar a week, and still have enough to take a trial music lesson at the end of a few weeks. That's the first thing I shall try to do: to sing, in a small way, if I can't in a big way, and to do the thing I can do next best if I can't sing. Because at the very least I could be a nursemaid and sing the lullabies correctly, couldn't I? You believe there's something I can do, when I—

when I'm a little more grown-up, don't you?"

Sarah Webb looked up sharply, and stopped the indulgent smile with which she had listened.

"No doubt," she said peremptorily, as she put aside her crocheting, "but there's something that needn't wait that can be done now, and you're going to do it. You stop your runaway tongue and lie down; and if an alcohol rub doesn't put you to sleep I'll have to go out and get a sleeping potion and no mistake. You think you're qualifying for my Commonsense Temple, I suppose; but a person with no more wit than to talk their temperature up three degrees couldn't look in the window!"

Maura laughed catchily.

"'Tisn't fever, it's healthy excitement, you dragon of an angel you!" She put up her arms and gave the stocky figure a hug and a pat as it bent over her with professional indignation.

"Did Mr. Barrison tell you that he bribed the girl to let him up here to-day? He did. And he said he should come again."

"Well?"

"Well, how shall I make him understand that he mustn't?"

"If you understand that he mustn't and don't want him to come, I guess you can manage him."

Maura flung aside the shimmering veil of hair that Sarah was brushing. "Oh, I've decided things enough for to-day. My head aches. Probably he won't come again. If he does, I can decide how to tell him."

"Even so," said Sarah Webb.

VIII

April cried over the humans that had piled a stone and brick and concrete city between her and the earth she longed to make verdant and fruitful. May, more subtle, came to her sister's aid with coaxing, sighing warmly, showing glimpses of her beauty and whispering of wide spaces and far fields where she might be wooed and possessed. Folk with time to listen and time to spare shut up their great houses and went to keep tryst; but

the myriads who were money-grubbing stayed perforce, and the bricks and concrete and stone stayed, and the good earth underneath was kept barren. So after twenty days' futile trying, May began to threaten the hot displeasure of her sister summer.

Her foretaste of what June would do made the climbing of Mrs. Dockham's airless four flights something of a task. Mr. Faris, in lighter gray than his winter wear, stopped on each landing that he might maintain his cool poise. On the third landing he paused a longer while, dabbed his forehead with a sheer handkerchief and turned down the wrists of his gloves. At that moment a door opened overhead and two girl's voices jostled together. Mr. Faris cocked his head on one side, and then deliberately leaned on his cane and listened. He felt certain that one of the voices belonged to a young person of whom he wished to know all that he could in every way that he could.

"Don't you be a bit afraid," that voice encouraged. "You hand him that letter from Mr. Barrison's lawyer, and don't you say a word. Then let him bully all he will. You stand there, the last payment in your hand, and wait for him to write a receipt. When you get your hand on it you pass over your money and come away. Now you understand?"

"Yes, sure! Sure I do!" This was a vastly different sort of voice, metallic, for all its youth, blurred with tears. "I know I talk too much, but I guess I c'n keep muh face shut once! Say, Maura, you—aw darn it! I can't thank you like I want to, nor him either. G'by!"

There was a thump and clatter that made Mr. Faris fear the young person had fallen downstairs; but it was only haste and high heels. The girl—a big-hatted, tight-skirted, over-scented little creature—passed him without seeing him in the semi-obscurity, using her handkerchief emotionally.

Overhead a liquid crooning began on one note, held amazingly. Abruptly it spurted upscale, swelled, diminished, dropped to a crooning one note higher than the first and repeated the performance. The young person of whom Mr.

Faris wished to know more was practising scales, and doing it, his critical, slow nod seemed to declare, astoundingly well. He passed his gloved hand carefully over his smooth gray hair, took hat and cane in his right hand and held to the banisters with his left as he went up.

The top floor was flooded with light that was a bit dazzling after the dimness below; and through the five open doors, front and sides, there swept a most refreshing current of air. Before each of the five doors hung a thin curtain of green-figured madras that gave privacy to the occupants, but afforded ventilation. Along the hall floor lay a strip of new green matting, the woodwork was enameled freshly white, the walls were painted a soft ecru, and on a tabouret beside the polished rail that fended the stairs was a green jardiniere holding a huge fern that stretched up to the mellow light from the screened skylight above, and stirred its lusty fronds in the moving air. It would seem that Mrs. Dockham had exhausted her funds and energy on housecleaning this top floor, most unwisely neglecting the better paying lodgers on the third, second and first.

"Er—Miss Wayne?" called the gray gentleman as the scales stopped.

"Yes?" The madras curtain before the door of the back hall bedroom was thrust aside, and the young person of his quest stood before him with a flood of sunshine pouring in behind her that made her seem haloed and clothed in the misty blue of May skies.

"Oh, Mr. Faris!" She came out to him, both hands extended; and with a movement that only his superlative good breeding saved from being hasty Mr. Faris shifted hat and cane, stripped off his right glove, and gave his hand, eyeing her as though to discover what change in her had made him do so. The old appealing flutter and deprecating, shy smile were gone. She looked at him squarely, and her smile took him momentarily from the top floor of lodgings to a drawing-room where he had unaccountably forgotten his manners. It was puzzling.

"Er—Mrs. Dockham assured me I

might come up here," he explained. "It's atrociously early, of course, but I wished to make sure of finding you. On a matter rather—er—personal." She stopped smiling.

"Of course. Do come in. We're quite alone on this floor. I was giving my flowers a sunbath, but it's getting too warm and I'll lower the awning. It will be more agreeable, I'm sure." She led the way to her door, and Mr. Faris followed to the threshold where he stood looking in with the sense of puzzlement still upon him. She crossed to the window, put up the screen, reached out and manipulated a rope, and a small, green and tan striped awning lowered, putting the room at once into grateful shade. In a window box under the awning were gay little blossoms and buds and masses of restful green.

Beside the window stood a green willow chair of comfortable shape, with magazines in its woven side pocket, and yellow sprigged chintz cushions at seat and back. Short ecru curtains, crisp and sheer, swayed over the shining enamel of the sill. On a small wooden stand opposite the chair were books, a manuscript score of music, a bowl of rose-pink, heavenly-sweet arbutus, and a cheap gas drop light, of inoffensive design, with green glass shade, attached to the wall jet by green tubing. On the under shelf was more music, neatly piled, and a mandolin. On the ecru painted walls were two reproductions of good etchings, in brown wood frames; and to the right of the door a single couch bed, with a brown denim cover, and plenty of the yellow sprigged chintz cushions. At its foot was a matting covered shirt-waist box, also chintz cushioned to serve as a seat. To the left of the door and as far from the chair as space would allow was a small dark oak wardrobe. Between that and the door was a carefully adjusted brown burlap screen that evidently concealed some essentials. On the strip of matting between the screen and the couch bed two persons could not have stood side by side; and three would have filled the more ample space by the chair and table. Under such circumstances it was singular that one got a

sense of woodsy browns and foliage greens and buttercup yellow. Perhaps it was the luxury of an awning, or the unusually fresh air and the nodding blossoms outside the window, and the color hints of wall and denim and chintz flowers; but with a decidedly puzzled frown Mr. Faris left off inspecting the room and concentrated on its occupant. She stood behind the willow chair, resting her hands on the back and looking at him with an expression that a line would have deepened to apprehension. Her blue frock was of crinkly stuff that didn't look expensive; the broad collar and cuffs of white lace that finished the short sleeves and round neck were vastly becoming but of ordinary quality. It was humanly impossible not to pay tribute to her slender yet contradictorily stately young body that without movement conveyed an impression of suppleness and instinctive grace. Her face he had acknowledged beautiful at first sight, yet had not admired. Her face was changed now, yet he could not detect wherein. Certainly her eyes were different; they were brighter without coquetry, steadier, and the upper lids had lost their suspicion of languid droop. He shrugged without concealment.

"You have surprised me to forgetfulness, Miss Maura. Frankly, I wished to see you here, to know how you had surrounded yourself, how you expressed yourself in such quarters. My reason I will give you presently—though perhaps I should tell you that it concerns myself—er—almost entirely and has nothing to do with anyone connected with yourself."

It was startling to see the flash of relief that crossed her face. Mr. Faris, who had traced her apprehension to the aunt he recalled, understood her suspense with a twinge of remorse. She looked so very young, in that transition, that the unfledged dignity of her body was eclipsed by a radiant trustfulness that made a world-hardened person feel compassion for her. "And may I have that chair?" he asked in his best manner; "and will you assure me that you truly live in this—er—box?"

"Oh, but it isn't! It's home!" She

pushed the chair hospitably forward the inch it might go, and crossed to the shirtwaist box, where she seated herself with the hunched abandon of a child and looked at him brightly. She seemed to take it for granted that he might question her and inspect her quarters.

"It was pretty messy when I came up here," she chatted, "but you may recall that I discovered ten dollars a week that belonged to me? Well, I promptly borrowed thirty dollars from Nurse Webb, on the strength of having an income, and I did miracles with it. You see——" She sprang up and moved out one panel of the screen nearest him. Behind it the wall was oilclothed, clean green-figured white, fastened by enameled tacks. Against it stood a small white iron washstand, with lightweight pitcher and bowl, and a packing box fitted with shelves that showed as the chintz curtain that hung before them was not drawn to the edge. Over the articles atop the case was a clean cheesecloth which she whisked aside with all the pride of a showman, to disclose a handsome, shining chafing dish, a kettle with spirit lamp, a tin closet with "Bread-Cake" in a gilt scroll across the front, and a tea set of pale green ware on a lacquered tray. She covered these wonders and pulled the chintz curtain farther from the edge. The shelves were covered with oilcloth, as was the top of the box, and peering closer, adjusting his glasses, Mr. Faris read the neatly written labels on the rows of tin cracker boxes that were arranged conveniently: "Sugar," "Cheese," "Matches," "Spaghetti" and the like; with tea and coffee canisters, a good sized dish pan, and a pile of folded dish-towels on the bottom shelf.

"Isn't it dandy?" exulted the owner of these riches, concealing them with the screen again. "And my mirror——" She swung the door half to, showing an oblong, wooden-framed glass screwed to the inner panels. Then, opening the door again, she went back to her box. "Shipshape, Nurse Webb calls it; and it's cheap, too. Mrs. Dockham's meals are rather dreadful; but with what Sarah Webb legitimately takes from hospital and with delicatessen things and canned

soups and vegetables, and nice cheap bits I see in the market that Sarah is teaching me to cook, why I get on sumptuously. She comes every Sunday to tea, and to dinner on her evenings off; and I save enough to take a singing lesson once every two weeks, and I'm trying to write some children's songs that are promising, and my instructor says that I've a voice that should get me a church position. If that happens, I shall be rich!" Glowing, shining-eyed, seeming uncannily childlike, she waited for approbation.

"Er—that's promising, sure enough," he agreed, almost awkwardly; and then he put his hat on the table, sat back and rested his hands on his silver-mounted cane, and became uncompromisingly rigid. "Now for my little matter. I came to talk of Ivan Barrison. He tells me—and indeed it is possible—you do not know that he is my son."

She started violently, and the glow left her as an electric filament ceases to glow when the current is turned off; but unless she were a consummate actress her quick look at Ivan Barrison's name, her start and her shock were understandable emotions. She leaned toward him, clasping her hands about her knees; and suddenly she was a strong-bodied, imperiously young, decidedly-to-be-reckoned-with woman.

"Ivan Barrison your son?" she repeated; "but *your* name!"

He gestured as though to dismiss that question.

"That will explain itself as I go into the past a bit. It was eighteen months ago, on Christmas Eve, that my physician was compelled to put an end to my too numerous activities by telling me that my prospect of life was extremely uncertain. I was just recovering from a mysterious, agonizing attack. The next might come at any time and end my existence. It was a—shock, rather."

"Yes," she said, as he paused. "I know." And so she did. But her understanding did not seem to grasp that it was Jared Barrison who was telling her that he was marked by death. This was still Mr. Faris, a cold gray gentleman toward whom she felt a reasonable

gratitude; her intuition told her that he had come to broach something that would touch her more nearly than his passing. A very faint color showed in the gray gentleman's lined cheeks. It was unthinkable to suppose that he should be piqued by her composure or embarrassed by her calm; yet in a lesser man one would have suspected both.

"I may confess," he went on a trifle pompously, "that I was unsettled. I am not a sentimentalist, but the associations of the day on which I faced the unknown may have worked upon me. I set about putting my affairs in order and hurriedly summoned a confidential clerk to bring a list of my holdings. To be brief, I found that I owned many blocks of houses now rented for lodgings. I was struck by the variance in rentals and sent for my agent for those properties. After some pointed questioning I discovered that in his zeal to make a satisfactory showing, and perhaps to increase his own percentages he had allowed, in some quarters, a class of tenants to come in who paid treble rents for the unspeakable privileges of their—er—business. In my mood of that moment I felt I, alone, was responsible. I had neglected the goods entrusted to me. I felt that I must personally repair, in so far as I might, the evil I had been so lax as to permit. I had reports made to me and investigated them under the name Faris—which suggested itself from the first two syllables of my own name. In due time I arrived at the Corey woman's—and found you."

"Yes," she said, under her breath as he waited. She had not moved, and her eyes were dark and intent, her face grave. But she seemed honestly unaware of his drift. He adjusted his glasses with a little cough.

"On that day, you may recall, my son saw you for the first time." She recalled. It was as though he had flicked her with a lash tip and sent a tiny shiver through her; but instantly she was attentive again. "He had suspected something, owing to my change of manner, and had gone to the physician and browbeat him into a confession. Then he had set out after me, having first got on my

trail at the office. While you were packing I had sent a messenger to tell Mrs. Dockham to stay at home as I should call. She was one of the tenants I had found unobjectionable. My son, in his car, made the rounds to that place and heard of the message. He waited, fortunately for me, because I had another attack, though not so serious, just after I got you from the cab. He took me home, was devotion personified; but it seems that he—er—noticed you particularly at that moment of meeting. It was one of the things not to be foreseen that he should have had an upset, and that, in order not to startle me, he should have had himself taken to the very hospital where I had sent you. Last night I told him my intention of going abroad soon. My case has taken a favorable turn and my physicians wish me to consult a specialist in Vienna after the relaxation of a sea voyage. Naturally I wish my son to be with me. I told him our passage was booked. From unhappiness he changed to confidences. He told me of you, said that he could not leave you, and proposed that I use my influence to persuade you to marry him at once and go with us."

Delicately pink as arbutus the girl's face flushed. One would have known the color for love's own without the mistiness that crept over her eyes or the tender upcurve of her lips.

"He has asked me," she said wistfully, "many times. But I wish him to be very sure. Of course, he must go with you."

For a full minute Mr. Barrison stared at her. The Sphinx could have been no more unreadable, yet Maura drew back, the flush fading, sat erect and whitened a little at the ironic contempt her sixth sense detected.

"That is generous of you," he said slowly. Caustic would have burned less painfully than his tone. "But I never thought that he wouldn't go. I may tell you that my son has, in his own right, not so much as your welcome weekly ten dollars. He is absolutely dependent on me. I may say, further, that I know him better than you possibly can. His wholesome sanity has saved him from any serious entanglements, but the few

he has had have been soon forgotten. I intend no discourtesy, believe me, when I tell you that I am inclined to treat this infatuation as lightly as I did those. You are both very young. There are tendencies. Well, it should be enough to say that I consider any thought of marriage as too preposterous to argue."

She was conscious of nothing save his calm gray face in a gray haze, his colorless lips shaping words. She knew she stayed upright and still, but her body seemed to be swung through space in a great arc and dropped back on the chintz cushion jarringly.

"Preposterous?" she repeated, without comprehension. And all at once, with speech, understanding came acutely, and rage seized her sickeningly, so that she shut her hands and clenched her teeth. "Is that all?" And until she heard her own intonation did not guess that she meant it to menace. Once she grasped the hint, a sense of her power grew on her. Ivan Barrison loved her. How well? How? It did not matter. He loved her, chaste and distant as she had kept herself, well enough so that if she exerted all the coaxing charm she had cultivated in her schooldays, and lured even a little instead of eluding carefully, she could be Mrs. Ivan Barrison before another day.

Barrison, Senior, twisted his cane a trifle uneasily as he watched her changing face.

"Er—that word was ill-chosen," he temporized. "I understand that your birth is quite as good as his own, and as to the tendencies I mentioned—the sins of others should not be visited upon you. But I have—other plans for my son. You are sufficiently a worldly wise young lady to understand that a romantic affection hardly survives actual want. Your ingenious acceptance of your situation here, your laudable ambition, encourages me to believe that we can agree to put off, at least, any decisive step. I quite frankly ask you to send my son abroad with me. I want him with me in case—well, in event of my death surely he would regret not being with me. If I live I trust myself to manage him. If not, my will makes my stipulations

clear. In this small crisis, however, I ask your assistance. I do not want to risk a scene. I am selfish. We all love life, at the last. For the very great obligation under which you will put me by taking a commonsense view of the situation, I desire to make recognition by—er—making it possible for you to pursue your musical education in slightly more agreeable surroundings. Pray do not stickle at naming a sum that will meet all your expenses for several years.”

This time it was she who stared a half minute; then she drooped forward and put her head in her hands.

“I see,” she faltered. “Give me a minute—please.” And for a little she sat quietly while the devil tempted her and the beasts of the flesh tore her. She looked up desperately to get away from the visions she saw behind closed lids.

“If I had been bad,” she broke out, “I could have done as I would with Ivan. I warn you that I could take him now. But I’ve wanted to be good. Tendencies, you say? I never knew what was in me of black viciousness until this moment when your insult waked it! It seems so unjust. Ivan has taken me motoring, but never alone. Always with Sarah Webb or Mrs. Dockham, or one of the girls in the house. When I was very weak he used to come and read and talk to me as a brother might. Only once, the very first time he came, he kissed my hand. But never even that afterward. Perhaps I shouldn’t have let him come, but I wanted him. Should I give up everything I want? When I told him of my income, we planned what I’d do with this room like children fixing a playhouse. He hunted bargains and bought the things with my money, and he came and painted the walls, and there was enough left to do this upper hall over. He would go buy chops and I’d cook them in my chafing dish—but that was all, after the first week, when he sent me food. Oh, yes, he bought my mandolin so I could compose accompaniments, and bought the fern for the hall. He comes here when Sarah Webb is here, and all the girls on this floor know him and like him, and some evenings we get together and sing; and he loves it all like

a child. There was a girl here just before you came to-day, who got into a loan shark’s clutches. She’s been paying over and over for two years. I told Ivan and he had his lawyer write the villain a letter that will end the thing. Is all this bad for your boy? Am I hurting him?”

“Oh, not that, not at all!” Mr. Barison grew assured as she grew excited. “But in his position—and yours—such intimacy is—er—indiscreet.”

“It isn’t!” she denied. “We’re one big family on this floor. My door is never closed when he’s here. We all bought these curtains alike so we could have air and privacy without that very indiscretion. They know I’m not out late, and that I wear and eat and have the things they do; and they take me for granted just as I have worked to have them. On top floors of lodgings we can’t stickle for the little proprieties, but the girls know I’m square, because I am, and because I’ve tried to make them like me. They—”

“They’re most interesting, no doubt, but wouldn’t we better return to the matter that concerns us more deeply?” he interrupted. It checked her like a flick in the face. For an instant the vengeful viciousness scathed in her; and then between her and the gray face came Ivan’s comradely smile, clean eyes, with the glint in the depths that she had kept from mounting to flame so often—so often! After all, this matter was Ivan’s and hers. It was for them to meet. How? But this cold gray man who roused such antagonism in her was meddling with his son’s self just as hirelings had meddled with herself for so many years. After all, it was Ivan she must help; Ivan she must sacrifice for. She stood taking a deep breath.

“I must think!” she said; and walked from the room. It was too small a place for two with such thoughts between them. She went to the fern and touched its tender fronds. Ivan loved green things and flowers! Up and down, up and down the hall she paced; ten times, twenty—and on that turn walked back to the imperturbable man who waited.

“I won’t interfere,” she said simply,

"I'll tell Ivan to go with you. If he asks me to marry him I will refuse. I will take——" There she choked, but after a breath went on steadily: "I will take five thousand dollars. When that is paid back to you, with interest, with money earned at legitimate work, to be proved to your satisfaction, I shall——marry Ivan if he still wishes it."

The gray gentleman got to his feet, adjusting his glasses.

"My dear young lady, do I hear aright? Five—really, you know, I quite expected to—er—urge at least twice that. Or quadruple it. And you say you will not entertain thought of marriage with my son until you have paid back this sum, with money legitimately *earned*?" He laid stress on the word.

She nodded.

"Earned. It may be in partnership; but it will be of a legitimate sort."

"I—er—may inform my son of your decision? Of this—er—loan?"

"I supposed that you would."

With no further word he took from his pocket a small check book and a fountain pen. He had come prepared, optimistic. In his neat, legible writing he made out the check and tactfully laid it atop the books before he turned to her with extended hand.

"I find it difficult to thank you as I should. You've spared me a most distressing series of arguments. By the way, I need no more than your word and my son's knowledge of it. You have been infinitely wise; you're sure—judging from the voice I heard as I came up—to make a success in your art. Do believe—if I should not see you again—that you have my unbounded sympathy and admiration." He took her hand, ignoring the fact that she did not offer it; bent over it in old-world salutation, bowed again on the threshold, and made his careful way out.

At eight o'clock that night Sarah Webb came up the four flights almost rapidly, a carton of ice cream held out before her by its string, her other hand extended flatly under the soggy bottom in case of accident.

"Lorry! Night like June and a full

moon; I had to get out, my two hours off, and do something summerish and silly. All the girls out on the steps but you. Get some saucers; this is too expensive to waste."

While Maura fumbled in the packing box shelves, she found a match, turned on the gas and lighted the drop light, with one capable hand, balancing the box of cream on the palm of the other.

"Worst thing about this weather is that butter and milk spoil so fast, and warm water is sickish to drink. Maybe you can afford a little icebox if Mrs. Dockham happens not to feel pious when you ask her, but that's not what's troubling you now, is it?"

Maura looked at her almost blankly, with eyes dilated and intense. She still wore the blue cotton crêpe of the morning, her hair looked as though she had thrust it through with nervous fingers many times, and her face seemed worn by the untimely heat. All at once her hand shook so that the spoon it held clattered against the saucer rim. She frowned and steadied it determinedly.

"Nerves you see. I expected something to happen and it hasn't, and I guess it won't now. But I'd rather not talk of it till I—get used to it a bit. Sarah, I want you to leave the hospital and rent a house like this. There's a vacant one next door. And you can take lodger girls, and do for them as we've so often talked of doing, and it will give you a living, and more freedom, and it's what you like. I've money enough to furnish the place plainly but comfortably. There's five hundred still due on your last mortgage. I'll pay that and add five hundred for improvements, if your mother will take the Wilkes family to work for her and give them an interest in the farm with prospect of buying. She's old, and your brothers won't farm, and Wilkes would be better than a hired man. I'll have enough left to guarantee expenses here for a year, I think, and you have your savings you can rely on; but it'll pay. It's sensible all around. All I want is this sort of room, and my meals—and you. My ten dollars will clothe me and pay for my lessons till I

get to earning more. I have five thousand dollars."

Till she had finished her cream, Sarah pondered it.

"All right. Glad to. Five thousand free and clear, or on note?"

"It's to be paid back when I can. First, tell me: did you know that the man I called Mr. Faris is Ivan's father—the rich Jared Barrison?"

"Yes. Thought it didn't matter. Let it come out when it would."

"Well, it came out to-day. You don't like details, Sarah, so I'll merely tell you that he came to me to argue with me against marrying Ivan. Such a thing was preposterous, he said."

Sarah sat motionless, her color rising; and immovability and high color in Sarah Webb were danger signals not to be disregarded.

"Did you take the five thousand from him?" she asked very deliberately. "Because if you did, without some mighty good reason aside from wanting to get me out of hospital work, you hand it over and I'll give it back to him before I sleep to-night."

"There was another reason. One I don't want to talk of yet. It seemed logical when it came to me, but——" She broke off. A breathless instant of listening and she stood, the color flying to her face, her lips parting. Sarah Webb, surprised into listening, heard a step on the flight below.

"Sarah—Sarah, go! It's happening after all—oh, thank Heaven! Ivan was the reason. If he isn't what I believe, you shall take the money back. But don't ask me anything now——"

That was almost an affront to perhaps the least curious woman in existence; but without resenting it Sarah caught the saucer of cream that tilted in the heedless hands. The slim blue figure was swaying.

"Keep your commonsense, whatever's up!" she snapped. "I'll take this to Mrs. Dockham, poor old thing. Keep your commonsense, child!" Next minute she greeted Ivan Barrison on the stairs. Maura struck her hands together in shock at the unfamiliarly slow response.

"Evening, Miss Webb. Oh, I say,

shan't be seeing you again. Sailing last of this week. Awf'ly sorry t'say good-by, 'm sure."

"So'm I. We'll miss you. But you'll be back before long; and be a good boy."

He laughed at that; an unfamiliar, slow, low laugh. He came to the threshold laughing. The long light-weight overcoat he wore was open, showing the white shirtfront of evening dress, and his tanned face, above that white expanse, looked darker than usual, and slightly swollen. But the laugh showed his perfect white teeth, the glint in his eyes was fire bright, and a casual glance would have judged him in high spirits. He was hatless, and seemed to have no cap in hands or pockets.

"Evening," he said, good humoredly. "Going abroad last of week. Indefinitely. Came to say good-by and to ask you why you sold me so cheap? Merely curious. There's a couple dozen millions, at least calculation, you might have had a slice of. Seems 's awf'ly silly. Got to figurin' on it till I left the game and ran over to find out why." He was not at all unsteady on his feet, but unmistakably his speech was thickened by wine and his wits fogged.

"Come in and close the door," she said, trying to speak bravely, "and I'll tell you."

But he shook his head, the devil-may-care look flaring in his face.

"Strong on propriety I am. Mustn't shut the door. Been taught not to. Nev——" Perhaps her agonized eyes troubled his unnatural satisfaction. He stopped and put his head on one side with an odd suggestion of listening to the words he had just spoken, then looked inquiringly at her. Slowly he put up his hand and passed it hard across his forehead.

"It was such a dev—er, pard'n—such an infernal jolt, you know," he said in a more normal tone. "Other women do that sort of thing but they fly higher. And with Jared Barrison, too! And if it was money you needed, I'd have held my tongue about what I wanted, till I'd gotten it for you. Seems to me you might have known that! But five thousand! And *your* suggestion, too. That

was what made it such particularly nasty hearing. *You, Maura!* I'd almost ask you if it were so, but the Guv'nor doesn't lie. Really, you know, he doesn't."

"No," she said, "he doesn't. I set the price. Five thousand dollars."

The dark angry color crept to his hair and his mouth set so like his father's that the resemblance struck her forcibly; but the pucker between his eyes and the stunned look that crept into them, dulling the glint, was pure boyish hurt. The wholesome nagging of that hurt forced him to thinking, and the process was as apparent as though the mechanism of his mind had been laid bare. Presently his face brightened to a look wholly his own.

"Was it something you had to have the money for?" he asked eagerly, his quickened speech shaking off the thick-ness. "Was someone pestering—black-mailing you? I'll swear you had some reason, but the jolt of hearing the bare facts knocked the wits out of my stupid head. And I went to the club. But I'm perfectly clear now, Maura; and please use me. Trust me, won't you? You had some reason, didn't you, that seemed good to you?"

"Yes!" She almost cried it.

He groaned, short and sharp, as a man might who had heaved off a weight that was crushing him. With an outthrust of his arm he sent the door crashing shut and strode up to her, grasping her hands.

"Tell me the whole thing, Maura. Every word. Clear the thing up. Whether it was a good reason or a foolish doesn't matter, so long as there was one. I'll take your word against the world. You've got me, body and soul, and you know it, don't you? You've got to let me tell you so, to-night. I'm not drunk; there wasn't rum enough in creation to drown the hell fire that roasted me this afternoon. Never mind that now. I'm yours anyway you say, or yours whether you say or not. Maura, darling——"

Boy's hurt and man's passion shook his voice as he bent over her hands and crushed them to his face. It was to the boy that she appealed.

"Ivan, be my comrade a little while

longer. Till you know what I want you to know, be just as you—have been." He pressed her palms against his hot, closed eyelids.

"I—can't promise anything more," he muttered. "But I'll try. Go on."

"First, I want you to sit here by the window where it's cool——"

"I tell you I'm sober now!" He saw through her anxiety. "And I'm not going to let your hands go. You take the chair——" He kicked the matting covered shirtwaist box over facing the chair, backed her into the willow seat and took the box facing her. His eyes, as he looked into hers so close, were more than ever the hurt, puzzled eyes of a boy, and she saw the veins throbbing in his temples. For an instant all that she had done and might do seemed of small consequence beside her mighty desire to put her arms about him and draw his head to her shoulder and kiss the hurt eyes to their old merry glimmering. He leaned toward her sharply, eagerly.

"Maura——" he just breathed; and with a shock of fear she understood how he felt her unspoken tenderness. She smiled with stiff lips.

"My turn first. I've got to begin at the beginning of myself——"

"Why?" he objected sulkily. "Have I asked? What do I care? I know all about Aunt, if that's what's troubling you. Guv'nor told me. But what's that to us? It's *you*——"

"Just so. It's you and I who matter in this, Ivan, and we only. And to make you see that, I must tell you how I found it out." So she began with the story of herself as a little girl in the under classes of the branch of Madame La-Roche's School for Young Ladies; a little girl who never went home except for Christmas, and then not to a regular home, with a tree and games and relatives. It was soon told, after all, even to her last days there and she used Sarah Webb's explanation of the girl she had been. He said: "Poor kiddy!" and kissed her hands softly while she talked, seeming to feel the pity of it, but not to get her point. Chiefly he watched her face, stared hungrily at her mouth. But when she came to the Barron episode he

understood her first halting words, and caught her fingers in a viselike hold.

"Damn him, damn him!" he gritted. "Stop there. Don't go on, I tell you I don't care. Whatever happened wasn't your fault; it doesn't change you——"

She cried out, protestingly, stammering reassurance, explaining; and he leaned and caught her to him, hiding his face against her neck.

"Thank God! I never knew what it meant to say that and mean it before. Don't tell me any more. You were saved. That's all that matters——"

She let her longing arms close about him for an instant as though he had been her unhappy child; but at his ecstatic shudder she thrust him away before he could speak, sat away from him, offering only her hands again.

"Not yet—not yet——" she warned. "You've got to know everything first. It has been too long a fight to stop now, even for you. There's little more to tell, for I feel that your father explained how he found me. I was sent on here to that woman for safety. I knew nothing of her, really, till your father came and brought me to this house, where I first saw you. I wouldn't see you because I had been frightened too many times by then. I got work——"

It was her recital of work that stirred him most. That record of her terrible summer through which he had idled and yachted and flirted woke the protective instinct in him, goaded the comrade-lover that he was. He got up and paced the narrow strip of matting like a caged tiger, and came back and kissed the hem of the blue gown before he sat again, and took her hands. There was no more save her version of that morning's interview; but that, although she told it briefly, set him raging again.

"Great Jupiter! That's too much. I didn't think it of Guv'nor! I begin to see why you did—what you did. He goaded you into it—insolence for insolence. Wanted to show him his prodigy wasn't worth a whole heap after all, didn't you, poor kiddy——"

"No—oh no, not that! Van, it was for you I did it! You've got to work out your salvation as I am doing; got

to be yourself as I'm trying to be. You haven't the struggle ahead I've had, but a different one—your own. I told him—told your father that I might earn the money in partnership, but I suppose he thought it one of the feeble pretenses I was using to make him think I'd pay the money back at all. Ivan—you and I can pay it back. That's what I want——"

She counted a dozen heartbeats while she waited, watching incredulity give way to understanding in his face.

"I—earn——" He grunted a laugh. "Well, you poor little romantic fool, kiddy! You make me feel like a shrimp! Polo and football and swimming championships don't guarantee the ability to whirl into Wall Street and rattle the dry bones. What childishness! Why, dearie, I could have brought Guv'nor 'round in time. He—he's awfully fond of me, you know; and there'd have been some sort of settlement so that we——"

Something in her look stopped him. She shook her head, trying to keep her lips from quivering and her eyes from brimming over, and she looked a very little girl.

"But I don't want you that way," she said. "I want you to love me and work for me, not desire me and scheme for me. I want to know it will last; and if we have money some day I want to feel we own it and aren't owned by it. I want to be proud of you."

That touched his pride. His face grew cold, the very glint that had come back to his eyes grew cold. She thought of the gray gentleman and winced.

"So you're not proud of me and you don't trust me. Well, that isn't good hearing, girl. But this test of devotion business isn't my way of taking the measure of a man. You mean to say that's the only way——"

Her tears welled over and slipped down her cheeks. "The only way, Van."

"Careful!" he admonished sharply, "because you love me. I know it now, as I know I love you. But you mustn't make conditions; you mustn't test wills—for if you got my cussed temper going, and I refused——"

She caught her hands from him and stood, shaking the tears from her lashes

with a fling of her head. She was white, but strangely triumphant, exultant, and her lithe, splendid body strained to its utmost height.

"If you refuse that won't stop the sun shining, nor the rain falling, nor blind me to spring nor summer nor autumn nor winter; and they will give me loveliness to be glad for and peace that will help the hurt of not having you. I've fought it out, I tell you, fought it out! Don't you suppose I guessed the thought that crawled under your father's words, like a snake? Don't you suppose that I know he would wink at your wasting thousands on me, as your mistress, when he would wish me to starve as your wife? But you're better than that, Van, you're cleaner; you're stronger. Maybe you won't see it now; maybe it will come some other way; maybe, dear, it will come to you through someone else, someone who appeals to you in another way than I. For you love my body; you love my beauty. But I love *you*—the you that *is* you; and that's what I want—or nothing!"

"Maura!" He stood, facing her, pallid as she was, half frightened, half angry; and suddenly, with an exclamation, he swept her into his arms, lifting her face almost roughly so that he looked deep in her eyes. She stayed still, looking up at him.

"Do you know what you're saying?" he besought; "do you know how long the days and months and years will be that you talk so assuredly of living? Do you guess what love is; what *our* love would be that you are so ready to forfeit?" The red flushed his face. "Well, I—I'd give self-respect and Father and—the whole damned universe to have you mine any way I could get you! That's the thing a man is. And I'll have you! That's the one thing I'm certain of." He tightened his hold, his eyes devouring her face from bright hair to white throat, and back to her mouth where they stayed. "And now——" he said, thickly, "now——"

From that kiss they drew apart shaken, dazed, with eyes open to a new heaven and a new earth; then, with an inarticulate murmur they came close

again, as instinctively as they breathed.

"I love you, I love you—I love you!" There were no other words, and the three were new, as he said them. "You love me. Tell me so." But she hid her face against his throat.

"Yes. Wait—I'm frightened—a little——"

"Of what? Not of me? Before the world was dreamed I loved you, and when there are no worlds I shall love you. You most wonderful, you purest, you sweetest—*my* love! Look at me."

Ineffably lovely with the loveliness that comes but once, radiant, exquisitely humble, she looked at him; and he was startled to earth, made incredulous by the perfection of the miracle he had wrought.

"You're too beautiful! What is it you see through me and beyond me? I'm jealous of every thought you have that isn't mine. And you haven't said you love me. Don't smile—I know I'm off my head, but I'm glad of it. Come down where I am, you goddess girl; love me as I love you!"

That second kiss whirled them into a singing void where they clung as one. There was no little world of meddlesome creatures, no quibblings, no penalties, nothing save love and the imperious desire of love. With his face in her fragrant hair he pleaded.

"Maura, come away with me. What does anything matter? Anything! I'll work, I'll do whatever you say I'm to do, after we've taken our space of Paradise while we're young, and the glory is new, and the soul in me is just awake. There'll never come such a time for joy, beloved, though I love you forever and ever. Let us take it courageously, as only the man and woman meant for each other may take it. Forget the little pale sham things, the sickening imitations of love. What is it, dear heart? What are you saying?"

She pressed close to him in trembling terror, like a little child.

"Help me to be good," she prayed, "help me to be good!" He lifted his face from her hair almost angrily; it was not so that his great moment should be met.

"Maura, don't take me for the usual

sort of brute! Don't shame this splendid love of ours! Can't you see that I only want it perfect for a time? Afterward shall come work and readjustment and poverty and convention; but love like mine puts its lady in cloth of gold, gives her silk to lie on, matches her eyes with topaz and black diamonds and her lips with garnets and her teeth with pearls, and her body with blossoms. Maura, my poor, starved, frightened darling, trust me! We'll go to the other end of creation, where it's summer always, and the stars are little moons so there is no night, and the winds are drunk with flowers, and the sea melted sapphire, and love is born new with each day—Maura, Maura!"

And the third kiss was temptation. In its first delirium he thought that he had won; but even as he exulted knew that he had lost. Her lips closed under his, her body stiffened in his arms, her hands unclasped from his neck and strove to put him from her.

"Maura!" And then as he saw her eyes the words crowded back. How long they stood, motionless, battling silently, he never knew; but in that space he gave up the ghost of his old self and felt the pangs of a new birth.

"What is it," he said hoarsely, "that you want me to do? Tell me what I can do." And at the soft cry she gave and the mother-ecstasy of her look, he put his arms about her contritely and pressed his cheek hard against hers, so that for a little she might not see his face.

Sarah Webb rapped after an unmeasured while. Far below she had heard the door crash shut, had used common-sense about it as long as that commodity lasted, and then had been obliged to reassure herself. She exhaled a breath of relief as Maura's voice bade her come, and opened the door apologetically.

They looked at her in welcome, smiling faintly, their eyes vague as though they saw her from a distance through visions; and they did not take their arms from about each other, and Ivan Barrison did not lift his face from the silver fair hair. Under her square sandiness Sarah Webb's mighty heart swelled

nigh to bursting at the look on her girl's face, and the smile on the boy's face. Her keen eyes, suddenly dimmed, fuzzed the gaslight into a wonderful radiance, and there was a confused surge in her ears that might have been the last whisper of departing wings.

"The chauffeur is kissing the singing teacher," Ivan informed her with his bad-boy grin.

IX

Everybody likes Christmas, because everybody is sentimental and feels at liberty to show it, on the twenty-fifth of December, without the probability of being laughed at. Remove that fear of ridicule permanently, and a sentimental, brotherly-loving race would evolve; and one way to effect that would be to increase the number of Christmases in a year, beginning with one extra, and increasing to three hundred and sixty-five. By that time the spirit of the day would be a habit, ridiculous gift-giving would have died of sheer inability to keep up, and any objections of a seemingly practical nature could be argued out of existence by any practical person with a working knowledge of metaphysics.

Sitting before his fireplace of carved Italian marble on Christmas Eve, Jared Barrison surprised and alarmed himself by snarling anathema on the day to come. Surprised himself because he fancied he had perfect control over his spoken words; and alarmed himself because his life depended on the avoidance of violent emotion. The Vienna specialist had informed him that his very iciness had been violent emotion; a humiliating fact to face after sixty years of striving for that repression. There was to be no more planning for stock market coups, no more balancing of pet trusts on the hair line between "legitimate combination" and federal prosecution. He might have art, books, people, philanthropy, any one of a dozen hobbies—the Vienna specialist had shrugged and spread his expressive hands to indicate that the world was full of fascinating things to do. And so, no doubt, it was for some people; but at sixty habit seemed a set-

tled thing. If Ivan had suggested anything—but Ivan had insisted on returning to America as soon as the favorable verdict had been given, and within three days after their landing had secured a position as chauffeur, by the unscrupulous pulling of strings at the garage he had contributed to so largely; and as "Samuel Webb" was giving entire satisfaction to a retired manufacturer of patent medicines, out of town.

That, after a few minutes' honest thought, Mr. Barrison discovered to be the reason behind his outburst. He didn't hate Christmas at all, but he hated the circumstances that would prevent him from having the sort of Christmas he wished. Which is equally true of anyone who says that he hates Christmas.

Having reached that confusing decision, Mr. Barrison made amends after his own manner. He ran over in his mind the people who were, or who were likely to be, detained in the city over the day, or dining alone in his own state of mind. There was Willotson, of Montana, summoned to the city by an important court decision which affected his interests: a bluff man, but presentable. There was Sir Kenelm Ridgeley, Baronet, who was registered at the Ritz, unknown to his exclusive circle of friends, as "Mr. Travis," and who had been detained in Washington by his private mission to the Embassy just over long enough to miss his steamer home. There were Atherton and his wife—his very new wife, who had figured in an unnecessary divorce case, and who might have been in Gehenna instead of in town so far as recognition of her presence went. To ask them would be to force people to recognize their existence again, and people didn't like to be forced, even by Jared Barrison. His intimates would get him into corners at the Club, and question him about it, and the dowagers would write him reproving notes marked "Personal." There was the young assistant curate who could talk shorts with Sir Kenelm, and who would be given an undeniable lift by having it known that he had dined at the Barrisons'; and there was his bachelor uncle Jared Mil-

ford, whose namesake he was, and who irritated him more than any other human being, and who would be sure to accept for the purpose of disapproving with everything that was said and served, and for asking humiliating questions of Ivan about his employment. Still, down they all went on a slip of paper, with instructions for his secretary to send messengers to each early in the morning; and then he rang for the butler to let him know that there would, possibly, be eight at dinner next day. Haynes, that perfect servant, received it as he would have received notice of a possible eighty or of dismissal—with impassivity and dignified calm. Although he had taken Haynes for granted for fifteen years, Mr. Barrison, looking into his fire again, found himself wondering whether his iciness had ever suggested a butler's manner, to the irreverent. It was ridiculously annoying; also it was very late. He would go to bed and stop fancying things.

On an impulse he crossed the huge main hall, from the private room where he sat when alone, and went into the reception-room, which was unlighted, to see what sort of night it was. Snow had fallen and the streets, for the moment, were beautifully white, with a starless but luminous sky, fathoms deep, somehow suggesting that the planets were withdrawn to some secret communion. The Avenue was unusually empty: a cab with a belated arrival, trunk and bags piled beside the driver; and a limousine whirling along, its lighted interior showing its man occupant looking over a stack of huge, queer-shaped bundles piled on the seat opposite him. Beyond doubt he was a father or an uncle or some interested male, taking the children's presents home now they were safe abed. For no reason at all, but with a flicker of astonishment that he hadn't thought of it before, it occurred to Mr. Barrison that the evenings wouldn't seem so long if he had his wife's portrait moved from the drawing-room to his private sitting-room. Each Christmas of the twelve she had been in her native Heaven he had missed Amy, his wife, a little more. She had been his

one great tenderness—sometimes, he had feared, his weakness. He leaned his forehead against the cold glass.

Something caught his eye on the sidewalk below. A man stood there, looking up at the window, with his arms outstretched, as unmistakably entreating as though he were shouting appeal. When he saw that he had attracted attention he caught off his cap and held it out, beating himself on the breast with his free hand, and then outstretched both arms again.

"Faugh!" Mr. Barrison stepped back from the window, letting the draperies fall. And without the slightest intention of doing so walked to the front door and opened it. There was a scramble on the pavement and the beggar clambered up the steps; a tattered man who breathed in whistling intakes, and broke into the barking, rasping, brazen cough of bronchitis as he stumbled close to the door. Lest that hardly won portal should be shut against him, he thrust in his arm while he leaned against the casing and finished his cough.

"T's food I want," he wheezed, lifting his congested face then. "Straight. Three kids—one jes' come—woman jes' crawlin' round. I'll take anybody there t' prove it—if 'tain't a Charities man that'll take away the kids. Nix on that! Can't make folks hear me in the crowds, come up here. Been sick, los' my job. Prove it you gimme chance. Food's what I want——"

"You're sick, man. Step inside here——"

"Nix on that! I'm goin' t' have Chris'mas t' home if I die t' day after! Are y' goin' t' gimme annything, that's what I arsk? Name o' God, can't you see I'm jest arskin' for what'll be thrown away t'morrer?"

Mr. Barrison thought of Haynes and hesitated. He put his hand to his inner pocket.

"Could you buy food if I gave you money instead?" The creature wheezed derision. He was either new to begging or working a novelty.

"Course I could!" Mr. Barrison adjusted his glasses.

"I'm not at all sure what I have with

me," he said, quite as though the man were a bill collector and he an apologetic debtor. "I carry so little cash. Oh yes, here's a twenty, and a few fives——" He folded them lengthwise, together, and held them out. For an instant the man glared up at him as a suspicious animal might, and then, with a horrible, rasping sob, tore at the money so that he hurt the hand that gave it, whirled, plunged down the steps, slipped and went to his knees in the new snow, but scrambled up and vanished, running.

"Imbecile! If an officer stops him—running—with that money——" But after all it wasn't his affair any longer. Only he hoped the fellow's wife would fix him something for that horrible cold.

As he rounded the curve of the great oak staircase, he heard steps and voices in the hall below, and leaned to the banister to look over. Haynes and Parker, his man, stood by the carved screen that shut off the door to belowstairs.

"I'll swear I 'eard the door an' felt a draught," said Haynes. "Didn't you, Mr. Parker?"

"No doubt about it. Take a look about if you say. But——" he dropped his voice—"I'm for thinking it was Mr. Ivan. This would be the time he came back to stay if ever he meant to come."

"Ah! If he does!" Haynes, also, lowered his voice but the words floated up. "But I'm thinkin' Mr. Ivan is on his own for all time. 'E spoke a good bit with me when 'e was 'ome Thanks-givin'; an' while 'is disappearin' looks queer, an' I can't find any gentlemen in service that 'ave picked up any gossip as to where 'e's gone, Hi'll wager anything you like that it's money as sent 'im orf. 'E was no kind to arsk for pennies, Mr. Ivan wasn't; an' 'e's took the right way to show it. 'E's as much of a man, today, as you or me, Mr. Parker!"

"That's right enough, Mr. Haynes. He *had* changed. Well, we'll look about before I go up to draw the barth."

When they had disappeared toward the dining-room Mr. Barrison went on upstairs. So Haynes and Parker approved of Ivan the chauffeur as they had not approved of Ivan his son! That was an argument the boy had used:

"I've got to be my own man, Dad. You liked living your life your own way, and you did; and now you're trying to live mine for me—that's what it comes to; but it isn't possible any longer. Some day you'll see it my way."

Some day, maybe, but not this day. At Christmas time a man—an old man—needed his son. If only he would live at home and take work in the Company's office or any office; but chauffeur for a patent medicine man! He shut his hands hard trying not to hate the girl who was at the bottom of it. He might have known that she'd have some sly, infernal trick in reserve to catch a young fool's chivalrous fancy. Trying to make him, Jared Barrison, go to her and apologize and beg her to marry the boy, was she? If anything less than his life was at stake he knew what he would do and say to her.

Parker got below stairs after two hours, limp and wrathful; and it took the combined eloquence of cook and Haynes and something tasty to eat and also to drink, to get him in any sort of accord with the blessed Eve. Cook begged him to remember there was one thing to be said for the place, at any rate.

There was. Money. While the Christmas bells rang under a joyous morning sky, Mr. Barrison sat at his desk and shook his pen viciously on the Bokhara rug as he redipped it for his many, many checks.

For money he was served and feared and flattered and besought, and while he despised the recipients, he dared not cease giving; because if he cut off such service and devotion he would be absolutely bereft.

Haynes came in with a wireless telegram as the last check was thrust into its envelope, and his lids lifted in the least possible betrayal of eagerness. The message was from the Baronet incognito: "Thanks. Small steamer sailing. Can't resist temptation head for home. Merry Christmas."

"There will be but seven at dinner, Haynes, and you may take these envelopes and distribute them as marked. The top is yours."

The usual fulsome compliments were uttered. Shortly would come the tap of Mrs. Winn, the housekeeper, who went to her own home nights, and then would come cook, clean and starchy, and the undermaids, all saying the stereotyped things and all coveting the wealth that came to them in driblets. He tapped his fingers impatiently on the mahogany table top, regretting that he hadn't found out the address of the bronchial man. That was the one bit of giving he had relished; and to escape the perfunctory thanks he stayed upstairs nagging Parker—the one person he let himself nag—until close on the time he expected Ivan.

As he came down, immaculate, icy and savage, Haynes took in a note by messenger from Mr. Jared Milford's attendant, who regretted that Mr. Milford had been slightly indisposed for some days and could not accept his kinsman's most kind invitation, but would hope to receive him later, on that day. That was one thing to be thankful for at any rate; and the call, with Ivan, wouldn't be so bad. His telephone—his private room 'phone, of which the number was known only to business intimates—rang as he went into the room. It was Willotson of Montana.

"Say, Barrison, it was almighty good of you to think of me! And I know you hate having outsiders to eat with you, too! But guess what! The Madam started East soon as she knew I wouldn't get home, and she'll be here in time for a late dinner together; so I'll just order one here and fix up the room with posies. I thank you more'n I can tell, though. Merry Christmas!"

Willotson, sentimental! As he smiled sardonically at the receiver, Mr. Barrison thanked Fate that he was not so afflicted; and then put in a bad five minutes wondering whether anyone save a sentimentalist would feel such infernal twinges at the sentimentality of everyone else. Haynes tapped and entered with another note by messenger; this from the Athertons, voicing the gratitude of both incoherently, illegibly. His people had relented, on this day, had sent the car for himself and Mrs. Ather-

ton, and they would both come later, in person, to thank him for the thought that had cleared away their difficulties; but he would understand, etc., etc.; and they wished him a Merry Christmas. He was about to say there would be three at dinner, when Haynes who had waited at a discreet distance, announced Mr. Wadleigh in the library. Mr. Wadleigh was the young curate; and he came in blushing, very nervous, but fortified by a sense of duty. There had been a disastrous fire in one of the model tenements controlled by the board of directors of the Charity Funds, and families must be housed and fed and found gifts—

Mr. Barrison reached automatically for his check-book, received the young clergyman's thanks and regrets patiently; and as soon as the door closed, got up to walk the rug in anxiety. Ivan! If Ivan—

And then there was a flurry in the hall. Ivan always pounded Haynes on the back and shouted, on Christmas Day. There was even a whining babble that told of cook's impertinent intrusion to the welcome; and Ivan wouldn't be giving one of them a cent, and never had, regularly, that is. The door rattled, and swung open.

"H'lo, Dad—merry Christmas! Rip-pin' day, what? Gee, but this looks good to me! How are you, fine's you look?" He crushed the hands he gripped most painfully. Browner, leaner, handsomer, insolent in his strength and independence, unquenchably gay—

"Yes, I think I'm fairly well, but I want you here, Ivan." The words came of themselves. "There are offices aplenty if you won't go into mine—"

"Taboo on business!" Ivan crossed his fingers. "'Fore I go we'll talk over things, but not this minute. Dad, give me something for Christmas that I want like the very deuce, will you? Maura sings her first solo to-day. I want you to go to her church with me and hear her;" and after a pause as he watched his father's face, he added: "I'm going anyway. But I'll come directly back here."

Maura! Always Maura! Barrison,

Senior, gripped the arms of his chair and his collar felt too tight; but he made his first concession.

"I'll go," he snapped, "if you'll come straight away with me afterward and make no attempt to have us meet." It was an ungracious speech, undignified, and his son's face showed him how greatly so; but the expression was instantly suppressed.

"Very well. But I'm to be with her the last half the day; and now let's talk of something else, Dad."

Jared Barrison wished, later, that he had made an effort to grasp that conversational branch so generously extended. It would have given him excuse to break through the rapt mood in which his silent son walked home beside him after that ordeal of hearing the girl sing. How the young fool did look! Head high and thrown back a little, eyes bright and blind, a smile like a young warrior's; and all because a girl in a second-class church packed with second and third and fourth-class people, had sung rather unusually. Recalling the scale practise he had once overheard, the elder Barrison grimaced disdain. Take such a voice, fairly trained, set it floating through a church flooded with eerie rays from dim-hued windows, with the thrill of prayer still in the air and the hushed thunder of the organ throbbing like the murmured accompaniment of militant angels guarding a seraph, and that upsetting Christmas spirit at work on emotional humans—why, even he, Jared Barrison, had forgotten, in the enthrallment of the finale, who it was that juggled notes of gold and crystal and mountain—spring bubbles, mixed with children's laughter and patient hint of past tears, and sun-fleck and shadow strain, swirling them higher and higher 'till they seemed to dash against the vaulted roof, shatter there, exquisitely, and shiver, straying, down, to merge in a level, sustained, triumphant note of peace.

He had come to himself with an apprehensive tensing of nerves, and glanced at Ivan; but only Ivan's body sat beside him, tranced, unheeding everything save the message that song had borne to him. A woman sobbed outright, once, and the

quiet throng began shuffling, coughing, in reaction. Ivan, startled a bit, roused and looked at his father; but Jared Barrison, icy and supercilious, was elevating his brows at the huskiness of the minister's voice, and by no slightest sign betrayed that he had known or cared who delivered the solo.

As they entered the big hall of the depressing place they called home, both thought of the woman whose love for Christmas had inveigled them into such orthodox observance of the day; but the elder's memory took a bitter turn. If the boy's mother had been spared, even though she were so frail and mentally misted as she had been at the last, their boy wouldn't have been hypnotized by a well-breathing prettiness. He would have remembered that the angels of the higher air are quiet.

"I'll just 'phone the place that I'm here and will be over," Ivan said, a trifle defiantly as Haynes left them with the coats. "I saw Sarah Webb and—the aunt at church, but as I'd agreed not to see Maura I thought I wouldn't see *them*, either."

Barrison, Senior, nodded as casually as he could manage, and walked out of hearing, trying not to let his resentment master him. Naturally, somehow, he found himself in the drawing-room before the portrait of his wife, which he meant to move. On the broad frame, at the base, lay a fresh, white rose, yellow-hearted—her favorite flower. His first emotion was of great thankfulness that the boy had remembered and found time to pay the little tribute; and then as surely as though he had been told, he knew that the flower was one of an offering to the girl who was forever coming between him and his dearest desire. His next clear moment came when he found himself leaning against a carved curio-cabinet, shaking, weak, painfully aware of the blood in his head. He had been angry, of course, but not angry enough—merciful Heaven, not angry enough to have to pay in full the dread total at that minute, that day? His mind fled to the coughing beggar to whom he had given so bountifully the night before; the instinctive human attempt to offset a penal-

ty incurred, by pleading for the credit due because of a good deed. That *he* should experience such weakness shocked him almost more than the fact of his queer semi-lapse from consciousness. He felt a mighty desire to see Ivan, to get to him in case—before——

Ivan looked at him sharply, he felt, when he entered the library and took the chair nearest the door; but he had been relieved to find that he could walk as well as ever after a momentary giddiness; and he felt that his color was high.

"We were to have been eight at dinner," he said as matter-of-factly as he could manage; "but by a curious series of coincidences we are left alone. Your greatuncle Milford, for instance, is indisposed. We'd better drop in there after dinner."

"What, Uncle Jared?" Ivan actually looked concerned. "Of course we must. I thought surely he'd be with us. Why, he wrote the card that came with my Christmas gift from him."

"Christmas gift from Jared Milford?" And then, as he saw Ivan's surprised look, he recovered himself. "Never knew him to give anyone a Christmas present. I, as you know, refuse to send anything to you under that absurd name you saw fit to assume. My gift is at your place at table."

Pearl studs and the costliest watch cleverness could construct and good taste simplify had been his choice, since he knew that Ivan would not make use of money; but he felt uneasy as he wondered what his uncle had given. Ivan's smile took on the quirk of positive tenderness that showed he was remembering something pleasant.

"Good old chap sent me a box of flannels. Mighty fine ones, too. And along with 'em a pamphlet on the evil of the tobacco habit, and another on the pernicious practise of buying on margin, which he desired me to read."

From somewhere, overwhelmingly, anger flooded in on Jared Barrison again. To have another man, even a kinsman, presuming to affect a paternal care in his son! Everyone seemed privileged to usurp his place, from that sickening,

masculine nurse-woman, who had suggested a parody of her own name to help out the chauffeur venture, to this attempt, indicated by unprecedented affection, on the part of miserly Jared Milford. He was grateful, at that moment, that it had been his habit to ignore distasteful topics: it relieved him of the necessity of commenting. Ivan, already off the subject, sat forward in his great leather chair, elbows on his knees, hands clasping and unclasping between.

"You spoke of our being alone for dinner," he said slowly. "Dad, you've got to let me open up a little. Ever since I came home here this forenoon I've been seeing Maura in the place. Literally almost seeing her here. Don't flare at me, and don't try to freeze me. As your guest I should be allowed to say what I choose. Besides, it's Christmas. That isn't a reason, exactly, but it's a mighty powerful feeling! I wish you'd try to know Maura. Just on your own account, that is, when I'm away again. Without any argument from me, get to know her as she is. She almost—well, Sarah Webb says Maura is almost grown up, now. She means the girl has developed, changed wonderfully in these few months of having something like a real home, with someone to care for her. She's getting to be a woman and a wonderful one; because most strong women aren't sweet; but she is! And while you feel you could rest all the troubles of your inside soul in her keeping, yet she's a kid. Just that. Sometimes she seems so young she's a baby! Couldn't you hear it in her voice to-day? Strength and joy and tremble and tears? There are bigger voices—I'm not altogether a creature of one idea—but I've never heard a voice that *understood* so! That's what made that woman cry in church and made the parson and congregation husky. And I don't want to keep away from you, and deny myself her; I'm ready to keep on working—I'd have to now, to keep my self-respect. But I want us to be together, we three. I want her, Dad. And she'd come if you truly wanted her; she has grown big enough to be generous. Wouldn't you like her here? Think of her, all white and silvery-gold against

our dark old woods and tapestries; think of her singing to us evenings, in the fire-light! I've gone into this chauffeur thing because it was the only thing I could do with my hands, and I've liked it so well it's worried me! But after the first of the year I'm coming back to town. Charteris wants me. They think I can sell bonds for 'em. And I'll be with you more, and then I mean to borrow the balance of that absurd five thousand, or give you my note for it and work it out; and make her marry me. I hope you'll take it as well as you can, Dad, because I'm going to *do* it. I'm going to make her. I—love her."

After a second Jared Barrison coughed slightly.

"Speaking of that place she calls home," he said coolly, "my agents tell me that it is well kept up, the neighborhood bettered by it, and the rent paid promptly." He saw Ivan's incredulous start give way to a blazing indignation, but kept himself steady. If he could only manage to make others angry instead of letting himself be inundated by those fearful currents of wrath, it would be the better for him, he knew. Ivan's jaw set; and then, with a shrug and a half sigh, he came back to the surface civility that he had tried to break through.

"Yes, they're very successful," he said, with praiseworthy calm. "Sarah Webb is in her element. Their rooms are packed three and four deep with girls who put up with crowding just to be in such a house. The food's rather unusual at the price, and it's hospital clean, and prettily furnished. They fixed up the roof for last summer, and had little evergreen trees sent from New Hampshire that are growing in tubs; and the roof is fenced and the ones with a suspicion of lungs sleep up there now, with only an awning shelter. Each girl had a big box of earth for her own, to tend the flowers and raise a few vegetables, and three of the toughest shop girls in the lot are going into the country as apprentices to a market gardener woman, and they're happy as children. Never knew of such things before, you see. Sarah has put in application for the

house next door, as Mrs. Dockham is leaving; and means to cut a door through if she can get permission. She believes in looking after them, but not spying. For instance, she saves the back parlor for reading and writing and the quiet ones who don't want to talk; the front parlor and the dining-room below for the noisy tango lot; and the little reception-room is sacred to the spoons, who may have it in regular turn by applying in advance. Sarah could fill a block in such fashion; and though she keeps her prices down, she's beginning to make money. And there's another thing: the aunt you remember—Aunt Claudia—”

“Dinner is served, sir,” Haynes announced, appearing in the doorway. Jared Barrison got to his feet with the energy of a man starting for something of more importance, even, than Christmas dinner. And so he was. He was scheming as he had never schemed, his brain alert, working with that odd sense of divination that had made his schemes so uncannily successful. First, he meant to break Charteris and the firm of Charteris and Billings. By persuading some active operators who were under obligation to him to combine, he could put Charteris where he'd have no bonding business with which to entice other men's sons from their proper occupations. Then to make a counter proposition to Ivan and if need be to the girl: to ask Ivan to enter his service in the office for a year, with no thought of marriage. Much might be accomplished in a year. For one thing, to a young fellow of Ivan's temperament, the novelty of going to cheap lodgings to woo would lose its charm in half the time. It would give the young fool his fill of seeing her and deprive the situation of its element of denial and mystery. His consent being half won, Ivan would drift back to friendliness with him, and he would see to it that if there were ambitions to be aroused, in the line of achievement, opportunity should offer. If no other fancy luckily diverted this trend of affection, the year of intimacy—with a girl of her probable tendencies—might bring a solution of the problem. He emphatically would not consider her as his daugh-

ter-in-law, but he had not the slightest objection to her in any other relation to Ivan that did not take from him the boy's companionship and first interest.

From oysters to port he exerted himself as though Ivan had been the head of an opposition concern whose antagonism he wished to disarm. It was said of him that he could gossip more divertingly than any man of his set, when he chose; and on this day he chose. From lightly malicious revelations about common friends he drifted to matters calculated to pique the new practical aspect of Ivan. He laid bare the workings and ultimate intentions of a dozen secret schemes of giant import, whose originators would have lost breath had they dreamed their projects were made the topic of dinner table conversation. And Ivan responded, perceptibly, with the old interest, the old admiration.

The look Haynes received from his master when he entered to announce a person on an important affair, would have driven that functionary from the room in confusion, ordinarily; but this time he stood his ground with a face of portentous gravity.

“It is Mr. Jared Milford's man, sir,” he added; and with a startled interchange of glances the two came to their feet.

“Poor old chap,” said Ivan, “I should have gone this morning!” And what he suspected was so. Unexpectedly, as he had done the few notable things of his ninety years, Jared Milford had died. He had insisted on being dressed and had got up to his chair by the window—“To wait for Mr. Ivan, sir,” the trembling-lipped man, explained. And he had remarked that it was a pleasant Christmas Day, had leaned back comfortably, and breathed his last.

As the limousine hurried the three of them to the old-fashioned quarter where his uncle had lived, Jared Barrison sat with his head on his breast, feeling strangely exhausted after his effort at dinner. He wished Jared Milford had taken some other day to die. It was gruesome that a man of means and standing should go alone, with a paid

servant the only one near. Decidedly he wanted Ivan to stay at home!

They were met in the narrow hall of the dim house by the elderly man from the attorneys who had looked after the Milford affairs for generations. He put his privileged hand on Ivan's arm after the conventions had been appeased and the arrangements for the following day agreed upon.

"I saw Mr. Milford the day before yesterday," he said; "and you will be glad to know that he spoke of you with hearty approval, my dear young sir. It would please him, I think, could he know that you would come daily until he is—taken away; and it will give you a better feeling when—er—the will is read, to remember that you justified his affection to the last."

Jared Barrison felt his muscles twitch at the unexpectedness of the suggestion.

"Why should you think that would weigh with my son?" he demanded with a venomous emphasis that made Ivan look at him in surprise. "Mr. Milford was not a rich man."

The old gentleman from the attorney's stiffened.

"No, sir, not as such things are regarded to-day," he replied. "Mr. Milford lived according to his creed that a reasonable return for honest endeavor was all a man was justified in trying for. His money was legitimately earned, his inheritance one to be proud of; and aside from bequests, he leaves your son a million clear and half as much more in securities of unquestionable value."

Ivan stood motionless, eyes straight ahead, the irrepressible glow of hope replacing the gravity on his young face. He had not heard the sum; he had heard the words "legitimate" and "honest endeavor." Jared Barrison, with his uncanny insight sharpened by fear, knew what those words had meant; so he was not unprepared when Ivan did not follow him into the car.

"Dad, you heard what he said. I've simply got to go tell Maura. I have money legitimately earned. Dad—that means—if she holds to her word—"

As if she wouldn't leap at the opportunity to get out of the situation her in-

satiable desire for social recognition and her desire to show her power had made complex! Thanks to Jared Milford she would have her way. Jared Barrison wished that the devil's self would inspire him with some scheme to outwit her, to out-tempt her, to lead her into fresh complications. He would have given half his fortune, at that instant, to have been assured a year of Ivan, free of her.

"I will go with you," he said, as though his long hesitation had been a striving for courage to make that concession.

"Dad! Oh, I say, you've done the one thing I hoped but didn't dare ask! By George, Dad, this is a Christmas worth having! Poor old Greatuncle Jared wouldn't grudge me the happiness his money is bringing me, I know." He sat forward on the seat, feet thumping a nervous tattoo on the rug, gloved hands beating together in sheer inability to sit still, his white teeth gnawing nervously at his lips; and slumped in his corner the older man tasted the acrid morsel of recollection as they rolled into the dreary street where he had brought the girl that dreary afternoon so many months ago. And for this!

The bright polished door with "Webb" on its neat name-plate, swung open and a pandemonium of laughter and scuffling and chattering and hurrying enveloped them. From the front parlor girls boiled over into the hall, on the stairs; one got an impression of countless eyes and kaleidoscopic colors, moving faces and waving hands, against the glow of dark red walls and ropes of green. There was an aroma of coffee, mince pies and oranges, with an undercurrent of savory goose and beef and "fixings;" and, withal, a certainty of fresh air and radiant cleanliness that was not the usual accompaniment in such a place of such reminiscences. The white-capped mulatto girl, unable to make herself heard, beamed and beckoned them up to the second floor.

"The tree's bein' fixed in the back parlor," she explained, "the last of the presents bein' put on; an' the girls has had their friends come. Hope you'll excuse it, bein' this day, gentlemen." And then

she opened the door of the small side front room and shut them in.

There was the same obvious cleanliness here, overlaid with a note of subdued richness that made Barrison, Senior, look about attentively. He noted the big, winged tapestry chair and footstool by the window, the inlaid mahogany work-table, the leaded glass shade of the electrolier, the sepias on the soft-toned walls, the books in the small mahogany case, the single dull green vase with the three Christmas roses, the very good rug on the floor and the oriental covering of the couch with its silken cushions. It might have been the work-room of any much-occupied woman of his acquaintance. Ivan paced the rug thrice, like a nervous bear, and then broke out: "I'm going to find her! You don't mind?" and was gone.

Deliberately the beaten man took the winged chair. His mind was racing, but to no avail; yet he kept his outward calm. Time enough at the last, he told himself, to try what the venting of his contempt would do. Someone tapped and turned the knob. He half rose, mechanically courteous, but sat back as he saw that the woman who came in wore a big white apron. That instinctive act brought a twinkle to Sarah Webb's eyes, that lasted only for the time it took her to close the door and turn to him. Under the white apron she wore a green silk.

"How do you do," she greeted briskly, ignoring his half raised, apologetic hand. "I've left working on the tree, for just a moment, because your son told me enough to let me guess what has happened and what he hopes. I'm glad. But are *you*? That's why I wanted a word with you first. If Maura says 'yes' to him, try to be kind to her, Mr. Barrison. What is there against her? She's of good blood on both sides. Well educated, in the modern manner. Any girl you 'd have picked for your son would probably have been finished at Madame LaRoche's. She has no money, true, but you have many millions and your son is independent now. As for social prestige, just announce that she is daughter of Sir Maury Digby's cousin

and see 'em flock to congratulate you! You may distrust the circumstances under which you met the girl, but you and I both know that she was no more to blame than a person who falls into a coal hole in the dark when the cover has been left up. And you used to like her, didn't you? I believe it's just a jealousy that you'll be sorry for, when you find you've gained a daughter instead of having lost a son. As for the aunt—I'll admit that according to story-book justice she should have passed away, repentant, or suicided. That last is just what she meant to do, although Maura doesn't know it. The woman came here to make one last attempt to save her niece from your son, queer as that may sound to you; and I saw her and liked her. To cut the story short, she came back in May and stayed. Cut away absolutely. This is her room, these things all that she brought with her. It was pretty bad for a time, but I talked some commonsense into her, and I set her to work. To work with her hands. And she has cooked and sewed and scrubbed and sweated away the laziness of foolish living, and she's going to have charge of the wilder sort of girls that I mean to put next door. Who'd be better calculated to manage them than a woman who has been foolish as they are foolish, and who has found that there's no happiness or content in it? If need be she can swear 'em into submission; because she isn't a saint, yet. She's just a handsome woman who has come to her senses, and is going into another sort of life as completely as she went the wrong way. And she has a right to her chance, a right to work out her salvation. That's my creed and it's the one that'll save the world! Everybody his own man, his own saviour in so far as a human can be. She won't trouble you nor ever shame you. I'll look after her. And she shouldn't be expected to die just to make things convenient for you or anybody else. That's all; only do as you'd be done by. Now I got to go."

The door clicked behind her. He might have dreamed her; had it not been for the angry beat in his temples and the unpleasant twitch of muscles

that his repression was costing him. Like tiny burrs the truths she had planted, prickled. For the first time he faced the fact that he didn't care whether Maura Wayne were a fit mate for his son or not. She had outwitted, thwarted, humiliated him, Jared Barrison; and by every law of his nature and custom of his life, she must pay for it. He did not rise at the next tap; it was time to show his contempt.

The door was opened by Ivan's hand; it was Ivan who stood back from it. But the girl came in alone, the door closed behind her, and they stood face to face the first time since that morning in May.

Beautiful, of course. He was prepared for that: very marvelously fair, her silver-gilt hair wound about her head, her almost too-perfect face pallid, her red mouth a startling contrast, her eyes pools of warm light. The little sheer white frock might have disarmed another man, the submission of her slim hands, clasped loosely before her, might have appealed; but he was armored against the artlessness of her. The graceful slimness that, at one look, added to her height and at the next contradicted it, he gave acknowledgment anew. Physically she was perfect; and that was the reason she had overthrown him. She had yet to learn, he told himself, that the vanquished do not always surrender. Grimly he waited. Even to him it seemed a long wait; but he rejoiced in it when he saw the effectiveness of his weapon. Under his silent contempt the golden glow of her eyes clouded to opaque amber and black, her face whitened; and in that surprising way characteristic of her, she took on strength as she abandoned hope, seemed to grow tall and splendid and to meet him valiantly, away from the protecting barrier of her sex.

"So you haven't changed!" she said quietly. "I felt you hadn't. That's why I wanted to see you alone, first. I told Ivan I wanted to tell you my decision first, but not that it depended on your attitude. I suppose every woman likes to sacrifice herself for her love, likes to be a martyr. But I have, beside, a fear

lest I haven't atoned for those idle, weak years of the beginning. I want to marry him, sir. I'd be a good wife, a true wife; and I know that he would be true to me. I know he loves me. But I know what you feel. You think that you haven't had a fair fight, and that you could offer the new Ivan, the worker Ivan, things that would wake his ambition, that would take him away from me, that would lead him into a life more in accord with your views. Well, you shall try. I will send him back to you for a year. Do what you can, what you may, and against that I stake my love—our love. He is to think it's just a year of waiting, of engagement; and if you win him away he shall never know a word of this bargain. But if I win—if at the year's end he comes for me—he shall have me. Because——" and there her quiet voice deepened to passion "——because, God knows, that will have been trial enough, payment enough!"

The sudden cessation of her voice seemed to drive home the incredible truth of her generosity with a veritable blow. Jared Barrison felt the shock of it through every nerve in his body; and then a slight weakness of immeasurable relief. He had his year. All that his scheming had not availed to compass, his silence and contempt had won. He wanted to laugh outright, but he turned the nervous eruption into a cough and was his cold, composed self again.

"Most gratefully, and as freely as you give, I take my gift," he said. "You are generous, truly. If you regret it, remember that I——" He bent forward to rise, his hand coming out in appropriate conclusion to the pact. For an instant he stayed so, seeming not to breathe, the upper part of his body inclined, his hat and stick in his left hand, his ironic half smile frozen. The smile was wiped off in a galvanic shudder, and the very color of death grayed his face. Hat and stick dropped and with an inhuman sound he struck his hands down on the tapestry arms of the chair, lifting himself an inch from the seat, by sheer strength of arms. His feet dragged along the floor as limply as a stuffed figure's, his legs bending not at all; and

when he relaxed his tremendous effort, he dropped back heavily, staring horribly, jaw sagging. He seemed to try to call out but only a croak came from his working lips. Maura moved to him, hampered by her own fear.

"What is it——" and then, as she saw the deadly horror of the gray face, she called twice, loudly: "Ivan! Ivan!" From the opposite room where he waited with Aunt Claudia, Ivan came running; and, so rapidly does alarm spread, the noisy merriment below hushed, there came the hurried opening and shutting of doors, and Sarah Webb came quickly upstairs and along the hall to them. A curious numbing spell seemed to hold the group in the room. Beside the chair, her hands just touching it, stood Maura, looking down at a fearfully changed man, whose glazed eyes were fixed on the horrified eyes of his son. Aunt Claudia, one hand to her heart, stood transfixed. Sarah Webb shook off the queer suspension of her own faculties, stepped inside, and closed the door.

"What is it?" she asked commandingly. Maura choked and found her voice.

"Oh, he tried to stand—and couldn't. His feet dragged——"

Sarah Webb, the nurse, put up a hand to cover the trembling of her mouth. When she withdrew it she was her capable self again.

"Go for his physician, Ivan," she ordered quietly. "And you, Mr. Barrison, keep as calm as you can. This is only temporary, no doubt; but it is—owing to the trying happenings of the day, perhaps—a slight touch of—paralysis." And at that word the galvanic shudder shook the stricken man again, and brought his speech back from such a hellish vortex of despair that the memory of unspeakable torment echoed in his voice.

"It is death in life," he said. "I was warned—in Vienna—but I didn't understand. It was the complete death I looked for—I may live, now, to be a very old man, my mind keen as ever, my body, half dead, wheeled about, an object of loathing, watching those about me speculate on the greed of a half-dead man for

life. And you—you who have finished me this far——"

And then he cursed them. Cursed the woman in black till she turned her face to the wall and put her arm across her eyes; cursed his son till the young face was ashen and menacing; cursed the girl——

"Stop there!" Sarah Webb was whiter than mortal had ever seen her, and her voice was steel. "Because you are crippled must you be a coward? What has come to you is the fruit of all your life. It is your devil's temper that your polished outer shell kept turned in, eating you, corroding you, leaving you rotten within. Claudia, stand away from that wall and hold up your head. Maura, if you dare shed a tear I shall despise you. Ivan, call the chauffeur to help you take this man——"

"Oh, Sarah, don't! Oh, all of you—don't!" On his clenched trembling hands, Jared Barrison felt Maura's trembling soft hands close and hold, saw her bright head at his elbow as she knelt beside him. "Think what has come to him—and on Christmas Day! He doesn't know what he said, he's just scared, afraid of death in life, afraid of being without love—alone——"

Just as the sick beggar had glared at him, so Jared Barrison looked down, suspiciously, fearfully, into the tearful face upturned to him; and he saw what she offered, saw pity and strength and understanding, and under all, his for the striving, love. Tearing through his outer self, painfully, the suffering soul of him gasped, with a hoarse, rending, dreadful sob.

"Amy!" he cried. And then, remembering: "Maura! Maura!"

And so they were married. Married very soon. But everybody knew all about it and everybody explained to everybody who didn't, what a romantic thing it was. Everybody knew of Jared Barrison's seizure, and that the amazingly beautiful girl (who had been kept in such strict seclusion that her existence was known to only a few of America's exclusive families through their daughters' association with her at the private

school of Madame LaRoche), had married thus unIntroduced, unannounced and quietly, because of her adoring father-in-law's sudden need of her. It was he who had discovered her and had managed that his son should meet her. Her father had been cousin to Sir Maury Digby, and the family, although they disapproved of the match, had sent a representative to be present at the wedding. They had allowed her to be educated in America because of a sentimental reparation they felt they should make her American mother, of whom they had approved too late. But Madame LaRoche had kept her charge as close as only Madame LaRoche could do, until the young lady's health necessitated her traveling with the stolid respectable person by the name of Webb. Madame LaRoche came on to be one of the exclusive few at the quiet wedding, and let these bits of information drop, in her inimitable manner. It was conclusive, to those who had been obliged to reveal their genealogical secrets and the sources of their incomes to Madame, before their daughters were accepted at her school, to see the tears in her sharp eyes as she embraced her one-time pupil and called her "dear angel." Indeed, the girl in her shimmering white, with her marvelous face and sweet eyes merited the name. "Angelic" was the description that then and there became Mrs. Ivan Barrison's by unanimous verdict. It was "angel" that her young husband's ardent eyes called her, "angel" that the gray man in the wheel-chair blessed her by, as he clung to her hands in farewell, and besought her to come back to him soon. It was the one word that Wilkes found for the vision she made, standing at the top of the steps of the Pullman, her ermines slipping from her shoulders, the smile on her lips as she looked down into the blackness of the New Hampshire night. The one word that Mrs. Wilkes had for the lady of great bounty, was "God bless and keep you, our good angel that you've been!" Sarah Webb's old mother, waiting and dozing by the fireplace in the pretty sitting-room, roused to greet the bright face bending over her with: "Why—you angel-

pretty! So you are! An angel-pretty!" Billy Wilkes was asleep. That was the one flaw in the arrival; but his mother had kept him below stairs, late though it was, and Maura took him up and kissed him, with wet eyes. The picture that she made with the sleeping child in her arms made Ivan catch his breath in adoration; and when they were tactfully left alone beside the little table that held their wonderful first supper together, he caught her hands and bent his face to them and called her his wonderful girl, his snow maiden, his angel come to earth!

Who shall fathom the heart of woman? As she stood before her mirror letting down her hair, Maura found her lashes wet. She went over to the window. Outside the night was full of wide-eyed stars, the snow lay blue-white in the hollows and magically white on the hills. Her bridal night! She leaned her forehead against the glass and spoke her thanks, simply, in almost child-like words, to the One who seemed nearer than she had ever known Him, on this night and in this quiet place.

Ivan rapped, and came in at her call. For an instant shyness at the novel situation held them both silent; but then she saw the adoration mount to his eyes at the picture she made, fair, serene, tears on her lashes and the look of prayer on her face.

"I just thought," he almost apologized, "that perhaps you'd come out with me for a moment, now everyone is abed. It's so still. And the stars——"

"Yes," she said softly, "let's say good night to the stars." But against all the canons of romance it was of Sarah Webb that she thought as he put her into a fleecy white coat, and even as he kissed her hair. "Good-by, Ivan's wife," Sarah Webb had said, her keen eyes misty. Sarah Webb wouldn't call anybody an angel: she knew humans too well.

Ivan's wife! By what strange ways had she come to this moment. She and Ivan under the stars, husband and wife, his arm about her, his ardent face worshipping.

"I wanted to get you out here where the world seems so clean and big and

quiet," he said haltingly, "to tell you what you are to me—my dearest dear—my own. I want to tell you what I mean to make of our life together, what I hope I may be to you—"

Something in her face, as she dropped her head back against the arm that encircled her shoulders, checked his words. She was smiling, ineffably sweet, but the serenity had changed to a troubling gleam in her wide eyes.

"What you may be will turn on what I am," she said softly. "But now! This is our moment—now! I am going to ask you my first favor, Ivan—husband!"

His arm tightened galvanically at the word. The worshiping tenderness of his face livened to a look that he fought back as loyally as though she were a maiden trusting him in the solitude.

"You want," he said gently, "to be—by—yourself, till you are more used to the thought of me? My dear love, if that is so—" And again her troubling look checked him. Her smile was a mystery.

"I want," she said, very softly, "to take your hand and run to the top of that hill—and slide down—and—play—I never have played—"

"Maura!" He cried it out. "Maura, you—you bewildering—"

"Woman!" She flashed it at him as she freed herself. With a bend of her

supple body she stooped, caught up a handful of damp snow and tossed it full in his incredulous face; and then she turned and ran. She heard his threatening laugh of man and boy and master as he sprang after her.

Halfway up the hill he caught her, seized her as she bent aside, by one loosened fair braid, and held, even as he ejaculated at his own cruelty. So might his cave-man ancestor have seized his mate in flight. The stars were in her eyes as he crushed her, laughing, panting, fragrant, cold-checked and warm-lipped. At that kiss under the night sky his awed adoration vanished.

"Maura! Maura!" he whispered, fiercely, "it's woman you are, even as you said. My woman, my goddess, my girl—but mine, *all* of you! Mine! Maura—girl, don't look at me so! Maura, was it only a moment ago I kissed you—for the first time? Was yesterday May? I'm—losing my head again. Maura—you—you child, you witch, you—what are you doing, what are you? I've been on my knees this twelve-month, I haven't dared touch your skirt! But now—now—"

"Now, I'm just Maura tired-of-being-an-angel," she whispered against his ravening lips. "An angel—to be a worth-while angel—mustn't stay on a pedestal all the time. Let me come down—to earth—with you."

FATE PLAYS TRUMPS

By Laurance A. Williams

HE was delightfully wholesome looking. Perhaps he was twenty-five, but, like all forceful natures, his face in repose coincided with a dignified bearing in making him appear older. Oddly at variance, a certain frank boyishness of as yet unsullied faith in things good shone in his eyes. He was misleadingly young or old, according as the first impression was gained.

She, too, was young; probably about his age. Yet her youth had lost the

bloom which might have been said to characterize his. A flippant hardness of expression had laid bold strokes upon her dark and brilliantly-handsome face, blunting the girlish lines of beauty.

He had noticed her earlier, at dinner. She was attractive looking, and she seemed difficult to please; spoke sharply to the waiter, immediately flashing a dazzling, friendly smile upon his embarrassment. She toyed modily with the food, and left a substantial tip.

The embodiment of caprice had been his impression.

Later, in aimless loitering, he drifted to the mezzanine floor. Deep in his own thoughts, he circled absently about its dimness.

Presently, in his idling, a subconscious, compelling force thrust its disquieting influence upon his mind, stirring in him a vague sense of unrest which roused him to seek its source.

He looked up at this juncture, and met her eyes, cool, scrutinizing, mocking and interested.

He felt a flush rising, sudden, undefined, indignation with it. Her apparent attitude of mind annoyed him, for he had cultivated the habit of taking himself quite seriously. But as he passed on they cooled quickly—and left him wondering.

Across from where she sat he slackened his steps and stood looking down upon the lobby below.

Out of his boredom he had been wishing anything might happen to relieve the monotony.

She did not look like the ordinary type, he meditated. She was quietly and well dressed; obviously a woman of no mean station. She was extraordinarily handsome, with her vivid face and daring eyes. They had plainly expressed a personal cognizance of himself.

He speculated at some length. He was not a conceited, over-ready fool, but neither was he a prig.

He stood revolving these questions in his mind, his gaze absently fixed upon the moving figures on the rotunda floor.

"Mis-ter-r Wil-yum Smith," droned a blue-uniformed individual.

The young man leaned far over and snapped his fingers for attention, "Here, boy!" he called sharply.

The woman across the way saw the boy deliver the yellow envelope. She watched the man intently, clearly-defined amusement shining in her eyes and lurking about her mouth.

He dallied with the message; reread it and frowned; then put it in his pocket. He looked down upon the people below, as though deliberating. Once, quickly,

he looked directly across at her. Then he moved away into shadows.

She saw him coming toward her again. Her eyes, coolly, boldly challenging, watched his easy, sauntering approach. Neither dissembled. He looked directly into her eyes.

Without hesitation she gave him a nod and smile such as might have been bestowed upon an old acquaintance.

He stopped, hat in hand. "Quiet tonight, isn't it?" he said.

"Very dull," she agreed.

A moment's silence, then she laughed softly.

"I was bored to death," she acknowledged.

He felt instantly as though he must meet it with apology.

"I am most grateful to you for pity upon my lonesomeness," he said.

At this she appraised him with perfect candor in her eyes; noted the healthful vigor of his frame, the serious clear eyes and the boyishness of his face. She let the silence go unbroken.

"May I?" he asked, drawing a chair forward.

"Do," she answered.

"I am a stranger in this town," he went on. "Don't know a soul. Not strong on running around much, or gassing down there in the lobby. Thought I was in for it sure with some days yet to wait on an appointment here." Whimsical relief sounded from the doleful significance of the statement.

She laughed at that. He was promising.

"I am an utter stranger also," she rejoined, "and I—have to wait, too," with a shrug of resignation.

Further than that she vouchsafed nothing, but added, as though in extenuation of her unusual friendliness: "I thought you looked as bored as I was."

"Heavens—how hopelessly bored!"

The last shred of conventionality was torn away.

"My name," he said gravely, "is Smith. My credentials—" he delicately refrained from looking at her, "just myself—under the circumstances."

"I know—about your name," her eyes

laughed at him. "The other—well!" She regarded him calmly, a bit cynically.

That was sufficient for the moment. The chivalrousness of him allowed no further appraisal of her. No masculine visioning after motives raised questions in his mind.

And with this informal beginning of acquaintance it was not a far stretch to the acquisition of much information of a more or less personal nature, such including their tentative plans for the consumption of the enforced waiting time. She learned that he had intended filling the next and other days with side trips nearby.

He learned at what hour she usually breakfasted.

During the evening she learned, too, that his outlook upon life was all optimism, with a vision wide and hopeful; that a boundless enthusiasm animated his mind in relation to beliefs and theories; also, some facts about his life and the fortunes of his future.

In a short time they were as old friends.

She rose to leave. He walked beside her to the elevator.

It occurred to him she had not told him her name. It had been an indirect "you" in their conversation.

"Shall I—may I—see you to-morrow, Miss——"

The door was opening to receive her. She stepped nearer, then turned.

"Perhaps," a flashing smile recognized his hesitation; "it is Smith," she said, and was gone.

He rose from his chair in the lobby as she came from breakfast next morning. The empty hours, suddenly flooded with her magnetic personality, had done their work. He was eager to see her again. His bearing unmistakably reflecting his thoughts, the weary coldness of her fact lightened.

"Not off yet?" she said, dispensing with other greeting.

"Not yet." His color was a confession. He added: "I wanted to see you—first."

Composedly she looked him over. The

flashing, friendly smile had faded back into the indifferent hardness of her habitual expression. "Yes?" she calmly questioned. "Why?"

"Because——" he began, and stopped.

An odd, fleeting smile swept across her face. Then, changeable as a chameleon, she became suddenly transformed with a slow, soft radiation of tremendous physical magnetism. Her gesture and slight laugh took up the break.

"No, don't!" she said. "That was stupid of me."

The little gods of mischief and chance doubtless danced their glee over this trick of their combined working. Never had they found better material for their wilful purposes.

The days afterward almost lost their count. What do hours, days, past or future years, matter when warm blood stirs under smile and glance?

She filled his days. She let him fill hers. And the hours they were apart served a purpose, too. He ceased to think definitely of anything but her. She, mystical, baffling, let him drift; beckoned or rebuffed, as the mood was on her. She watched the fire smoulder, but with ready wit and coolness defended herself from the little leaping jets of its flame. He abandoned himself to its warmth as unrestrainedly as a child before the comfort of a hearthside.

It became quite a natural matter for him to tell her of himself, his life and ambitions. She listened and smiled in her softer moods, or when her world-wisdom came uppermost and threw the quenching spirit of incredulity and ridicule upon his fine high-mindedness and intentions. Again, with inconsistent gentleness, with almost maternal interest and earnestness, she counseled or cautioned.

Her ridicule swayed him not a jot. He watched her in such moods with the thoughtful, tolerant eyes one might turn upon a child's petulant wilfulness; the patient reasonableness which will presently induce its like. Sometimes he caught, in the daring of her speech, expression, the shrug of her shoulders, the impression that this spirit of bravado was simulated, worn as a garment of

protection from real and troublous emotions.

He wondered where lay the source of her inner strife. What had fallen, or was about to, upon her life to warp that gentler side?

The boyish wholesomeness of his nature reflected in odd contrast beside her bruised spirit.

Upon one subject to which he often unconsciously drifted, William Smith's enthusiasm was indeed boundless. It was in an affection, almost idolatrous, for his brother.

"He's the greatest fellow! Wish you could know him."

It was a favorite form of expression with him. She grew to watch for the shine in his eyes when he said it. She provoked him to it after a while.

"But, you see, it's this way," he told her, "he can't get over my being the boy he's been a father to, almost. He doesn't want me to take this thing. He seems to think it's too heavy a responsibility for me; too far away from home, and all that. But I—gee!" the boyish expression burst forth, "I've just got to take it! It's my chance. I'm not afraid. I know I can make good."

"But away down in South America! That is something, you know," she suggested.

"Yes, but look what they offer me—a five years' contract at big money. And that for a fellow just starting, you might say!"

"He must be very fond of you," she said softly.

"And, too, he's only my half-brother, at that. But as far back as I can remember—and before, maybe—he's been everything possible to me. You see, my mother married our father when Buz was about ten. You know the proverbial step-father's place. But he was a good affectionate son to her. I can't make up enough to him for that even. But he's great all the way through! Took Father's place to me when he was only fourteen—and Mother's only a little later." His eyes deepened reflectively.

"I suppose," she said after watching him a moment, "you'd do anything for

him—except give this up." Habitual cynicism was strong.

He turned clear eyes upon her. "I'd give up my life or earthly happiness for him," he said with simple eloquence. "But this—well, this is business, you know—my career. It doesn't really affect his life in any way. Of course, I hate to go directly against him in anything. I'm awfully fond of Buz," he ended convincingly.

His companion impulsively laid her hand on his sleeve. "You dear boy!" she said.

His eyes came back to hers full of sudden laughter.

"You, too!" he exclaimed. He rumbled his hair tragically. "Boy! Can't I make you people believe I'm a grown man? Gee! these fellows with their South American proposition do anyhow. They didn't have to be convinced."

"So he's to meet you here to talk it over with you?" She came back to their original subject.

"Yes. But he's been delayed. That's why I had to wait around in this strange town. But—I'm glad now," boldly and with undisguised satisfaction.

"Did you think it very dreadful of me—speaking to you that night?"

"Why?" he asked simply, his blue eyes clear and frank. "Why should I?"

She bent a searching gaze upon him. She read his eyes.

"Oh, well, it was unconventional, you know. I might have been misunderstood—by someone else."

"Oh, come now!" he ejaculated.

"I could not have done it safely, say—in New York."

Her lips pursed and her brows drew slightly at the thought.

"Oh, I say—don't you suppose——" A furrow creased his smooth young forehead as her insinuation crystallized into thought. "Now be fair! There are gentlemen in New York," he insisted.

"Yes," she agreed. "But not wandering around lonesome," with a slight laugh.

"Pretty young women should not wander alone either," he admonished gravely.

She studied him wonderingly.

"But they do," she said finally. "All taking their chances—as I did."

At that a little flame jet burst from the banked fire she had built. It shone in his eyes. She saw it; she recognized it.

But her quick gesture failed of its intentions.

"I don't like the thought of it. I—want to keep you safe from that."

In the momentary silence playing emotions shifted quick-changing expressions across her face. Remonstrance and dissent died before unmistakable comprehension. Her eyes swept over him a strange commingling of tolerance and unbelief, with a tinge of regret, of humid softness.

"Don't, my dear boy!"

"Why not?" His face expressed all seriousness.

She looked again into his eyes. His belief—a beautiful belief—in her looked back. With a short intake of breath she parried.

"You barely know me."

"That is not a reason why I—may not care."

"But—you do not. Really you do not." To her credit was the genuine hopefulness of her tone.

He flushed deeper at her disbelief. But the directness of his eyes never faltered.

"I—care so much I want—to come back for you," he stated simply.

The demonish piercing of a ruthless might-have-been stung her sharply.

"No!" she cried. "No! You will forget—when you are away!"

"Do you think so?"

And she knew it was not so.

"But you must not—oh, you must not think of me so." She was awake to its reality at last, and in the understanding her better self was roused to real regret for the inevitable; yearning for the unattainable. "Once—oh, if you might have—once! Not now! It is too late! I am not the girl you think me—not worthy!"

"I know you to be good—and unhappy," he said.

"Oh, yes, 'good' in the world's sense of respectability. Unhappy—yes! It seems I've always been unhappy; it's my nature. I find nothing—nobody—"

She broke off, blankly staring at him.

A dawning, strengthening knowledge grew in her eyes.

She put out her hand vaguely, and drew it back as a child might from a desired and forbidden object. "Yes," she almost whispered, "you—might—have."

"Why do you put it that way?" he asked sharply.

"Because——" bitter laughter sounded mockingly, "you—misunderstood. I allowed you to. It was the inborn deceit in me, I suppose. I—am not the girl you think me. Not *Miss* but *Mrs.* I am married."

The silence seemed to shriek hideously. Out of the mist and blue and whirl one reality thrust itself with absurd insistence upon him. Her name really *was* Smith then.

"I beg your pardon," he said dully.

Then, because he had thought her all she knew she was not; because she had duped his unsuspecting faith with a careless indifference and for her own amusement; because she had come to value his esteem and dread its loss, she felt, as she had never before felt, a responsibility, the need of redeeming herself. She rushed at details with nervous haste.

"Listen! I married—like everything I seem to do—to escape what I liked less. I had a straightlaced raising. I wanted to get away; I wanted independence. It is in my blood—restlessness, discontent. I do not care for my husband. He bores me. But he is good to me; he lets me come and go as I please. I—have pleased to be away from him most of the time. I have tried to fill the emptiness of life—the same old discontent—one way and another; amusements, travel, flirtation even. Nothing lasts, and I am tired of it all—tired of life sometimes. I have wanted—I don't know what; and I am tired of all make-believe. I was utterly reckless," she flared out, "that night when I spoke to you; my evil spirit was tormenting me. But you—you have been different. And you—seemed hardly more than a boy—then. I did not think—of this."

A dreary smile flickered across his face! She touched sensitive spots with the disregard of the self-centered.

"Oh, I hate to lose your friendship! Just in these days I was beginning—through you—to see; to know things as they are. I have felt better—wanted to be better. If I might only have known you earlier or later! Now you will never believe in me again! I had resolved to leave my husband—to have a divorce. I had written to my grandmother to come to me here; it is not far from the old home. Then, when I had told her my decision I would go home with her for a time—if she would have me. I meant to write him afterward. It will hurt my grandmother; she is so strict-minded and upright. It will hurt him, too. Oh, it seems I am always hurting someone."

He had sat still, listening. But her breaking into self-reproach stirred him chivalrously to save her even with the sense of his rebuff hanging its dead weight about him.

"Don't say that—or think it," he begged. "The most hurt has been yours, perhaps. God knows, I would save you from it if I could, and make you happy."

"My happiness——" her face quivered, her voice broke, "always seems to cost—too high!"

Presently he said: "I—have no right—now—to say what I would—to you. But since you have said what you have—may I—come back a year from now?"

She gasped, and laughed, and gasped again; the hysteria of tension. The old daring boldness, the flippancy and cynicism, were all gone. Bare of sham or excuse, she was only the woman-girl who longed for contentment.

"Oh!" she breathed, "that you should want to!"

But Fate held one more trump.

When she joined him for luncheon next day she was as a reincarnated creature, bubbling with a hardly suppressed joyousness.

He seemed even older. A mild severity, through rigid restraint, lay upon him. But he was keenly alert and deferential to her.

He gave her his South American address. And—might he write? She wished him to. Then they set about

making a gay little meal, prolonging it, like children at play.

"Our last day, you know," she said once when she had been very frivolous, and looked quickly into his sober face, fearful of disapproval. "Your brother doesn't know what an ill turn he is doing me by coming to-night. What time does he arrive?"

"Somewhere about midnight," he answered.

She babbled on. "And is this paragon brother a man of family?"

"Not exactly. He has a wife."

"And is she a paragoness?"

"I don't know. Buz married after I came East."

"That is such a quaint name you give him."

"'Buz?' My early efforts at brother, I suppose, and I can't drop it. I think he likes it, too."

They came out into the lobby. "I should have some letters," he said. "Will you wait here for me?" he added as though he could not venture to lose her.

She assented, and sauntered idly on, watching his lithe figure make its way to the desk. Like wine mounting to the brain, the joy of him and a revived self throbbed and sang within her. She knew and made no denial of the fullness of her heart in him.

Her eyes saw him only as he stopped before the desk. The registering guest and the several others waiting were just people infinitesimally small and unimportant in her world. She saw and heard him speak to a clerk, then turn quickly toward the man who had been registering and who was advancing upon him. She saw and heard; turned sick and faint.

There came a rush of insane impulse—she stumbled forward.

The movement brought her within range of the other man's vision. He gazed at her while surprise, recognition gathered. He stared a moment in sheer wonderment.

She heard her name spoken. She saw William Smith turn to where she stood agonized, her very soul in abasement. She saw his face go white, his body stiffen. She felt the new world of her

tardy happiness slipping away. Vague thoughts came out of the jumble of sounds that other man, who had come rapidly to her and was now holding her hands, was making.

"Katherine! Well, by all the powers! How did it happen? Bill—here you, kid—come get acquainted with your sister. What? Why, sure—of course, you'd find each other out. But say, Kitten, why didn't you tell me you were coming on here? You wrote Cincinnati. Well—of all lucky strokes of fortune—to have you both here together!"

Dumbly and stiffly they went through their parts; the grim farce of pretense.

"I got in earlier through an unexpected connection," he went on. "And what's all this about the boy going to South America? Come over here, and let's talk it over. Oh, you, too, Kit; you're very much in the family now."

Her quick glance flashed to William Smith's face at this unconscious irony. She saw that in those few minutes a sharp haggardness had marked it.

"Now we won't waste any time over it," continued the hearty voice. "Just state that the youngster's thinking to play a big game, and one that'll get the best of him in no time. It won't do, it won't do! That's a job for a man."

Automatically her lips sounded the one clear thought, this evolved from her dizzy brain.

"He is a man," she said.

The older man looked from one to the other in rough good nature.

"A man, is he? Well——" pride and affection sounded, "I guess yes—something! But say, kid, you look ill. What have you been doing with yourself?"

The nervous movement of the woman passed unnoticed by him. His anxious eyes were wholly for the boy he had fathered.

"I—think I need a change."

"And you think South America with its tropical fevers the place to go for it, do you?" A slight gasp from his wife attracted him and he turned to her, adding: "Fact. That country swarms with fevers. Kills 'em off like flies."

Her brilliant wide eyes fell upon William Smith.

"Don't!" she began.

The young fellow rose. "Perhaps," he said a trifle wearily, "we'd better talk about it later. Mrs.—Smith——" only she knew the hurt in that hesitation, "may be—tired."

It was all over at last; dead hopes, dead faiths—hearts had paid their toll.

William Smith answered her imploring plea for a moment's interview with added dignity in his young face. He was quiet and controlled, at what cost none other could know.

"Oh—believe me!" she cried, "I did not know, nor even guess! There are so many Smiths. And he always spoke of you as his 'kid brother, Bill.' If I thought at all it was as of a mere youth. William, William—what shall I do?" Her heart cried out with her voice.

The very completeness of his still calm was appalling. Only when he tried to speak was his emotion apparent. In a voice hoarse and halting slightly as though for breath, he answered her appeal, though the tremendous cost wrenched his whole nature.

"Be good to him. I would rather die than that he—should be—hurt!"

"You mean?" Wide-eyed, breathless, she asked.

His hoarse, dull voice went on. "I am going a long way—for a long time. He—need not know. And he—cares—so much—for you. I would do anything in my power for him. You—will—for me?"

She shrank as if struck and looked at him horrified.

"I leave at once—to-night. I—shall not see you—again."

She watched him out of sight with hard, dry eyes.

"Katherine's got a headache," William Smith heard his brother say when he joined him later for the trip to the station. "She sent her adieu. Just didn't feel equal to coming down to see you off. Doesn't seem to be very well anyhow. Such a high-strung temperament; keeps her nerves taut. I'm going to pack her off somewhere to-morrow for a rest-cure. She's a great little girl, kid—great! Funny how you shouldn't have

known each other till right in the face of your going away. Fool notion of yours—this obstinate hurrying off to-night. You could wait another day and nothing suffer as I can see. And South

America's no place for a boy like you, anyway," he grumbled.

"You're wrong, Tom," answered his brother. "It is the very best place—in the world—for me—now."

THE DREAM LIFE'S END

By Howard P. Rocky

IN the dim light of the luxuriously furnished studio, Fleurette was busy making tea, while Jim Hammond struggled to make a fire burn in the big corner fireplace. Through the narrow window the lights of Paris were beginning to twinkle and there was a bit of snap in the evening air.

Now the blaze started up briskly and Hammond arose to light a cigarette. For a moment he stood looking out of the window, thinking. Then he turned and joined Fleurette at the tea table. She went on with her task without speaking, and Hammond thought she turned her pretty head away a trifle as he looked toward her.

"What's the matter?" he asked solicitously. "Tired to-night?"

She shook her head and answered with a soft "no." But she did not look up.

"Then what is it?" he insisted. "There's something troubling you. Why you're crying, Fleurette."

His arm slipped about her and he turned her face to his. "You *are* crying," he repeated. "What's wrong?"

"I can't help it," she said with a little smile through the tears in her great dark eyes. "It's happiness, I guess!"

"What do you mean?" he asked perplexed. "I don't see why anyone should cry because of happiness?"

"You don't know what it has meant to me," she told him quietly. "When the picture won the medal I thought I should cry my eyes out—I was so happy!"

Hammond laughed. "You're a strange little girl!" he said. "I was rather pleased myself after the way we worked, but I must confess I hadn't the slightest thought of crying."

"You're a man," Fleurette explained.

"But I did feel like crying and I *did* cry—most of the night."

"Then I suppose if you were unhappy you would reverse the order of things and spend the night in laughter!" he went on teasingly.

"I'd try to—I think," Fleurette said slowly.

Once more Hammond looked sharply at her. "There's something else—you haven't told me," he persisted. "Come on—be a good girl and 'fess up."

The curly head shook again—this time quite vigorously.

"You mustn't ask me," she said firmly.

"But I do ask you—and I want to be told," he demanded.

She stood still for a moment, toying with the teapot. Still thinking, she poured two cups and dropped down on the little divan beside the table. "Sit over there, great artist," she commanded abruptly.

"The great artist is seated, oh, famous and beautiful model," Hammond laughed.

"You've always been so good to give me so much credit," she said sincerely. "That is one thing that makes me happy."

"Don't you deserve credit?" Hammond asked. "Isn't the picture really you? I never could have painted it as I did with a model less sympathetic—a girl who could not have inspired me as you did, little girl."

"But many of the artists would never have even said so—whether it were true or not. The work would have been theirs—all theirs—with never a thought for the tired girl who posed day after day to do her little part in it. Can't you see that it is just your giving me the

credit that I do not deserve that makes me so happy?"

"I certainly shan't give you any more if it is going to produce tears," Hammond said.

"Oh, it isn't all that!" Fleurette answered quickly. "There's just a little shade of regret, too. I shall miss the work——"

"So shall I—very much," Hammond admitted.

"It's meant so much to me," Fleurette told him.

"And to me," said Hammond. "It has made my name—given me the reputation——"

"I didn't mean that," Fleurette interrupted. "Of course, it has given me a name in the Quartier, too. I could pose for all the great ones now—if I wished—but I don't."

"I don't understand," Hammond said, really perplexed. "One of the most pleasant features of it all to me has been the fact that hereafter you will be able to secure most desirable engagements—that you will earn a great deal and be able to live comfortably——"

But he stopped suddenly as he caught the expression on her face.

"Fleurette!" he exclaimed and leaving his chair dropped down beside her, kneeling upon the floor. "Tell me, little girl, can I help you in any way? I meant all that I said about your part in my success and if there is anything I can do to make you happy before I go——"

She hung her head and he knew she was crying again. Then it dawned upon him. It was his going away that troubled her and the thought hurt him. All during the months they had worked day by day in the garret studio, Hammond had been extremely careful to avoid the slightest sign of sentiment. In the first place he felt none. The girl was an excellent model and was as enthusiastic over the picture as he had been. That made his work easier and he had grown genuinely fond of her, but as for anything else—it was sheer nonsense.

The girl looked up and read the perplexity in his face. "Please don't misunderstand," she begged. "I know I am very foolish—I should never have said

a word to you about it—but now that you are going away—to-morrow—I just can't help it!"

He took her hand and pressed it warmly. "That's right," he said kindly, "tell me now."

"You've never treated me like the others," Fleurette told him. "I shall never forget what you said the day you engaged me. It was to be all work and no play. But it hasn't been—quite. Did you realize how you helped me, how you warned me against dangers, taught me to understand and to care for better things? It has meant such a lot to me—more than you will ever know, perhaps."

"I'm glad if I have helped any, Fleurette," said Hammond. "I wanted to—you're too good, little girl, to make the mistakes that some of them make."

"It has made the world seem different," she continued. "I've lived in a dream, and somehow, posing for you never seemed to tire me as the old work did. Then at night, when I went home, I enjoyed the books you gave me. I slept like a child and felt rested in the morning—and then there was always the feeling that the landlady and the baker and the others could be paid when they asked me!"

He stroked her hand and smiled into her sparkling eyes. "So you've really enjoyed it?" he asked.

"Enjoyed—I have loved it!" she exclaimed rapturously. "And like the foolish child that I am, I wanted my dream life to go on and on forever!"

"And so it will, Fleurette," Hammond explained. "I have written notes to several friends of mine in Paris. They will all pay well and keep you busy as much of the time as you care to devote to work."

It was an indulgent smile that she gave him in answer. "That doesn't mean that my dream will go on," she said. "The picture is a part of it—the studio here is another—and then there is—you!"

"My dear girl," Hammond protested. "You know, I think, that I have learned to be very fond of you—but you have always known, too, that I——"

She nodded and her gaze turned to a great photograph in a silver frame.

"Of course," she said. "I have always known of your engagement. I used to listen in wonder when you told me what she was like—of the great house in which she lived—of her goodness and—and all the rest of it——"

"Then!"

"Oh, don't think I ever expected—ever even in my wildest dream—ever imagined for one moment—that you could care for anyone but her!" The girl spoke earnestly and there was no bitterness in her voice. The tone was rather one of resignation—of one accepting her fate. Yet this did not tend to make Hammond feel any more at ease.

"I'm sorry, little girl," he began, "sorry if I have said or done anything to make you feel——"

"Jim!" she protested, putting out her hands to him. He stopped abruptly and stared at her in wonder. "You will let me call you Jim—just this once?" she asked quite seriously.

Hammond laughed. "Of course," he said, indulgently. "Why shouldn't you? I've always called you Fleurette."

"That is different," she replied. "But to-night, for just a little while, I felt that I wanted you to know how much you have meant to me—that I can never forget all that you have done. If it hadn't been for you I should have been in the Seine long, long ago!"

"Fleurette!" he exclaimed with a shudder.

"Yes," she went on. "It was as bad as that. I could not have stood it much longer. But then you came and life began to be worth while!"

"You never told me!" he said, surprised. "I never dreamed you'd been in trouble—that there was anything serious bothering you."

"I couldn't tell you," she explained. "Often I've meant to do it, but just about the time I'd make up my mind you'd talk to me—and then—well I just couldn't!"

"You mean that you——"

She nodded. "I mean that I wish you had come a year ago—before it was too late!"

"You poor little kid!" he said earnestly and in spite of himself he took her in his arms and her head sank upon his shoulder. His heart seemed to open to her and a wave of tenderness swept over him. She was so young, so delicate and pretty! When he had engaged her it had seemed to him a crime that this tender girl, hardly old enough to be trusted away from home, should be going the rounds of the studios.

"But it's all right now—Jim!" she said with a smile as she looked up into his face. "I've learned my lesson both ways—experience and advice."

"It's a rotten price for—you!" he muttered and she heard him.

"But I wouldn't give up my dream life—even if I could have back——"

"Don't!" he said sharply. "You don't realize what you're saying!"

"Oh, don't I?" she murmured, with half-closed eyes. "You're mistaken!"

For several moments he knelt beside her silently. Then he raised the little white hand to his lips and kissed it tenderly. He was wondering—wondering if she were strong enough to go on alone, if the dream life had really made a lasting impression. Yet what could he do.

"You know *she* is coming to-morrow?" he asked quietly.

"I know," Fleurette answered. "Sometimes I have wished I could see her. Oh—don't misunderstand—I know it is impossible!"

"Why?" Hammond said aloud and at the same time asked himself the question seriously.

"You know why," said Fleurette with an air of finality. "I do not want to see her now. But, Jim, do you remember one hot day, when you were tired out and discouraged, when you took me out to Versailles? Then we had supper at a funny little out-of-the-way restaurant and went to a music hall afterward? That, I am very sure, was the happiest day of my life!"

"Really?" he said.

"Honestly. And Jim——" she hesitated a moment, but seeing the look in his eyes went on. "I was wondering—and don't mind saying no if we can't—I was wondering if we could have a lit-

tle picnic like that—a last picnic—to-night?”

He caught her close to him as he might a child. “Of course, we can!” he agreed instantly, without considering the wisdom of it. “It’s good-by, Fleurette, but we’ll celebrate with a real party. You’re entitled to it after all you’ve done to help me!”

She gave a delightful little laugh. “You’re sure—quite sure she wouldn’t mind?” The last came a little hesitatingly, the tone of a child that objects but does not wish its objections considered. His ignoring them would make her pleasure all the greater.

“Of course not,” Hammond assured her, realizing her mood, although the doubt of his wisdom was beginning to dawn in his mind. “We’ll never tell her,” he said, and then felt sorry for it.

Fleurette put her hand upon his arm. “I wouldn’t want you to take me—if you feel that it *would* make a difference—to her—or to you.”

There was a wistful look in her eyes and, seeing it, Hammond had not the heart to disappoint her. After all, it was to be their farewell party—and she did deserve a reward such as this would be to her. So with schoolboy abandon he threw himself heartily into the scheme. “Of course, it won’t make any difference—except that I shall have a mighty happy evening and hope you will,” he told her. “Now let’s have a cigarette together and plan it all out.”

He lit one and passed it to her, then took another for himself. “Now let’s see. No queer little café to-night—only a big brilliant restaurant will do.”

But woman-like she found a quick objection: “Jim dear, I haven’t the clothes for a great restaurant. You would be ashamed of me.”

“Never!” he protested.

“But I should be—and you would, too—really.”

“I have it!” he exclaimed, a sudden idea striking him. “You shall wear the gown of the picture. It’s just the thing!”

Her eyes flashed and a little cry of pleasure escaped her. Instantly Hammond realized that it had been in her mind all the time—she wanted to wear

that gown, and he also resolved on the spot that it should be hers afterward.

“Hurry, little one,” he said. “It is to be a long, long evening, so we must start early.”

“Jim,” she said a bit shyly, “you’re such a dear to me. I—I could kiss you!”

“Why don’t you?” he asked laughing-ly, and catching her in his arms touched his lips gaily to hers. She drew away quickly. The touch of his lips had sent a thrill through her slender frame, and that same kiss had aroused a new feeling in him. In that moment he suddenly realized that his one-time model was a woman—a very pretty, charming woman at that.

But she had already hurried away, blushing prettily. In the little dressing-room she was even then tenderly laying out the gown of the picture—that wonderful dress of black velvet that Hammond had engaged a fashionable modiste to make to fit Fleurette. It had been an eccentricity of his to have the gown real as well as the model, and he had carefully superintended its creation.

In that instant another thought occurred to him. He liked to dress for dinner and he knew, too, that it would please Fleurette if he did. So he retired to his own room and began to change. On the bureau stood another photograph, and he looked curiously into the woman’s face as he dressed. He was wondering if it would make a difference to her. Probably it would—if she ever knew—but she never would. In all the time he had been in Paris, working to make a name for himself, Jim Hammond had never forgotten that he was engaged to the girl in New York. He had written her regularly and her letters had always meant a great deal to him.

He had nothing to blame himself for, and the deception he meant to practice that evening was excusable, he told himself, because of the pleasure it would give Fleurette. But somehow, as he told himself this, the memory of the only kiss he had given her came freshly to his mind—and he wondered—just a little.

At last he was ready and stepped out into the studio. There, standing before the open fire, was Fleurette. He gasped

as he looked at her. Naturally she had only posed in the daytime. Now, as she stood there in the light of the flickering fire, she was like another woman. The gown set off the curves of her figure to wonderful advantage. Cut sharply away at the throat it exposed her snow-white skin and outlined the perfect shoulders and throat. Her hair was charmingly arranged and she had struck a rose amid the dark tresses.

"Fleurette!" he cried in admiration. "You are wonderful!"

She laughed delightedly. "You really like me in it?" she asked and stepping forward showed a dainty buckled slipper and the trimmest of silken ankles.

Impulsively he stepped beside her and took her in his arms. She looked at him in surprise but did not attempt to draw away from him. For a moment he looked into her eyes—and then he kissed her eagerly. "You beautiful child!" he exclaimed in enthusiasm. "You'll be the center of attraction!"

She only smiled and snuggled closer to him, just as his eyes wandered to the picture in the silver frame. It sent an unpleasant thought into his mind—a sense of impatience with himself and he gently pushed Fleurette away. She looked up quickly, but he concealed his thought and at once suggested that they hurry down to the taxicab he had summoned.

As the motor sped through the brightly lighted streets, Fleurette's spirits rose and Hammond felt better pleased with himself. She was going to enjoy the evening and he knew he would enjoy it because she did. And he said to himself that if the girl in the frame knew and understood, she, too, would approve. He even thought that some day he might tell her all about it.

And now they had arrived before the entrance of the café he had selected, a place of subdued lights and soft music, of velvety carpets and flowers and fountains. It was a fashionable place and one where the most beautiful and fashionably dressed women dined in company with aristocratic men who cared not a rap for the prices since they might be seen there in company with

women who made them envied of all about.

At a sign from Hammond the captain led them to a table beside a little fountain, where the water rippled through a maze of varicolored lights. A waiter obsequiously took their order, and with a sense of pleasure Hammond observed the admiring glances of several men about him. The women, too, were looking at Fleurette. And now someone who was familiar with the last salon made a startling discovery. In another moment it was being whispered that the famous artist, James Hammond, was dining there with the replica of his medal-winning portrait. And instantly everyone asked his or her companion who she might be—surely not a common model! Here was a choice bit of scandal indeed!

Laughingly he whispered to Fleurette what he had heard and her cheeks flushed a little as she found herself so much observed. She was just a little frightened, too, although she tried hard to appear unconscious and at ease. Now they drank to each other and to their farewell party and as the dinner was served they grew carefree. Fleurette forgot that there was to be a to-morrow and that then her dream life would end forever—and Hammond even forgot the girl in the silver frame for a little while.

The room was filled now and the music was playing gaily. There was a well-dressed throng at the doorway, but the red silken cord barred their entrance until some other diners might finish. At last, when Fleurette and Hammond were over coffee and brandy, the cord was let down and as the party at the adjoining table left other wouldbe diners entered.

As the girl sat down Fleurette gazed admiringly at her. "Isn't she pretty?" she asked, turning to Hammond.

He looked around and started. The brandy glass almost slipped from his fingers. The girl had not seen him, but he recognized her. It was the girl whose picture adorned the silver frame.

Mechanically he turned to Fleurette. She was pale and trembling. The sudden change in her startled Hammond from his own nervousness and he looked

at her inquiringly. "Have you seen a ghost?" he demanded anxiously.

Fleurette did not answer. She was staring at the man with the girl of the silver frame, and now, for the first time, Hammond, too, became conscious that there was a man there. He was tall and slender, dark and extremely handsome—a Russian probably, and Hammond noticed the ribbon of an order in the lapel of his evening coat.

"Who is he?" Hammond asked with a double curiosity. Neither of the pair had as yet noticed them. They were too much occupied with themselves.

"Narakoff—Prince Boris Narakoff," Fleurette said in a low tone. "He is——"

Hammond looked quickly at her and read it in her eyes. "Not——"

Fleurette nodded. "It was one night at the Bal Tabarin," she said slowly. "He promised——" her voice broke and there was a faint trace of a tear in her eyes. "But I have never seen him since until now!"

"Tell me——" Hammond began eagerly, almost fiercely.

But Fleurette shook her head. "No," she said. "That is gone—long ago. Do not think of it again. Let us go—somewhere!"

Hammond pushed back his chair and assisted Fleurette to arise. As he did so the girl at the next table turned her head and their eyes met. She grew pale but retained her self-control marvelously.

Fleurette had already started toward the door, and with a courteous nod to his fiancée, Hammond followed her rapidly.

In the cab Fleurette leaned against the side cushions, her face in her hands. As for Hammond his brain was in a whirl. His first desire had been to step to the table and strike Narakoff, but he had wisely refrained. He hated scenes and he wished to spare Fleurette. In the second place, he was wondering what Marion Deland was doing there with this Russian. She was not due in Paris until the following day. She had written him that. And even though she had arrived ahead of schedule, why had she not sent for him at once instead of dining with

another man—a man of Narakoff's reputation?

Fleurette touched his arm. "Jim," she said softly, "I am wondering if I couldn't go back and tell her—some way. She is so pretty—so——"

"Don't!" Hammond exclaimed. "Didn't you——" But he saw that she did not know Narakoff's companion. She had not recognized her from the picture in the silver frame, and he decided that it would be better to say nothing more.

The lights of a theatre flashed by the window and he suddenly awakened to the fact that he had not given the chauffeur any direction. "Where do you want to go?" he asked, hardly knowing what he said.

"Would you mind, Jim—if we don't go anywhere?" she asked a little sadly.

"No, not if you're upset," he said, rather relieved. "I'm sorry, Fleurette, that our evening has been spoiled this way."

"It isn't your fault," she answered. "I suppose I'm silly, but I couldn't enjoy anything after—seeing him."

And Hammond agreed silently that he could not enjoy anything after seeing Marion. Even then he was trying to puzzle it all out. Her letters had been so sincere, her last one so enthusiastic and eager to meet him in Paris.

"I'll tell the chauffeur to drive you home," he said simply and leaned forward to speak to the man.

"But I must go back to the studio and change my dress," Fleurette said.

"The gown is yours," Hammond replied. "I'll send your other things around in the morning."

"But I can't accept it, Jim," Fleurette objected. "I could never wear it now—it would bring back too many memories—bitter-sweet. Take me to the studio and let me change now. Please do."

"Very well," Hammond agreed, sympathizing with her, and he directed the chauffeur to his own studio.

For the remainder of the ride they sat silent, each one occupied with different thoughts. Even as they climbed the long stairs neither spoke, and Hammond unlocked the studio door, stepping aside for Fleurette to enter.

As he did so he noticed an envelope lying upon the threshold and, stooping, picked it up. With a start he observed the familiar handwriting and crossing quickly to the fire tore it open. Fleurette had gone straight to the little dressing-room and he was alone as he read the hastily written message.

Marion had arrived in Paris twelve hours sooner than she had anticipated. Her aunt was ill at the Ritz, so Prince Narakoff, whom they had met on the steamer coming over, had kindly offered to escort her to Hammond's studio. Not finding him they had decided to dine together and they left the address of the café, inviting Hammond to join them there the moment he came in.

With a sigh of disappointment, Hammond let the note fall to the floor. What a fool he had made of himself! Now he remembered the pained expression of Marion's face when he had bowed coldly to her—his whole manner unquestionably appearing guilty to her. And he recalled, too, the ugly sneer on Narakoff's face as he had observed Fleurette with Hammond. What right had he to doubt Marion—to question her dining there with the Prince, notorious though his reputation was? No more right than Marion would have had to doubt his dining with Fleurette. And now, simply by jumping at conclusions, and through his own needlessly guilty conscience, he had made a silly mess of things!

He heard a step at his side and looking up saw Fleurette dressed in her plain little tailored suit, neat and attractive but now a trifle shabby. She was looking sadly at him, and as she saw the letter lying at his feet she at once surmised that something was wrong. "You are in trouble?" she asked anxiously. "Something has happened?"

He nodded, but could not answer her. She did not know and he could not tell her.

"Is it—my fault?" she asked, a little fearfully.

"No, dear," Hammond answered. "It is really—nothing."

"Good night, then—good-by!" she faltered, extending her hand.

"Good night," Hammond answered brokenly without taking her hand.

For a moment she stood there astonished. Then, slowly, she turned away and walked hesitatingly toward the door. Hammond still sat before the fire, gazing stupidly into the fading embers. He heard the door open and Fleurette's footstep as she passed out.

"Fleurette!" he called in anguish and sprang after her. She hesitated and looked at him puzzled.

"You can't—you mustn't go like this!" he cried. "I can't let you go, little girl!"

"But you forget *her*," Fleurette reminded him. "To-night is good-by!"

"Didn't you recognize her—surely you—"

Fleurette looked at him strangely. "You don't mean—that the girl with—"

"Yes," said Hammond. "It was my fiancée!"

With timid step Fleurette reëntered the room and came slowly to his side. Tenderly she placed her hand upon his shoulder and looked up at him sympathetically. "Poor Jim," she said. "It is my fault then. Narakoff knew me, of course. He will tell her—"

"It isn't that," Hammond said. "I have been an idiot. If I had acted like a sane man instead of as a guilty boy, it would have been all right, I suppose. But it is too late now—the damage is done!"

He sat down on the edge of the big cosy corner and sat studying the floor, undecided. The note seemed to be conclusive evidence that he had been a fool. Yet—knowing the escapades of Boris Narakoff—he could not help the cruel feeling of doubt that kept creeping into his mind. He knew it was unfair to Marion, unworthy of himself, but what, he asked himself, was she doing with this libertine under any circumstances?

Fleurette watched him uncertainly for a moment. Then she tiptoed over, closed the door, and returned to Hammond's side. Kneeling down before him she raised his head in her small hands and looked into his troubled face. "Jim," she said, "I have a plan. I will go to

her and tell her all about it—about our good-by party and about Boris, too.”

Hammond took her pale face in both his hands and kissed her forehead.

“No, little girl, that will not do,” he said tenderly. “In the first place I would not let you humiliate yourself in that way for me. What is more, it would not help any.”

“But, Jim,” she pleaded, “you are unhappy and it is all my fault.”

“It isn’t!” he protested, and, with a sudden wave of feeling, drew her close to him. He saw the light in her eyes and realized that her heart was all his—that she would willingly sacrifice everything to make him happy. He wondered how many women loved as she did?

“You dear girl!” he exclaimed, and, bending down, kissed her red lips passionately. For several minutes they did not stir. To Fleurette it seemed more of a dream than ever, and as Hammond felt her heart beating wildly against his, he completely forgot the sorrow that had possessed him a moment before.

“Fleurette!” he murmured, “will you marry me?”

She stirred in his arms and attempted to draw away, but he only held her more tightly, and he felt her warm breath coming rapidly.

“No, Jim dear,” she answered positively. “It is impossible!”

“It isn’t!” he exclaimed, straining her to him.

“It is,” she said quickly. “Oh, Jim, I love you too much!”

“But you must!” he urged. “I want you, dear—I need you!”

She stroked his hair tenderly. “You think you do, Jim, but it would not last. This is my night—the last wonderful night of the wonderful dream life! Let me stay here with you—just a little while. Then I must go—and to-morrow you must go to her!”

In the gray light of the dawn Fleurette stirred uneasily and raised herself on the couch. On tiptoe she slipped quietly into the little bedroom where Hammond was still sleeping. She smiled down at him and leaning over gently brushed his forehead with her

lips. For a moment she gazed longingly at him, then moved silently toward the door. The dream life was over. She crossed the studio and slipped out, closing the door noiselessly behind her.

There was a messenger ascending the stairs. He glanced curiously at Fleurette, but she paid no attention to him, hurrying down and out into the street.

Back in the studio, Hammond was awakened suddenly with the feeling that something was wrong. Dazed, he arose as the knocking at the door continued. Opening it he found the messenger there with a letter written on the stationery of the Ritz.

“Explanations are useless,” it ran. “Do not think it makes any difference to me, and I know it makes none to you. I hope you will be very happy with her. She is quite beautiful. By the time this reaches you I shall have left Paris. Within the week I shall become the Princess Narakoff.”

Hammond smiled rather bitterly. Then his expression softened and he turned back into the room. “Fleurette! Fleurette!” he called eagerly. There was no answer.

For the first time he realized that she was not there. He quickly searched the apartment, but she was gone. For a moment he stood stunned. Then, to the astonishment of the messenger, whom he had forgotten to fee, Hammond dashed from the room and took the narrow stairs two at a time.

Disheveled, like a madman, he ran through the street. He had only a vague idea of where he was going, but somehow a voice within him told him to hurry toward the Seine. Along the river bank he ran wildly up and down, looking everywhere, and arousing the astonishment of laborers going to work.

Now there came a cry just ahead of him. A gendarme pointed, and called shrilly.

Hammond looked in the direction that men were running, and with an exclamation of horror dashed after them. But a little way off a small figure was climbing over the rail of the bridge. He called madly but she did not hear.

To Hammond it seemed an eternity as

she stood there, swaying, fearing perhaps to take the plunge. A moment more and he could reach her. The gendarme was running breathlessly by his side—but could they arrive at her side in time?

The figure dropped a little; her hands still clung to the rail. A moment more and it would be too late. But in that instant Hammond threw himself against the rail and caught her arm in a vicelike grip.

With the aid of the gendarme, he

pulled her back, shivering and sobbing bitterly.

"Fleurette!" Hammond exclaimed. "What on earth made you attempt this?"

She looked up suddenly, for the first time recognizing the man who held her in his arms.

A smile came over her face—a sorry sort of smile. "The dream life is over," she said.

"It isn't—it isn't, dear!" Hammond said tenderly. "It has only just begun!"

THE LADDER OF FAME

By Lucy Stone Terrill

THE FIRST STEP

IT was a Fourth of July evening. Ruth always remembered that he said her fingers smelled like fire-crackers when he kissed them. She wore a little checked gingham dress with white-all-over-embroidery yoke and cuffs, and they talked about what a woman should mean to her husband.

There was moonlight—of course, there was moonlight; and the catalpas were sweet with bloom. They stole across the campus under the shade of the thick trees, and sat down on the steps of the old Normal building where Ruth's mother had learned to be a teacher some thirty years before. Ruth had not wished to be a teacher. She had expected to write books, but nothing as yet had presented itself for material.

"Oh, Tom, I wish I could put the beauty of this night down on paper," she breathed as he lowered her gently into a secluded corner of the steps.

"You bet! It's a peach of a night all right. Let's walk over to the lake and I'll take you out a while."

"Oh, I wish I *could*," in more worldly tones, "I'd just love to! But I've got to go back and study that psychology lesson. I don't know of anything worse than summer schools."

"I do. Having the girl you love go to one." Tom himself had found school tiresome. He was now a man of the world.

"Tom," after a short silence, "you mustn't say things like that any more. It's all right to say you *like* me but I just don't think it's right to talk that way about love—I think we ought to keep it a real—well, a real *sacred* thing."

She put her warm, slender fingers over his hand to soften the rebuke of the words.

"Maybe I'm different from other girls, but I can't help feeling that way about it."

"Of course, you're different from other girls—a heap. It didn't take me long to find it out, either. But say, Ruth, tell me honest, how old are you?"

"What good would it do you if I did? I'm old enough to be a junior here at Normal and I don't see what difference it makes to you."

The boy—he was very much of a man to Ruth—put his arms around her and kissed her.

"I want you to marry me, Ruth," he said. "That's why I want to know."

"Oh, my goodness!" breathed Ruth reverently.

It had come. A proposal. And she had not been wicked after all, to let him kiss her for these several weeks past. Her mother had been most specific in stating that the only time people were supposed to kiss each other was when they were married or engaged. And, of course, Tom had known all along that he would propose some day.

The boy, that is, the man, waited silently. Then Ruth lifted her very serious and also very sweet face to his and kissed him.

"You know I love you, Tom," she whispered, "or I never would have let you kiss me. But oh, my dear, I can never marry you."

Her voice suggested insurmountable barriers between him and her, but he put them aside with manly directness.

"Oh, get out—why can't you?"

She straightened up with a sudden little jerk and regarded him reprovingly. She felt this matter far too deeply to be met with any such frivolous rebuke as "Oh, get out," but Tom's next remark was sufficiently serious:

"Why, Ruth, there can't be any reasons why we shouldn't marry each other—we're just meant for each other, that's all. Why do you think you can't?"

Ruth folded her hands in her lap and stated her reason briefly.

"Father borrowed money to send me back here to school. That's why I go summers, too—so I can hurry and pay it back."

"Why, sweetheart! You didn't think that would make any difference to *me*, did you?" came the quick assurance as he covered the tightly clasped hands with his. Being a clerk in a jewelry store, a little money was of no moment to Tom.

"Oh, yes it does; I never could let anybody else pay it. And besides, there is another reason."

Her voice brimmed with the promise of a serious mystery, and he whispered back an impatient "Yes?"

"I've always thought that some day when I've had more experience I would——" she hesitated—"write."

"Now look here, Ruth," argued Tom gruffly, "that's nonsense. I suppose every girl thinks she'll be a great actress or—or something, but they're mighty glad to get a good home with a man who loves them after a while. There isn't anything that beats a happy little home."

The decision in his tones left no room for argument.

"Of course, happiness is all that counts, but we can't all find it in the same way," quoted Ruth in the words of her

last library book. "I shall never give up my ideals. If others have accomplished what they set out to, why can't I?"

"Well, why couldn't you—write," he seemed more ashamed of the word than she, "as well if you were married to me as if you were single? We'll have a girl to do the work."

Tom's philosophy, supplemented by the hired girl, was hard to upset, occupied as was her mind with half a dozen sensations; so she surrendered a point.

"I suppose I could—if you were willing. But still, if I had a home of my own I'd want to do every single thing that I could myself. That's what makes women happy in their homes; don't you think so?"

His approving embrace agreed with her so heartily that it showed his failure to catch the drift of her argument.

"And so," she explained, "I'd be so busy with my home that I wouldn't have any time to write and then I'd be unhappy. Besides, there's Mother. She'll think I'm too young and I couldn't ever do anything, no matter how much I wanted to; that would hurt Mother."

"Oh, you sweet little thing!" breathed Tom in reverent admiration. "I'd be a beast to want you to do anything to hurt her. But she'll *want* you to be happy, won't she?"

He was always right. Of course, her mother would want her to be happy. She gave a little affirmative sigh and nestled to him contentedly. The psychology lesson remained at her boarding-house, unstudied, while Ruth delved into deeper matters. Tom leaned against the stone post and held her close to him. With his free hand, he drew a purple velvet box from his pocket and snapped it open, disclosing a modest diamond that sparkled faintly in the moonlight.

"For my own darling," he said with pride, and Ruth's throat choked as he slipped it over her finger.

"Oh, Tom, I hope I'll always deserve it," she said softly. "I love you just awfully."

It was not at all as she had dreamed of it, but her mind could not think of beautiful things to say when her heart was

taking up all her attention. She was so happy that long years after the same hurt crept into her throat when she thought about it.

"I've been afraid," she confessed in a whisper, "that you'd think I was awfully—common, or something; and that you wouldn't respect me because I've let you kiss me, and—and everything."

"Well, if you aren't the limit," laughed Tom, comforting her with lips and arms. "Of course, I respect you—all the fellows do. You know fellows get together and talk these things over and they all know you're a mighty fine girl. But, Ruth," his voice fell to a stern, serious whisper, "I do want you to tell me if you've ever—ever let anybody else love you like this?"

"No," slowly.

"Honestly, Ruth?"

"N-o," still more slowly, "not like this. I wish you wouldn't ask me, Tom." In her voice was a faint, sorrowful reminiscence of other loves and she wondered what she would say next but left it to luck. Her tongue had a most surprising way of tripping off by itself with no mental suggestion whatever.

"Ruth! I've always thought I was the first man to love you. "Why, I was *sure* of it." For it had taken weeks of the most tactful management to even press Ruth's arm, unrebuked; and months of the most ardent persuasion to earn the joy of kissing her, for her mother's little twilight talks on a girl's self-respect had taken deep root. The astonishment in Tom's voice now was not exactly satisfactory to Ruth, though she didn't in the least know why.

"You've never asked me before," she argued in soft tones, and Tom's jealousy instantly flamed.

"Of course not—I *trusted* you; and I told you everything about myself. To think of another man kissing you—o-oh!"

He turned away from her but the misery of that "o-oh" lingered pleasantly in Ruth's ears. What a glorious thing—to be so loved.

"Why, Tom! You've kissed girls lots of times. You've told me so yourself."

"It's different with a girl. A fellow

don't have any respect for a girl that everybody's kissed. Who was the fellow?"

"What fellow?"

"Look here, Ruth, don't fool with me any longer. Can't you see I'm nearly crazy? I say, who is this fellow you've never told me about?" As proof positive of his approaching insanity, Tom rose and walked with quick, nervous steps to and fro in front of her. Ruth's heart fluttered and sang alternately, but the song was joyful and the fluttering sweet.

"He's dead now," came the gentle and unexpected answer from Ruth's lips; as much unexpected to Ruth as to Tom, but the sad little note in her voice sang a requiem for the dead lover.

"Oh!" said Tom weakly. "Why didn't you ever tell me, Ruth? Do you still love him?"

"Not the way I do you, Tom," she admitted in a low voice. "But I suppose I—I will always remember."

Tom, completely softened, sat down again and drew her head against his shoulder. Her face was sweeter than ever, shadowed with this past sorrow of her life.

"Tell me about it, sweetheart."

"He—he was killed last year. Of course, I was quite young and he was lots older but—but it was awfully hard."

There were real tears in Ruth's eyes. "How was he killed, dear?" asked the tender, sympathetic voice.

"In an automobile. Oh, let's not talk about it any more," she pleaded. "I'll tell you all about it some other time. It seems like I can't talk of him—*to-night*."

"All right, dear," said Tom, realizing the delicacy of the situation. "Just tell me his name."

"Walter, Walter Reynolds." Thus she paid tribute to a ninth-grade admirer whose courtship had reached its climax in the gift of a stale box of chocolates, decorated with a scrawled red crayon "I love you" on the cover.

But her imagination bumped into the disturbing thought that, when they were married, Tom might mention the be-reaved Walter to her mother or meet him in the flesh, so she smoothed back her ruffled hair and said wearily:

"Dear, of course, I didn't love him as I do you, and you must take me home now; I feel all tired out. Does it make any difference in your love for me?"

"Of course not, sweetheart; I am *so* sorry," said the penitent Tom. "And I'll wait for you just as long as you want me to. Will you forgive me for acting the way I did?"

Ruth was most generous in her forgiveness.

The porch of her boarding-house was deserted so she told him he might stay five minutes longer and they sat down for an hour.

"We will be very happy, dear," he said.

"Yes, always," said Ruth.

"Are you sure you love me more than than the man who died?"

"Oh, yes!" At least she could be sincere in that.

Over in the next yard, Will and Jimmie Livingston were shooting off late sky-rockets.

"Sweetheart, do you like kids?" he whispered.

"Yes, I love them," she whispered back, somehow feeling the solemnity of the question.

"Some day *we'll* have two kids like that."

Ruth's heart almost left her body. She gasped. Surely she stood on the pinnacle of happiness and understanding, but it was startling. Yet, she reflected, she should be unashamed and proud to talk of such things to the man who was to be her husband. Not to be outdone in the prophecy, she added softly:

"Yes, and a little girl."

So they sat there, serious and happy, watching the sky-rockets; and Ruth was seventeen.

That night when she had undressed and knelt by her bed in the moonlight she looked long at the modest diamond glimmering faintly on her third finger before she bowed her head upon it and prayed earnestly:

"Dear God, forgive what I said about Walter, and make Tom forget it. Bless Father and Mother and Tom; and oh, God, make me as good a woman as Mother is, so I can be a good wife for

Tom; and make him love me always. For Jesus' sake. Amen."

THE SECOND STEP

The death of a rich old aunt sent Ruth to college; still with the modest diamond on her third finger, for Tom had hopes that in four years she would glean sufficient understanding to enable her to keep house for him. And Tom loved her.

But just as her letters began to talk of dark red velvet curtains in their living-room, her grandmother died; and Ruth decided on a two years' graduate course. Then the diamond came off. For Tom's ideas on what a woman should mean to her husband could not keep pace with Ruth's, so he transplanted his diamond to the third finger of another girl who never expected to "write" and who preferred scrim curtains stenciled with yellow poppies for the living-room.

The two years endowed Tom with twin girls and Ruth with the greater part of the alphabet after her name but with no promise of a change in it otherwise. She went straight from her university for a vacation with friends on a Wyoming ranch, where she met men, really very interesting men, who had either forgotten or had never known whether Shakespeare was Bacon or the King of England.

The big, sunburned man on the next ranch, who had chosen to raise cattle and alfalfa rather than rows for a railroad in a lawyer's office, allowed Ruth to ride with his boys one morning while they cut out the calves for branding. Ruth had longed to see a real "round-up" so her friends asked Mr. Blair to take her.

It was her first long ride, and after two hours of constant trotting through the dusty sage brush, her knees began to weaken and ache and a sharp pain caught her side. Her companion, though pleasant and courteous, would plainly have preferred her absence. Mrs. King had told her:

"He doesn't care for women a bit, so you needn't try to be entertaining—just enjoy your ride and don't go too far."

However, it was growing impossible to enjoy anything; and as they trotted on and on after first one and then another elusive cow or steer, it took all her energy to remain in the saddle while her well-trained cow pony turned and twisted like an eel. Still she kept her back straight, as her friend had instructed, and tried to forget the existence of the saddle-horn so that she might overcome her wild desire to clutch it.

After each bunch of cows and calves was rounded up and turned over to the boys with the herd, the big rancher returned dutifully to her side; and each time Ruth greeted him with a little crooked grin of torture.

"We're getting along fine," he told her. "You're a pretty good mascot. Enjoying yourself?"

"Oh, yes," lied Ruth, "it's great!" but thinking as she watched him sitting so easily in his saddle, "I hate you—I hate you—you great brute."

It would have surprised her host intently could he have known that the smile was one of torture and that the straight figure beside him was aching in every joint and hating him most cordially for his unconcern. Wyoming girls ride long and hard in the saddle and Mrs. King had said nothing of Ruth's amateur horsemanship when she requested him to take her.

"You sit your saddle first rate," he commented. "Ever ride much?"

"Oh, yes, I rode an old lame, white horse across the stage in a college play once."

But he had turned sharply after an escaping calf and missed the point of her answer. Glad of his absence, Ruth pulled down her riding skirts, though she really didn't care very much whether they were above her riding boots or not, if she could only keep them between her stinging knees and the saddle. If Jane sent her out with such an utter beast, she didn't care how she looked nor what he thought of her. She tried to move her foot from the stirrup to rest it until he came back, but the foot wouldn't move; every joint and muscle was howling with pain. The sun was scorching.

"Oh, I wish I were dead!" she groaned, for the mere pleasure of hearing the words.

"Who's dead?" inquired Blair, loping up to her.

"I said that old cow looked about dead. Why don't you feed them, Mr. Blair?"

"Oh, no use," he laughed. "We just keep those old cows to raise calves." The color flamed into Ruth's face and she bit her lip angrily but the man, perfectly unaware that he had made other than an ordinary remark, suggested pleasantly:

"Let's lope a bit—it'll rest you. We'll gallop over there and help the boys hold the bunch while they cut out the calves."

His horse leaped ahead and hers followed, but the gallop proved even a keener torture than the trot for it discovered a lot of new bruises.

When they reached the restless, dusty herd of cattle, Blair left her with a talkative cowboy and rode in to help with the "cutting out."

"You're sure a dandy rider," complimented the youth.

"Thanks," said Ruth shortly, "I feel like a hospital of incurables."

"Why, ain't you rode much?" giggled the boy.

"All my life—from the way I feel. What time is it?"

"Pretty near noon. Say, if you throw your leg over the saddle-horn and sit sideways it'll rest you."

"Good Heavens! I'm nearer a corpse than an acrobat."

The boy howled with laughter at her amazed expression, but he noticed that her lips were white and her hands trembled.

"Say, you're game all right," he said soberly. "'Spose we start on slow and when the boss is through he can catch up with us and take you on home. It's pretty near noon."

"Much obliged," said Ruth with real gratitude. "But don't you tell him I'm done out, for I'll ride back if it kills me."

They had gone only a quarter of a mile—and six whole ones stretched between them and home, when Blair gal-

loped up to them and dismissed the boy with:

"All right, Shorty, they need you to guard." And she knew from his tone that Shorty should have remained where he was.

"We can trot home in less than an hour so you won't be very late for dinner," he assured her, assuming that hunger was the cause of her haste.

Trot! How they trotted!

"I *will* get home, I *will* get home," Ruth kept repeating to herself. Blair talked along easily and she said "yes," or "no," or "indeed," according to the inflections of his voice, while her face grew from scarlet to a yellowish white under her wide hat.

A few minutes before one they reached the ranch gate and Blair swung from the saddle to tie the horses. Ruth tried to move her feet, but they were solid in the stirrups and when Blair looked up in surprise that she did not dismount, he saw for the first time the dull eyes and white face.

"If you'll wait a minute longer," she said weakly, but still game, "I'll be dead and fall off, but I can't move my f-e-e-t," and for the first time in her twenty-three years Ruth fainted, and tumbled into the astonished Blair's arms.

For a long second he surveyed her with wide, amazed eyes, as she lay utterly relaxed in his arms; while his confused mind gathered itself together. Then his arms tightened and he carried her quickly to the house, muttering in a puzzled voice:

"Why, you plucky little devil!"

Thereafter, deeply penitent for his neglect and filled with admiration for her pluck, he took her riding as a favor to no one, but because he had decided he wanted to marry her. Many an afternoon found his cowboys sitting idle in the corrals, discussing the sanity of their hard-headed boss; while the boss himself, regardless of cattle shipping, rode aimlessly around in the hills with Ruth.

One glad sunny morning in the last week of her visit they had been out for a wild gallop over the hills, and his eyes were proud of her fine, straight figure. Her hair had loosened and fell over her

shoulders, a tangled mass of dark gold. With the reins in her teeth she was trying with determined fingers to make her few remaining hairpins do their duty.

Their horses trotted along quietly, and meadow larks sang from the fence posts.

"You look just like a big sunflower," said Blair slowly. "I can't bear to have you go away, Ruth. Don't you think you could stay out here always to keep me rounded up?"

He asked his question quizzically—half humorously, but his eyes were serious under the broad-rimmed Stetson and his horse started quickly at the sharp prick of his spur.

"Do you mean that you want me to marry you?" she questioned, smiling, and shading her eyes with her outspread palm that she might see him more plainly.

"That's what I mean. Will you?"

"Yes." Her tone was merely one of quiet agreement, but her eyes fell from his and her lips trembled like those of an eager, yet frightened child. He laughed softly as he watched her.

"I'm afraid your horse won't stand while I kiss you," he said regretfully.

"I think I'll be able to wait," she laughed back.

"So do I—till we get to the next gate."

At the next gate she was lifted from her horse and kissed thoroughly for several minutes.

"I love you more than you'll ever know, my girl," he murmured. "How I've wanted you, you independent little thing!"

They walked along the brow of the great hill and watched the early sunlight deepen, while their horses grazed on the new grass.

"Will you marry me next month?" he asked.

"No, not for several years," she replied quietly. "I have gone to school all my life; now I want to *do* something.

"Yes," scornfully, "write books, Mrs King said."

"Maybe, dear, if I can." The voice was so unusually gentle that Blair put his arms around her quickly and asked her pardon for he scarcely knew what. The Ruth that he had come to know was not especially gentle.

"Girl, don't you know that if you leave me, you'll never come back?" He turned her toward him that he might look down into her glowing face, and all the love of a great-hearted man lay in his eyes, so that she was ashamed and could not meet his gaze.

"Oh, my dear, I *will* come back; I love you," and she put her arms up around his neck and drew his lips down to hers, and her eyes were full of tears because she knew that he was right and her heart cried out for what he offered.

"No, little girl," he said slowly, "you're lying to me and you know it. We can't any of us live but one life that's worth anything and we've got to choose it without trying half a dozen others first. If it's fame you want, you aren't very likely to run across it out in these hills. You'll have to pay the price for that. But if you want the things that'll make you happy—you'd better take me, girl."

She smiled up at him almost wistfully, and drew him down beside her on the crest of the hill where they could watch the horses as they grazed down the hillside.

"What do you mean by price?" she asked after a long silence, and he hesitated before he answered.

"I don't know what yours would be—but you're a poor girl and you'll have to pay one. Nothing comes to us for nothing. There're too many climbing beside you who have all the money they want. You know it, Ruth."

There could be no arguing with the flat certainty of his voice and she was silent.

"Stay here, dear," he said gently. "We'll be mighty happy if you'll only make up your mind to it."

"Do you mean that if I should try for a few years—and fail, that you wouldn't want me?"

"I'll always want you, Ruth," he answered her. "You're the first woman I've ever asked to marry and I want you mighty bad. Do you mind telling me if I'm the first man with you?"

She laughed. "Why, yes—would you have cared any less if you weren't?"

"No-o," he said slowly, and then in his straight, simple words, "but I'm mighty

glad I'm the first one. I suppose every man wants to be first with the woman he wants for his wife and some day for the——"

"Oh, *don't!*" she cried sharply with a wave of curious shame at what he was about to say, and a flood of crimson in her cheeks.

"Why, girl," he said softly, "I love you," and the words carried surprise, apology and explanation. "That's the reason I want you now, before you leave me and risk the world. I've thought ever since I came to know you what a fine, big-hearted mother you'd make for a boy," he whispered reverently. "And, oh, girl, I know what I'm talking about; you'll never find a love that'll beat mine."

The same hurt crept up into her throat that she had known once before, but this time it was from the heart of a mature woman. Far out to the west where the red-topped hills backed into the mountains, the sun was changing the dull peaks into masses of living color; and over her swept a keen longing for the love and honest simplicity in the life that this man offered her. She turned to him quickly and her face was full of her love for him, so that his eyes gladdened as he looked into hers.

"Oh, my dear big man, I *do* love you," she breathed, "and I'll come to you in the fall. There! I'm glad I decided. Shall we go home to breakfast?"

"You bet you, sweetheart," he laughed, and caught her roughly in his arms. She put her slender hands softly against his cheeks and kissed him.

"I'll love you always—always—always," she whispered.

The mountains were purple in the distance; the man who held her was strong limbed and tanned of face; and the world was full of meadow-lark songs and the love of him and her.

THE THIRD STEP

The big automobile chugged along restfully. It was a very fine automobile; Ruth leaned back against the soft cushions and wondered how many thousands of dollars it had cost.

The hair of the man beside her was tinged with gray; his face was strong

featured and tight lipped. But Ruth's hair still held its dark gold shadows and her eyes were bright and exultant.

They were riding through quiet roads, walled with bloom, that wound in and out by ponds and parks. He owned the roads but they led to *her* star which sparkled with promise in the near distance, for her girlhood wagon of ambitions had nearly finished its journeys. Several times it had upset on the way, but always she had righted it and climbed in once again.

And she had won!

The man beside her was a fit master for her loftiest air castle and the big automobile was well on its way. She felt his keen eyes and turned to meet them.

"Well—you got my note. Are you going to?" he asked with a half smile of amusement.

"Yes—thank you. I never dreamed for a moment that you would ask me."

He laughed heartily; a thing so unusual that the chauffeur turned his head in surprise.

"It didn't occur to me that the delay might worry you," he told her, adding after an almost imperceptible pause, "or I would have asked you three months ago."

"Oh, no, you would not," she contradicted calmly. "You would never have asked me in the world if you had not thought I might marry George Blair. We will have to be perfectly frank with each other, you know—if we are not to make a failure."

He settled back with a relieved shrug of his shoulders, but leaned forward to ask with sincere curiosity:

"You really don't love me one bit on earth, do you?"

"No," candidly, "and since you don't love me a bit either, why should we pretend anything about it?"

"You're right. I've never seen such absolute honesty as yours in my life, and it rather wilts me. I can remember when I thought 'l-o-v-e' spelled the whole world."

"I have some similar memories," she said lightly, "and I still think it does—for some people."

"Oh, yes, so do I," he affirmed care-

lessly, "depends on the size of their world."

"Take us up to the cliff that overlooks the house and grounds," he told the chauffeur; and they rode on silently until the great machine slowed down just at the top of the cliff where they could see plainly the massive house surrounded by its beautiful gardens, which was to be her home. And as she looked, she thought of another glad, sunny morning and a gallop over endless hills; and a log ranch house down among the cotton woods; and a little hurt crept into her heart but her mind was proud and exultant.

"Kill it," she heard him tell the man, "I'll drive back and you can take the short cut to the lodge."

After the man had gone, she leaned back in the wide seat, conscious of the steady scrutiny of his eyes, though her own were fastened intently on the beauty that lay below them.

"My nose is altogether too large, and I am afraid to have that mole taken off my cheek; otherwise, do I suit?"

"You do," he answered gravely, ignoring her jesting tone. "You are, as I told you in my letter, exactly the woman I want for my wife. I was not sure of it until I found I might lose you. And you—does it please you?" She followed the direction of his eyes.

"You mean—all this?" and she motioned out over the loveliness about them.

"Yes, and incidentally—myself."

"You know that I want to marry you," she returned frankly. "I can never repay half that you offer me." Then, abruptly: "Why did you send him away?"

"Because I want to talk to you without tempting his ears. Do you mind telling me which of your moods has hold of you at present?"

"An absolutely new one. I cannot vouch for its actions," she answered lightly, but he detected an earnest note underneath and noticed that the white fingers lying on the seat between them were tight against the cushions. He lifted the hand gently, kissed it and slipped a great, shining stone on the third finger.

"You have a beautiful hand," he said

courteously, straightening her fingers out upon his palm.

"And they smell like firecrackers," she murmured absently, entirely unconscious that she had thought aloud until the words had escaped and his astonished "What!" brought a swift, shamed flush over her face. For her mind had leaped back to a girl in a checked gingham dress whose untaught heart held a world of happiness.

"Oh!" she stammered, laughing. And he saw for a moment the sweet, laughing face of her girlhood.

"It made me think of something that happened about a hundred years ago," she explained. "I suppose you think this new mood of mine borders on insanity."

"No," he laughed, "I was thinking that I never saw you look at all like that before. Do you like the stone?"

"Oh, yes," and she withdrew her hand, holding it up in the sunlight. "Though I can't think of anything to say but 'thank you.'"

"It is sufficient that you will wear it," he said in his short manner, and she flushed curiously, turning away while he gave a quick glance at his watch. "I must take the afternoon train for Washington, but we have over half an hour here. I wish you would take off your hat—I like your hair."

Obediently she loosened the long veil and laid her hat on her lap, fluffing the thick hair from her forehead; after an instant's hesitation she unearthed a powder puff, used it, and settled back comfortably in her own corner.

"I didn't suppose you knew whether it was sky blue or chestnut," she observed drily, "but I'm glad you like it. What are we going to talk about—John?" Her lips showed themselves strangers to his name and he smiled at the sound of it.

"Thanks, Ruth. That's another thing I like about you—your name. I suppose we can be perfectly frank with one another now, and I should like to know if you are in love with anyone else?"

"I am not in love with *anyone*," she corrected, and he accepted it with a quiet, amused glance.

"That's good. Neither am I; it puts us on a better footing. Now this is

what I want to do. I want you to put on your play before we are married. Now that we're engaged I have a right to back you openly; and with the name you already have and the virtue of the thing itself, it can't help but be a success with plenty of money to start it right."

"You want to do this before we are married?"

"Yes, immediately."

"So that more people will know whom you are marrying." The words were a mere statement of fact, judicially considered. His lips tightened a trifle.

"We both profess to enjoy honesty," he vindicated himself and Ruth nodded absently, drawing in a short, deep breath.

"Next to marrying you, I'd rather see it a success than anything on earth," she said bluntly, and he took her words up with a little gesture of displeasure.

"I've wanted to tell you, Ruth, that you are not to feel—that is," he stopped for a more careful choice of words, "I do not wish you to think that I am conferring any favor upon you in making you my wife. I want you. Even in our relations for the last three years, I have never found the least thing to criticise in you, and when we are married I shall never in the least way make you regret the trust you have placed in me in the past. I shall want you to go on with your work; nothing will help me more than to have a wife who can climb *with* me."

She glanced up at him curiously and after a second's silence asked: "Did you never love a woman very, very much?"

A swift flash of surprise swept his straight, hard features.

"Yes, it's been a good many years since I have thought. But I loved one 'very, very much,' as you say."

"Was she at all like me?"

Sincere amusement colored his quick sarcastic laugh.

"She was totally devoid of intellect," was the sufficient answer, "it almost killed me not to marry her because I did love her so 'very, very much.' But even at that time I realized that I couldn't afford to give up my chance at the big

things in life, merely because of a woman whom I enjoyed holding in my arms. I should have spent my life in a little town, kissing her, and sitting in the dusk with her evenings, and buying a nickel's worth of candy for the children later on."

"Yet those are the things that prove strongest in my book—and you approve it."

"Yes, in the book; it'll take like wild fire. Oh, I've never forgotten Jane," he went on carelessly. "I remember how I used to sit in my office half the night and fight with myself to give her up—but I did it. She's married now and has three half-grown children. Your hair is like hers but that is all."

He finished his sketch with a characteristic gesture of dismissal, but Ruth's eyes were interested and rather puzzled.

"You will not expect us to have children, will you?" she questioned in exactly the same tone that might have asked his wishes regarding the lighting of the new library.

"Of course not. There are plenty of people to have children who have time for them."

She knew that he expected her to say something, but she only raised her eyes for an instant to his and let them stray again to the great house far below them. She heard his watch case click.

"Yes, in just a minute," she said, as if in answer to a direct question, "I want to tell you something."

It was a long minute—a long two minutes, before she turned to him as he sat silently awaiting the result of her thoughts; watching the wind flutter the soft lace below her white, round throat; and noting the deep gold shadows in her hair. It was always pleasant to look at Ruth. His expression changed as he watched her, but it was not love that sprang to his eyes; only a common, coarser thing that lights easily in the eyes of men, and which veiled itself instantly in a look of concern when she straightened and turned to him.

"What is it, Ruth?" he questioned quickly, an undercurrent of surprise in his voice for her face had changed entirely, and all the exulting pride had gone

from it. He had not dreamed that this woman of laughter and stern purpose could look so like a hurt child. Unconsciously his hand reached out and covered hers.

"What is it, Ruth?" he asked again.

"I have not been honest at all," she said simply. "I have lied to you all the time," and he would have smiled but for the keen pain in her voice which made him ask, hesitatingly:

"Do you mean—that there are other men?"

She grew very red—a hard, deep red that crept from her face down under the soft lace at her throat, and lingered long after his quick apology.

"No," she said at last, "not as you have been," and the hard little expression had gathered again around the corners of her mouth. She straightened tensely and stared straight out ahead, her words following quick upon each other.

"I *do* love someone else, with all my heart. You think I chose your name and wealth ahead of all other things—I wanted you to think so. But I didn't. I wanted to go with him."

"May I ask why you didn't then?" and the annoyance almost covered the surprise in his tones. He had asked her to marry him partly because she was not given to climaxes.

"He didn't want me," she said in a flat, hard voice. "I had promised to go with him when your letter came, but he didn't want me—when I'd told him."

The man beside her sat up suddenly and leaned toward her.

"Great Cæsar! Did you tell him about us?" he demanded, but she paid him no heed.

"And then I knew how badly I wanted what I'd missed. I know now that we're all alike—we women. If we overcome our instincts we have to fight them down and—it isn't easy. I wanted to go way out there with him and plant flowers and make table-cloths and white curtains and ride over the hills in the morning again and after while—to have a little baby—but he didn't want me."

"What did you tell him?"

"The truth—that you had, had given me money for three years."

The man's inscrutable expression did not change but he looked away from her face which was as some dead thing after the buoyant life that usually covered it. He cleared his throat.

"He must be a narrow-minded cad," he said at last, contemptuously.

"Oh, no, he isn't!" she said wearily. "He was right—I know it. But he loves me; I know that, too. He said I would—would be ashamed before my own children, and he was right." Her voice fell to a whisper full of humiliation. "I could never bear it to know what I had done, when I held my little baby in my arms."

He was silent, his face still turned from her, and she laid her hand on his arm but he did not move.

"I had to tell you," she said finally in

a matter-of-fact voice, pulling on her gloves. "If you do not want me, knowing these things, it will be best for both of us if you will simply say so."

Then he turned, and for a mere second her eyes looked straight into his and saw there, sincerity, respect and admiration.

"Of course, I want you," he said gravely. "It is one of the strongest desires of my life that you should be happy."

"I know we will be very happy—always," was the low-spoken promise, even as she had promised the two men who had loved her.

So they rode down through the roadway of blossoms into the land of her dreams, as it lay before them full of the morning sunshine.

THE INTERCESSION OF MADAME

By Varian Holmes

"MEES OBRIE, will you not be so kind as to repeat that again; it goes too slow, much?"

Antoinette Obrie flushed and pulled herself together at Madame's reproof, for underneath the lady's polite request, the accompanist detected latent sarcasm. After which she played with more animation until the singing pupil had finished.

"Now, Mees," began Madame Endour, when the two were alone, "you and I must come to one understanding—you are too preoccupied, much. You of late play very bad accompaniments, you drag—drag, gazing are you always through the window and for the sound of the doorbell do you listen. Already have I lost one, two pupil on your account, of that am I sure, Mees. You lack entirely interest. *Hélas!* but one changed girl you have become. Never used you to be so careless. Your accompaniments once they were full of life and fire. Now, no! *au contraire, et pourquoi?* Because, Mees, too much in love are you with Mr. Petaire Villard.

Do I not pay you and, well, hey? for services. If I more scholars should lose, where will come money for me and my child Leontine with which to buy bread? You, Mees, must improve or it will be for us to part."

Antoinette gazed tentatively at her friend and patron, whose black eyes flashed and who spoke rapidly. Madame was angry; else why should she have addressed her so formally? Laying her head on the music rack of the piano, the accompanist burst into a torrent of tears.

"Oh, Madame," she sobbed brokenly, "I am so wretchedly unhappy—I wish I were dead!"

"Of course. Why not?" ejaculated Madame, stamping her little foot. "So, too, would I be had I a big, fat Mr. Petaire for five years hanging around me and too lazy and proud to work and make me his wife. Hah! is he a man? He say he adore you? *Tres bien*, then why do he not go to work and get money? Because it is for the shoe of a dead man he waits. *Oui*. I have much disgust. If he so love you and so

wants to marry, why he not become a conductor or motaireman? Hey?"

When excited Madame spoke broken English interlarded with her native French. "When first Mr. Petaire asked you to wait for him, he tell you he cannot yet announce his engagement. *Pourquoi?* On account of his mamma. She too aristocratic is to let her son make a misalliance. *Tres bien.* Then God was good. Behold Mamma gets much illness and die. *Voilà!* does then he acknowledge you as his fiancée? *Non!* *Pourquoi?* He now has to live with his papa, who is alone and who is old and his care desires, and Papa will not go *contraire* to *Madame la mere's* wishes. Am I not correct? *Non,* he prefers not to marry because Mr. Petaire obtains from his papa a big allowance, and for even you, Antoinette, he will not of his comforts be deprived. So for the money that he should earn, behold, he lets you work, and because for five years he pay you attention, he lets your friends criticise and scandal you, and they believe not that he means to marry. They say for why does she go with him always, and he allows you to be compromised. Yet he say he loves you. Bah! Let not my daughter meet and love one man who to the upper class belongs, but one who for her will work and who to her gives honest love!"

"Oh, Madame," sobbed the girl, "I thought you liked Peter. You call him fat and ridicule now, but you are always nice to him, and doesn't he take singing lessons to help you?"

"*Oui, ma chere,* and do I not take him for one-half price? And do I not give him one long hour's instruction? *Pourquoi donc,* does he not use my house for five years as a rendezvous to meet you, Mees? Bah! Know now that I am not quite so big fool. I know when it is to be used I am. Mr. Petaire takes me and Leontine automobiling. True, and in the summer he invites us at hotels to be his guest. True. *Mais,* who else would go as chaperon with you to hotels, hey? *Non,* I am one convenient accessory. Madame Endourd plays chaperon because Antoinette's mamma left her daughter in anger because of her and

Mr. Petaire's actions, and well you know it. I like not these all time bluffs, *non!* *Certainement* I think to marry you he intends some day, but, *hélas,* already is your hair turning gray! Already to read your notes you have to wear glasses. Will he wait until your teeth become a bridge? And with rheumatism will your hands become big and your knuckles enlarge. Why can he not at least your engagement announce and take you to see papa at the Madison Avenue house, hey? *Alors,* my temper have I lost. I apologize—but it is in future to play with more expression I desire. Think not of Mr. Petaire when you my pupils accompany, or I shall engage Mr. Kohler in your place. Understand, I dislike not Mr. Petaire; he is to me most agreeable and polite and a gentleman, but he is lazy. With a clean suit and a broom would I sweep the streets to marry a woman I loved, I would not take my papa's money, but I would be one man and work. Mr. Petaire is over forty. He is ashamed of himself, I think. But cease to weep; it is of your own *affaire*—not mine," and the impulsive Frenchwoman kissed her friend with affection.

Madame Emil Endourd was a widow with one daughter, who at present was in a convent. Madame had been educated for the operatic stage, but failing, had turned to voice culture. Leasing a small house on the East side, she had sublet enough rooms to meet her rent, while from her teaching she derived enough income to support herself and Leontine in comfort. Miss Obrie had answered Madame's advertisement and had become her accompanist.

Miss Obrie was thirty-five years old. She had a wealth of auburn hair, dark eyes and pretty features. Madame, who was nearing forty, was a bright vivacious brunette, and was like a sister to the girl, for she loved her. The affair between Peter Villard and Antoinette Obrie was the old story of a rich man's son and a self-supporting woman.

From his father, for years, he had received a liberal income—never in his life had he earned enough to pay his club dues, although he had graduated from

a law school. He attended to his parents' pleasures. He had been his mother's escort to the Opera, where they always had subscription seats, and after her death he went about with his father.

Peter was quite stout, with a perfectly round face, pale blue eyes and iron-gray hair. His skin was swarthy and mottled. As Madame expressed it, Peter's face reminded her of a round huckleberry pie, where in places the juice had run through the upper crust.

When younger, he had been engaged to a distant relative, a Miss De Peyster, but owing to his laziness in failing to secure an income by working, she broke the engagement and married another, to the intense disappointment of Mamma Villard, who had above all things desired that her son should wed a De Peyster. Peter belonged to several clubs, where on certain occasions he had composed and delivered very creditable speeches. He wrote impossible odes and sonnets, and was a general favorite, although everyone criticised him. Music was his passion, and it was Antoinette's wonderful musical talent that first attracted and afterward won Peter. She played at musicales, and had composed several admirable songs, and it was she who persuaded Peter to become one of Madame's pupils.

Old Peter Villard was an autocrat whose word was law. He was tall, wiry and aristocratic looking, and, although nearing eighty, was as active as a man of sixty. His hair was white and his dark eyes seemed to read one's very soul.

Before his mother's death, the news of Peter's entanglement (as old Villard termed it) had reached his parents' ears, whereupon Mrs. Villard changed her will, leaving her husband the money she had intended giving Peter, thereby making him absolutely dependent upon his father—then she extracted from him a promise never to marry during her lifetime. After she died her husband, who was intensely selfish, refused to entertain even a thought of his son's marrying. He loved his boy, his comfort, and his money too well to part with them during his lifetime.

"Peter, my son," he would observe as

he sipped his Burgundy, "you are the last and sole representative of an old and aristocratic Knickerbocker family. You come of honorable stock on both sides. Wouldn't you wish to say to your son what I am now saying to you?"

"Why, yes," replied Peter doubtfully. "Why?"

"Because you must marry a woman who speaks our language, Peter, one who is your equal socially. Now don't attempt to say I am prejudiced and all that, for I'm not. This woman whom gossips couple with your name is a musical genius. You love music; you inherit that from me. It's her music that has fascinated you, not the woman. Why, she's old—nearly forty. She'll be in her dotage when you are my age. Your head is turned. You should marry a young woman. Cut it out, my boy, and you'll soon forget her. She'll be happier with a musician for a husband—a fiddler or an organist—one of her own class, and she'll soon become consoled—but you—'*noblesse oblige*.' You belong to another world and it is from that world you must select and marry a wife. Where did Miss—what's her name—come from? Who were her father and her mother? Do you know aught of her antecedents?"

"Yes, Father, I do," replied Peter. "They are French. Mr. Obrie went through the Civil War, and his wife gets a pension. Antoinette has supported herself since she was seventeen. At present Mrs. Obrie is away on a visit and her daughter has an elderly friend staying in her flat."

"I shouldn't think that at her age she needed a chaperon," said old Villard grimly. "It makes it convenient for you, having her mother absent, hey? How does she feel about your attentions to her daughter?"

Peter vouchsafed no reply. As a matter of fact, the mother, disgusted with it all, and not being able to influence the girl, had left her to her fate sooner than stay and behold her being compromised by the man.

"And this Frenchwoman, her friend; is she respectable?" asked the elder Peter.

Then Peter told of Madame and of her struggle for support since her husband's death.

"Emil Endourd was a wonderful leader and composer, and Madame is a brick, Father, besides she's been an angel to us; I never knew such a friend."

"Humph! doubtless she's clever. Why, being a rich man's son, were you to marry the girl, this Madame would be benefited socially, of course. There's the cause in a nutshell. Peter, you're up against a hard problem. I'll take you for a trip around the world if you're afraid to stay and break off with her, but you'd better do it at once."

"Father, if only you'd seen Antoinette you'd love her! She'd be like a daughter to you."

"Nonsense!" ejaculated old Villard, looking disgusted. "Drop all that 'daughter' business, if you please. I'll select one of my own equals for my daughter—she shows her lack of pride when she allows you to dangle around her as you have done for five years. If you love her so, why don't you hustle and make a living?"

Peter grew mottled.

"You've never worked nor earned a dollar. Where would you be without the allowance I give you every month? You're too old to begin at the foot of the ladder. Well, if you persist in marrying her during my lifetime, that's what you'll do. Not a penny goes to you, and you can't break my will, either, for before I die I can give away everything I possess. Are you ready to promise to wait for the woman until after my death?"

"Yes, Father," faltered Peter.

"Very well, then, you'll get all that's coming to you. I shan't care, for I'll not be alive to see and suffer the disgrace of my only son's marriage to a Miss Nobody from Nowhere," and with a motion of finality he arose. "I'd like the full name of this girl's father and what occupation he followed while living."

"His name," answered Peter, "was Jerome Obrie—they lived in a town near Albany; they are French, although Antoinette was born in this country." Pe-

ter's face was dark and angry looking, while upon his cheeks there appeared purple patches. "Father," he faltered, "if I obey your wishes may I not announce our engagement? Antoinette will abide by your decision, but won't you ask her here and meet her? At least I owe her something. I'd like to show people that I'm not such a black-guard as they suppose me to be, for she has been compromised by my attentions, and I'm not such a cad as not to be ashamed. But I'm powerless. You never brought me up to work, worse luck! I've been a lackey to you and Mother ever since I left college," and Peter's eyes filled with unshed tears which he quickly wiped away.

Old Villard loved his son and could not but see that he was right.

"There, don't take it to heart, my boy. Perhaps the conditions imposed may be too strenuous. Under the circumstances I'll meet you halfway in this promise. You may bring your fiancée here. I'll invite the relatives to dinner and announce your engagement. That will quiet Mrs. Grundy; but I'll enjoy seeing your aunts and cousins squirm when I do it, and the joke is, they consider you a non-marrying cousin who will leave them the Villard millions." Whereupon the gentleman went off into a fit of laughter, nearly causing him to choke. "But," he continued, after catching his breath, "remember, no wedding bells for that young woman and you until after Papa's demise," and he chuckled as he left the room.

The two women were overjoyed at Peter's news. Madame loaned the girl her finest laces and prettiest jewels. She even combed and arranged Antoinette's heavy hair most becomingly. "First appearances count much," she declared.

"Oh, Hortense!" said the girl, kissing Madame impulsively, "you shall live with us when I am mistress of that house," and she gazed at herself gowned in one of Madame's French costumes. "We shall never forget all of your goodness and friendship. We can never begin to repay you." Madame was genuinely delighted, and sat up until Antoinette returned from the dinner party.

"Oh, Hortense!" cried the girl, as she stood while Madame unhooked her gown, "it was simply lovely! Mr. Villard is a dear. He actually kissed me; and he seated me upon his right—and then—" the girl was wild with excitement, and her eyes shone—"then during the second course, what do you think? He announced our engagement. And everyone drank our health. Oh, don't they love me? I guess not. I responded in a master-like way to every toast. Peter said he was proud of me. You know I've been studying 'toasts' to be ready for this occasion. I know old Mr. Villard likes me. I impressed him, no doubt. Just wait, I'll be mistress there yet; before the old gentleman realizes it. I'll make him release Peter from that promise. And what else do you think Peter says—an account of the dinner and the announcement of our engagement will be in every paper," and the girl danced around the room.

"You are fortunate," replied Madame. "You have my sincere congratulates. But you go now to bed; it is early I have to arise tomorrow and work, I am tired."

During the dinner, old Mr. Villard had studied his son's fiancée carefully. He was a keen observer and read character well, but he had not decided for or against the girl until she had so cleverly acquitted herself and after she had played so charmingly; then he said to himself, "She will not disgrace us."

"Don't you think her beautiful?" asked Peter proudly.

"Well," answered his father, "she might be so considered if when she laughed she showed only her pretty teeth, but she shows above and it spoils her mouth. It's a pity. But she's as smart as the devil, and can hold her own against the entire family, although there's a certain something about her that jars me unpleasantly. Her environments may have had something to do with it and when she's your wife it may disappear."

Antoinette now spent the greater part of her time at the Villards'. Madame had accepted several invitations and was

charmed with "Peter's papa," as she termed him. For hours Antoinette would accompany Peter while he sang; then she would play until the old gentleman slept, after which the lovers would talk in whispers. Many were the tales she told of her ancestors, especially after a few glasses of champagne drunk at dinner. The old gentleman would smile grimly as he listened and take them with a grain of salt. She now felt sure that her future was assured. The motor stood before Madame's door half of the time; twice a week found the lovers at the Opera, and often they invited Madame. The girl was the recipient of lovely gifts from the old gentleman, who invited her to accompany him on shopping trips and consulted her regarding dinners and musicales, for now the Villard mansion had opened its doors once more, and Antoinette felt herself almost its mistress.

She read to him, played for him, and threw the soft light of her pretty eyes upon him, as she had often done when Peter's allegiance had shown symptoms of wavering. She played chess and dominoes; night after night she sat at dummy bridge until she could sit no longer. But to Peter, Junior, there came no sign of the father's relenting. Madame, in a tactful manner, would praise Antoinette, her capabilities, her beauty and ability, but Mr. Villard would only give her a quizzical look.

"It's useless," cried the girl one night. "This will go on until I wear caps, Hortense!" and she began to sob. "There's no sign of his weakening; he's like a mule. I am as unhappy as I was before I met him."

"That's foolish," her friend replied. "To him everything comes who waits, hey?" Then she reminded the girl of her improved condition and reproached her for worrying. "Be patient," she said, "and see." Meanwhile the girl had begun quietly to cut many of her former friends, so sure was she of her new position.

"Oh, Hortense!" she exclaimed one day, "suppose Father Villard should live to be ninety. No man will marry me then. I shall become insane if this goes

on much longer; the strain is telling on me."

Madame had been a stanch friend, when, before the engagement was announced, she had repudiated indignantly the insinuations of gossiping friends, thereby losing pupils.

"Won't you go with us, Madame, on a trip to the White Mountains?" asked Peter one day. "It will do both you and Leontine good. Then you might, when alone, intercede for us with Father; he thinks you so intelligent and clever."

"Yes," interrupted Antoinette, "when you get him alone some evening on the porch, if you plead our cause real hard, Hortense, I'm sure he'll weaken."

Madame consented. Would it not benefit her child, the trip, though she herself might have to do some disagreeable work? So they went and the change made her feel younger. They stopped at a large and well-known hotel, and everything went harmoniously.

One afternoon Leontine asked her mother to take a walk through the woods nearby, and, sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree, the girl began to weep.

"What is it, *ma chérie*?" asked Madame, kissing her. "Tell Mamma."

"Oh!" cried the girl, "they're using you! Peter and Antoinette. I overheard them talking. I was in the hammock and it was dark. I couldn't tell you before, for I knew this place would do you so much good, but I cannot keep it longer. Mamma, you are to be dropped after you get Mr. Villard's consent to their marriage. Antoinette is a cat. She says to Peter: 'Of course, then our position in society will not admit of our having a singing teacher for a friend.' And Peter says: 'By George, you're right, but I'll do the square thing by Madame. She's been the bulliest friend a couple ever had. Say, we've used her for five years, think of it!'"

"Yes," replies Antoinette, "but she's been well repaid. Why, think of the operas we've taken her to and the pleasure she has derived from our auto, and the little trips that she has gone on with us. Even dragging along Leontine. Oh, don't worry about her! You can send her a present now and then, but so far

as I am concerned she must be dropped. I consider her most undesirable; she's a semi-bohemian."

"Yes, but," says Peter, "she's lost scholars on account of our being at her house."

"Nonsense!" replies Antoinette, "that's what she says. They'd have probably gone anyway. I consider her very mediocre as a teacher."

"So, Mamma," continued the girl, "I thought it best to tell you. Let's leave here at once. You are to be turned down for Peter's wealthy friends. I feel so indignant I could murder them—you who have been so true and noble, for them to dare to do such a thing!"

"Patience," replied Madame, while a bright spot glowed on either cheek, "I have made one promise: it was for that I was brought here, *chérie*. I with Papa Villard have to intercede for them that they may marry; then forever shall I go out of their life," and Madame softly wept. "You know, Leontine," she said huskily, pressing the girl's hand to her own heart, "Mamma nevere breaks a promise—but trust Mamma."

When alone she soliloquized: "For five years have I my drawing-room allowed them to use; for five years have I shielded Antoinette Obrie from scandal that people not think her one bad woman. Many friends and pupils have I lost on her account and now after making it possible for them to meet in a respectable way, how have I been treated by her who will soon be a beggar on a horse. Always have I had to be bored with their troubles. Why have I not seen—why have I been so used—because it is one tender heart I have," and taking Emil's locket from her heart, Madame kissed it and, gazing at it tentatively, wiped her eyes.

But, like a woman of honor, that night she kept her word; while the couple were dancing, she walked the long porch with old Mr. Villard, then sitting beside him in a dimly lighted corner, she interceded for the lovers with all her might.

"It is one crime, my dear sir," she said, "and it is with hatred that they will your memory regard. People will say that you are one selfish person. An-

toinette is lovely. She will bring the sun into your house and you will feel never lonely. Who knows, but leetle grandchildren may climb upon your knees and make your life happy?" and so forth and so forth.

The following day they left. Madame, though quiet, showed no sign of anger. When home again she informed them that she had done her very best and thought that she had won. The two nearly overpowered her with expressions of everlasting gratitude and thanks, which she knew to be false.

"I have with fat Mr. Petaire no more sympathy," she said to Leontine after the lovers had gone. "He is one lazy man, and will not work. No, he prefers to wait for the shoe of the dead—beware always of such love, my child."

The following day Peter and Antoinette attended the Yale games at New Haven, leaving Papa to take a short motor ride with Madame and Leontine, returning to Mr. Villard's house, where they were to dine. Madame, while in the act of removing her hat, turned, and who should walk into the drawing-room but Mrs. O'Brien, who had, upon reading a New York paper, seen notice of her daughter's engagement and hastened to the city. Finding no one in the flat, she sought Madame's, from thence to the Villards' house, thinking sure to find her there. Madame quietly introduced her to Mr. Villard, who at once politely bade her to be seated. Gazing at the woman he seemed surprised, for in truth she was most ordinary. She was dark, with overhanging brows, keen gray eyes, and a most unpleasant expression and personality.

"Sir," she began, "I have returned to my disobedient daughter—my headstrong little girl. I have never approved of the way Peter Villard treated her, and as she refused to listen to advice, I left her and refused to live under the same roof. 'You're of age,' I says to her, 'and you can't see further than the end of your nose. You'll go to the dogs, but I shan't be here to see you go;' yes, sir, that's what I says; 'and I'll light out before you disgrace me.' Of course, now it's all different and I'm back. She's

worked hard, has my girl, since she was sixteen. Her pa and I spent a pile of money on her music and bought her a piano. People said she had great talent and so she had. She played at dancing school twice a week and at people's houses, at afternoon teas and card clubs. But she was dead set to come to New York, and come she would. I had to sell the little place that my poor Jerry had worked like a dog to get. I hated to part with it."

"Madam, what was your husband's name?" asked Mr. Villard, wiping his eye-glasses and gazing furtively at Madame Endourd.

"Jerome O'Brien, sir, of Amsterdam, New York. After goin' through the war, Jerry took up his old trade. He was a carpenter and a good one, too, but before Ann was born—"

"O'Brien, I think you said," interrupted Mr. Villard. "Why, I supposed your name to be O'Brien!"

"Oh, that's Ann's nonsense," replied the woman with a sheepish laugh. "She said to say we was French was more swell and would be better for her every way. I give in to her and let it go, but laws! why, Jerry O'Brien, sir, why, he'd rise in his grave and swear if he thought Ann was ashamed of her good Irish blood. Why, even Madame here, who has been her best friend, never knew it, did you, Madame?" addressing the lady, who, wonderingly, shook her head at the way the girl had deceived her.

"Yes, sir, her name is Ann O'Brien, named for the blessed St. Ann, and her father's name, God rest his soul, was Jerome Patrick O'Brien, both named for the saints, sir. He was a good man and went by the name of 'Honest Jerry'—I don't know wherever Ann comes by her silly airs."

"But you, Madam," asked the old gentleman, "is there no French in you?"

"Not a bit, sir. French, is it?" she laughed. "If you please, I am as Irish as Galway can make me—but we settled here before Ann was born. I lost my first, sir."

Madame went quietly over and sat beside Mr. Villard. The shock had been unexpected and he seemed appalled.

"Mrs. O'Brien," he resumed, after collecting himself, "remove your hat and dine with us. Leontine, my child, kindly touch the button. Dinner for four, Simpson," he said to the man, "and serve it at once."

Then he politely seated Madame Endourd opposite himself and Leontine on his right. Under the influence of the wine, Mrs. O'Brien's tongue loosened, and she regaled them with Ann's entire life from the cradle. When the third course was about to be served, the lovers appeared. Peter, Junior, seemed out of sorts over something and his face was cloudy. When Antoinette beheld her mother she nearly fainted, but cleverly controlled herself and greeted the loquacious lady with effusion. She feared lest the old gentleman might think her ashamed of her mother and despise her for it, and she was at present building character with that august personage.

"Madame Endourd, you are evidently unaware that you are occupying my mother's seat. We have always kept it sacred. My father perhaps has failed to realize it," said Peter most impolitely, with a scowl.

"Peter," interrupted the old gentleman sternly, while an angry flush appeared on his face, "I beg to tell you that I did realize it, but it was I who put her in that place. Henceforth it is to be her seat. Understand?" and crossing over to Madame he put both hands on her shoulders, saying: "This afternoon the lady sitting here has made me the happiest of men, for she has become my wife and the head of my establishment. While this little girl," smiling at Leontine, "will be as my own daughter. Simpson, two more plates for Mr. Peter and Miss O'Brien."

Antoinette held on to the chair, white to the lips. Did he say O'Brien, or had she heard incorrectly? Peter sat down heavily in a chair as though stunned, and groaned aloud. Then he buried his head in his hands.

They glared at Madame, not daring to speak lest they should incur the wrath of the old gentleman, who still stood beside his new wife with his hands on her shoulders.

"You understand what I said, I presume, although you take my announcement rather ungraciously, it appears. For one hour this lady pleaded for you—that I might consent to your marriage. I told her that upon one condition only would I give it, and that was that she should take the place of my son, and I compelled her to marry me to-day so that I might withdraw my objections to your marriage, thus making you happy."

The color slowly returned to Antoinette's cheeks. True, her mother had told all—their true name included—still it would blow over and she could easily obtain the old gentleman's forgiveness through Madame, who loved her. After all she had committed no crime, but would Peter despise her? Peter's face was set and covered with black and blue spots; while he was exceedingly angry that he was obliged to be agreeable.

After each one took his seat and the butler had discreetly withdrawn, Mr. Villard arose and said:

"My son, I release you from the promise made to me. You may marry Miss Ann O'Brien, but you will be obliged to work and support her. You must now begin and earn money. Some of my friends will give you a position. You will have to rise early and be in business at eight-thirty. It is right that you should begin to have some responsibilities and, if possible, show yourself to be a man. This girl loves you. Yes, for five long years she has waited to become your wife. To her I shall make a moderate allowance, but to you, none—what you inherit at my death depends largely upon what you amount to during the rest of my life, and particularly upon the respect shown by both of you to my wife, who has been a true and loyal friend.

"I shall at once announce the date of your marriage. It shall take place here and I will present Ann with her trousseau; then I would advise you to hire a modest little flat within your means. I hope you will work and show the world of what mettle you are made. You may be a rich man before I die, who knows? Peter, give your arm to Mrs. O'Brien—coffee will be served in the library."

THE WEDDING RINGS OF MARY ALLINE

By Henry P. Dowst

IT is the rule at St. Susan's to give each discharged patient four dollars. Mary Alline accepted this bonus without visible enthusiasm, although she was as grateful as her strength permitted. She said her good-bys numbly, while the matron patted her thin-bladed shoulder, helped her to button her dinky little spring weight jacket, and gently admonished her:

"Be a good girl, Mary. Write us how you get along, dear."

"Ain't she the good soul!" thought Mary to herself, going down the wide granite steps and along the brick walk to the street.

It was windy and cold, and the streets were icy. Mary Alline hitched the little bundle in her arms an inch or two higher. Supporting it on her left arm, she parted the blanket that wrapped it and peered nervously inside. A faint and petulant sound filtered out.

"S all right, kiddo," cooed Mary softly. "Don'cher care, love, 's all right."

She closed the slit in the blanket and patted the bundle.

"Freeze 'r smother, I dunno which," she murmured. "I hope to God I don't take a tumble."

It was maybe ten blocks from St. Susan's to The Home. Mary's baby was three weeks old, and Mary wasn't *quite* strong. She was a big-framed girl, and had been plump. But now she could feel the two two-dollar bills in a little bundle with the note from the matron that would entitle her to a fortnight's stay at The Home, slipping down and down, inside the stocking that was not tight enough to hold them in place.

Mary trudged bravely along Main street, through the crowds of shoppers. She patted the little blanketed bundle, but had no extra breath for words to comfort the baby, who wailed vaguely. When she came to Plater Brothers' jew-

elry shop she pushed through the door and dropped down half exhausted on a stool.

"Gee! That's some walk," she gasped. "Slippery, too."

She waited patiently for her breath and a floorwalker. The latter came a little ahead.

"Well, madam," he said, "is there anything to-day?"

"There is," said Mary. "Which is the rings?"

"Last counter on the right."

She got to her feet and followed the direction of his comprehensive gesture. She stopped at the last counter on the right and gazed critically into the case, while a saleswoman waited.

"How much are those?" asked the girl presently.

"Do you mean these?" the woman queried, indicating a tray.

"No'm, the next one," Mary said.

The saleswoman lifted the tray and set it out before Mary on the glass.

"These are wedding rings," she volunteered.

Mary picked one up tentatively.

"I know," she said. "How much?"

The saleswoman plucked in some confusion at the little tag.

"That is fourteen carat gold—five seventy-five."

"Haven't you got somethin' cheaper—real cheap?" the girl asked.

"Only in plated goods; like these."

The saleswoman brought up another tray and Mary picked up one of the rings.

"That one," said her informant, "is a dollar forty."

"I guess that's nearer," Mary said. "I'll take it."

"But the size," interposed the saleswoman. She became slightly ill at ease. Mary looked into her eyes and found the thing she expected to see there. Her own eyes hardened a very little, but she

could feel the slow flush beginning at her throat and pulsing upward. The saleswoman's embarrassment increased. She said:

"What size do you—does your friend wear?"

Mary advanced her left hand, steady-ing her baby with her right. She held her level eyes gravely upon the sales-woman's face; then smiled faintly.

"Quit kiddin,'" she said.

Mary was very weary when she ar-rived at The Home, and they put her to bed. When she awoke a girl in a non-descript uniform took her temperature and then brought her some light food. After that the girl sat down by her bed and asked her a long string of questions, writing the answers on a big blank. Mary gave them, in the main, truthfully. There was no sentiment in these queries, either in their form or in the manner of their asking. The girl in the uniform was quiet, business-like, matter-of-fact. She thanked Mary gravely, bade her good-night and turned down the lights.

Mary found out in the morning that The Home was comfortable, clean and well ordered. There were rules, enforced without flexibility. There were no wasted sentimentalities. She had two weeks' residence guaranteed her there unless she should find employment soon-er. She was told that she was fortune-nate, for many were waiting for the place she would vacate, but only one would be accepted.

"Fortunate!" she brooded. "Fortu-nate! My God!"

She saw her baby every day, and learned to bathe him and dress him in the coarse, clean little garments The Home provided. After the first week she cared for him altogether, day and night. The Home matron told Mary she could offer him for adoption, with a fair chance of his being taken into a good family.

Mary, submerged in a big wave of fear, held the little thing close and cried:

"Not much, I won't! What, my baby? I should say not!"

When she had been at The Home ten days Mary was offered a job. It was

in "domestic service," she was told. She had no choice of refusal, because one of the rules of The Home said that an inmate able to work must take the first available place, if offered by respectable people. Her baby, they said, they would keep in the nursery department for a while, and Mary was to pay two dollars a week for his board. That was all there was to it, so she went to work, not un-cheerfully, at four dollars a week.

Mary had been a mill girl, and knew little of housework. She wished she could go back to the mills, but it hap-pened just then that they were shut down for a period of repairs, and—well, may-be she wouldn't have gone back, anyhow. She applied herself courageously to her unaccustomed tasks. She was big and strong and wholesome. She did "gen-eral housework," and the people with whom she lived decided that she was "better than no girl at all;" and she seemed to be willing. They, too, were willing—more than willing—that she should sweep and clean and scrub and cook, as fast as she could learn. At first Mrs. Bennett, her employer, haunted the kitchen and tagged her up and down stairs, "showing her how." After a while these attentions diminished. Mrs. Bennett said she thought she was doing very well to "put up with a green girl" and help her to an education in "do-mestic science." She made it clear to Mary that she was being kind to her.

Once a week the girl had an afternoon off, to go and see her baby. Mrs. Ben-nett decided that, for the present at least, a girl of Mary's "antecedents" ought not to go out evenings. Mary was sure she had never had any relatives of that name, but she felt that she wasn't in a position to contradict Mrs. Bennett. She kept on with her sweeping and cleaning and scrubbing and cooking, and as her will-ingness became more and more apparent, so did that of Mrs. Bennett. Sometimes Mary broke a dish, and Mrs. Bennett took its value (or what she estimated to be its value) out of Mary's wages. Mrs. Bennett was a very charitable, conscien-tious person, as Mary fully appreciated.

Mary usually got her work all done by ten o'clock and was free to retire.

She climbed the third floor stairs to her luxuriously appointed chamber, and went to bed on an iron cot with a straw mattress. Sometimes, on hot nights—and in Mary's room the nights were hotter than they were anywhere else—she would lie awake for hours, thinking about her baby, and wondering and wondering. Unconsciously she would twist her dollar-and-forty-cent ring round and round and round, until shortly it became quite naked of its gold "filling" and created its own shadow in greenish black on her finger.

Early in the summer Mrs. Bennett resumed taking ice, a practice suspended every autumn. Then it was that Big John came into Mary's life. Every other morning he came to the back door and called:

"Hey, anny ice?"

To this Mary would reply:

"Aw, g'wan, yer ice melts!" or something equally clever. Based on badinage, her acquaintance with Big John developed into a rollicking friendliness. He used to stand on the back porch and mop his forehead, while Mary brought him a tin dipper of ice water, which he drained in great gulps, like a thirsty horse.

One day he noted the ring on Mary's large, red hand.

"Gee, kid," he exclaimed, "you ain't married!"

Mary jumped, and her face went ruddy. She made a quick recovery and came back sharply.

"Who says I ain't?" she demanded with asperity. Involuntarily she thrust the tell-tale member under her apron.

"Well, say, where's the ol' man?"

"Nunnayerbusiness," snapped Mary, and shut the door in his face so abruptly that the tin dipper went rattling down the steps.

Later, however, she allowed Big John to become confirmed in the opinion that she was a widow. He muttered huskily:

"Tough luck, kid," and went on his perspiring way.

One day, late in the autumn, Big John broke the usual procedure of their rep-
artee with an announcement.

"Say, Mary, you know the folks that live along this here street ain't gonna take no ice much longer."

It was in order for Mary to assume an air of purported delight.

"Good riddance," she said, politely.

"Aw, come off, now," said Big John. "Ain't you sorry, honest?"

Mary relented measurably.

"You're not so worse," she conceded.

"Sure I ain't," he urged. "Say, kid, don't you ever go out evenin's none? How about a pitcher-show to-night, huh?"

"I wouldn't care about it," she answered, uneasily.

"I bet you would, now," persisted the man. "I bet that dame won't let you, that's what!"

He looked at her with a peculiar, newly awakened, hungry light in his round, stubbly face. Then he blurted:

"This ain't no place for you, Mary girl. Honest, that old dame would drive *anyone* to drink. Looky-here, kid, what do you say to blowin' this job. Let's you an' me get mar——"

And just then a voice from the top of the back stairs came pitching down, impatient, fretful, grating.

"May-REE! MAY-ree! Aren't you coming up to finish your chamber work this whole *morning*?"

Mary Alline slammed the screen door and dashed panic-stricken up the stairs. But as she vanished she turned and blew a kiss at Big John, standing open-mouthed on the porch. Almost instantly she heard him thumping off down the walk, whistling a shrill and discordant rag-time tune that continued intermittently and with diminishing volume as his duties took him further and further along his route.

Mrs. Bennett harassed Mary all that day with obviously invented tasks, and, worse than that, she seemed never to take her suspicious, searching eyes from the girl's disturbed face. Toward night she suddenly opened fire.

"Mary," she said, "what was that ice-man saying to you this morning when I called you?"

Mary was not wholly unprepared for the question, yet it startled her.

"Nothin'," she replied, voicing a hint of defiance.

Mrs. Bennett bridled. It became plain to Mary that the woman had been making up her mind all day to "have it out," and there was no escape. So she held her tongue, and listened wearily while Mrs. Bennett reviewed the details of her own great kindness and charity during the past months.

"And now, Mary," she went on, "if you leave me to get *married*, it'll be a nice return for all I've done for you. I don't accuse you of it, Mary; but just let me warn you that if you haven't got the common gratitude and loyalty——"

She stopped short. Mary looked up. There was a glint in Mrs. Bennett's eyes that Mary understood.

"Oh, Mrs. Bennett," she cried, "you couldn't do that—you wouldn't, you wouldn't, you *wouldn't!* Haven't I been a good girl? Haven't I been——"

Mrs. Bennett smiled a cool, mirthless, triumphant smile. There is a certain charity that, upon occasion, makes its beneficiaries its victims. She went away into the front of the house. That night Mary Alline lay awake many hours, thinking and thinking, turning the wedding-ring round and round in the dark until it felt like a band of red-hot iron.

Big John made his accustomed call on his regular day. Mary managed to be above stairs at the time. On the succeeding day she mustered courage for her usual bantering sally, but there was no need. Big John came, washed and brushed the ice, lugged it into the back hallway and dumped it in the refrigerator. Not once did he lift his eyes in Mary's direction. She opened her mouth to speak, but something choked back the words, and the man went dumbly down the walk.

Mary knew what had happened. He was "wise." Mrs. Bennett had conferred with Mr. Bennett, who had taken obedient precautions against losing a capable servant. During the rest of the ice season, a matter of a few days, Mary got out of sight as soon as she heard Big John's wagon rumble up to the back gate.

And then one night, just as she was about to climb the long, disheartening

stairs to her room, Mr. Bennett called: "Mary, come to the telephone."

Even before she had the receiver at her ear, she knew it would be The Home. Her baby was ill, desperately ill. She hurried to catch a late car, a halting, snailish thing, and sat fidgeting during the half-hour's journey, her suffering patent to the dullest of her fellow passengers. He had been so well, her baby, all during the hot weather, growing stronger and plumper every week, as every week she had gone to visit The Home, seeking against odds to foster in him the mother-love that other children gain by daily contact. Tears welled up, and sobbing with grief and fear, she sat and twisted the wedding-ring round and round upon her ungloved finger.

It was three o'clock when she left The Home and threaded the dim silent streets back to the Bennett's. Once a policeman stopped her, looked a question into her distorted face, and stood aside with an apology to let her pass. Mrs. Bennett let her in, asking news of the child with perfunctory sympathy.

At six o'clock Mary was about, preparing breakfast with numb, accustomed hands. The day wore by, the hours leaden and hopeless. By telephone she had news of her baby, but no reassurance. After supper she started again for The Home.

When she alighted from the car, a man stepped down off the curb and accosted her in the dusk.

"Mary," he said. It was Big John.

"Oh, Mary!" he pitied, "ain't there nothin' I can do for you? I saw ol' Bennett on the street this after', an' I couldn't help askin' him about you. He says your little kid is sick. Say, can't I do nothin' at all?"

"I guess not," she answered dully, and turned toward The Home.

"Lemme go in with you," he urged, and Mary neither consented nor denied. He went up the steps and followed her through the door. Inside a doctor, pulling on his gloves, was about to leave.

"Are you Mary Alline?" he asked. "Your baby is better. Don't worry, Mary, he'll pull through now." He went out into the deepening night.

To Mary a girl in a nondescript uniform said:

"You can go into the ward."

But she looked doubtfully at Big John.

"Aw, lemme go, too," he begged. "I'm the fellah this lady's goin' to marry, see?"

Together they went in. A nurse held a little sleeping child in her lap. With a low sob, Mary went down on her knees by her.

"Oh, John," she whispered. "Ain't he just lovely?"

The nurse laid the baby in Mary's arms and tiptoed out. Mary sat rocking softly, crooning, in the half light of the ward. Big John made a long and curious inspection.

"Some kid," he announced, in a husky, scared whisper.

He drew up a chair, and Mary slipped her free left arm around his stooped shoulders.

"John," she said, a little hesitant, "he's mine; if you want us both, why—he's got good blood, John."

"You betcher he has," said Big John. "Ain't you his mother? We'll make one grand man out of him. He'll do fine—if he don't I'll whale the stuffin' out of 'im."

He tapped Mary's finger with his own toughened digit.

"That's a bum ring," he said. "Tomorrer we'll git you a good one."

SUBLIMATION

By Jane Burr

"SUBLIMATION—sublimation's the only thing." The doctor sat forward and took the little tear-blotched face in his hands.

"Nature makes fools of us if we allow it—look at *me*; none of your sentimental folderol—work! work! up at five and at it till midnight. That's the only thing that pays—nothing in love; either you get what you want and wish you hadn't, or you don't get it and wish you had."

Her youth stared up at him. "But, Doctor Kane, I love him so much; of course, I want to get over it now that he doesn't want me but it's hard—you were young once—you ought to understand."

The doctor's lips drew down in a sneer. "Young, yes, but never in love. I saw at once it was no special set of eyes or teeth that I wanted—it was merely a matter of opportunity in sex—nothing else. Any two normal people can have that feeling—do you think that I was going to allow any such atavism to come between me and success? No, I was above it and now I'm going to get you above it. You've got to go to work."

"But I can't do anything."

"Study art."

"No sense of proportion."

"Suffrage."

"Haven't enough brains."

"Music."

"Can't hum a tune."

"Well, what have you enough sense for?"

"Only for loving, I guess, and maybe—having some babies."

"You're impossible."

"No, I'm not. I'm all right—it's just youth that's wrong. Youth's an awful catastrophe and nobody prepares us for it. I wish I were professional and forty." She began to sob again.

Doctor Kane arose with a colossal air and patted her shoulders. "Well, the quickest way to get out of a shipwrecked love affair is to crawl into another boat."

She began to look cheerful. "But how?"

"Oh, just go out cave-womanly and land one."

"That's the most sensible thing you ever said to me—I'll do it."

"Come back often and let me know how you progress."

She went out the side way and the doctor lost himself with another "neuro."

II

"Oh, Doctor Kane, I met the dearest fellow—reporter from the *Herald*—

it was like this—the conductor tried to collect my fare twice; I got angry and said: 'I paid you once,' and a young man next to me said: 'Always take a transfer—it's a sort of receipt.' He was simply a dear—I remembered what you said about being a cave woman and put it into action; we chatted as delightfully as though we had eaten out of the same sand pile."

The doctor got up excitedly. "You'd better not talk to strange people in the street that way——"

"Oh, I didn't! What do you take me for? We went straight to a tea-room and then we tangoed and then it was so late we dropped into the queerest little 'newspaper joint,' that's what he called it, and smoked cigarettes and had some cocktail—all the ladies did."

"You must never do such a thing again. This is terrible. I'm going to 'phone your mother. I'll not be responsible for any such insane acts. I did not mean that you should meet men in an irregular way."

The girl's laugh rippled away among the books on the shelf and came back to tug at his sense of humor. "Oh, I see now what you meant by a cave woman!" she continued. "You meant a steam-heated cave with oriental rugs and running water. You meant I should sit in our parlor cave at home and when an attractive young man passed in the hall, after having been admitted by the maid, that I should immediately grab my stone ax and knock him senseless. Oh, Doctor, you're a clever physician, but you've made one big mistake—you've told the truth and you can't pull me back. You've shown me something new and big—talking to everybody—knowing everybody and living—it's the finest thing in the whole world and I'm grateful."

The doctor rubbed his flattened palm up and down the back of his head. "What's that fellow's name?"

"Hans Heimerdinger."

The blow was dynamic—the doctor flew into a million pieces. "That dog—I know him—he's worse than the man you just escaped—he's in love with a different girl every week—you must never see him again."

"But he makes love so beautifully—he must have gone to the very best finishing school—he hadn't known me an hour when he leaned over and kissed my elbow."

"And you permitted such a thing?"

"Oh, certainly not for more than a second—then I made him come round and kiss the inside soft part that Rickie always kissed—it's heaps pleasanter."

"I shall positively have you locked in a private sanatorium if you persist in such atrocities." He jerked the receiver down and called her number. Deftly she twisted it out of his hand and pushed the 'phone to the back of the desk.

"Look here, Doctor Kane, you've known me all my life and you know I'm to be trusted. In a humane moment you showed me a glimmer of the freedom a woman might have if the world were right, and just because I caught your meaning so well, you're sorry—but I'm not sorry. Still if it worries you so, I'll go a bit more cautiously."

The great man who had bluffed a thousand "neuro" into health paced the little room in a rage. "I shall 'phone to your mother or dismiss your case—make your choice."

"I'm dismissed," she said, taking his big helpful hand into hers. "You've cured me. You know they say if you dangled a string in front of a nervous wreck and the wreck believed sufficiently in that string, he'd get well—you've dangled that string and I believe in it and I'm well—I don't love Rickie any more and I'm happy. I think it would be interesting to write the case up in your new book, only you might have to go to Sing Sing."

Doctor Kane opened the door and she passed on out into the world of big spaces that he had accidentally shown her.

III

Green things were frost-bitten and steam pipes were banging when she rang his door-bell again.

"Why did you come here this morning?"

"Well, because you say in your very weightiest tome that you like to keep in touch with your old patients."

"You were never my patient, properly speaking."

"Perhaps not properly—but don't be a bear—I've so much to tell you; such oodles of lovely, harmless things have happened to me in these few weeks; please can't I tell you some of them?"

"No."

"Why?"

"I'm not interested."

"Why aren't you interested?"

"Because it makes me angry."

"Why does it make you angry?"

"Because I am personally interested."

"Why are you personally interested?"

"Is this a catechism class?" The big

psychologist began to push his chair backward out of the way.

She moved forward.

"No—but why are you personally interested?"

"Because I have known you since you weren't born."

"Is that the only reason?"

"No, that's not the only reason." They stood up facing each other.

"What else is there?"

From somewhere down in among his kisses and his arms she heard him say: "Sublimation," and she whispered back, "You taught me to be a cave woman—you dear old bluff!"

ON BROADWAY AND OFF

Henry Miller, who has scored a triumph in "The Rainbow," tells the following anecdote:

"Is there anything in the world so pathetic as the spectacle of a young man showing his favorite trick with cards to a bunch of girls? The slaughter goes something like this. Let us suppose that the man speaks first:

"I used to know a clever trick with cards. If you like, I'll try to show it to you while we're waiting. Miss Margaret, will you please choose a card from this pack?"

"I am to choose? Which card do I take?"

"Any one you like."

"But how can I tell, when you show me only the backs of the cards and the backs are all exactly alike?"

"That's it. You just choose one at random."

"Oh, that's the way? But is that fair? Well, I'll choose. I've got the jack of hearts."

"Oh, oh! You mustn't tell me the card you pick. That's what I'm supposed to tell you, you know. Put it back into the deck and choose another."

"Why can't I keep this one? I can remember it better."

"Yes, but then there wouldn't be any trick. You see, you are to take a card

that I don't see, and then I'm to find out the one you looked at."

"Oh! You couldn't do that! Well, I pick this one."

"Very well. Now look at it and put it back into the pack."

"What part of the pack shall I put it in?"

"Anywhere you wish."

"But how can you tell what card it is if you don't know where I put it? Well, there it goes."

"Now take the deck and shuffle it. Now give it to me. Presto—there! Is this the card you chose?"

"Oh, dear—I don't know. I forgot to look and see which one I took. Does that make any difference? I should think the trick would be better if I didn't know. Oh, look! Here's Helen, and now there are enough to play bridge. Helen, you should have been here sooner. Mr. Smith has been showing us the most wonderful tricks with cards."

Tully Marshall, the clever actor, gives a study in self-revelation, truly delightful:

"Children," said the teacher, instructing the class in composition, "you should not attempt any flights of fancy; simply be yourselves and write what is in you. Do not imitate any other person's writ-

ings nor draw inspiration from outside sources.'

"As a result of this advice one bright lad turned in the following: 'We should not attempt any flights of fancy, but write what is in us. In me there is my stommick, lungs, hart, liver, two apples, one piece of pie, one stick of lemon candy and my dinner.'"

' Here's a good story related by Robert Edeson, the popular actor:

"An aged country couple, on the urgent invitation of a grandson who lived in the city, were on for a visit. The grandson's wife was very anxious that the first meal should be one which the aged couple would enjoy after their long ride in the train, and accordingly the table groaned under its burden of good things to eat.

"In the course of the repast she noticed several times that the old man seemed to be making little progress with the meal.

"'What is the matter, Grandfather,' she asked, 'don't you like my dinner?'

"'No, no, my dear,' mumbled the old man, 'it isn't that. Only I've a pickled onion in my mouth, and I hain't got but one tooth left, so it's harder'n Sam Hill to catch it, it's so lively. Just rest easy a spell till I git a holt on it and I'll be all right!'"

"This defendant was scarcely 'Within the Law,'" asserts Jane Cowl, the beautiful actress appearing in the play of the above title.

"Once out in Nebraska a man went to protest against his real estate assessment, and one of the things of which he

particularly complained was assessing a goat at twenty-five dollars. He claimed that a goat was not real property in the legal sense of the word, and should not be assessed. One of the assessors, a pleasing-faced old man, obligingly said that he could go upstairs with him and they would look over the rules and regulations and see what could be done.

"They looked over the rules and finally the old man asked:

"'Does your goat run loose on this road?'

"'Well, sometimes,' said the other, wondering what the penalty was for that dreadful offense.

"'Does he butt?' again queried the old man.

"'Yes,' answered the owner; 'he butts.'

"'Well,' said the old man, 'this rule says "tax all property running and abutting on the highway." I don't see that I can do anything for you. Good day, sir.'"

"Making up" has a variety of meanings, according to Christie MacDonald, who has made a decided hit in "Sweethearts."

"There had been a lovers' quarrel, and it was his first visit in two weeks.

"'I guess you know there was a difference between your sister and myself?' he ventured, trying to pump the little sister.

"'Yes, indeed,' responded the latter, without hesitation.

"'Well—er—do you think Clara will make up when she comes down?'

"'Little Bessie leaned over nearer and whispered:

"'She is upstairs making up now.'"



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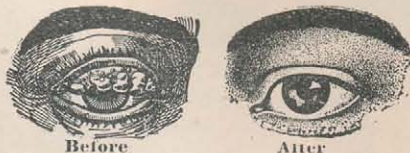
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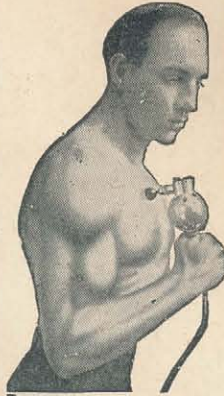
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