TELL SOMEBODY ELSE HOW GOOD IT IS

LOVE STORY

EVERY WEEK MAGAZINE DEC. 18, 1926

ILLUSTRATED 15 CENTS

Vivian Grey,
Georgette MacMillan
and others

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The next Love Story Magazine will be on all news stands December 25th

Vivian Grey's New Serial: *"WHOSE DAUGHTER?"*

begins next week in Love Story Magazine. It is a tale thrilling with love and pathos and tense with mystery and intrigue. Don't fail to read the first installment of this wonderful love story by Vivian Grey next week.

"BORN FOR THE STAGE," Georgette MacMillan's good serial, will be continued in the next issue of LOVE STORY. If you like to know what goes on behind the scenes in the hearts and lives of actors and actresses, "Born for the Stage" will thrill you.

GLADYS thought she was solving her difficulties when she borrowed money from a loan company in order to pay her debts. But she found herself worse off than ever—the interest was so high that she could never expect to pay back the loan. She was just about to give up in despair when a young Westerner stepped in and settled things with the loan merchant. Don't miss "Love's Everywhere," by Margaret Gibbons MacGill. It will appear in LOVE STORY next week.

THOUGHTS of Christmas! Are they happy ones with plenty of friends, or are they lonely ones, lacking any glad anticipation? Babs was one of the lonely ones! She had no lover who would send her a present like her sisters had. It was hopeless not having a man at Christmas! She hated herself, and of course she would never get a man that way! But Fate was kind to her. Read about the strange way she found one in "Babs' Harbor of Love," by Violet Gordon, in next week's issue.

JULIET was the plain sister, the one who always had to stay at home and take care of the younger children while her pretty sister Margaret got all the good times. But when an old friend of their mother's invited Juliet to come and visit her, she made up her mind that this was her chance. She would no longer be the dull, plain sister; she would be sparkling and witty. How did she accomplish this and what happened when she did? Read "On the Eve of Her Triumph," by Rhea Jewett, next week.

RICHARD ELLIOT believed that if you loved well enough and long enough, your love would hear you and answer, no matter what barrier separated you. Did he love well enough? Read "Winged Hearts" next week and see.

Love Story Magazine

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Volume XLII DECEMBER 18, 1926 Number 6

TENDER and TRUE

by Ethel Donoher

WOMEN can't be clever when they're in love," Sally Levington asserted, rearranging the pillow at her back and helping herself to another caramel.

Dorothy Roberts, who was seated beside her on the couch, looked thoughtful.

"Yes," she agreed, "women do seem to lose their knack of handling men when they fall in love with one of them. Why, I wonder?"

There was a little silence.

"Well, I presume it's because everything a man does, or doesn't do, matters so terribly to a woman. It's always easy to act wisely toward a man who couldn't really hurt you, no matter what he did."

Dorothy sighed.

"Yes, I suppose so. But Bee is so tactless. She seems to go out of her way to wear Douglas' patience threadbare. I'm so afraid she'll lose him."

"Oh, don't say that! It would be too awful if anything came between them. They're both so terribly in love. That's the trouble. The more in love one is, the more perfection one expects."

"Yes, I know, but in this case it seems so absurd. Beatrice and Doug are both unusually fine people. Why can't they be satisfied with each other just as they are?"

Sally considered this, gazing reflectively into the open fire.

"I imagine," she said at last, "it's because they're always expecting one an-

other to behave in a certain way at a certain time. That's awfully trying. For instance, when Doug came in from Boston the other night I was over at Bee's. There were four of us in the living room, playing bridge. Bee was playing the hand and that round determined the rubber. It wouldn't have been fair to her partner if she had jumped up and gone out into the hall to meet Doug. We were all deeply interested in the outcome of that hand. If Bee had left in the middle of it, she couldn't have remembered what had been played. But Doug had evidently expected her to run out and meet him. And because she didn't, he sulked all the evening."

"How do you know that was why he sulked?"

"Because I charged him with it afterward, and he admitted it."

"Oh, dear, what are we to do with them? I didn't think Doug ever behaved like that. I thought, as much as I loved Bee, that it was always her fault when they quarreled."

Sally shook her head.

"No, not always. Doug's unreasonable, too, sometimes. The main trouble with Beatrice is that she makes an issue out of every little thing that she doesn't like. She gets angry and tells Doug what she thinks about it. Then, if he doesn't call her up the next morning, she is so desperately unhappy that she phones him and takes back every little thing she said to make him cross. Do you see how unwise that is? She's continually placing herself in the wrong and apologizing for it."

"Yes, I see. She's making a fearful mistake. It would be better if she overlooked some of Doug's peculiarities, instead of creating situations, and then assuming the blame."

"Exactly," Sally agreed. "It's all right to say you're sorry when you've made a mistake. It's the only decent thing to do. But it's so much simpler not to create situations in the first place. If Bee goes on like this, Douglas will think after a while that no matter what he does Bee will get angry and then say she is sorry. She shouldn't get angry, unless she is sure she has a very good reason for it; then she shouldn't back down. It's undignified and no way to keep Doug in love with her."

Dorothy nodded assent and reached for another caramel.

"I think you're quite right. Isn't there anything you can do to make Bee understand?"

Sally grinned.

"Try to talk to her!" she offered generously. "You know Bee. She'd probably throw a poker at you."

"Oh, no," Dorothy said hastily, "I wouldn't think of trying to tell Bee what to do. But couldn't we do something to help her?"

"What?" laconically, from Sally.

"Oh, dear," Dorothy admitted, "I don't know. But we can't let Beatrice go on blindly, killing Doug's love for her. They had another quarrel last night."

"What about?" Sally looked troubled but interested.

"I don't know," Dorothy told her. "I went over to see her last night and as I entered the hall Douglas brushed past me on his way out, looking mad enough to eat me because he had to say hello. I went on into the living room and found Bee crying. She pretended she wasn't crying when she saw me. Of course, I didn't ask her what the trouble was."

"My heavens!" said Sally, "I never knew any two people to quarrel as much as they do. I hope they've made it up by this time. After all, there's nobody quite like Bee. I couldn't bear to see her really unhappy. I'd do anything on earth for her, and I know you would, too."

While this conversation was taking place in Sally Levington's sitting room,

the girl under discussion was standing by the window in her uncle's library, looking out at the snow-covered streets of Weymouth with very blue and very unhappy eyes.

She was an unusually pretty girl, Beatrice Bromley. Her blue eyes and black hair, her short upper lip, her delicate but impertinent little nose, were gifts from her Irish mother. Her determined little chin, they told her, was like her Uncle Judson's. Uncle Judson was her father's brother, with whom she had lived since her father's death ten years ago. Beatrice adored her uncle. She was glad that at least her chin was like his, but she always felt that her chin hadn't much chance against her Irish heritage.

She was proud of her Irish blood, but she felt that it played tricks with her. It provided so much that was stirring and so little that was peaceful. It illumined and glorified the world or else darkened it until it seemed as though no ray of light could ever break through.

She was resenting her unhappiness, as she stood by the library window, thinking of Douglas Foster.

If only, she told herself helplessly, she didn't love Doug quite so much. If she cared just a little less it would be so much easier, when they quarreled, to wait until he made the first move to make up. As it was, the knowledge that he was angry with her, the fear that he might not come over that night, might even be so angry that he wouldn't come ever again, was a constant, gnawing torture.

Why, she asked fiercely, should she endure it, when all she would have to do would be to go to the telephone and call Douglas up?

But suppose he wouldn't forgive her? Suppose, one of these times when she called him to come back, he shouldn't come? It seemed to Beatrice that icy fingers closed about her throat, about her heart. What a terrible thought! What if she and Doug had quarreled once too often?

What if this should be the time when it would do no good to make the first move herself?

Beatrice whirled about and darted to the telephone.

Breathlessly she gave his number.

"Hello," a masculine voice responded after an interminable wait.

"Hello, D-Douglas," Beatrice returned. "It's Bee."

There was a brief silence; then Douglas asked:

"Don't you think I'd know your voice?"

Beatrice's heart bounded. It was all right. He still loved her. She could tell by his tone.

"Yes," she admitted, "of course I expected you to know my voice. Are you coming over to-night, Doug?"

There was another slight pause. Then:

"Are you sure you want me to come?"

"Yes, goosey, I'm very sure I want you to come. I was horrid last night, wasn't I?" She waited, holding her breath. Would Doug say he had been horrid, too? For, after all, he had started the quarrel by objecting to her very natural friendliness to the brother of an old school friend.

But what Doug said was:

"You're a little torment, Bee, but you're honest and I love you. I love you so much that—oh, well, this is no way to tell you. I'll be over to-night."

Beatrice replaced the receiver and sat looking at the telephone with luminous eyes. Her heart was singing. All was right with her world again. What difference did it make who had originally been to blame? Her quarrel with Douglas was a thing of the past.

He was coming that night to tell her how much he loved her.

This happened a week before Christmas. Invitations were already out for a party Bee was giving on New Year's

Eve. Three days before the party, Sally Levington and Dorothy Roberts stopped to see Beatrice on their way back from an errand. They found her in the living room curled up in a big chair by the fire, crying bitterly.

At sight of her visitors Bee sat up and dabbed ineffectually at her eyes.

"Hello," she said in a small voice. "Come on over by the fire and sit down. Is it very cold out?"

Sally Levington ignored this question. With her usual directness, she took the chair opposite Bee and said accusingly:

"Beatrice Bromley, you've quarreled with Doug again, that's what you've done!"

Bee's lip quivered.

"Y-yes"—reluctantly—"I have. Oh, girls, I'm so unhappy! I want to die."

Dorothy knelt beside Bee's chair and slipped comforting arms around her.

"Oh, my dear," she offered, "can't we do anything to help you?"

"No," came back in a muffled voice, "nobody can help me."

Sally's eyes, fixed upon her hostess, were bright with tears, but she spoke dogmatically:

"Why do you quarrel with Doug all the time? You know perfectly well it's almost always your fault, Bee. He's so mad about you."

Beatrice sat erect and stared her resentment.

"And I suppose I'm not mad about him!"

"Of course you are," Sally said more gently, "but the difficulty is that you're so unwise, dear. Just because you do love Douglas so much you expect him to be entirely perfect. If he does the least little thing you don't like you make such a fuss about it. Then there's a quarrel and you're fearfully unhappy. Don't you see what I mean?"

"Yes—in a way. But Douglas hasn't any right to object to Bob Garret dropping in here to see me occasionally. It's absurd. Bob's sister, Helen, is one of my dearest friends. You know, I go out there to visit her every summer. And I've known Bob for ages. He's never been the least little bit in love with me, or I with him. When he came here to take a position in Weymouth, Helen wrote and asked me to be nice to him. I've introduced him to everybody, but after all, you're strangers to him. He feels at home with me and likes to drop in occasionally for an hour or so. Now why should Douglas object to that? It isn't fair."

"No," Sally admitted, "it isn't. And if you give Doug time to think about it, he'll realize he's been unreasonable."

"Give him time to think about it!" Bee's eyes were wide with amazement. "But look how miserable I'd be while he was thinking it over."

"Not half so miserable," was the firm response, "as you will be if you go on like this. Doug will continue to do things of that sort just as long as he thinks you can't stand being alienated from him. If he does anything bad enough to make you angry, then stay angry until he admits he was wrong. Whoever is to blame should be the one to say so."

Beatrice considered this. She looked very young, very uncertain, and very forlorn.

"You may be right," she said at last. "I presume you are. But I—well, I couldn't do that. I can't bear the uncertainty. It's just agony, waiting to hear from Doug and not knowing whether I ever will hear again. I wanted to call him up this morning because I knew he was going to Sansborough to-day and wouldn't be back until New Year's Eve, but I didn't call. I was still too angry. Now I've written to him. He'll get the letter to-morrow. But he was so very angry this time, I'm afraid he won't even answer."

Sally and Dot exchanged glances. There was a moment's silence.

"I suppose," Sally asked Beatrice, "that we couldn't possibly induce you not to send that letter?"

"Indeed you couldn't. I'm only afraid it won't do any good."

"Oh," said Sally impatiently, "really, Bee, I could shake you! Can't you see that Doug is bound to realize he was unfair if you give him a chance? And if he can't realize it, you'll be better off without him. What sort of life would you have with a man who isn't big enough ever to admit he was wrong? But Doug isn't so small as that. In fact he's unusually fine, when he gets a chance to be. He adores you, and won't enjoy this quarrel any more than you will. Just do nothing for a few days, and everything will come out right."

"But, Sally, I couldn't! Think of my party New Year's Eve. How could I go on preparing for that, not knowing whether Douglas was even coming? And suppose he shouldn't come? How could I ever go through with it, smiling and talking with all those people! Oh, no, really I couldn't. I must send the letter, at least do all that I can. Will you girls mail it on your way home? You pass right by the post office."

It was this request that fired Sally's imagination. She turned to Dot with half-frightened determination when, about fifteen minutes later, the two girls were walking briskly through the twilight in the direction of the post office.

"Do you know," she began, "I have half a notion not to mail that letter."

"Not mail it!" Dorothy looked horrified. "Why, we must."

"I know we ought to, but after all, is it the right thing to do? I mean, is it right for us to insist on being strictly honorable, instead of thinking more about Bee's future happiness? We both know that sending this letter to Doug is the worst thing she could possibly do. This time he was entirely to blame for their quarrel. How could Bee tell Helen Garret's brother that she didn't want him to come to the house? It isn't as though she went out with him, or entertained him in preference to Douglas. It's all ridiculous. And we know Doug well enough to be very sure he'll be ashamed of himself, if Bee gives him a chance to realize how he's behaved. If she sends that letter to him now it will make her look fearfully undignified; besides, Doug will think he can do anything he pleases and that she will coax him back. They can't ever be happy, going on like this."

"No, they couldn't. I quite agree with you there. Still, to keep the letter from Doug——"

"We'd keep it only until New Year's Day. If he doesn't come to his senses before then I'll take the letter to him and tell him I didn't mail it because I wanted to give him a chance to behave decently of his own accord. And I'll tell Bee, too, just what I've done. I'd rather have her angry with me than unhappy about Doug all the rest of her life."

"Oh, dear," said Dorothy, "I don't know what's right and what's wrong! Maybe you do know best, Sally."

And so the letter was not mailed. The two conspirators were busy for the next few days and saw nothing of Beatrice. On New Year's Eve they went over to the party, eager and half fearful to discover the result of their strategy. Even if Douglas came back of his own accord, Sally realized that Beatrice would soon discover he had not received her letter, but she was ready to take her medicine.

All she asked for was the desired result. She intended, if Doug did appear at the party, to draw Bee aside at once and confess everything. In that event, Bee would never have to let him know she had written the letter.

"Suppose Doug's here, now?" Dorothy quavered, as she rang the door bell. "Suppose he came back early, and Bee has asked him if he received her letter?

If she has, we might just as well have mailed it. He'll know she tried to get him back."

"He won't be here." Sally tried to sound positive. "Bee said he wouldn't get back until to-night and the only train from Sansborough arrives at eight forty. It's only quarter past eight now."

They found Beatrice in the living room, her eyes unusually bright and her cheeks burning with color. A number of the guests had arrived and the dancing had commenced.

Douglas was not present.

"It's all right," Sally whispered to Dot. "Doug hasn't written. I didn't expect him to do that. But he'll come."

"Oh," breathed Dorothy, "I do hope so! Just look at Bee. She's trying desperately hard to be gay, poor darling, but I'll bet anything that she's fearfully unhappy. Do you really think we did the right thing, Sally?"

"I know we did. Isn't it better for her to be unhappy for a few days than for all the rest of her life?"

At this point Fred Halworth claimed Sally for the next dance. Soon Dorothy, too, drifted off in the arms of the boy she liked best, but the eyes of both girls were turned frequently and anxiously upon the living-room doorway. Would Douglas come; oh, *would* he?

As the evening wore on and the grandfather's clock in the hall struck half past nine, Sally began fervently to wish that she had mailed that letter.

And for Beatrice the evening was a torturing maze of laughing faces, into which she must laugh back. Sally was quite right; she had not heard from Douglas. Supposing, of course, that he had received her letter, she was living through the time she had always feared —the time when she had called to Douglas, and he had not come.

If he did not come to-night, she told herself, he would never come again. They had planned this party together. He had shown so much interest and they had expected to have such a good time.

But the last train had been in from Sansborough long ago, and he hadn't come!

These thoughts were a running accompaniment to the laughing remarks Beatrice made to her partners, as she danced on and on.

As the hours passed her eyes grew, if anything, still brighter, her cheeks burned feverishly with color.

But her heart ached.

It was almost midnight when Beatrice's Aunt Caroline asked Janice Walton, a newcomer in Weymouth, to sing.

"I hear that you sing the old-fashioned songs very charmingly, my dear," said Aunt Caroline. "Won't you let us hear you?"

Obligingly Janice went to the piano. Beatrice was standing with Bob Garret near one of the windows. Bob was talking animatedly, but Beatrice was looking out at the dimly lighted streets, wondering how soon after midnight she might hope for the departure of her guests. They had been invited to welcome the New Year.

A rich contralto voice floated through the room. At the singer's first words Beatrice stiffened; then she sank down upon the window seat, turned her head away from Bob and the others, and stared blindly out.

Janice was singing:

"Could ye come back to me, Douglas, Douglas,
In the old likeness that I knew,
I would be so faithful, so loving, Douglas,
Douglas, Douglas, tender and true.

"Never a scornful word should pain you,
I'd smile as sweet as angels do,
As long as your smile shone on me, Douglas,
Douglas, Douglas, tender and true.

"I was not half worthy of you, Douglas,
Not half worthy the likes of you.
Now all men beside you are shadows, Douglas,
Douglas, Douglas, tender and true."

As the song ended Beatrice arose.

"Excuse me a minute, will you, Bob?" she asked.

"Surely. But are you ill, Bee? You're as white as a ghost."

Beatrice laughed. The sound appeared to her to have come from a long way off.

"Certainly I'm not ill. I just want to see about supper."

To the singer she said: "That was lovely, Miss Walton. Please don't stop. I'll be right back to hear you."

She slipped through a doorway near her and entered the library. There she stood motionless, her hands pressed to her throbbing temples.

Two figures came toward the door opposite her, and crossed the library. Sally and Dot had followed her.

"Beatrice," Sally whispered, "where are you? Oh, darling, don't cry; please don't."

"I'm not crying," said Beatrice quietly. "I don't think I shall ever cry again."

"You didn't hear from Doug?"

"No, he didn't answer my letter."

For a few seconds no one spoke. Sally broke the silence.

"I'm going to make a confession, Bee. I never mailed that letter to Doug. But now I'll take it to him and tell him just why he didn't receive it before."

The silence this time was intense. It seemed to Dorothy that no one breathed, there in the darkness of the library.

"You didn't mail my letter to Douglas?" Bee asked finally. "Why not?"

Sally told her. She gave all her reasons, but they sounded less convincing than they had before.

"Are you very angry, Bee?" she concluded. "Won't you try to realize that I did it just because I wanted to help you?"

Beatrice laughed. It was a taut, harsh laugh, entirely mirthless.

"It's so funny," she explained. "You didn't mail Doug's letter because you thought I shouldn't call him back and yet this was one of the times when I couldn't have expected him to come unless I did call him. I didn't tell you everything the other day, because you always say it is all my fault when I quarrel with Doug."

"What didn't you tell us?"

"Well, I was so angry with Douglas for resenting my friendliness to Bob that I told him I hated him, that I never wanted to see him again, and that I wouldn't marry him for anything on earth."

"You told Doug that?" Dorothy gasped. "Oh, Sally, what have we done?"

"You've kept the letter from him," Beatrice answered dryly, "which told him that I didn't mean one word I said. And now you won't have a chance to see and talk with Doug for three months. He was going away on a trip to-morrow. Undoubtedly, he's gone straight from Sansborough. I don't even have his address, and his people, as you know, are in Florida."

"Oh, my dear!" Sally's voice trembled. "I must get in touch with him somehow."

"Beatrice," Mrs. Bromley called from the living room, "come here, dear. It's almost midnight. We're going to send your uncle out with his bag."

"What does she mean?" Dorothy asked.

"Oh, it's nothing much," Beatrice explained wearily. "Aunt Caroline believes in the old superstition which declares that a man, carrying baggage, must be the first to enter the house on New Year's Day. He is supposed to bring happiness and prosperity with him. So every year we pack Uncle Judson's bag, send him around the block, let him in after the clock has struck twelve, and greet him effusively. Uncle Judson doesn't believe in it, of course, but he's such a lamb he'd do anything to please Aunt Caroline."

"Beatrice," her aunt called again, "we're going to send your uncle——"

"Yes, dear," Bee replied, "I'm coming."

"Just a minute!" Sally begged. "We must decide what to do."

"Oh, don't talk any more about Doug now! I couldn't bear it."

Then Sally and Dot were alone in the library.

"Well," the former exclaimed unsteadily, "I'm the world's prize idiot, that much is certain! It isn't your fault, Dot. You wanted to mail the letter. I'm entirely to blame, and I should have had more sense. For one thing, I should have remembered that when people confide in you they rarely tell you everything. They tell just as much as they want to tell and no more. For that reason I should have realized it was probable that I didn't know enough about the situation to manage it."

Dorothy looked harrowed; she was almost in tears.

"Oh, dear, it's terrible, isn't it? But, after all, why did Bee say all those awful things to Doug, if she didn't mean them and would have to take them back?"

"Because she was very unwise," Sally replied promptly. "But she was no more unwise in her way than I was in mine. If anything, I was worse, because I thought I was so darn clever. Well, I've learned one good lesson this night. I'll never again try to manage anybody's affairs, not even if they invite me to."

Meanwhile, Judson Bromley was preparing for his yearly pilgrimage around the block, to bring health and prosperity to his house by reëntering it.

"If a woman should come in first—this year, I mean—it would be fearfully bad luck," his wife explained to their visitors. She added: "Of course you children think I'm a superstitious old woman, but I can't help it."

There were laughing protestations to the effect that they considered Mrs. Bromley a superstitious but by no means old woman. Then Beatrice went to the door with her Uncle Judson.

"Turn out the lights," Mrs. Bromley called after them. "And wait there until your uncle returns, Beatrice. A young girl must kiss him in the darkened hallway, you know."

Smilingly Judson Bromley pressed the electric switch, and the old hall lay in deep shadows.

"It's fearfully cold out, dear," Beatrice warned him. "Do you have your muffler on?"

"I have. It's wrapped around good and tight. Stand over there by the radiator, honey. We can't have you catching cold, standing here waiting to greet the New Year."

Beatrice tried to smile at him; remembered that it was dark and that he couldn't see her smile, even if she achieved one. She was conscious of a sudden, almost uncontrollable longing to throw her arms about her Uncle Judson's neck and cling to him. But if she did that she might cry—despite her assurance to Sally that she would never cry again. And she was certain that if she began to weep she couldn't stop until the storm was over. That would deeply distress Uncle Judson.

When the door had closed behind him, Beatrice sank into a high-backed chair, locked her hands tightly together, set her lips firmly, and waited.

It would soon be over, this party which she and Doug had planned with such high hearts. Oh, she mustn't think of things like that; not, at any rate, until she was alone in her room!

Her heart hurt too much.

The bell pealed sharply. Beatrice sprang to her feet, and opened the door. It must, she concluded, have been too cold for Uncle Judson to go around the block. He had been gone only a minute or two. A tall man, carrying a dark

Beatrice started, drew back and stared up at the man before her. "Douglas!" she whispered. "It's you!"

leather bag, entered the darkened hall, and closed the door behind him.

Beatrice flung herself into his arms.

"Happy New Year, dear," she said unsteadily, and added to herself: "Don't you cry! Don't you dare cry! You'll spoil Uncle Judson's New Year if you do."

"Happy New Year, darling," a deep and totally unexpected voice responded close to her ear.

Beatrice started, drew back, and stared up at the man before her as though she scarcely dared to believe her ears.

"Douglas!" she whispered. "It's you!"

"Of course it is. Who did you think you were greeting so effusively, young lady?"

His voice was tender.

"I thought you were Uncle Judson," Bee stammered, scarcely conscious of what she was saying. "You know how he always goes out on New Year's Eve to bring luck and happiness to the house."

"Yes, I remember. Well, I beat him to it this time; got in before him."

"But Douglas, I thought you were angry with me."

"I was," he assured her soberly. "Then I thought things over and decided I had behaved very silly about Bob Garret. No wonder you resented it. But no matter what I deserved, you didn't mean any of those things you said, did you, darling?" This last anxiously, as his arms again closed about her.

"Oh, no," said Beatrice fervently, "I didn't mean a word I said. I was horrid, simply horrid. Oh, Douglas, I love you so!"

"And I love you so!" Douglas' voice was husky. "I've been so unhappy these last few days I've wanted to jump in the river. Oh, Bee, if I should lose you. I don't know what I should ever do."

"You won't," she assured him earnestly. "Don't worry about that for a minute. I love you too much to ever let you lose me."

"But I shall worry. I shall worry, now, until we're married."

As his lips clung to hers Beatrice closed her eyes—and marveled. Douglas had come back to her and without receiving her letter! Why, at rock bottom he was like the Douglas in the song, tender and true! Never, never would she be unkind to him again. But possibly it would be just as well not to tell him she had written him that last letter.

"We've both made mistakes, dear," she said softly. "Let's not make any more. Love is such a beautiful thing. Let's make sure that we keep it with us for ever and ever."

The grandfather's clock in the hall struck twelve. Somewhere in the distance a whistle blew.

"For ever and ever," Douglas repeated soberly. "Let's make a New Year's resolution, darling, not to get angry at each other any more. That's what causes the trouble. People who love as we do should always think how much our love means to us before we get angry."

"Of course we should, and I promise you that I will, Douglas, darling. Oh" —as the doorbell pealed again—"that must be Uncle Judson! Let me go. I must let him in."

She gave him another kiss and sped toward the door. "Maybe his coming will bring prosperity to the house, but it was your coming that brought happiness to me!"

The Girl Who Was Always Left Out

Margaret Gibbons MacGill

FOUR men—two young, one middle aged and fat, and the other quite an old man—jumped suddenly to their feet, and the girl who was strap-hanging turned her head to see who the beautiful newcomer might be. There was not the slightest doubt, of course, that it was somebody young and pretty, and exquisitely dressed—probably somebody who could easily afford a taxi and had no need whatsoever to travel by trolley, thought Edith Burr, a trifle bitterly. It was excusable, for she was very tired, having worked late at the office every night for the last ten days, trying to cope with the rush of orders.

But it was not a pretty young girl who had aroused such gallantry in four male breasts; it was a frail, sweet little old lady, the kind of charming personality that girls of to-day might read of or hear about from their mothers, but seldom see.

She was of the Victorian period, from the little ostrich tips on her fine, black, velvet poke bonnet, to the buckles on her dainty little shoes. A black satin quilted coat kept the dear little lady warm, but Edith could see the flowered silk dress beneath its hem, when she sat down in the nearest of the seats. The faint, sweet smell of lavender which surrounded her seemed so entirely fitting that a smile crept into Edith's pretty, but tired blue eyes.

It wanted two days to Christmas, and the old lady's arms were filled with parcels—evidently presents for little stockings, to judge by the shape, size, and the decorations on the boxes.

"We shall have a white Christmas after all, I think, and I trust it will be a merry one for everybody," smiled the old lady, as she rose to get off the car.

Everybody, including the conductor, did something to make the progress of the dainty passenger easier, and when she finally disappeared in the gray dusk, conversation became general, tongues chattered, and eyes brightened beneath the most potent of all spells—the charm and graciousness of a womanly woman.

Edith Burr sank into the seat which had just been vacated, and a rather wistful expression showed in her pale

little heart-shaped face as she allowed her mind to follow the old lady home.

She closed her big, black-lashed, blue eyes for a second and mentally visualized a homelike, fire-lit room, with possibly the old lady's son or daughter, but certainly there would be merry, laughing children, who would crowd around her, loving her, petting her, and making her feel—oh, the bliss, the wonder of such a feeling!—that she was essential to their happiness, an important part of their lives.

Edith was obliged to open her blue eyes quickly, for in another second a tear which had gathered all unknowingly in the corner would have trickled down her nose, and that would have been a nice thing to have happened in a public conveyance.

But Edith was made for love, and all the sweet, kindly, generous things of life. She was not overwhelmingly pretty—young men seldom gave up their seats to her—but such beauty as she possessed did not have much chance in a cheap, black gabardine frock and coat, and a velvet tam which hid most of her hair. But it was all that she could afford after her mother's funeral expenses had been met out of the insurance money.

Her mother's death four months ago had left her a pitiably lonely little craft on the sea of life. She was an only child, and her mother being widowed and delicate, she was her constant companion, so that she had hardly any friends of her own age. Anyway, the doctor and the druggist between them absorbed every spare penny of Mrs. Burr's money, so that there was nothing left for little pleasures like moving pictures or the theater with other young girls.

Such a life had rendered Edith very shy, and now that she was all alone in a boarding house, she felt more than ever out of things. So because she felt that way, she was left out—almost invariably—whenever plans were made for little outings.

For instance, two sisters, typists, like herself, had said, not knowing they were overheard, "Oh, don't count Miss Burr in for the dance. She can't bring a boy, and her clothes are simply awful!"

Edith had cried herself to sleep that night, and when the morning came and she looked at her own wistful, pleading little image in the glass, her tremulous lips asked herself the question: "Shall I always be the girl who is left out?"

Conversation was unusually animated around the boarding-house dinner table that night.

An air of cheery expectation seemed to surround everybody, and Mrs. Stebbins, the usually fretful landlady, actually made a couple of jokes during the course of the meal!

"I hope you've all made your arrangements for Christmas, and the day after, because I want to give Katie"—Katie was the little maid-of-all-work—"I want to give Katie the chance of spending her Christmas at home. Of course, I shall be going to friends," finished Mrs. Stebbins, casually. She looked expectantly at her boarders.

Immediately there was a little hubbub expressing approval of the arrangements for Katie.

"I am going down to the country to my married daughter's," announced Mr. Cobb, who was a widower and had an auctioneer's business.

"We are spending Christmas Day with our friends'—gentlemen friends'—people, and the next day all the lot of us are to meet and go to a dance," giggled one of the sisters who had been responsible for poor Edith's tears of humiliation and loneliness.

Everybody had somewhere to go; everybody but Edith was looking forward to the holiday.

It was Mrs. Stebbins who noticed that she alone had not spoken.

"What are your plans, Miss Burr?" she questioned, a trifle sharply.

Edith blushed and stammered as, with every eye in the room upon her, she explained in a low voice that she had not made any plans for Christmas, and intended to have a quiet rest.

"But please don't spoil Katie's holiday," she pleaded, anxiously. "I can get my own meals," she added, with a little smile that, in its attempt at brightness, was infinitely more pathetic than an outburst of tears.

Mrs. Stebbins made a sound which is best described by the word "snort," and her voice was several degrees more acrid as she announced that she would leave a chop out for Christmas Day and a piece of cold ham for Edith's next day's dinner.

One or two of the boarders, with their minds on their own Christmas dinner of turkey and plum pudding, looked rather pityingly in Edith's direction, but, as they told themselves with logic, as brief as it was decisive, it was not their fault that the girl had nowhere to go, and anyhow they were to be guests themselves.

Edith was sitting in the drawing-room after supper reading an evening paper—the others had gone out to do some late shopping—when the advertisement that was destined to transmute the dull gray of her life into living gold, claimed her attention.

It was not a very unusual advertisement, considering the time of year.

Wanted. A few bright young people, either sex, to join others in a jolly Christmas party and dance. Plain or fancy dress; latter preferred. Tickets $5.00 each. Apply Mrs. Edwards, 89 Somerset Avenue, Burlington.

Edith dropped the paper, and, looking into the heart of the fire, allowed her imagination to play around the advertisement.

As a child, she had often amused herself with "pictures in the fire." As she gazed deeper into the glowing coals, she seemed to see a gayly decked room, a party of jolly young people dancing, and, surrounded by a crowd of laughing faces, herself as gay as the youngest of them, her little old lady of the trolley car.

Just why she should flash back into Edith's mind at that moment it was impossible to say, but she did, and in a few seconds she was linked up with a certain box which contained all sorts of treasures that had belonged to her grandmother, which her mother had begged her to keep.

Edith sat bolt upright, her blue eyes shining, and her breath coming and going in little gasps at the sheer audacity of the idea, that, born solely of her fireside dreaming, had suddenly flashed into her brain.

Edith was only twenty, and, with all the passionate ardor of her youth, she longed to be in the midst of things, to be gay and companionable—in a word, the poor little thing was sick to the soul with utter, stark loneliness.

It seemed as if her small feet possessed wings as they raced upstairs to rummage among the contents of the antique box beneath her bed.

"If I go as myself in this old black frock, I shall be pushed into a corner as usual, but it will be the finest fun going to dress up as an old lady."

To the last day in each of our lives, there lingers the love of "dressing up," else why are fancy dress dances so popular?

Edith found a long black cape which had evidently served her grandmother as a winter garment, for it was warmly lined, and when the hem was turned up, would do splendidly for traveling. A stiff little gray silk frock, that "stood by itself," had a pair of long silk lace mitts wrapped in tissue paper tucked away in one of the sleeves. Edith's blue eyes opened wider when she caught sight of them.

"Just as if grannie knew," she told the empty room, speaking aloud in her excitement.

"Of course it would never have done to have gone with bare hands," she murmured, spreading her small hands in front of her face, and smiling as she surveyed them.

With one or two inexpensive additions, Edith found that she could easily muster up the clothes for the character that she wanted to represent; but her face sobered and some of the youthful gayety vanished as she remembered that she would require a wig, and some of the stuff that actors and actresses use on their faces to make them look older for certain parts. Edith knew all about it because she had once acted the part of an old woman in a play at school. Her wig had been hired, but she did not know how much it had cost.

It was only just half past eight, and shops were keeping open late for the holidays. Nine o'clock saw Edith talking across the counter of a theatrical costumer's shop to an obviously interested young man, who at length agreed to let her have the loan of a white wig for one night for a dollar and a quarter.

A tube of the paint which was to make a few lines here and there on Edith's fresh young face in order to help out with the illusion cost twenty-five cents, and as she counted out her money from her purse, her heart seemed to miss a beat with excitement, for it seemed as if the adventure had really started!

"There's a telegram for you, Miss Burr; come this afternoon. Hope it's something nice," remarked Edith's landlady quite pleasantly, when she reached home on Christmas Eve.

She stood by, curiosity in every line of her features, while Edith opened the orange envelope, which contained an answer to her inquiry as to whether she could join the party.

"With pleasure. Starting at four o'clock," it ran, and then looking up and catching sight of her landlady's expectant face Edith remarked: "I shan't be in for dinner after all, tomorrow, Mrs. Stebbins. I'm going to a party."

A smile of unalloyed delight lit up the pleasant face of Edith's hostess—an enterprising woman with a love for young people who had conceived the idea of taking a hall and giving a subscription party—as the daintiest, most charming of old ladies appeared in the doorway.

"Just the touch that the party needed to complete it!" she whispered to her husband, who was winding up the phonograph for the dancing, which was just about to begin.

Edith looked exquisite in her demure gray silk frock with long gray mitts, a cap adorned with lavender ribbons on her white wig, and the daintiest little lace cross-over shawl pinned over her bodice.

The blue eyes shining with excitement, and the softness of the little red lips, gave a clew to her youth, but for the rest, she was made up so splendidly that everybody at first was deceived.

"Won't you take this chair, madam? It's by far the most comfortable in the room," said one tall, young man, drawing an armchair near to the blazing log fire.

He stood at the back deferentially while Edith settled herself, inwardly laughing, and experiencing for the first time the pleasure of being fussed over and waited upon.

Everybody rushed to do something for "sweet little Miss Burr," as the girls called her. One brought a footstool while another placed cushions at her back, and for ten minutes all the adulation that she received went to Edith's head like a stimulant, warming her love-starved heart, and making her feel that, after all, there was a little corner in the world for such as herself,

All the adulation that she received went to Edith's head like a stimulant, warming her love-starved heart.

who possessed neither home nor relatives to call her own.

"You are not an actress, are you, Miss Burr? I think that your make-up is wonderful," smiled Edith's hostess, who had put her quaint little guest on her right hand at dinner.

Edith smiled, highly delighted at the compliment.

"Oh, no, I'm a typist. These clothes belonged to my grandmother," she explained, in her young, eager voice.

It was marvelous how the knowledge that she was looking her best, and feeling "a part of things" instead of "outside" the fun, gave Edith confidence, freeing her shy tongue and sharpening her wits, until gradually she became the center of attraction at her end of the table.

Nobody was more surprised than Edith herself at the gay sallies that fell from her lips. The jokes and stories that she had read and laughed at were all remembered, and told for the benefit of the company; and afterwards, at the dance, she was hardly allowed to sit down before she was asked for the next.

Edith was sitting out one dance because she had begged to be allowed to do so for a rest, when Joe Wilson came across the room and took a seat beside her.

He was a fine, tall, handsome young fellow, probably twenty-six or seven, with keen gray eyes, and a look of the open air about him which made an instant appeal to Edith.

His voice, when he spoke, sounded a

trifle shy, and the sound did not belie the fact, for to Joe Wilson, who was an only child, girls were something of a mystery, and he never felt "at home" with even the gayest of them, as he did with other men.

But there was something irresistible in the sweet picture that Edith made, sitting by the leaping log fire, her bright, happy little face, beneath the snow-white wig, in such striking contrast to her demure, old-fashioned garments.

"I hope you don't mind my speaking to you," he commenced, a little shyly, but Edith gave him the brightest of smiles and said:

"Why, of course not! We are at the same party, aren't we? You have only just come?" she rattled on, more to make conversation than to gain information, for she had seen him come in only a few moments before.

"Yes. I was driving until half an hour ago, and then I had to go home and clean myself up, of course," he explained.

Edith wondered slightly why any one with a home should want to come out to a party given to lonely, unattached people. The men in her boarding house always used the term "diggings" in referring to the roof over their heads.

"You've been motoring?" she asked, thinking how glorious a spin would be, along the hard, white roads, with the keen air whistling in one's ears.

He nodded.

"Yes. I own a taxi, and I'm hoping to own another next year. I've been driving people to parties as hard as I can ever since ten o'clock this morning. But there's nothing doing between nine and twelve, so I thought I'd kill time here. It's tough not having anywhere to go on Christmas night," he added, and there was something in the way he said it that caused Edith's ready sympathy to kindle.

"Do you live in a boarding house, too? I thought I heard you talk about 'going home' just now, that's all," said Edith, in the soft, gentle voice that was one of her greatest charms.

"Oh, no. I've got a nice little flat overlooking Durant Park, but it isn't a bit like home, now. You see, I lost my mother six months ago, and that was why I simply couldn't sit at home to-night," he said sadly.

Then, for the first time, Edith noticed that her companion was wearing a black tie.

Her blue eyes were swimming with tears, and her soft voice expressed all the sympathy that throbbed in her warm, understanding little heart as she said:

"I know. I lost my mother, too, only four months ago. I am living alone in a boarding house, and I should have been there to-night if I had not chanced to see the advertisement of this party."

"Is that so?"

That was all that Joe said, and then a silence fell between the quaintly dressed, lonely girl, and the young man who was equally lonely. But there was nothing strained or embarrassing in the silence. That fellow-feeling that makes kin of all mankind lay between them, and Joe Wilson began to feel glad that he had not yielded to the impulse to overhaul his taxi rather than look in at the party.

Suddenly the dance ended, and happy, laughing couples, some with masks on their faces and colored balloons on strings floating aloft, began to drift past them, throwing careless, jovial comments as they went. It was Joe who broke the spell.

"I say, we mustn't allow ourselves to get down in the mouth to-night. Let's dance, shall we?" as the phonograph started a lively fox trot.

"No, you don't steal my partner! Come along, Miss Burr. This is our dance," and a young man claimed Edith

and carried her off beneath Joe's very nose.

They had no further opportunity for talk that night, until just before twelve, when the party was breaking up.

Then, as Joe Wilson was helping Edith into her grandmother's wrap, he told her of a little plan.

"I've asked half a dozen of the boys and girls that are here to-night to come to the flat to tea to-morrow afternoon. Will you come and pour for us? And —er—I wonder if you'd help me to buy the things in the morning? I could call for you in the old bus any time you name," suggested the handsome young taxi-driver, and then waited eagerly for Edith's reply.

Joe turned to the shining-eyed girl, and in his own eyes burned the question that men in love have asked since the beginning of things.

Instantly she was all enthusiasm to help.

"Oh, I should simply love it," she said readily.

It was past one o'clock before Edith reached home, but she did not go to bed. She sat up with a length of white crêpe de Chine in her hand. She had meant to save it until summer, but now she fashioned it into a pretty little blouse with a Peter Pan collar, putting in the last stitch just as the day was dawning.

Edith was tired —incredibly tired; but a happy heart was singing in the worn little frame and Mother Nature is kind and sends sound, refreshing slumber, with happy dreams, to those who woo her with smiles instead of sighs.

There is nothing holier in this life of ours than the first consciousness of love, the first fluttering of its silken wings.

Edith was like a bud newly blossomed into flower. Joy had put sparkle into her eyes and a pink flush into her usually pale cheeks, and Joe Wilson smiled as he looked into the sweet young face, so convincing in its innocence that in some intangible manner her purity seemed to enter into him for a moment, enveloping his consciousness in its strange, ethereal loveliness that was soft and cool, and exquisite as starshine.

They joked and played games after tea, and then, as it was striking seven, some of the party suggested trying to get in at a local theater where a comedy was being played.

"I can't go, because I've got a job

on at eight o'clock," said their young host, regretfully.

"What about you, Edith?" asked one of the girls in the casual, friendly fashion that is so heart-warming a thing.

But Edith could not afford to make further demands upon her tiny store of money—she had barely enough to see her through the week as it was—and so she, too, shook her head, pleading another engagement as an excuse.

They stood together at the window, laughing and waving their hands to the merry little group that was walking toward the park. When the last couple had disappeared, Joe turned to the shining-eyed, young girl, and in his own eyes burned the question that men in love have asked of women since the beginning of things.

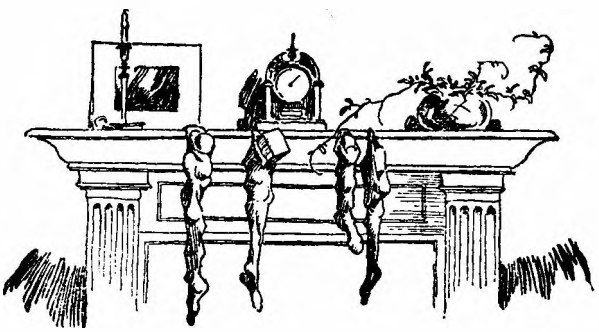
"Edith, I'm a plain, blunt sort of chap, and I've never had much to do with girls, but I know this much—I fell in love with you the moment I saw you last night. You looked sweet enough to eat, dressed up as a little old lady, and if you can't love me at once—well, I'll be satisfied if you'll just give me a chance to let me prove my love. Will you, little girl, will you?"

Love, the almighty educator of tongues, had made the usually shy young man eloquent, and as Edith listened, a sweet, all-pervading sense of warmth flooded her being, and she luxuriated in the unwonted sweetness of being "wanted"—of being necessary to another's happiness, never to be "left out" any more.

"Will you try to love me, darling, will you?"

Joe Wilson's arms were around her, and his voice was very tender, very insistent as he spoke.

And love's music crept into Edith's voice, too, as she smiled up at him and answered, "I don't think I'll have to try so very hard, Joe."



BLESSINGS

FRIENDS, folks and acquaintances
Are the blessings that conquer strife,
And gladden the days and months and years
Swift spun on the loom of life,
By thoughts and messages of good will,
And visits that bring us cheer.
Friends, folks and acquaintances,
May their number increase each year!

FRANKLIN PIERCE CARRIGAN.

If Love Be Love

By Vivian Grey

Part III.

CHAPTER XI.

IN spite of the fact that Willard repeated these arguments to himself over and over again, not one brought him any relief.

This money element was honestly repugnant to him. He dared not admit, even to himself, the bald, brutal fact that Ray was marrying Ernest Lascelles to save him from exposure.

The release from his debt which Ray had handed to him in silence had been like molten lead in his fingers. Yet, he had acquiesced. He had even urged this alliance; and his conscience gave him no peace.

The following day Guy Burton was one of the very small group of mourners who followed his uncle to the graveside. In the evening he found himself in a hotel lobby, a long interview with his lawyer over, and with nothing to do save to wonder what he was going to do with his future.

Upon a few actions he had come to a decision.

The next day he was going to seek his old comrades who had wished him luck that day at St. Mary's, and find out if there was anything he could do for any of them.

They were not the sort to accept a dole, but Guy Burton knew that there are many strings that can be pulled by one who possesses wealth, and he meant to pull them good and strong on their behalf.

St. Mary's seemed to belong to another existence to that of this busy, fashionable hotel in which he found himself. He wondered what St. Mary's would be doing at this hour.

All the shops in High Street would be closed. His own would not be reopened by him.

The books on the shelves would have to keep each other spiritual company. The cathedral bell would be booming out the hour to the silent town. Perhaps the choir would be practicing, and passers-by might hear the organ and the boys' voices singing "The day Thou gavest, Lord, is ended." In Willard's study window there would be a light. By the pond in the park lovers would be straying.

And Ray?

He did not know how Ray spent her

evenings, and so there was denied to him the picture he most wanted to draw. No doubt Lascelles would be with her. At the thought an icy hand clutched at Guy's heart. What a muddled, tragic, hopeless farce was life!

At that moment Ray, with her father and mother, was dining at Lascelles Court. Lascelles had called his party an informal affair, but the dinner was long and elaborate. Rare and beautiful flowers adorned the table, which glittered with glass and silver.

Around the table was a gathering of the strangest people Willard had ever met.

Besides his wife and Ray there were three women of middle age, the wives of three of Lascelles' men friends. They were stout and bejeweled, and spoke with an accent of which Willard did not approve, while their laughter struck him as unnecessarily loud.

Willard glanced at his wife, and found that she was frozen into silence; at Ray, who sat next to Lascelles, and saw that she looked nervous, almost frightened.

At the head of the table sat Ernest Lascelles, looking more than ordinarily aggressive, and flushed and purse-proud.

Willard sighed a little and bent over his plate. He had found that his companion was not interested in the affairs of St. Mary's, and he could think of nothing else to talk about. The meal progressed and at last was over. Ernest Lascelles rose with uplifted glass.

"I want to propose a toast," he said loudly. "The health of my fiancée here —Miss Willard. You'll agree with me, if you have a good look at her, that if St. Mary's is about the dullest old town in existence, it can breed darned good-looking girls."

Willard started in his chair, gasped, and looked at the speaker with a flush of shame on his pale cheeks.

"Miss Willard's father," went on Lascelles, "is the old boy up there. He's a pretty big gun in these parts."

There was a burst of hilarious laughter. Lascelles emphasized his hideous pun.

"I've heard of the son of a gun, but not of the daughter of a gun. However——"

He waved his glass. There was more shrill laughter. Willard was pale to the lips and there was the gleam of anger in his eyes.

Ray was very grave.

The man on the other side of Lascelles leaned toward her and whispered in her ear. She made no reply, but rose with a glance toward the other women. It was her signal to leave the men to their cigars.

"Hold on, Ray. We haven't drunk your health yet," cried Lascelles.

She waited quietly while the guests rose, glasses in hand. Willard rose too. His pride forbade him making a scene, but this dinner party was intolerable to him. As for Lascelles—his heart grew cold as he thought of Lascelles.

Nemesis was falling upon Willard. Very gravely Ray bowed her acknowledgments.

"Thank you very much," was all she said, and she left her place.

Lascelles opened the door for her.

"Buck up, Ray," he said. "You are as dull as dishwater."

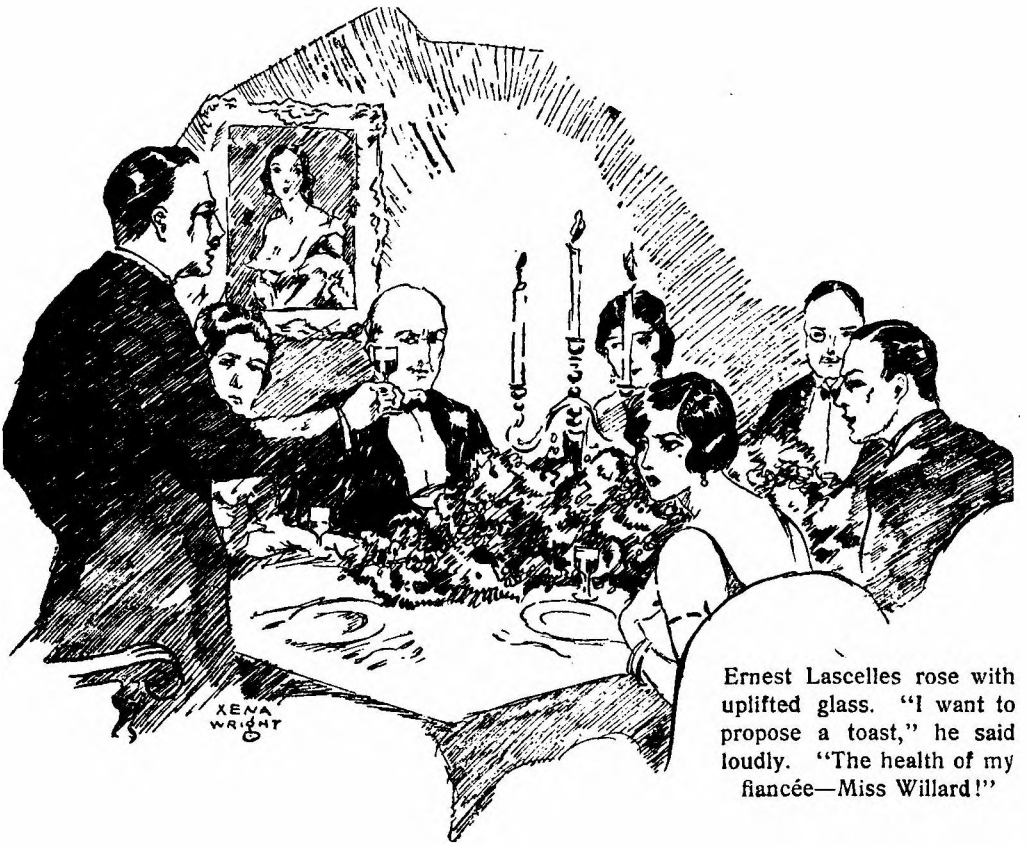
She left the room in silence. If this were the first of Lascelles' dinner parties, what was to follow? What in the name of Heaven was to follow?

She dared not show her distress.

In the drawing-room, before these impossible women, some sort of pretense of enjoyment had to be kept up. She owed that to her own self-respect.

It was then that Ray realized that she had saved the honor of the family at too heavy a cost.

She had been brought to heel. The rebel daughter, who had flouted the con-



Ernest Lascelles rose with uplifted glass. "I want to propose a toast," he said loudly. "The health of my fiancée—Miss Willard!"

ventions of St. Mary's, had finally given in.

Circumstances had proved too much for her.

In the dining room, Ernest Lascelles, claiming the attention of his guests, told a story which brought Willard, beside himself with anger, to his feet.

"I must ask you, Lascelles," he said in a trembling voice, "to respect your future father-in-law."

There was an awkward silence. Somebody tittered. Willard sat down. Ernest Lascelles glared at him balefully. He was furious because the effect of his very story had been spoiled, because he had been reprimanded in his own house and before his own guests.

"I shall join the ladies with your permission," said Willard, striving to prevent another outburst.

"Good!" laughed Lascelles sardonically.

Willard walked hastily to the door, but Lascelles intercepted him.

"Look here," he said, in a hoarse whisper. "I don't want any spoilsports here. This isn't your house and don't you forget it. You have insulted me at my own dinner table."

Willard was a weak man, but righteous indignation gave him strength.

"For shame, Lascelles," he whispered. "We are your guests!"

"Guests be bothered! I do as I like in my own house. I am not going to be insulted in my own house. Least of all by you. I've got you like that"—he pressed his forefinger and thumb together—"and don't you forget it. Any more of this high-falutin', goody-goody business on your part and I'll show you up."

Another voice made reply. Ray was standing at the dining-room door. She laid her hand on her father's arm.

"Father," she said, "mother is very tired and wishes to go home."

She turned to a servant. "Will you ask Mr. Willard's cab to come to the door, please?"

She drew Lascelles aside. He tried to catch her arm, but she flung him off and evaded him.

"One word, Ernest," she said, in a low, tense voice. "Please do as you threaten. Please show us up. Then our bargain is at an end."

He laughed in her face.

"I was only jesting with the old boy," he said. "Of course I won't. I'm too well satisfied with my bargain even if you're as dull as dishwater tonight."

She thought he was about to caress her and she ran swiftly to the hall door.

"Come along, mother, father," she cried. "The cab is here."

They clambered in and drove off. No one spoke. Mrs. Willard was flicking at her eyes with the wisp of a handkerchief. Willard was suffering from wounded pride, anger and remorse.

Ray sat very still and silent, her eyes closed, thinking with dull horror of the fate she had brought upon herself. But she had put her hand to the plow, and there could be no drawing back.

The morning after Ernest Lascelles' dinner party found him in the vilest of tempers. He had just enough sense of propriety to know that he had behaved very badly.

The departure of the Willards had been most marked. It was just possible that Ray might again break her engagement. If she did, he had no more methods by which he could bring her to heel, as he was fond of phrasing it.

He had given her Tom Willard's confession and she had burned it. He had given her a release from her father's debt. He told himself that he had made a mess of things.

He had allowed Ray Willard to beat him at his own game. He might try bluster and bluff, but he doubted their usefulness. He might apologize, but there was always the chance that Willard might not accept a private apology for a public insult.

When he got downstairs he found that his guests, with the exception of a political wirepuller called Aitchison, had gone to the golf course.

"I waited behind to have a word with you," said Aitchison.

"Talk away then."

"It's about last night."

"Well?"

"You'll forgive me saying it, but you made an awful hash of things last night."

"Was my dinner not to your liking?"

"You know I don't refer to the dinner—which was one of the best I have ever eaten. But you offended Willard with that confoundedly foolish toast of yours."

"Did I? What the devil do I care? It'll do him good to be told that he must take a little chaff like any other man."

"I take it that you want to win this seat?" said Aitchison quietly.

"What about it?"

"Only that you won't win it if you get his crowd against you. And you are going the very best way about securing their opposition. I tell you frankly, Lascelles, that if you can't show a little tact we shan't run you."

"I suppose I can run by myself?"

"Certainly. But you wouldn't have an earthly chance. You know what St. Mary's is. You upset your fiancée, too. Although she didn't say anything, I could see that she was blazing with anger. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if she threw you over, and then—you're a goner."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake shut up," cried Lascelles rudely.

"I want to know what you are going to do about it."

"Do about what?"

"Patching things up," said the other. "We're not going to risk losing this seat, you know, and there's heaps of time to find—somebody else."

Ernest Lascelles' nerves were ragged. He spoke angrily, impetuously.

"Find somebody else then."

"Do you seriously mean that?"

"I mean that I'm sick of kotowing to snobs round here," growled Lascelles. "I could buy the lot of 'em up and not notice it. If they don't like my friends and my ways they can do the other thing. And if the check I promised to your crowd isn't as good as anybody else's, then you'd better look round for another one."

"A check can't do everything, Lascelles. It can't make you member for St. Mary's."

"I've never yet known a check fail in its object—if it is big enough," said Lascelles.

"That's a pity," mused Aitchison. "It tells me that your experience is even more limited than I had imagined. Well"—he rose—"let's get out of doors. Take a day to think things over. But if I'm to be of any use to you, you'll have to make your peace with the Willards."

"I tell you this, my friend," said Lascelles, with a snarl, "if the Willards don't do what I tell 'em I'll make St. Mary's too hot to hold 'em. And that's that. Let's get out. Can you ride?"

Aitchison smiled.

"I can," he replied.

"That'll do. I'll have a couple of mounts brought around."

He telephoned to the stables.

A groom, leading two magnificent

Willard was a weak man, but righteous indignation gave him strength. "For shame, Lascelles," he whispered. "We are your guests!"

animals appeared at the door, and the two men rode off. They took the road that led to a neighboring village, and they put their horses to the gallop.

It was near the middle of the ride that they encountered a traction engine, preëminent among its kind for its ability to make a noise.

Aitchison reined up and then shouted to Lascelles:

"Look out, man. Pull her up."

At that moment of necessity the art and nerve of Ernest Lascelles failed him and his mount became a runaway.

Ray was crossing the hall that morning when her father's door opened and Willard beckoned her into his study.

"Ray," he began, "something has got to be done. About last night, I mean. Your mother and I have not had a wink of sleep all night. We have come to the conclusion that something has got to be done. The question is, what? Of course you know to what I refer?"

Ray nodded.

"When I say that something must be done, Ray, I am not thinking of myself, although I consider that I was grossly insulted. The vulgarity of that dinner party I shall never forget. I cannot think where Ernest Lascelles finds his friends. And that speech he made! Positively, I blush now when I think of it. Ray, you cannot marry this man. His nature was revealed to me last night. He is a gross vulgarian."

Ray raised her eyes for a moment and glanced at her father.

"Have you only just found that out?" she asked quietly.

"Well," replied Willard embarrassedly, "I have always known that he was not a man of breeding or—er—culture, but I regarded him as a—what shall I say?—as a rough diamond, a business man, a—a hail-fellow-well-met sort of person. You know what I mean. I did not think he was a man who could bring himself to ridicule those who might be counted as his guests."

Ray made no comment.

"I know that if this engagement be broken off, it will be very awkward for me. I shall again owe Lascelles money. I shall have to borrow from somebody else to pay him back. Perhaps my brother will come to my rescue, but it is very humiliating for me to approach him. But I cannot let you marry Ernest Lascelles, Ray. I should be failing in my duty as a father if I did."

"I must, father."

"No. As I say, I shall find this money somehow. I shall approach my lawyer to-day. It is, I fear, hopeless to approach my banker, for I owe him money too. But although my brother does not view things as I do, I feel sure he will let me have this sum. In any case, you cannot marry this man. I can see now that the alliance would only bring discredit upon us. The man is impossible."

"A promise is a promise, father," reminded Ray.

"I know, I know. But your promise was—er—conditional. Let us face the facts. If I repay this money I shall free you from your promise."

"No, father."

"Why not?"

"There's—there's something else."

Ray was thinking of the confession she had burned.

"Something else! What else is there?"

"I cannot tell you, father."

"But you must, child. What else can there be?"

"I cannot tell you. Only—only I've got to marry Ernest Lascelles now."

"I shall not permit it. I shall go to almost any length to pay back this money. Leaving myself and your mother out of account, the influence of Lascelles on Tom would be injurious, for they would be bound to meet."

"Tom!" repeated Ray, looking out of the window. If her father only knew!

His unconscious selfishness was beyond fathoming.

"I propose, Ray," continued her father, "that you write to Lascelles today and tell him that after his most discreditable outburst of last night you have no alternative but that of breaking your engagement."

"I can't, father."

"If you will think this over for an hour or two you will find that you can. Your happiness is very dear to us, Ray, and we can both see now that you would never be happy with this man. I have made a disastrous mistake. That I admit. But I can rectify it by insisting that you do not marry Ernest Lascelles."

With a wan smile and a shake of her head Ray left the room.

A woman older and more experienced in affairs than Ray would have found several courses of action open to her, but none of these occurred to Ray.

The burning of Tom's confession seemed to bind her irrevocably to her promise. She had made the handing over of that confession a condition of her engagement, and the condition had been fulfilled.

Yet more than ever was she terrified by the prospect before her.

Her terror was mental—the terror of living with a man whose friends were utterly repugnant to her, whose habits were gross and vulgar, who seemed to possess not one atom of chivalry.

She left the house for a solitary walk to compose her thoughts, and, as she did so, she caught a glimpse of Ernest Lascelles and his friend setting off on horseback. The very sight of him was offensive—his broad, heavy figure, his thick, red neck, his highly polished leggings; even the sleekness of his horse.

She turned quickly in the opposite direction and found herself in the park.

It was Saturday morning, and all the youngsters of St. Mary's seemed to have congregated there, playing football, sailing their boats, quarreling, shouting. In her mood she found the park impossible, and was leaving it when she was stopped by a little old lady.

"My dear Miss Willard," said the little old lady, "I have just read the announcement of your engagement, and I want to wish you all the happiness in the world. It is so nice to think that you will still be living among us. Is it to be a long engagement?"

Ray said that she didn't know, and thanking her friend moved on.

Near the bridge over the river she was hailed by an elderly gentleman of military appearance who came panting after her.

"Just one word, Miss Willard," he cried. "Congratulations. I mean, good wishes. Best of good wishes. He's a lucky young man, Miss Willard. Do remember me most kindly to your father."

With that and a smile suggestive of an imminent attack of apoplexy the tall gentleman hurried off.

Ray had seen no announcement. She gathered that Lascelles had right away informed the newspaper of their engagement. The publication of the item of news seemed to make things even more irrevocable.

She could hope for no help from her father.

She did not blame him, but she wondered dully why he had urged her into this engagement for his own sake when now he declared he could meet his obligations without her sacrifice.

She could look for no advice from her mother, who had not left her room since, prostrated by the nervousness following on Lascelles' dinner party, she had betaken herself thither.

Her brother Tom was of no use to anybody.

Ray wondered if she were wicked for hating her brother Tom. She was not

marrying Ernest Lascelles to save Tom, but to spare her father and mother. Yet her father was objecting to this hateful wedding on the score of Tom! The influence of Lascelles would be injurious to Tom, he had said! He had not suggested that it might be injurious to herself.

And then she thought of Guy Burton.

But Guy Burton had left St. Mary's. The bookshop was closed. He had gone away and he would never come back. In any case, he could not help her now.

She walked out toward the country, loath to return home, where she knew she would have to combat again the arguments of her father—arguments which she could not answer.

Everything was a hopeless muddle. Life was a muddle. Love was a muddle.

Even walking in these country lanes it struck Ray as sinister that she could not get out of sight of Lascelles Court. Set on a hill, its red roof could be seen for miles around.

In these country lanes Ray Willard came to her decision.

Against her will she must again set herself in opposition to her father's wishes, which had changed so quickly.

Honor demanded that she keep her part of the bargain that had been made. She would marry Lascelles, and she permitted herself the vindictive promise that she would make him sorry that he had ever married her. He had had his way. After their marriage she would have hers. She would refuse to accept as her guests such people as Lascelles had invited the previous night. Or, if he insisted on inviting them, she would leave the house or keep to her room.

On her way home Ray derived a certain grim satisfaction from her plans for taming this man of great wealth.

Their bargain was completed as soon as the ceremony of marriage was over. Let Ernest Lascelles look to himself after that.

Her resolution brought her fresh courage. The future promised nothing but battle. Well, she would fight, and fight, and fight, until she conquered.

As she neared the cathedral, the ambulance swept past her. Her own troubles were such that she took little interest in its passing.

At the door of their house she was met by her mother, who was in a state of great agitation.

"Oh, my dear, my dear, have you heard what has happened?"

"No."

"Mr. Lascelles has had an accident. He has been thrown from his horse. We have just heard all about it."

"Is he—dead?"

"No. But we are told that he—that he will not be able to walk again. He will be a cripple all his life. Oh, Ray, is it wrong of me to say that this seems like an act of Providence? You know your father is against this marriage. Well, you will not have to marry him now."

Ray Willard could make no reply. All her sense of duty told her that if she had been bound to Ernest Lascelles in health, she was bound far, far more strongly to him now.

CHAPTER XII.

"I propose catching the boat Friday," said Guy Burton to his lawyer. "My friend—a better fellow never breathed—is at present at Columbus. I shall meet him there and we shall go on to his place together."

"And how long will you be away?"

"I don't know. Maybe I shall stay on with my friend if he can give me a job. Rubber seems to be as good as anything else I can think of. I don't want to be idle."

"Very proper, very proper," murmured the lawyer.

"Your man has settled up my affairs

at St. Mary's very well. I didn't come out of that deal nearly so badly as I thought I should," said Guy.

"You have not paid St. Mary's a farewell visit?" asked the lawyer.

"No."

"You told me when I called on you there, about a certain young lady in whom you were interested," smiled the lawyer. "Is she still in St. Mary's?"

"For all I know."

"I do not ask out of idle curiosity," continued the lawyer. "Forgive me making a suggestion—I am a much older man than you—but if you are going away because of—of your attachment to this young lady, then I beg you to think twice before you do so. They say that absence makes the heart grow fonder."

"If I stay here," said Burton, in a low voice, "it is almost certain that, sooner or later, I meet her. I could not bear to meet her as the wife of another man. And so I am going away. Oh, don't think I am going to develop into a sentimentalist. I shall work hard. Very likely I shall make a lot more money. Everything comes to him who has, you know. And then, when the wealth has filled my coffers and ruined my liver, I shall come back and cultivate roses."

"Is this meant to be cynical?"

"It is a statement of probabilities. And now, unless there is other business to talk over, let's go out to lunch."

When they parted, Guy Burton went back to his hotel to idle away the hours until he should catch the night express.

The idea occurred to him of walking the streets, taking a farewell peep at familiar places, but it did not appeal to him.

He sat in the hotel smoke room and tried to concentrate on a book, but ever and again his thoughts would stray to St. Mary's, to High Street, to the little bookshop now robbed of its companionable volumes.

The picture would never fade from his eyes.

He could shut them and see Ray Willard, lithe, graceful, adorably sweet, coming toward him with her rare smile. He could see her again, a tragic figure of despair and helplessness, beseeching him with her gaze of anguish to leave her to her sacrifice.

At this picture the strength came near to leaving his resolve. He longed to be living in the days when a man, if his strength could prevail, might carry off the woman of his heart and bid defiance to his rivals.

Instead he was going away.

After dinner he drove to the station and found a place in the train. He had provided himself with a pile of evening papers and magazines, but he had no interest in reading, nor yet in watching the platform scene.

It was not till the train began slowly to move out of the station that a kind of resignation—the resignation of despair—came upon him.

The die was cast.

He would never see Ray again. The years would pass, the seasons would change, the cathedral chimes would ring out over St. Mary's, Ray would grow out of her girlhood and become a woman, while he would probably settle down to a staid and humdrum existence, and all that it would mean was that two people had lost all that made life worth the living.

The train gathered speed, dashing through the suburbs shrouded in darkness.

With a short sigh Guy Burton picked up an evening paper. Its columns were full of sensational news. Big black headlines told him of political changes, of threatened strikes, of a bank failure, of this and that.

He turned the pages casually until, suddenly, he gripped the paper fiercely and held it up to his eyes.

At the foot of a column was a para-

graph in very small type. It had not been honored even with a heading. It looked as though it had insinuated itself unnoticed into the sheet, and, as it did not matter to anybody, nobody had troubled to strike it out

But to Guy Burton it mattered everything. The reading of it brought the veins out on his forehead, and the newspaper shook between his trembling fingers.

What he read was:

"The death is announced, as the result of a fall from his horse, of Mr. Ernest Lascelles, of Lascelles Court, St. Mary's."

Lascelles—dead!

Guy Burton had the mad impulse to stop the train and get out. He did not want to go to Columbus; he wanted to get back to St. Mary's.

For half an hour he sat gnawing his fingers, cursing the delay, until he should get off. His excitement was so extreme that fellow-passengers watched him over their magazines with considerable anxiety.

After what seemed to Guy Burton an interminable time the train stopped. He sprang out, and seized a station official.

"When can I get a train back to New York?" he panted.

"Not until to-morrow morning," was the reply.

Burton pressed a bill into the man's hand.

"See to my luggage. Name of Guy Burton, and labeled for Columbus. Have it sent to St. Mary's. I'm not going on. I'm going back—by car."

In St. Mary's the people talked of the death of Ernest Lascelles for nearly a day.

One exceptionally well-informed person whispered that he knew for a fact that the doctors had confidently expected that he would pull through, but that his mode of living had been against him.

"Too fond of lifting his elbow," was the more vulgar verdict of the common people.

Intimate friends of the Willards who called to express their condolences did not see Ray Willard.

"Naturally," explained her mother, "the poor child is prostrate with grief, but she is very brave. The doctor has advised that she is to be kept very quiet and left alone."

To youth death is the supreme tragedy that blots out all that has gone before.

It was incredible to Ray that the man who had presided at that dinner party, loud of voice, seemingly in the lustiest health, should be dead.

There was no element of hypocrisy in Ray.

She did not pretend to grieve for the dead man. Indeed she could admit to herself that his death was as the bursting of her prison doors. Yet there was much that she regretted. She had not been fair to him—not because she had broken any promise, but because she had not. She ought to have risked anything, dared anything, rather than have entered into this unholy contract.

Two days after the funeral, and nearly a week after the publication of the paragraph which had crept into Guy Burton's newspaper, Ray Willard went for a walk, avoiding the streets of St. Mary's where she might meet those who would stop her and offer a sympathy which made her feel meaner than ever, but choosing the country lanes instead.

She had come to a vague decision as to how she would fill the years to come. St. Mary's had become impossible for her. It reminded her at every turn of the things she wanted to forget.

Ernest Lascelles had passed away, but his great house remained, and Ray could not see it without a shudder and a sinking of the heart.

She felt almost dishonest. The dead man had fulfilled his part of the bargain

—Tom and her father were safe—and she had not fulfilled hers.

She resolved to find employment somewhere, perhaps not immediately, for she knew that she would have to be trained for a position that was worth the holding, but as soon as possible.

In the securing of an office or secretarial position she believed her uncle would be willing to help her. And, away from St. Mary's, she might in time forget—forget the menace that had threatened her, forget Guy Burton who had gone away and who would never come back.

She was walking slowly, preoccupied with her thoughts, when the warning hooting of a car sent her toward the hedge.

It was a very noisy and dilapidated car, and it was being driven very fast by a man in a cloth cap. Ray turned her face away from the cloud of dust that rose from its wheels when she heard a loud shout.

"Ray!"

And then "Stop! Stop!"

With the jarring of brakes suddenly applied the car came to a halt and an overcoated figure leaped out and seized her hands in a grip that hurt.

She saw a man with a white, eager face and disheveled hair, and, for a moment, she could not realize that he was Guy Burton.

"You have come back?" was all she could say.

"Yes. I had started. I was in the train when I read in the paper what had happened. I was lucky enough to get this sport to drive me back. There was no train. We missed our way once and we've been on the road all night. Ray! You're not angry? Is it wrong of me to have come back—so soon? I suppose it is. I ought to have written or—or done something of that sort. But I couldn't wait. I had to come back at once, Ray. I'm half crazy now. It seems too good to be true to be able to see you again, to hear you speak, to hold your hands. Ray, the—the other fellow is dead. It's the living that count. I don't know if I'm saying what I oughtn't to say, but—you still love me, Ray? We can forget the rest, both of us, Ray. I want to hear you tell me you love me."

She raised her head proudly.

"I can tell you I love you, Guy. But I cannot tell you how much." The taxi driver, himself an engaged man, tactfully leaped from his seat and buried his head under the radiator.

Half an hour later Mr. and Mrs. Willard were surprised to see drive up to their door a very common car in which were Ray and a man who, despite the warmth of the morning, was wearing a heavy overcoat.

"What has Ray been up to now?" cried Mrs. Willard agitatedly. "I hope she hasn't had an accident."

The agility with which Ray alighted from the car relieved her mind on this score, and she scrutinized the features of Ray's companion.

"I—I do believe that he is that bookseller person," she panted. "Really, Ray has no sense of the proprieties."

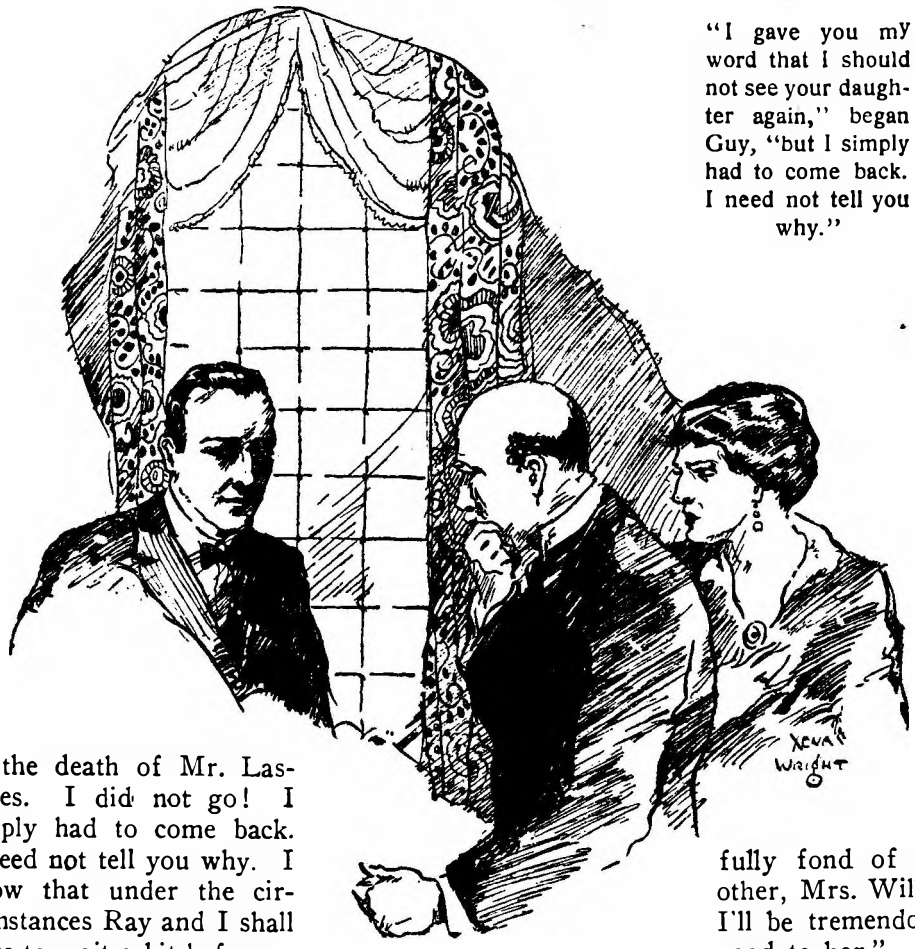
"He isn't a bookseller person any longer," said Willard hurriedly. "Don't you know that he has left the town? I am told that he is a very rich man now."

Further conversation on the subject of Guy Burton was interrupted by the appearance of Ray and the erstwhile "bookseller person."

"Mother! I met Mr. Burton on the road. He is ravenous and he wants to wash!"

Ray fled from the room, leaving Guy Burton to explain the situation.

"Forgive my appearance," he said. "I have been motoring all night." He turned to Willard. "I gave you my word, sir, that I should not see your daughter again. I have a ticket, and was on my way last night when I read



"I gave you my word that I should not see your daughter again," began Guy, "but I simply had to come back. I need not tell you why."

of the death of Mr. Lascelles. I did not go! I simply had to come back. I need not tell you why. I know that under the circumstances Ray and I shall have to wait a bit before—before we get married, but we've made up our minds about that, sir, and I most sincerely hope that we have your approval."

"Get married!" cried Mrs. Willard weakly. "I don't understand."

Very gallantly Willard came to the rescue.

"Ray and Mr. Burton have wanted for some time to get married," he explained. "At that time, of course, such a thing was out of the question, because—ah—because Ray was—because Ray had promised——" He stopped, floundering.

Guy Burton broke in eagerly.

"Yes, that's it," he said. "It was out of the question before, but now it's quite all right, see? We're most awfully fond of each other, Mrs. Willard. I'll be tremendously good to her."

Mrs. Willard turned a bewildered gaze upon her husband.

"I don't know what you think about this, John," she said, "but I think——".

Willard interrupted with a solemn gesture. He was himself again.

"I think," he said impressively, "nay, I am sure, that it would be out of the question for you to consider yourself engaged to our daughter so soon after our very sad bereavement. One moment, please, Mr. Burton. At the same time, so long as both of you behave with the utmost discretion I have no objection at all to contemplating at a future date your marriage to Ray."

"John!" from Mrs. Willard.

"I shall explain everything to you later, my dear," said Willard.

Guy Burton grasped Willard's hand. "Thank you, sir!" he cried. "This is the happiest day of my life."

Ray came into the room. She addressed Guy with an air of proprietorship, of command even.

"The bath is ready, Guy," she said. "I have put some mustard in it in case you should have caught a chill in the motor. Don't wait too long in it, please."

Guy's smile was expansive. "You bet I shan't," he replied.

For the second time within the month Guy Burton set off on a journey. This time, after spending a week in Paris, he actually reached Marseilles and there boarded the boat on which he had secured a cabin. Ray was with him.

On their first evening the Mediterranean gave them the kindliest and most suitable of welcomes—a calm sea, a moon of silver, the softest of breezes.

Seated on the deck were Ray and Guy, their chairs fairly apart, so as to convey the idea that they had been married ever so long.

Said Guy: "We'll trot around and see Japan and a few other adjacent islands. And then——"

"And then?"

"By that time we ought to have got our stuff into Deepwell Farm. Branson is looking after the stock."

"But you don't know anything about farming, Guy!"

"I can learn, can't I? In the meantime Branson will look after the farm, and I'll look after Branson. As for you, you will milk the cows and feed the pigs and see that the chickens keep their teeth clean."

"It pleases my lord to jest," said Ray, demurely.

"I've got to keep on saying things presumably funny," said Guy, "in order to give myself an excuse for laughing. I want to laugh all the time. I feel like that. Don't you?" His voice was tender.

"Yes, Guy"—gently.

"I feel that I want to stand on my head; in short, to behave like a raving lunatic, to announce to all these prosy people who are sitting there reading their books that here at my side is Ray the incomparable, the sweetest and dearest, the most beautiful——"

"Don't, Guy, they'll hear you," she implored. Then she bent her head closer to his. "And I want to tell everybody that here is the bravest, the kindest and the best man in the world, and he is my husband and I love him I cannot tell how dearly."

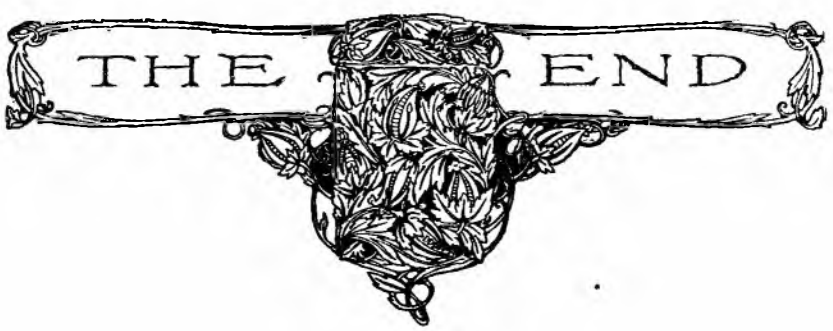
The elderly lady who saw the lips of Guy and Ray meet turned to her companion.

"Do you know who those people are?" she asked.

"No. They must be very rich, for they've got the best cabin on the ship. Obviously newly married."

"Oh, obviously."

But by that time Guy and Ray had forgotten to keep up their deception and were sitting in silence, holding hands.



The Heart That Was Too Big

by Violet Gordon

OH, dear!" said Claudia peevishly. "Here's the party all arranged, Cliff Deemer coming and everything, and me with not a rag to my back!"

She glowered at a pile of soft, luscious peach satin that flowered in Morine's lap, while Morine's patient fingers worked it into something lovely for Helen's dark beauty.

"But, Claudia dear," Morine expostulated, "you have your pretty new orchid georgette—you look lovely in it."

"Morry, you make me tired!" Claudia's voice sounded tearful. "New orchid georgette, indeed! Why, I've worn and worn the thing. It's nothing but a limp rag. Do you realize I'll look like a dowd—a perfect dowd—while Helen will be gorgeous!" Tears of jealous anger coursed down her cheeks.

Morine looked tired and unhappy. The frock she was making for Helen took every moment of the time she could snatch from her work at the library and her housework. She did not see how she could make something new for Claudia as well as for Helen.

Tom, who was still in high school, entered.

"Gee, you look red as a turkey," he addressed Claudia with brotherly frankness. "Crying again?"

"Oh, you make me tired, too." Claudia threw a magazine, which Tom adroitly dodged. She then turned her back on him and resumed her conversation with Morine, coaxingly this time. "Morry, there's the sweetest coral-silk crape in Perry's—you could charge it and pay it off by the month. It would be adorable for the dance, and I'd help you make it!"

"Har-har!" from Tom. "Touching on Cliff Deemer, I opine. What's the odds on the running, Claudia? Two on Helen and one on you?"

"Sh-sh!" Morine's grave eyes rebuked him, and before Claudia could find breath to answer back, Helen and Jerry, next in age to Morine, came in.

"Gosh, I'm tired!" Jerry sighed, after his day's labor selling motors. "What's for dinner, Morry?"

Hastily she folded Helen's peach satin.

"I have a cheese-and-potato dish and a new salad, also croquettes. I'll run and see if they're ready."

"Croquettes!" he groaned. "Why can't I get a man-sized steak, Morry?"

She smiled at him apologetically.

"The exchequer's low. Can't be done, dear."

"No, indeed," said Claudia, who

cared little for steak and much for a coral evening dress. "You and Helen don't pay Morry enough to feed a batch of starved mosquitoes! You spend all your money on yourselves—Helen on her back and you, Jerry, on that silly little Haizler girl." This last spitefully.

"Oh, shut up!" Jerry rudely invited. "Go roll your hoop, kid."

Tom could not refrain from snickering.

"Claudia's after a new dress, Jerry. She wants to cut Helen out with Cliff Deemer. You know—the swell guy Helen's been giving us an earful about."

Helen, dark and handsome, had been examining the peach-colored frock critically. She turned scornful, supercilious eyes upon her younger sister. Claudia flushed with alarm.

Fortunately at this minute Morine appeared at the door, her face hot from the heat of the oven.

"Do stop quarreling and come to dinner, children," she pleaded. "I've made a deep blueberry pie for dessert."

And this was all very characteristic of an evening reunion among the Marsden family.

In Mapledean they called Morine a saint; and it seemed they were not far wrong. In the first place, she looked like one of Botticelli's madonnas—calm gray eyes, tender lips, features molded into firm, delicate loveliness and colored like nectarine, dark hair parted in the center. She might have posed any day for a madonna, and daily—hourly—she lived the part.

Since her father's death six years ago, her mother having left them at Tom's birth, Morine had taken the place of both parents with her four exquisitely spoiled brothers and sisters. With her meager salary from the library, and her clever needlework at night, she had carried the whole family on her two able little hands, till now, at the age of twenty-eight, she sometimes felt more like sixty.

Jerry, as salesman for a big motor company, would, she felt sure, go far if only he would think more of his work and less of his pleasures. She had got him the position through a library friendship, partly in hope that he would help her financially. But this had proved a vain hope. Jerry half the time forgot to pay her anything, and when he did remember he eventually borrowed it all back.

It was the same when Helen, after taking a stenographer's course, had gone into a lawyer's office. She used her entire salary to buy new clothes, even expecting Morine to make a certain number of them.

"You're so clever, Morry," she would wheedle. "You get such a French touch to things."

Then there was Claudia, who was so frankly lazy that she never even attempted to get a job—though she was all of eighteen—but expected, nevertheless, to dress quite as well as Helen. And last of all—Tom.

Morine had an especially tender spot for Tom. He had been her baby; she had taught him to walk and talk. And now she longed to put him through college. But how was it to be done? None of the others would help her; and Tom, who had his own share of the Marsden laziness, would not try for a scholarship.

No wonder Morine sometimes felt sixty!

The night of the dance found her so tired she could hardly drag one foot after the other. She had bought and made Claudia's coral crape, just as Claudia had known she would. Combined with Helen's peach satin, her own clothes had suffered. But this consideration carried no weight, least of all with Morine.

She knew she would be busy all eve-

ning, as she had been busy all afternoon with Helen's preparations. There had been sandwiches, chicken salad, and cake to make. For, of course, Helen had no time to attend to these things herself. In Mapledean the librarians were allowed one afternoon off every week, and Helen, with acute foresight, had invited the guests when Morine would be free.

Doctor Clifford Deemer, the guest of the evening, arrived when the party was in full swing. He was a handsome young man, tall and dark, with keen blue eyes that "never missed a trick," as Tom expressed it. Morine, through the window between the dining room and pantry, paused for a moment to inspect him.

She saw that his mouth in repose was severe, though when he smiled one quickly forgot this. His nose, high and noticeably thin, stood out prominently; his eyes were deeply set and penetrating; his chin was determined. With the quick observation of the socially retiring, Morine noticed his hands—strong but sensitive, the fingers exquisitely cared for and turning backward at the tips.

"He's nice, but he could be hard, almost cruel," she thought. "Yet one could never forget him! He is a distinct type of his own, and impressive," Morine concluded.

Supper was ready, but it was too early to serve. Morine slipped into the hall and stood watching the dancers, glad that their father had at least left them a good-sized house for these entertainments. No one paid any attention to her, but then they rarely did. She was too tired and shabby to expect attention. It was a surprise that fairly took her breath away when Tom came up with Doctor Deemer.

"What do you think—he's been raving about you," Tom grinned. "I didn't know what he was howling about till I dropped on good li'le ole Morry."

Morine, puzzled and confused, offered the young doctor her hand. He took it gravely, and she saw that he was annoyed by Tom's nonsense. But Tom had dashed after one of Claudia's flapper friends and knew none of this.

"I wouldn't let my brother call me 'good li'le ole Morry,' if I were you," said Clifford, his mouth stern.

Morine raised her brows.

"He means it affectionately," she admonished, exonerating her youngest charge.

"Probably," Clifford admitted. "But it sounds all wrong—considering you."

"Considering me? What do you mean?"

His keen glance fell on her smoothly parted hair, her delicate lips and gray eyes.

"Never mind," he said, smiling for the first time. "Don't you want to know what I said when I was raving about you, as Tom expressed it?"

The girlishness in Morine had been pretty well stifled; but coquetry in any living woman is never quite dead. The rich color of ripe nectarines stole into her cheeks, and the calmness of her madonnalike eyes became blurred for a second.

"Of course, I'm a little curious," she smiled in return.

"Well then, here goes," and Clifford looked suddenly boyish. "I asked young Tom who the beautiful girl standing by the curtain was. I said I'd asked two other fellows to introduce me, but they didn't know you, and that if he didn't take me right over I was going to ask you for a dance anyway."

Morine thought he must be making fun of her.

"Why—I'm not beautiful," she faltered. "No one has ever thought that."

Clifford shook his head.

"But I can't believe you. I apologize for paying an obvious compliment, but I had to explain my 'raving.' Now may I have that dance?"

Morine was too tired and shabby to expect any attention. It was a surprise that took her breath away when Tom came up with Doctor Deemer.

Morine could dance well. In fact, she had taught both of her brothers; but she thought with dismay of her shabby black frock and worn slippers. Black was unusually becoming to her, but when it is shabby it is always forlorn. Clifford, however, took her consent for granted, and swept her among the dancers.

Morine was strangely happy. This, after her years of obscurity, was as thrilling an experience as she could wish for. She felt like a different person, rising superior to those shabby clothes and to all the supercilious friends of her younger sisters. Men began to gather round her, and she laughed and sparkled as naturally as though she had been a social queen all her life. Her brothers and sisters stared at her in surprise, Tom and Jerry amused, the girls—distraught.

"Morry," accosted Helen, a bright spot high on each cheek, "have you forgotten supper? It's ever so late!"

Morine laughed happily.

"I had," she confessed, "forgotten all about it. I'll run now."

"I'll help you," said Clifford Deemer promptly.

"We'll all help you." The young men rallied round her, uproarious. "Recruits for Morine! Come on, let's help her serve the stew!"

They invaded the kitchen and pantry, carried small tables and draped them with covers, rattled forks and spoons, and got the salad, rolls, and sandwiches out in no time. They became more and more hilarious, pretending that Morine was the queen of the crew and they were her helpers. They drank her health, vying with each other in proposing original and often very absurd toasts.

Here's to Morine! We love her stew!
We love her hash; we love her, too!
She looks like a saint,
But let's hope she ain't,
For whether or no, she's the queen of the crew.

Afterward there was more dancing; and Cliff Deemer hardly allowed any man to come near Morine. Both Helen and Claudia watched in speechless indignation, completely neglected by the guest of the evening.

"You grow more beautiful every minute," the young doctor whispered against Morine's soft hair. "You were too saintlike when I first saw you—your lips too pale. But now they have the cherry-ripe naughtiness that makes you perfect, darling!"

Her small face, framed by its dusky hair, was turned up to him, just a little frightened. It had been heaven to dance with him: But why should he wish her not to be a saint? Not that she thought she was, but still——

Presently she forgot all this in a strange, wild thrill, half joy, half terror. Cliff, with an inscrutable smile in his eyes and determination in his chin, was stooping toward those cherry-ripe lips.

They were in the dimly lighted hall for the moment, out of observation. Cliff's arm tightened about her; his head dipped swiftly down to hers. It was almost as though a spark of fire passed between them. Morine caught her breath. Then he laughed softly, drew aside, and kissed the soft little lobe of her ear.

"Not yet, Morine—not yet," he whispered. "But I hope some time—very soon, sweetheart."

Others had come into the hall. Clifford, guiding Morine, brushed past them, back to the lights of the living room. In another minute the guests were all leaving, the men crowding round Morine as though it had been her party.

It was a sadly wrecked house she faced at two o'clock that morning. Jerry, as usual, disappeared at once; and the girls, without the customary excuse of being so tired they couldn't stand—"just wait till morning, Morry," followed Jerry in complete silence. Tom remained, yawning prodigiously, to roll back the rugs and help move the furniture.

"Gee, that was a hot one you gave the girls—what got into you, Morry?" he asked. "You were the kangaroo's sunshade all right. The fellows were all nutty over you."

Morine blushed like a schoolgirl, then shook her head honestly.

"I don't understand it myself, Tom. They just seemed to like me for a change. It seems foolish when I'm so much older than the other girls."

"You're not such a Methuselah at that," said Tom, who had taken pleasure in seeing Morry cut his younger sisters out. "You looked real pretty to-night. Of course, the reason the other guys fell over you like that was because of the young doc. He sure took a shine to you. Oh, boy!"

Morine's blush deepened. She scolded Tom for being even sillier than she was, but her good night kiss was very warm. When he had gone, she started to work on the dishes without minding them in the least. She even sang a snatch of song she had learned years ago, till she remembered that it was a love song and stopped guiltily.

A great wave of panic swept over her. Here she had allowed a little flood of popularity to sweep her off her feet. But was it popularity? No, it was the way Cliff had looked at her. He was the only one who had counted —the rest had been mere background. And he had liked her; there could be no doubt of that. He had called her "darling"—"sweetheart"—lover words. She knew that his kiss—sidetracked to her ear—had not been what the girls would call petting. No, it had been something that would lead to love—perhaps to marriage. And marriage, for Morine, was unthinkable.

Her father and mother had left her a sacred charge. She must see every one of her family settled in life before she could think of herself. Fierce mother love bloomed in her heart. She was only a few years older than Jerry, and yet he seemed like a baby to her. Helen, Claudia, little Tom—who must somehow be sent to college—were all helpless without her. How could she have been so unjust to Clifford Deemer as to encourage him?

The young men became more hilarious than ever, pretending that Morine was the queen of the crew and they were her helpers.

A tear dropped on her wrist. A terrible desolation crept about her. It seemed curious that until to-day she had never yielded to a girl's dream of love. Breathlessly she pushed it from her, closed the door on that sweet temptation.

It was after three in the morning when Morine dragged weary feet upstairs. She was slipping toward the little room she shared with the sewing machine and the alarm clock when a sound caught her ear. She paused, listened closely. It was a sob, then another, a whole battery of sobs.

Morine moved to Claudia's door. Yes, the sobs came from there! She turned the knob and went in, dropped on her knees beside the bed, and caught Claudia to her heart.

"Darling, why are you crying? Tell Morry."

Claudia struggled back as though she had been struck.

"You, Morine? Go to bed—l-leave me alone!" More sobs.

"But I must know what the trouble is. Tell me, dear."

"N-nothing," from Claudia; then, after a moment's thought: "But Helen must be terribly unhappy."

"Helen—why?"

"Morry, how can you be such a simpleton?" Claudia sat upright, her whispers taking on a shrill note of temper. "As though you hadn't ruined Helen's party! As though you hadn't twined yourself like a clinging vine—no, a clinging oak—round Cliff Deemer! What in the world possessed you? And attracting so much attention from all the other men! Why, Morry, you always used to behave like a lady——"

Morine stood paralyzed. She couldn't take this all in in an instant. A flash of anger prompted a retort:

"I thought it was old-fashioned to be ladylike."

"For some people—yes. But not for you. You're the old-fashioned type."

Swift condemnation gripped Morine. She had been a simpleton. Claudia was not weeping for Helen. No, the younger girl was weeping for her own failure to attract Cliff Deemer. But this in itself was a tragedy. Cliff was young, attractive, and already, she understood, gaining fame as a surgeon. He was the obvious mate for one of her pretty sisters, the first man they had met who might truly be called eligible. And instead of helping one of them to make a good match, what had she done? Selfishly attracted him to herself.

"But she hadn't deliberately tried to do this—it just happened!" she argued to herself.

But the thought of what she had done caused her to flush with shame. She had failed in the trust her father had reposed in her! Some words of Cliff's came back to taunt her: "Now your lips have the cherry-ripe naughtiness that was needed to make you perfect." That was it! She had been worse than naughty—she had been wicked!

Without a word she left Claudia and went to her own room. Here, standing before the pictures of her father and mother, she promised to undo all the mischief she had made.

The very next day, at the library, she was put to the first test. Cliff called her up from Coburg, a neighboring town.

"Hello, Morine——" His voice was low and caressing.

"Oh, it is Doctor Deemer?" She sounded cold and businesslike.

"Doctor Deemer? How do you get that way?" he demanded, tenderly amused. "Can't I be Cliff to you, darling?"

"Please," she begged, "don't call me that!"

There was a pause, and when he spoke there was a hurt tone in his voice.

"All right, not over the wire," he promised. "But, dismissing all that,

may I call for you at eight to-night, Morine?"

She was about to say "No" when it occurred to her that there was a better way.

"That will be very nice," she returned cordially. "We'll all be glad to see you."

"Yes—but, look here—Morine, I'm not calling on the family——"

With shaking fingers she hung up the receiver, cut him off. When he got the library again he was told Miss Marsden had just left the building.

"Gee, I guess popularity don't agree with you, sis," said Tom after dinner that night. "You look like you hadn't slept in a week."

"I'll be all right to-morrow," she returned, hastily gathering up the dishes. They were alone, the girls having gone to their rooms. "Tom, I wish you'd tell Helen and Claudia that Doctor Deemer will be here about eight o'clock."

"Huh," from her young brother, "why don't you tell them yourself? I guess it's you he's coming to see."

"I can't tell them"—Morine ignored his last speech—"because I have to get these things done up and go back to the library. I have to work to-night."

"Aw—shucks!" Tom was plainly disgusted. "You'll let them snitch him if you aren't careful."

Morine fled into the kitchen with her last load of dishes.

Later, at the library, she buried herself in a catalogue and tried to forget the horrid silence of the big building. Occasionally she worked extra hours after the other members of the staff had gone home, so that it was not an entirely new experience. But to-night she hated it.

The silence mocked her. Sinister voices whispered in her ear: "You're a fool, Morine—a fool! No one is worth such a sacrifice."

And then she would think of her brothers and sisters, and of how helpless they would be if she left them. Tenderness would flood through her, and her heart would cry: "They love me—I can never leave them!"

An hour passed, and then another. It was half past ten; and Morine, ever so weary, wondered when it would be safe to go home and slip silently up the back stairs. She was laying her work away when a sound startled her.

It was very dark in the library, with only the tiny circle of light flung from the green reflector of her lamp. She peered toward the door and saw that some one had entered—a tall figure that advanced toward her with long strides. She looked up to meet the quizzical eyes of Cliff Deemer.

"Why did you run away from me?" he asked without parley.

Morine's hands shook so that she was obliged to grip the edge of the table.

"I—I was busy here," she told him. "I was just going home now."

He nodded, his keen gaze piercing her.

"Yes, but not to see me, I fear. Morine, come across—I want the truth."

They faced each other over the little table, the green light making their features unreal and ghostly.

"Please," Morine begged, "don't cross-question me. Really, you're quite mistaken about me. I'm not as interesting as you thought I was last night. I——"

Cliff interrupted by throwing his head back and laughing heartily. His eyes had softened.

"Darling," he said, "you deserve a thrashing. What an absurd child it is!" He came round the table, caught her in his arms, and held one of her hands against his cheek. "Honey, don't you know it's the you in you I love? I was raging to-night when I got to your place and found you had gone! Neither Helen nor Claudia seemed to know where you were, and I hung round

Morine was laying her work away when a sound startled her. She peered toward the door and met the quizzical eyes of Cliff Deemer.

nearly an hour and a half before I found out. Then I saw Tom beckoning from the hall. I followed him out to the veranda, and he told me you'd gone to the library, but asked me not to give him away.

"Now, I don't understand all these mysteries, Morine. In fact, I don't like mysteries. But I love you—I've loved you from the moment I saw you. And I want you to marry me—no joking, dear; I'm in dead earnest. How soon can you be ready for me?"

Morine, trembling like a bird against his heart, glimpsed Paradise and put it from her.

"I—can't," she whispered. "I—like you, Cliff, but I suppose I'm one of those people who like their own families best."

She told him how it was, how the children could never get on without her, financially or otherwise; how she had promised her father never to leave them till they were all well settled. Cliff was thunderstruck.

"But they're all grown up!" he exclaimed. "There's not one of them who couldn't be self-supporting!"

Morine, who had drawn herself out of his arms, cried out in protest: "Why, Jerry's only just getting a start. Helen and Claudia need me daily. What would happen if I didn't keep a home

for them? And Tom must go through college if I can manage it."

Cliff studied her, his brows perplexed.

"I couldn't help with the older ones," he said, "because I honestly think they could shift for themselves. But I might help out with Tom."

She shook her head.

"It's splendid of you to say that. Only I couldn't allow it. Besides, I couldn't leave the girls."

A long pause; then:

"And what about you?"

She smiled bravely.

"There's no way out, Cliff."

He was sitting on a corner of the desk, his strong, well-shaped hand spread out upon it, his eyes on the floor. Suddenly he stood up, and she saw that he was very angry—all the tenderness had gone from him. Morine remembered her first glimpse of him; she had thought he might be hard—even cruel.

"Oh, Cliff," she gasped, "you wouldn't have me selfish, would you?"

"Selfish!" His voice rang with scorn. "My dear, you are without exception the most selfish girl I know. I couldn't make you more so."

"I—selfish?" she faltered. Morine was not a conceited person, but this was an entirely new thought. She could hardly be blamed for not liking it.

"Yes—selfish," he repeated. "You love your brothers and sisters; therefore you enjoy serving them. I've seen enough of your family to know that you are turning them all into fine young monsters. They not only depend upon you, but demand everything you have and more. Yet you will never help them to become self-respecting, because you get real pleasure out of having them depend on you. In fact, you get so much pleasure out of it that you willingly sacrifice your own future welfare and me for them. If you aren't selfish, Morine, I don't exist; that's all!"

She did not answer, the slow red of hurt anger mounting into her cheeks.

"I hate him—I hate him," she kept saying to herself.

"May I see you home?" he inquired with formality.

"No, thank you," was her cold response.

He bowed stiffly and left her.

Morine stood where she was, looking after him with eyes that burned. Her throat felt sore with checked sobs, and she put her hand against it. He had wounded her in the most amazing way, made little of her. A sob fluttered to her lips, and suddenly she dropped into her chair, laid her head on the desk, and wept bitterly.

"I can't help it," she moaned. "I love him—dear Heaven, how I love him!"

A little later she locked the door of the library and stole home, a broken, disconsolate little figure. It was a pitch-black December night—no moon or stars—and the street lights were few and far between. Morine dodged shadows that loomed about her menacingly. She seemed to have lost some of her natural independence; she longed for Cliff's strong arm to protect her against these shadows—to chase away the bogies.

She felt that she was being followed and quickened her footsteps. For the last few blocks she almost ran. Then at her doorway she turned and peered back. In the dim light thrown from the windows of the house next door she saw the figure of a man. His hat was lowered slightly over his eyes, and in a flash he melted into the shadows, but not before Morine had recognized Cliff Deemer.

It was with a little pang of remorse that she realized he had seen her home in spite of herself.

For the next week Morine threw herself feverishly into the once-beloved task of making her family happy.

"It's hateful to be so poor," Claudia wailed two days after the party. "There's the Halcyon Club—all the girls belong to it—even Helen's joining. And I can't. Besides, I'm freezing in my winter coat, and Helen's buying a fur one. Oh, Morry, father left a little money, didn't he? Why can't we have it and enjoy it instead of living without any fun?"

"But, Claudia," Morine expostulated, "that little fund was to be used only in case of great illness. It's not more than a few hundred dollars, and it would be foolish to draw on it."

"Get a job and earn some coin for yourself," Tom advised.

"Please keep your mighty thoughts in your own ivory dome," his younger sister retorted. "Look at Helen—she hates her job; says it's killing her. She's going to give it up next month after she's made her last payment on the coat."

"Whew!" said Tom. "That's tough on Morry."

Morine had heard something of the sort before, and it worried her. Each morning it seemed harder for Helen to drag herself to the office. It was becoming fairly certain that, since the fur coat was an accomplished fact, Helen would treat herself to a holiday.

"You're saving that money for doctor's bills," Claudia continued petulantly, "yet you let me wear a cheesy coat that sets me right in line for the hospital. I call that false economy."

Morine looked distressed.

"Darling, we'll have to see about a coat. Of course I can't have you cold. Don't worry."

And Claudia took her advice, knowing full well that when Morry looked distressed help was always at hand.

A few days later Morine noticed an advertisement in the paper. A woman in Coburg offered a substantial sum to have her personal library catalogued. The work could be done in the evenings. Morine decided to visit the woman and apply for the work. The extra money would go far toward helping out with new expenses. The savings fund had already gone on a new coat for Claudia.

Morine took the trolley to Coburg on the following night and made her way in a fine, drizzling rain toward the address given in the paper. It almost seemed that Cliff walked beside her, towering, masterful. She could hear him saying:

"You are selfish, Morine."

"But I can't be," her heart cried out. "How can I be selfish when I love you so—and yet have given you up?"

"But you have sacrificed me, too," Cliff seemed to answer. "I loved you, Morine, and you threw me aside for a crowd who don't care if you work your nails off. You've made them parasites—every one of them."

The rain was coming down harder; it was turning bitter cold. Morine stopped short. In a blinding flash she saw that Cliff was not cruel; he was merely just; that what he had said was true.

"I've been an idiot, dear," she whispered, "a blind mole. And I won't sacrifice you any longer! I'll find a telephone and——" She stopped in swift fear. Perhaps Cliff had finished with her; perhaps he didn't want her any more. No, she could never find the courage to throw herself at him after all that had been said! Still——

Across the street was a building in process of erection. A large scaffolding extended over the sidewalk, illuminated by red lanterns. From somewhere in this vicinity had come a shrill cry:

"Help!" called a child's terrified voice. "The bricks is fallin'!"

Morine found an opening and stepped inside. Almost at once she saw a small boy struggling with an upright board.

With a sobbing scream the child dashed to safety. Morine heard a rushing, grating sound—then the whole world went black

"I moved it," he sobbed. "I didn't know I hadn't ought to. The bricks is fallin'—and if I let go they'll kill me!" His voice rose to a shriek on the final words.

In the faint red light Morine could see what he meant. He had jolted a board out of place, which supported a load of bricks. The boy, a child of about ten, had sense enough to know that unless the board were braced the load would fall on him. But he had not sufficient strength to shove it back in place. Besides, his nerve was deserting him.

"Don't move," called Morine in dull horror. "I'll help you hold it till some one comes." And without a thought for herself she ran to the boy's side.

"What's up?" shouted a voice from the street.

Right then the boy lost his head. Morine's small, willing hands had grasped the upright above his. With a last sob-

bing scream the child relinquished his burden and dashed to safety. She knew a heart-sickening moment of failure; the bottom of the upright, jarred beyond recovery, was slipping. Nothing could stop it. Morine heard a rushing, grating sound—a roar. She felt a flash of incredible agony. Then the world went black.

It was a strange place that she lived in after that—a place of ugly shadows and flashing pain. There seemed to be spells of lightning and storm. The lightning always struck at her head, till she would cry out in terror. Then she would hear meaningless, stupid voices. They frightened her almost as much as the lightning, and she would try to run from them. But that was impossible, because she was tied down in some way. After a time there came a tiny ray of comfort. One of the voices soothed her. It was deep, tender, and a little broken. It belonged to a pair of hands that held hers when the lightning was most terrifying.

She couldn't measure time—she never thought of it. But she called incessantly for the voice and the hands that never hurt. She called them by a name she couldn't quite understand, but that seemed to belong to them somehow.

Then quite suddenly one day she opened her eyes and looked round a strange and beautiful room. The walls were papered in soft ivory and rose. The curtains were of fine muslin under rose overdrapes. The furniture was of rich old mahogany with a four-post bed topped with a frilled canopy. On a table near her lay a bowl of yellow roses.

Bewildered and puzzled, Morine studied the room, though she was so weak she could hardly turn her head. The windows were open, and outside one of them she could see a fringe of honeysuckle. How could honeysuckle grow in December?

Presently two people came to her bedside—a soft, silvery little lady in black and a nurse.

"No change?" asked the little old lady sorrowfully.

"Not the slightest, Mrs. Crew," said the nurse.

"But there is," Morine politely insisted. "It's turned so warm the honeysuckle's blooming."

Two startled faces peered into hers.

"Oh, my dear," said Mrs. Crew, "thank Heaven, you're better!"

"Where am I?" Morine wondered.

She was told very little. But she was bathed, fed, and coaxed to sleep again. It was a drowsy, luxurious experience to one who had always waited on others. When next she opened her eyes it was night. Helen, Claudia, Tom, and Jerry sat round her bed in the radius of a low lamp.

"Children," she called weakly, "what does all this mean?"

There was a little cry from them; then they were all crowding round and kissing her ecstatically. Morine knew an astonished moment when even Jerry hung above her as though she were a priceless bit of jewelry. Helen held her thin little hand.

"Morry darling, you're really, truly better, aren't you?"

"Have I been very ill?" Morine asked.

"Oh, precious, you've nearly killed us with fright. For six months you've been unconscious." Tears streamed down Helen's face.

"Six months!" This was a shock to the girl in bed. "How have you ever managed the house, and what about money?" anxiously.

"Oh, Morry," Claudia sobbed, "you'll never know how we've all—hated ourselves. We were beasts, beasts—every one of us—taking so much from you and giving nothing in return. But we weren't really bad inside; we all knew how much we loved you, when we heard

how you'd nearly given your life for that horrid little boy."

"If you'll come back and let us wait on you, sis," said Jerry, "we'll show you a thing or two! There never was any one but you, Morry. I tell you what—the bricks that fell on you couldn't have hurt such an awful lot more than the bricks Cliff Deemer threw at us."

Morine, thinking this must all be a dream, looked up to see Jerry's eyes suspiciously moist.

"Here, I want to get in on this repentance chorus," said Tom, grabbing her other hand. "Anyway, Morry, I always knew what I thought of you."

A door closed downstairs. Footsteps hurried upward. Four guilty grown children stooped to kiss Morine, and vanished from the room.

"Don't be cross with us, Cliff," she heard Claudia say. "We haven't hurt her—we just had to talk to her a little!"

"Cliff!" Morine grew faint. What did Claudia mean?

In a second she knew. Clifford Deemer was kneeling by her, his eyes devouring her, his arms trembling.

"My darling—my precious little sweetheart!" he whispered, drawing her close. "Oh, Morine—how I love you!"

She lay there very quiet, with his arms about her, and so happy she thought it couldn't be real. Cliff—dear, masterful, handsome Cliff was kissing her hands, her hair, and every curve of her thin little face. He was pouring out his love upon her.

"Tell me, dear," she whispered after a while, "shall I get well? I mean, shall I be able to walk?"

"You bet you will," was his fiercely tender answer. "It's just been your darling ole head, Morine—and now that's better."

"I'm so—happy," she breathed. "What hospital is this?"

"It's your own home, loveliest."

"My home?" wonderingly.

"Yes. You see, dear, when you had your accident you were taken to St. Christopher's Hospital in Coburg. It happens that I'm on the surgical staff, so I found you next day—a poor, battered little lady who could say only one word." Cliff's voice broke. "Darling, I nearly died when I recognized you. Your collar bone and one arm were broken, and your poor little head was cut. We sewed and plastered you up. But you never woke—just moaned and called one word in your sleep.

"I sent for your family—they'd been hunting all over the country for you. And I guess I said some pretty rough things to them. They wanted to take you home, but I wouldn't let them. I said you belonged to me. Anyway, dear, when spring came I bought this house in the country, within easy motor distance of my office and the hospital, and I got Aunt Sally—Mrs. Crew—to keep house for us. Then I installed you and a nurse here. I explained to Aunt Sally that you would be my wife as soon as you recovered."

"Cliff, she must have thought you mad! I'm sure there was a big doubt of my ever getting really well again."

"There was no doubt," said Cliff stanchly. "There was enough love in my heart to bring you back from the grave. I knew you'd get well. I was in New York when I got Aunt Sally's telegram to-day, and though I couldn't catch a train fast enough, I wasn't really a bit surprised. It was what I knew would surely come."

"Oh, Cliff"—Morine's weak hands clutched him—"how could I ever have thought you hard—cruel? Why, I was wicked to think it. And, oh, my dear—how I love you! I was all wrong, and you were right, Cliff, about—about——"

"About your family, sweetheart?"

"Yes, dear. When I thought you were cruel, you were only being just."

He kissed her soft lips again and again.

"And when I thought you were selfish, darling, I was wrong. You didn't know how to treat a grown family, but you were never selfish. Your heart was too big—that was all. I knew this when I saw how much they really loved you."

After a while she asked him what her brothers and sisters were doing—who was keeping house for them.

Cliff smiled.

"They all pitch in," he said. "It's been good experience for them. Claudia and Tom have both had jobs this summer. They have some system of dividing the housekeeping among the four of them, with a woman to clean now and then. Tom's going to college this winter."

Morine's eyes questioned his.

"Who is sending him?"

"His sister," said Cliff slyly, "Mrs. Clifford Deemer."

After her long illness Morine was several weeks convalescent. This was the happiest time she had ever known. One or more of her family came to see her every day; and Cliff was with her each moment he could spare from his practice. Also, she grew very fond of his aunt, Mrs. Crew.

Aunt Sally was always sewing pretty things for a trousseau; and Helen and Claudia invariably brought attractive little offerings toward this happy cause.

It was on a day in early September that Morine, with Jerry, who had been proudly promoted to an important rôle, passed through ranks of nodding cream-and-rose hollyhocks to a waiting car. Morine, in her gown of soft white satin and her veil of rose point—"borrowed" from Aunt Sally—was a transformed little person from the orange blossoms in her hair to the tiny white slippers on her feet.

"She's far prettier than either of us," Claudia whispered to Helen. "And we always thought her a settled old maid!"

"We were idiots," Helen agreed.

Half an hour later Morine returned through the hollyhocks. But this time she was with Cliff. And Cliff was the proudest bridegroom in the world.

They stood for a minute on the broad veranda before going in to await their guests. No one could see them, so Cliff caught his little bride lovingly in his arms and kissed her on the lips which were now his own beautiful cherry-red ones. He also kissed the platinum band on the fourth finger of her left hand.

"My darling wife!" he murmured.

"Cliff," she said, looking up soulfully into his eyes, "I've just thought of something. After the terrible way I treated you, how did you know I loved you when you took this house for me?"

He smiled ever so tenderly.

"You may not remember, dear, that when I found you, you could say only one word. Guess what it was?"

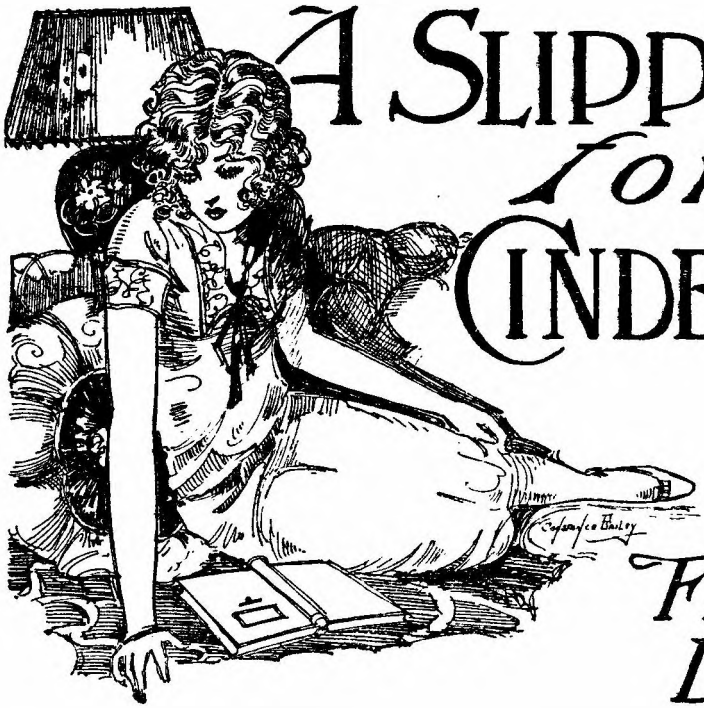
With a ray of understanding lighting her eyes she guessed at once. Her face became radiant with the love she felt.

"It must have been 'Cliff'—I'm sure that was the name I gave the voice and hands I loved."

"You darling!" answered her husband, crushing her to him again. "You are right—it was! And yet, Morine"—there was the shadow of an old hurt in his eyes—"you didn't use to love me enough to leave your family for me!"

"But I did," she told him breathlessly, her eyes dancing. "Cliff, I've loved you ever since the night of the dance! I've been wanting to tell you that. The night I was hurt I wanted you—wanted you more than I can ever say! It was you who came out of the darkness with outstretched arms and a smile on your lips, which gave me the courage to go on. It was this thread of life, backed by your love, which made me get well!"

"Oh, Morry, Morry, life is complete with you, and I know that you do love me! How happy we will be!"



A Slipper for Cinderella

By Mary Frances Doner

CHAPTER I.

THE counter was heaped with Christmas cards that lay about in gay confusion, resultant from the nervous haste of Christmas shoppers.

There were small modest cards at trifling prices, and large smart cards at ridiculous prices, as well as boxes of very imposing engraved cards upon which personal greetings were expressed most properly and impressively.

Then, too, there were those special cards meant for people who have mothers and sisters and lovers; intimate little cards that make one think so tenderly of loved ones.

And behind the counter stood Delia. A twisted little smile played around her mouth. To Delia, Christmas meant a period of the year to be spanned with bitter pangs of loneliness. For Delia had no family.

The girls at the shop were nice to her and found her gay and jolly enough. But at Christmas, they had their own families, and Delia was forgotten. The boys at the shop were pleasant and friendly, but Delia saw little of them except at work. None of them spelled romance, and she was a dreamer.

Of course, there was young Harper Bentley, junior member of the firm, who many times had tried in vain to force his unwelcome attentions on Delia. It was only the stern hand of Miss Fairweather, the manager, that had kept Delia from losing her position. For Miss Fairweather knew Harper Bentley of old and the unpleasant nature of his attentions to the pretty girls in the bookshop.

But Delia realized that she had antagonized him, and his displeasure was like a sword hanging over her head. He smiled too sweetly when he passed, and his manner was too extremely polite. His eyes said things that no one had ever said to Delia. She preferred no friends at all to a friendship such as he offered.

The cards and bills poured over the counter, and mechanically Delia went about her work. But her heart was heavy. There was no use. She simply

couldn't bear the stationery counter at Christmas time, when all these busy, happy people were preparing for Christmas. She could imagine the open fireplaces on Christmas morning; children tumbling about before a glistening tree. She could hear the delicious rattle of tissue paper as it was taken from the presents; the exclamations of delight. She could see the final gathering around the big table for Christmas dinner. Then evening, candlelight, and a feeling of peace and contentment.

Delia could never remember the time when she had known a real Christmas. Her first recollections were of an orphan asylum; of small gray figures marching on Christmas morning to the big room where a man in black prayed for ever so long, while one pinched wonderingly at the toe of a little black stocking and hoped that Santa Claus had not forgotten the book and doll. But the Santa Claus of the orphan asylum hadn't always put the right thing in the right stocking.

And then came the time when Delia was released from the first home she had ever known, to enter the service of Mrs. Sylvanus Brewster as second girl.

One could peek through massive doors there, where Jeanie and Ralph Brewster had their Christmas in the great old library, and see Jeanie impatiently pull the wrappings from a long velvet box with a delighted cry, "Pearls—from father!" or "Oh, mother! This is just what I wanted—silver fox!"

That was how Delia knew what Christmas could really be like. There were many times, when the Brewsters were south or abroad, that Delia could steal into the library and spend an hour or two among the books there.

Mrs. Murray, the housekeeper, had caught her there one day, and scolded her severely. But perhaps the look of hunger in Delia's eyes had softened her, for one day she gave Delia a book. From that time a bond of friendship formed between them. And Sarah Murray became Delia's "family."

She was startled from her reverie as she felt a hand on her arm, and looked up to see Sarah Murray standing before her.

"I just stopped in for a minute, Delia," the older woman told her. "Could you run around to the house for a minute, to-night?"

Delia smiled and nodded quickly as an impatient customer demanded her attention.

It seemed quite natural, that evening, to descend the steps inside the big iron grating at the servants' entrance of the Brewster house on Madison Avenue. Delia bumped against a trunk standing in the hall.

"This looks like traveling," she told Mrs. Murray, who came forward to greet her.

"That's exactly what it is, child! Come in and sit down. I'm busy getting ready to sail to-morrow. Mrs. Brewster has been kind enough to give me a two months' vacation, and I'm going back to my old home in Ireland for a visit. The Brewsters have gone to Italy. Now take off your things and rest yourself. You must be tired after standing all day. It would have been easier work here than going down to slave in that shop. Do you think you did the right thing leaving here, Delia? Just because you were so crazy about books—and where was it I found you to-day but at the writing-paper counter?"

"Oh!" shrugged Delia, "Christmas rush, and they needed more help in the stationery. College girls come down to earn extra money at Christmas time, and they know all about books." She

broke off and glanced away, biting her lip.

Sarah Murray shook her head slowly.

"It's a shame and a pity the way things go in this world. Here you are, starving for a bit of learning and breaking down your health to stand all day and sell books so you can be near them. And there's Jeanie Brewster! Fighting like a cat with her mother and father to get out of learning anything.

"They went over to put her in a school in Paris," continued Sarah, "but she put her foot down with a decided 'no' when she saw the school. Now they've taken her to Italy, and the last I heard—Jeanie's maid wrote me about it—Jeanie is head over heels in love with a penniless marquis. Now can you explain the way things go in this world, Delia?"

In the girl's slow smile was the look of one who knows life first hand.

"What's the use? What goes right for one goes wrong for another—you can't explain it. But that's life! It's not so bad the rest of the year. But it's this glad season that gets me all wrong. I'm just kind of lonely!"

"That's just what I surmised this whole day," Sarah Murray answered quickly. "And that's why I wanted to see you to-night. Here's Christmas upon us again, and you with no family to spend it with. So if you want to, Delia Cloon, you can come and sit in the Brewster library and read away to your heart's content—for your Christmas.

"Now, I'll leave an ice box full of things for your dinner," she continued, "and old Michael will have the place warm for you, and you can curl up in the big chair before the fire in the library like you did when you came here from the orphanage, and no one was looking! How does that strike you for Christmas, you poor lamb?"

Delia swallowed hard, blinked her eyes and smiled.

"You can have my room to sleep in," went on Sarah. "And you can leave the keys with old Michael when you go." Then she drew an envelope out of her apron pocket. "I've got a little farewell remembrance for you. Who knows, maybe I'll never be coming back again. Maybe the ship will sink or I'll die over there, or something, and I want to leave you something now to remember me by—you without a soul in the world to call your own! We'll go up to the library now, and I'll put this in the first volume of Scott, and you can find it there Christmas Eve. Come along with you now, and quit that silly mooning at me as though I'm a ghost or the like!"

And that was how it came about that on Christmas Eve, Delia Cloon turned Sarah's key in the lock of the door beneath the tall iron fence.

What did it matter if her body was numb with fatigue? Here was a home—her home for Christmas! This, instead of her gloomy hall room! She threw off her damp wraps and went on through to the familiar kitchen with its great shining range where a slow fire burned. Humming, she went to the ice box and cupboard, and in a few minutes she sat down alone to her Christmas Eve meal.

Sarah Murray's thoughtfulness had not left much to be desired. There were brandied peaches and pressed chicken and thick cream for her coffee, and Christmas cookies and little iced cakes and Sarah's own delicious raisin bread.

Afterward, Delia went upstairs to the great old library. Old Michael had laid the fire there. The massive chairs were drawn before it invitingly. Nothing had been changed, thought Delia, as she stood in the doorway, her fingers closing gently on the heavy folds of the dark velour portiéres. She lighted the

lovely twin Chinese porcelain lamps, with their heavy brocaded shades that threw pools of liquid amber against the old Tudor table; then moved on to light the heavier one beyond of russet pottery, with its somber brown shade beside the great chair where Sylvanus Brewster always sat.

There, too, faintly visible against the soft buff wall, was the small exquisite etching of that old lane in Surrey; the little church, its steeple the barest line, its fields, miracles of minute detail.

Delia admired these things with genuine appreciation. Surely, the orphanage attendants had not taken time to instill in that childish heart this deep reverence for the rare and beautiful.

"I love you—every bit of you!" she whispered, arms outstretched longingly. "We haven't always been strangers—beauty and me! Who were they—my people, my mother? Oh, that is worse than loneliness, not to know!"

She threw herself in the big chair and buried her head in her arms. She sat there, thinking. Somewhere, a choir of voices sounded on the wintry air, singing Christmas carols. She got to her feet and blinked back the tears.

"It's shameful for me to sit here feeling sorry for myself, when I've never had a Christmas that promised to be so lovely! If it weren't for Sarah——" Then she thought of the Christmas envelope in the first volume of Scott, and she ran over and swept down the book and tore open the envelope eagerly.

Five one-hundred-dollar bills were wrapped in a note that read:

A Merry Christmas to you, Delia Cloon! And here's my good wishes with it. Take this money and lay it away for a rainy day; for the day when sickness may come to you or your job be taken away. Take these few dollars for an anchor, you child without a home, and I can go to Ireland in peace, without having the lonely child-face of you haunting me. SARAH.

Delia stood riveted to the spot. Five hundred dollars! She counted the five gold-back bills wonderingly.

"If there was only some one here to tell the glad news to; some one to share it with—some one——" The thick sobs choked her. "You're good, Sarah, too good! But if you were only here! It's being alone I can't bear, Sarah."

As if to escape the specter of her loneliness, and a little mad, perhaps, at the unexpected magnificence of her gift, Delia fled through the hall and up the winding staircase. She came to Jeanie Brewster's door, and hesitated; then obeyed her impulse and stepped inside, switching on the lights.

Yes, the same familiar room—all old ivory and blue and gold. There stood the bed with its lacy counterpane and heaps of small lace and satin cushions; the small table beside it with its tiny priceless lamp; the dressing table with its array of cloisonné toilet articles. And over near the window stood a dainty spinet desk.

Delia crossed the room and switched on the small desk lamp to glance at the few books Jeanie had left there. Books drew Delia as a flower does the bee. Beside the books lay a small, neat pile of gayly colored travel folders. One in particular caught her eye.

Why not spend the holidays at the Embassy? Palm Beach is never so attractive as during the holiday season.——

Delia read on and on.

The folder was lavish in color and display. It pictured fairy blue skies, with great white drifts of clouds; and the ocean placid and lovely beneath a winter moon; the board walk, gay with promenaders and wheeled chairs; hotel lobbies and verandas seething with smiling people.

It was all too much for Delia. She wanted to be one of those smiling peo-

ple in this land of beauty. She, Delia Cloon, walking along the board walk! It was absurd! But the longing wouldn't be downed.

"This house has gone to my head," she decided, "combined with Sarah's kindness. Here I have a palace to spend Christmas in and that isn't enough! I guess it's because I'm tired —so tired——" Sitting there at the desk, she nestled her head in her arms, and closed her eyes. Sleep and dreams claimed her.

After the ludicrous and extravagant manner of dreams, Delia's was no exception. For she saw a castle by the sea; a board walk that led straight up to the stars, and very grand wheeled chairs, wherein sat lovers. There was one in which sat a princess, whose eyes were like small patches of the morning sky, and whose skin was as fair as the milky-white clouds that sailed in that sky. Her hair was as bright and golden as the sunlight.

At the feet of the princess knelt a knight, with gleaming breastplates and silken doublet; his fine dark head bent adoringly over her foot as he tried on a slipper. And he called her—Delia!

Delia roused at this amazing interlude, and she realized she was not a princess at all.

"I want to be with people who care," cried Delia's heart, "to laugh; to love; to cry against some one's shoulder! I want you—life!" Madly she paced up and down the room. "I'm twenty," she told the unoffending French-doll lamp on Jeanie's dressing table, "and I'm going to spend Christmas all by myself—reading! I ought to be grateful, but I'm not! Much as I like books, I don't want to read! I want to live!" She stopped again before the spinet desk, and the brightly colored folder loomed before her.

"Palm Beach!" she cried bitterly. "I've got just as much chance of going to Italy and falling in love with a marquis! I haven't a cent in the world, and——" She stopped, half-dazed. She had a cent in the world. She had five hundred dollars!

With a gasp, she sank into the chair before the desk. Five hundred dollars. Sarah Murray's gift for a rainy day—for the sickness that might come—for an anchor!

While Delia listened to the small tempting voice, her eyes rested on a door at the farther end of the room, unseeingly. But suddenly, the door took on a certain significance. For it was the door to Jeanie's wardrobe.

Temptation flitted across Delia's vision, bowing and scraping before the door like a small laughing dwarf, saying to her: "Why not, Delia Cloon? You'll never have a chance like this again! Borrow Jeanie Brewster's clothes for a while; take Sarah Murray's gift, and go to Palm Beach! Those pictures can't be half so lovely as the resort, itself. Think of it! Music and dancing and a man, perhaps, to make love to you!"

And as though the small laughing dwarf had caught her hand impatiently, Delia rose slowly and crossed to the door. As she opened it, she was not surprised at the beauty of Jeanie's frocks and wraps, for in days gone by she had stolen glimpses of them when every one was away. She stood feasting her eyes, and marveling that any one could ever have enough clothes to leave so many behind as Jeanie did.

For that fortunate girl had trunks and trunks of finery with her in Italy, yet here were many hangers burdened with lovely garments! Beyond hung a squirrel wrap, which she had evidently scorned, and a broadtail jacquette and a brown bengaline dress to wear with it. Upon the shelves were boxes of hats, and over in the dresser drawers were layers of cobwebby lingerie, and

over in that cabinet were shelves of slippers.

Conscience made one last tremendous effort. It sent a slow red flush to Delia's cheeks. But conscience was dealing with an entirely different person now, for already Delia was rushing up in the store room to find some trunks and traveling bags.

She selected two of similar size with the monogram J. R. B. Of course, that had to be reckoned with, for registration at the hotel had to be consistent with one's luggage! She finally decided upon the name of Jacqueline Barrington, and if pressed for an answer to the "R" by some desperately infatuated male, it would be Renée.

Conscience by this time had fled.

Late Christmas afternoon found Delia alone in the double seat for berth No. 10 of a train bound for Palm Beach. Two of Jeanie's smartly monogrammed bags lay on the seat beside her, and two trunks were in the baggage coach.

Delia could feel the soft caress of Jeanie's lingerie against her skin. The smart little jacquette infolded her like a warm embrace, for the train was very cold, as Christmas trains usually are. But, how luxurious, gay and happy she looked, she, poor Delia Cloon! A guilty feeling suddenly took possession of her. She wouldn't have been at all surprised if the door had opened and an officer of the law had grabbed her by the silky fox collar of the jacquette. In fact, she half expected it.

So when the door really opened, she pressed her hands together very tightly —waiting. The first thought that flashed through her mind when she beheld the man in front of her was: "If he is an officer of the law, I won't mind, I'm sure!"

For Larry Cullane always had that effect on people. It wasn't fair. He must have been born with that infectious smile. It made him attractive. But he wasn't in the least handsome. His features were uneven and his figure far from that of an athlete. Still, you didn't think about features or figures when you thought of Larry. In short, Larry had a way with him.

He closed the door and put down his bag.

"This must be mine—lower ten," he began. "Right, conductor?"

Delia eyed him wordlessly.

"The conductor told me that you wanted a lower," went on the undaunted Larry. "Really now"—and he smiled again—"I'd just as soon have the upper if you care to exchange!"

"Why," faltered Delia, "that's most generous of you! Thanks a lot."

He beamed broadly—pleased, no doubt, that his offer had been received so well.

"My name is Cullane—Larry Cullane. Knew there'd be a rush on this Palm Beach Special, so was one of the early birds. I just had to get away from the big town! Seemed as though I couldn't stand it until I got down to the land of joy and sunshine. It straightens you out when you're blue. Don't you think so?"

Delia nodded slowly, bracing herself for the rôle she was about to play.

"I decided to go down," she told him, "to escape the maddening social whirl! There's no end to it—especially during the holidays. In a few more days—well!" She threw out eloquent hands.

He nodded, apparently with understanding.

"I guess you think I'm rather presuming to tell you all this. But to tell the truth, I'm so tired out after the Christmas rush I just had to be comfortable and have a change. Things always stack up at the office around this time. Some of the fellows lay down on the job. Never seem to take the proper

The diner was not crowded. At a small table in a far corner, Delia and Larry had their Christmas dinner—together.

interest. They'd just as soon let the business go to the deuce."

"What business are you in?" asked Delia timidly.

"Shoes. Ernest, Duke & Cullane. Shoe manufacturers."

"Oh," replied Delia, a glow in either cheek. "And you're Mr. Cullane?"

"Er—what—I——" Larry hesitated a moment. He seemed a bit startled. "Yes," he said finally, a wraith of a smile in those gay, fearless eyes. "Yes, I'm—Cullane."

Delia's eyes opened wider. A shoe manufacturer! He must be very wealthy, or why were shoes so absurdly expensive? So this was what happened to people when they dressed in fine raiment and traveled in trains en route to Palm Beach on Christmas Day!

A porter opened the door to warn them that dinner was called for the last time.

"Suppose you've had a hundred-percent Christmas dinner about four this afternoon," ventured Larry, with a smile, "in a big, old-fashioned dining room with a fireplace at one end of it, and a tree, and——"

"What makes you suppose that?" demanded Delia, ready to play.

"Why—oh, I don't know! Something tells me there were candles on the table, red roses and a lace table-

cloth. I'll wager your father has white hair and a kind old face. And your mother—why, she's you, done in silver. And you're going down to Palm Beach to a big ball, am I right?"

What a picture! If he only knew!

"No," said Delia, slipping again into her rôle, "my people are abroad. I shall be quite alone down here. As a matter of fact, I haven't dined at all. That was the final call."

"I don't suppose," Larry began doubtfully, "that if there happened to be an empty chair at your table, you'd let a humble fellow traveler sit across from you?"

"And supposing I would?" returned this amazing Delia, dashing out ahead.

The diner was not crowded. At a small table in the far corner, Delia and Larry had their Christmas dinner—together.

"But," protested Larry, over the soup, "I've told you my name. I can't keep on calling you 'Say,' and 'Now.' I could be guessing your name, I suppose. If it was your hair, I'd say 'Glory' or something like that. And if it was for your eyes, I'd say 'Violet.' If it was the smile of you, I'd say Moonyeen! Because in Ireland that means 'Angel,' or something like it."

"It's none of them," said Delia, in a voice that was lower than usual. She did not raise her eyes. Perhaps she did not trust them. "It's Barrington—Jacqueline Barrington."

"Oh!" said Larry, "and you live in New York, don't you?"

Delia nodded indifferently.

"I suppose you're putting up at the latest hit in new hotels," conjectured Larry after a moment.

"No. The Embassy," Delia corrected him. "We—ah—we usually stay there. It will seem strange being there in winter," Delia went on leisurely. "Last year it was the Riviera, and the year before, Paris—and—oh, dear! I had almost begun to feel like an expatriate!"

She smiled sweetly across at Larry, and he smiled back. She was putting it over big, she knew.

They drank their coffee in silence. Delia was thinking how easy it was to fool people and what a shame it was to fool such a nice person as Larry Cullane. And Larry—well, it's hard to say what he was thinking about, but he was gazing at Delia intently. Though it does seem that any well-bred shoe manufacturer should have known better than to feast his eyes on his dinner partner with such abandon.

CHAPTER II.

But all delightful journeys have an end. The next afternoon Larry took out his watch with an "Already?" and frowned at the porter who came after the bags.

As Delia moved to go, with an enchanting farewell smile, Larry ventured bravely: "There's a piece of this day left—Moonyeen. And if it doesn't belong to any one else, would you give it to a poor lonesome fellow named Larry?"

And Delia, who had been hoping he'd say this very thing, began to demur. But Larry conveniently urged, "Please!"

So there seemed to be nothing to do but allow him to accompany her to the Embassy Hotel and dispose of her baggage and register. Then they went out together into a night all silver and sable. The board walk was a ribbon on silver studded with diamonds.

Larry was humming a new love song and making eyes at the moon. As she looked up at him, something in Delia's heart reached up in her throat and stilled her very breath for a moment; something that seemed to whisper, "It's happened before, Delia Cloon! Love isn't a matter of days or years. It's liable to happen in a minute!"

Music floated out to them as they sauntered along.

"There's a place over there," said Larry, "which isn't a bit ultra, unfortunately. But they dance there to music better than angels playing on golden harps. And there's a little Carmencita who sings a song and wears a red dress with cherries in her hair! The song is about nights in Spain. Shall we spend the rest of our evening there, Moonyeen?"

It was a typical cabaret, plus the holiday spirit. And Delia and Larry danced together to the music that was better than angels playing on golden harps.

And Delia thought, "I was made to dance with Larry Cullane!" Larry scowled blackly every time the music stopped. It was one of those nights that one remembers when the years have made yellowed lace of dancing and song.

"If I never have another happy Christmas," Larry told her as they parted in the lobby of her hotel, "I'll always have the memory of this one. Will you remember to-day—Moonyeen?"

"Yes," whispered Delia, but her heart cried out, "Always, Larry! Always!"

"Perhaps," ventured Larry, hopefully, "if you had time, I could see you again."

"Perhaps," Delia told him, trying to keep ecstasy from her voice. "Good night!" She left him standing there staring after her—Larry Cullane of Ernest, Duke & Cullane! Staring with longing eyes after poor Delia Cloon! Oh, stars in the sky, how you must be smiling!

At the Embassy Hotel, Jacqueline Renée Barrington was one of many who wore fine clothes and spent money carelessly. Her coming created no great stir, however. Though on the evening of her first appearance at dinner, the head waiter found a very choice table for her and seated her with considerable flourish. Mentally, Delia relayed the compliment on to the Parisian modiste who was responsible for Jeanie's chartreuse-hued gown she wore—and there was the squirrel wrap.

She tried to keep her mind on the business of ordering while the orchestra breathed a bit of Schubert and the roses on her table embraced her with their delicate fragrance.

A man at a near-by table stared at her most obviously, while the lady with him scowled. Delia smiled a bit to herself. Let men stare and let women scowl, and let the music whisper and the roses dream! Here was life! To-morrow, perhaps, Larry Cullane would walk with her beside the ocean. And another to-morrow, perhaps.

When the waiter had served the demi-tasse, he laid a small card on the table before her. She picked it up and read on either side of the shaded old English Mrs. Ethan Ponsoby Jeavons: "My dear, I should enjoy the privilege of a moment with you after dinner. May I?"

There was a moment's swift fear of detection, then the gay fearlessness of youth.

She smiled up at the waiter. "You may tell the lady 'yes.'"

Tingling with delicious excitement and anticipation, she went out bravely to meet Mrs. Ethan Ponsoby Jeavons, who wore a sable wrap and an expectant, if a bit fearful, smile. Her head was bent forward, due, Delia decided, to the long double rope of perfectly matched pearls.

"My dear," said Mrs. Jeavons, in a voice as perfect as the pearls, "forgive me! But your resemblance to some one I used to know is most startling. Who are you?"

"My name is Barrington," Delia told her, trying to keep the sudden fear

from her voice. Was the woman a detective?

"Barrington—Barrington," repeated Mrs. Jeavons thoughtfully. "And your parents? Are they here with you? This is abominable, I know. But you can't realize how important it is to me!"

"N—no," faltered Delia. "My parents are—they—they're abroad for the winter."

"They are alive, then," breathed Mrs. Jeavons. "One more question, please! Are you—oh, forgive me—are you an adopted daughter, Miss Barrington?"

"No," Delia told her quietly.

Mrs. Jeavons studied her keenly for a moment. "You must forgive my presumption, but I was amazed at dinner to see you sitting there so thoroughly the image of—of some one I used to know. It brings back memories—sad memories, my dear." She stood for a moment lost in thought. "But, then, I must not keep you. Some one is waiting for you, of course——" She touched Delia's arm affectionately as she turned to go with a smile almost of reluctance.

"No," said Delia suddenly. "No one is waiting for me."

There was something childish in the wistfulness of that smile. Perhaps Mrs. Jeavons was reminded still more of that memory of long ago, for she said eagerly:

"You mean—your evening is free? Then, shall we spend it together?"

"That would be lovely," agreed Delia, catching at this straw of companionship.

"You dear!" Mrs. Jeavons caught Delia's hand. "Sometimes I'm desperately lonely. This threatened to be a dismal evening. Now, let me see. Young people enjoy lively things. Shall we see if the clerk has tickets for something gay and entertaining? A musical comedy or operetta? At this time of year there's bound to be some special entertainment."

The clerk had tickets for a very fine musical comedy, and a few minutes later Delia stepped into the Jeavons limousine with her gracious hostess, and a footman arranged the robes about them.

The performance was delightful, and as they drifted out of the theater with the crowd, Delia found herself staring straight into Larry Cullane's eyes. He was smiling as a child might smile on Christmas morning, with wonder and awe and a bit of wistfulness in his eyes. A sense of pride swept over Delia as she stood with the squirrel wrap open at her throat and the gleam of the chartreuse-hued gown barely showing and the small jeweled pin in her hair. Mrs. Jeavons was saying, "Come, my dear," as she started to pilot Delia toward the huge, shining car that slid up at the moment.

"He must believe me, now," thought Delia. Wasn't it fate that had let him see her at that moment, entering the Jeavons motor? He wouldn't dream, of course, that was just poor Delia Cloon. The fairy tales she had told him on the train dovetailed perfectly with what he had seen to-night.

"I feel," said Mrs. Jeavons, as she bade Delia good night, "that we are going to enjoy each other a great deal. Meet me to-morrow at three, if you're not otherwise engaged. Shall we take a wheel chair for an hour in the sunshine, and then have tea?"

Delia never remembered what she said. She was almost afraid to speak for fear the bubble would burst.

At noon the following day, Larry called her.

"Do you suppose you could spare the afternoon to a beggar?" he asked gayly. "The ocean is all dressed up in its blue-and-gold gown for you to see, Moonyeen. The sky got up early and swept all the clouds away and the sun must

have spent the night shining its lamp to dazzle you. Will you walk with me, Moonyeen?"

There was tenderness in his voice and Delia almost weakened as she answered:

"Oh, I'm sorry!" And Larry could not know how much. "I'm having tea with a friend. Could I see you to-morrow—perhaps?"

Her tone was tender.

"It's little enough time to wait for an hour with you, Moonyeen!" He laughed gayly, but there was a tinge of sadness there, too.

Delia remembered that laugh over the tea and muffins in the old Italian garden of the hotel, where music whispered and lights were low, and one, it seemed, should never have tea with white-haired ladies. For that garden was made for lovers. They danced now in the room beyond. Delia watched them, her eyes wistful.

"My dear," began Mrs. Jeavons, "you're too young to sit here with me. Surely among these people here, there are some young men you know."

Delia shook her head slowly.

"No. It just seems that—that none of them are," she finished lamely.

"Mercy!" mourned Mrs. Jeavons. "I feel selfish keeping you here when you might be out there dancing. Let me see, I must know some of them." She studied the moving figures thoughtfully. "No. Isn't it queer that—why, there's Harper Bentley! The Bentleys are such dear friends of mine!" She took a card from her bag and wrote a few words on it and summoned the waiter. "Give this," she told him, "to the handsomest man in that farthest group to the left. You can't mistake him."

Harper Bentley! Delia sat with cold hands clasped rigidly together. Yes, surely, there he was! He would recognize and shame her before Mrs. Jeavons. The sword of his displeasure and revenge would descend on her head, because she had refused to flirt with him in his shop—because she had resisted his unpleasant advances. But there was no escape! She must see it through.

The waiter had appeared with Harper Bentley. Mrs. Jeavons extended her hand delightedly.

"My dear Harper! I wanted so to inquire about your mother and, too, I wanted you to meet Miss Jacqueline Barrington."

The lights were low and Delia's hat shaded her eyes—her saving grace! At first Harper Bentley did not recognize her, for he bowed low and murmured, "Miss Barrington. So pleased!"

The orchestra swung into a lively fox-trot and in a moment they had joined the dancers.

Had she fooled him, too? Delia wondered, scarcely daring to breathe.

She didn't have to wait long to find out, for the very first words he said to her were:

"Well, Delia Cloon, what's the big idea?"

She could not answer. Her heart was frozen.

"Jacqueline Barrington! Heavens to Betsy, that's good! Two days ago you were making change and waiting on customers in the shop. To-day, the ultra-ultra Mrs. Jeavons presents me to you as she would to some celeb! How come, Delia? How come?"

Still she did not answer.

"Say, Delia, you're a knockout in these clothes. Where did you get them? What's it all about?"

Perhaps if she could have avoided his eyes, he might not have seen her fear. But one glance told him that he had Delia in his power at last.

"I suppose Mrs. Jeavons knows who you really are," he said, laughing and drawing her closer as they danced, "and the poor but proud Delia Cloon is pulling a masquerade. What I want to

Perhaps if Delia could have avoided Harper's eyes, he might not have seen her fear. But one glance told him that he had her in his power.

know is, who's putting up the money for this stunt of yours? You—the little angel who wouldn't let a fellow kiss you! Had to run to Miss Fairweather with your story of my beastly attentions! Come on, Delia, out with it! Who's the man?"

Delia's eyes flamed.

"You—you beast!"

Her sweet voice shook with anger and fear.

"Not so fast, little one! There's a catch in it somewhere, and you'd better tell me!"

And rather than let Harper Bentley think the full of his evil mind, Delia told him the whole story.

He laughed amusedly and shook his head.

"You funny little kid! Oh, if Jeanie Brewster only knew you were parading around in her togs! That's the best I ever heard! You've got more nerve than I gave you credit for!"

The dance was over. Delia put a pleading hand on his arm.

"Please don't tell her—yet. Wait till I've gone. She's been so kind."

"Course I won't tell her!" And Bentley's eyes met Delia's with an unpleasant smile. "Providing you're a bit kind to me——"

There was malice in that last remark, but Delia ignored it. Terror was in Delia's heart as she went back to Mrs. Jeavons. But nothing happened and she breathed easier.

That night, the waiter found a table for three when Delia entered, for Mrs. Jeavons and Bentley were with her. And when the trying day was at an end and Delia crawled into bed exhausted with the strain of the day, her thoughts were like great dark birds preying on

her consciousness. What would Harper Bentley's next move be?

CHAPTER III.

Toward noon of the next day, the telephone rang and drew Delia back to consciousness. She sprang to her feet, for bells in the morning usually meant alarm clocks to Delia. The telephone rang again, and she smiled as she lifted the receiver. "Hello!" drowsily.

And some one answered, "Is it you, Moonyeen?"

So, of course, she knew it was Larry. And her voice was not the least bit drowsy as she told him, "It's a very lazy person, who danced late last night. She even kept on dancing after the clock struck twelve."

"But, then, why shouldn't she?" demanded the amused voice on the telephone. "Only Cinderellas have to go home at midnight. So I suppose your little gold slippers are standing in order at the foot of your bed—both of them. And rags would look funny on you, Moonyeen—like hanging a dust cloth on a star!"

"Well," said Delia, with more seriousness than her listener realized, "what would you have thought, Larry Cullane, if you had seen me running down the board walk last night in rags and one slipper?"

"Now, let me see," returned Larry with a chuckle. "With one hand I'd have grabbed you quick, for fear the wind might have swept you into the ocean as it would a feather. And with the other hand, Moonyeen, I'd have pulled the money out of my pockets and offered it to the world for that other slipper!"

"For a slipper for Cinderella?" demanded Delia. "And why would you have done that, Larry Cullane?"

"Because I'm thinking, Moonyeen, you'd have given me a smile, maybe. Would you?"

"Are you always so absurd in the morning?" evaded Delia.

"Only on occasions," he returned. "And I'm wondering if you'll think it altogether too absurd if I were to say—would you meet me in the lobby in an hour and—and have a bit of lunch with me somewhere?"

"I'd think it was very nice," answered Delia, trying to hold back the joy in her voice.

"Then, you'll come?"

"In an hour." And she fled to dress.

Delia took a last look in the mirror as she drew on her gloves, when the telephone rang again. When she answered it, Harper Bentley's smooth voice was saying, "Up so early, fair one? I thought you'd sleep until noon!"

"Well," she began nervously, "you see, I had a luncheon engagement."

"With Mrs. Jeavons, I presume," he decided equably.

"No."

"Then who is the fortunate party?"

How she detested his suave tones! And what right had he to question her? But she swallowed her anger and tried to put a smile in her voice.

"A friend—an old friend."

"Oh! An old college friend, I presume." Delia caught the echo of his laughter. "Pardon, little one! That was cruel, wasn't it? But I couldn't resist it. Now, let's get to the point. Is the friend, by any chance, a gentleman?"

"I can't see what difference it makes to you," returned Delia with spirit. "I'm in a hurry, now, so you'll have to excuse me."

"Not so fast—not so fast," came the smooth voice. "I've made up my mind to have lunch with you to-day, myself, Delia Cloon, and that's that! Tell your friend, whoever he may be, that the party is off."

"I'll do no such thing," flamed Delia.

"Are you quite sure?" he asked slowly. And Delia sensed the steel in his voice.

"Please—to-morrow?" she begged.

"To-day!"

Delia could see her castle of dreams tumble down to a heap at her feet, for Harper Bentley would keep his word! If she didn't give in to him, Mrs. Jeavons would scorn her, and when Jeanie Brewster returned from Italy, young Bentley would not hesitate to tell about the borrowed clothes, and—oh, it was all too awful!

Delia could see Larry Cullane standing down there in the lobby this minute, smiling as he waited. She could see the hours they might have spent together! If Harper Bentley told this thing, of course, it would get around the hotel and she would have to leave in shame. Then Larry would hear of it, too.

With a smothered sob she answered, "Very well."

"Fine, fine!" Bentley told her. "I'm down in the lobby, and I'll wait here for you. Don't take long. It's a gorgeous day!"

Slowly Delia put the receiver back on the hook. The clock on the dressing table said one o'clock. Larry would be down there! How could she tell him? He would think she didn't want to go—that she didn't care!

There wasn't much time to lose. Summoning her courage, she called the office and told them to page Mr. Cullane. Then settling back disconsolately in her chair, she waited.

His voice came to her anxiously over the telephone.

"You're not ill, Moonyeen?" he begged.

"N-no. I—you see—I——"

"What is it?" he demanded in a worried tone. "What's wrong?"

"Well,"—and she tried to smile and make her voice sound casual—"the fact of the matter is, I'm in a frightfully embarrassing position. You see, I had another engagement for lunch to-day—that I'd forgotten all about until a moment ago. I—I hope you're going to understand——"

He was silent for a moment, and it seemed he must hear her heart beat as she waited. His voice was brisk and matter-of-fact when he answered.

"Yes. Of course, I understand. And—I'm sorry. You know, Moonyeen,"—and he laughed, a ghostly sort of laugh—"I never let myself believe a thing is true—a thing like this, I mean—until it's happened. It's such an awful comedown."

"You can't know how sorry I——" She could not finish.

"Some other time," he tried to say carelessly.

"Perhaps. Good-by!"

When all trace of tears had been erased, she went down to meet Harper Bentley.

He came forward as she left the elevator, but Delia's eyes searched the lobby for Larry. If he hadn't gone, he would see her. Yes, there he was, sitting disconsolately over near a desk.

She dared to smile and nod at him as she passed, and he watched her go to meet young Bentley with a hurt look in his eyes. She knew he didn't believe her. He thought she preferred that smirking Beau Brummel!

It was such a lovely day to waste on some one she hated. She was half tempted to defy him, and run back to Larry Cullane. But she grew cowardly at the thought. What if Larry discovered that she was an impostor? He would probably scorn her, too. And Mrs. Jeavons—Delia's heart grew heavy.

"Well," Harper Bentley was saying, "this certainly is a clever stunt on your part, Delia. I didn't think you had it in you, but I like you better for it. Come

on, now, where shall we have lunch? At the L'Aiglon? That's a jolly little place." And he would not listen to Delia's protests, for the L'Aiglon was the very place where Delia and Larry had spent the last piece of that memorable day.

After they were seated at the table, Harper began, "You've certainly got Mrs. Jeavons going! She swears you're the dead image of some one she used to know. Say, if I told her who you really were, wouldn't she cut you cold? But I'll let you play your little game as long as you're square with me," he smugly confided.

Delia endured the afternoon. She let Harper Bentley make love to her, but scarcely hearing a word he said. Her heart was back with Larry Cullane. She could not forget the hurt look in his eyes. Oh, if she could only tell him why she had treated him as she did! When Harper urged her to dine with him that evening—demanded it, in fact—she firmly refused. Even his threats to divulge her secret did not move her. A sort of blind desperation took hold of her.

"I'll call to-morrow," he told her on leaving, and there was a look in his eyes that Delia did not like. But she was beyond caring. Once in her room, she gave way to tears.

"I can't be so cheap! I won't!" she cried into her pillow. "I can't bear the sight of him. If he's going to tell on me, let him! It had to end soon, anyway. But, oh, why did he, of all people, have to be the one person down here that Mrs. Jeavons knew? Her scorn will be terrible!"

Later that evening, she stole out of the hotel and drew the fox collar of the broadtail jacquette high about her face, and wore the small, brown hat over her eyes. With her back to the passing crowd, she stood facing the sea, letting the chill wind whip against her. She didn't even brush away the slow tears that crept down her cheeks. Already had her promising adventure landed her high and dry on the shoals of grief.

And Larry! If only, on that memorable night, when they had first met on the train, he had proven to be a struggler like herself! But Cullane, of Ernest, Duke & Cullane—no! He would never understand the madness that had sent poor Delia Cloon running off to Palm Beach with another woman's clothes and a borrowed name.

Life didn't push people of his set against the wall so that they had to resort to such measures for a fling at fun. No, only some one who had lived on pleasure's crusts could understand. To-morrow morning, early, she would steal back to New York, and close the door of Paradise behind her. And the future—well, she would have a memory!

The winter moon hung cold and silent above the restless sea, and along the silvery road of its reflection Delia could see her dreams march with bowed heads into nothingness. Larry Cullane and his smile, and the things he said. Oh, what might have been! She recalled his smiling eyes and lips—and smiled at the memory of them. She wondered if she would ever see them again.

Then some one was saying beside her, "Is it you, Moonyeen?" And she turned to see him standing there.

"Larry!" cried her heart, and the flames of her blushes shot through her white cheeks.

He caught the small gloved hand that she flung out in surprise, and held it.

"I suppose you're thinking that a man of any self-respect would go on his way and leave you alone, since you've shown him how little he matters," he told her.

"Please!" came the tremulous whisper, and a ferocious tug at his hand.

Larry Cullane laughed.

"Oh, I won't keep you long, Moonyeen! But the cat's going to have a long look at the queen and then go and crawl in the ocean! You don't want to be bothered with me; you told me that this afternoon when you turned me down. And since I'm never going to see you again, I'm going to make you listen to me, just this once.

"Moonyeen"—his voice was husky now, and his eyes sad—"to-morrow I'll be wondering where I found the courage to tell you this. I'll be wondering why you didn't call a policeman and have me jailed! You on your throne!" He laughed again. "It's just as if I stood here trying to tell a star that—that I loved her!"

"That you loved her, Larry?" whispered Delia, her heart pounding in her throat.

"We'll use that word," he said with a trace of a smile, "in place of a better one. Moonyeen, that first night I found you—well, I said to myself, 'Now, Larry Cullane, keep your head! You knew some day you were bound to meet her, and here she is! She isn't the kind that knows the seamy side of life. She's been carried around on a satin cushion and fed with a gold spoon. So, don't go falling in love with her now, I tell you!' But, Moonyeen—my heart might just as well have told the sun to stop shining. For I loved you then, and I love you now—and I'll always love you, my dear!

"Now, look the other way for a minute while I tell you the rest," he went on. "And then keep on looking till I've gone out of sight and don't shame me more than I can bear. For I lied to you that night. I'm not the real Cullane of Ernest, Duke & Cullane. My name just happened to be the same as one of them. I'm a salesman of theirs, and my whole salary wouldn't be enough to keep you in slippers alone. But when you misunderstood me that night, I thought, 'Well, there's no harm in letting her think I'm somebody!' Now keep looking at the sea, my dear, and I'll walk right out of your life with its richness and luxury! Then you'll never see me again. But I won't be forgetting you, Moonyeen—ever. You're that to my heart—and you always will be—that the moon's silver path out there is now to the dark, old ocean!" He pressed the small hand tenderly that lay in his own and turned swiftly to go.

Delia found her voice at last.

"Larry!" she cried, "come back! Come back! You mean—you——" She was laughing now, hysterically, into the soft fur collar. "Larry!" she cried, as he came close again, "think—just think what might have happened if you hadn't told me that! Listen, now—and perhaps this time, you'd better look out at the sea!" And she told him her story from the very first—from those orphan-asylum days.

After the first few sentences, his arm stole around her.

"And Delia Cloon is your name!" he repeated. "Do you know, Moonyeen, I couldn't be calling you Jacqueline, somehow. It didn't sound like you. Can you imagine a combination like Jacqueline Cullane? Now, take Delia Cullane—there's a name for you!"

Their eyes met in the moonlight's sheen—the gay city at their backs. But no one in the dazzling throng possessed a happier heart than Delia. She thrilled at the name—Delia Cullane.

Robinson Crusoe and his Friday were never more alone on their desert isle than were Delia and Larry here on the gay board walk. For Palm Beach, alone, did not lie behind them as they stood looking out at the sea, but all the shadows of the past. And, as Larry found her lips nestled down in the fur collar, the years ahead beckoned as bright and shining as the pathway on

the whispering water that led up to the moon. Delia's dreams were holding their heads up now, proudly marching right into her own life! They had come back in triumph! Delia's common sense overrode her longing to stand there forever with Larry's arm about her, and they walked back to the hotel like two joyous children. Just before she turned to run up the steps, he snatched a good-night kiss and said:

"At nine o'clock in the morning, Delia Cloon, I'm coming to get you, if I don't die of joy to-night!"

"And I'll be late for my own wedding if you don't let me go, Larry," she pleaded, loathing to leave him at all.

He stood watching until she had passed inside the great doors of the Embassy, and would never have let her go if he could have known what waited for her inside. He went whistling down the board walk, winking at the moon and dreaming of a glad to-morrow.

As Delia passed through the lobby, three people came toward her. Mrs. Jeavons, pale and weary-eyed, a shrewd-looking man and a tall, white-haired man with a haunted face and eyes, the saddest Delia had ever seen.

"My dear child," began Mrs. Jeavons. "We've waited for you since nine."

Delia's heart flew to her throat, for all this could mean only one thing. Harper Bentley had disclosed her secret. Mrs. Jeavons was here to upbraid her, and the shrewd-looking man must be an officer of the law, and the white-haired man—oh, he was probably the Brewster attorney here to bring her to account for wearing Jeanie's clothes. Delia stood quite still and murmured a little prayer and thought of Larry for courage.

But Mrs. Jeavons did not scold her. Rather, she came forward and drew her close and pressed her damp cheek against Delia's. And the white-haired man said, "Milly, dear. Don't grieve so. After all these years, it's time for joy, not sadness."

"I know—I know," murmured Mrs. Jeavons. "Come, we'll go up to her room."

The shrewd, black-eyed man shrugged his shoulders and said something to Mrs. Jeavons in an undertone, then stalked away. When they reached Delia's room, it was Mrs. Jeavons who broke the silence.

"I don't know what you must think of us, my dear, but we're both so overcome at what's happened to-day. Shall I tell her, Ethan, or will you?" She turned to the white-haired man.

His head was bowed as though in pain, and when he did not answer, Mrs. Jeavons turned again to Delia.

"If you recall, my dear, the first night I saw you, your resemblance to—to some one I used to know was so striking that I could not let you out of my sight until I had spoken to you, and assured myself that a hope I had long entertained was really dead. After I had spoken to you and you told me who you were, I believed you, of course."

Delia started, a slow, deep blush covered her cheeks.

"Oh, my child! Your little fairy tale was no sin!" And she smiled kindly. "I would never have known the real truth, of course, but for Harper Bentley. He thought he was shaming you in my eyes, but, on the contrary, he forged a link, through his malice, which has brought about the reunion of your grief-stricken uncle and yourself." She nodded toward the white-haired man.

"On seeing you that first night, I immediately got in touch with my husband—your Uncle Ethan—for it didn't seem possible that anywhere on earth there could be a person who so closely resembled your dead mother, as yourself."

"My—mother!" cried Delia. "What do you mean?"

"Let me tell you, dear," begged Mrs. Jeavons, uncertainly. "Years ago, your grandfather Jeavons married a very haughty lady from England. A son was born—your Uncle Ethan. Your grandfather was a very gay gentleman who loved laughter and song and happiness, but his proud English wife froze that side of his nature. She made his life a different sort of thing from that which he had hoped for. Ethan grew up in that forbidding atmosphere—I speak this way, my dear, to justify what happened later. The gentler side of his nature was never allowed to find expression. He was twenty and attending Oxford, when his mother died.

"Shortly afterward, his father met a girl scarcely older than his son. But to him she was all the sunshine and laughter and happiness that he had missed. They were married, and the silent old house was gay again. Now, when Ethan came home from England that year, and found his new mother, he wasn't pleased. He wasn't used to her sort, and considered her an interloper. And"—she glanced sadly at the white-haired man opposite—"he was a little jealous, too. This was because he worshiped his father, and his father was learning to be a boy again. Ethan was years older in dignity. He couldn't bear to share his father's love with some one else; and bitterness grew in his heart toward this girl.

"Perhaps a year later, a daughter was born to that union—little Delia Jeavons, your mother!" Mrs. Jeavons' voice was low. "Then it seemed Ethan was almost forgotten, for in their new joy the parents had little time for him. He hated the baby, because it seemed to separate him still further from his father. A few years later we were married, and I believe in our love he found something that made him forget all the bitterness and jealousy of those other years. For we were very happy.

"He had taken up law as a profession, but he was not particularly successful. This preyed a great deal on his mind. His continued coldness toward his mother and little Delia angered his father, and many times they had words over it. I tried hard to reason with Ethan, but this thing seemed to eat away at his soul. Once, his father threatened to disinherit him if he continued to treat little Delia with such scorn, and it was then that Ethan began to realize that not only was his half sister stealing away his father's love, but that she would probably inherit the greater part of his father's fortune. And being no great success in his profession, this fear haunted him.

"When Delia was about seventeen, a young gardener, Jack Cloon, was employed at the Jeavons country house near Boston. He was a handsome, gay youth and won Delia's heart at once. When the news of her infatuation reached her father, he sent the young man away in a rage; scolded Delia, and threatened her if she ever dared speak to him again. But Delia's love for Jack Cloon was not the sort that can be denied, and one day she stole away to meet him and never returned. They were married, and a few days later a note came to her father saying how happy she was and begging his forgiveness.

"But her father turned bitter and relentless, and the next day he made a new will cutting off her name entirely. It was as though she had died in that house. The shock of it killed her mother. At last Ethan had the new joy of seeing his father turn to him for comfort and consolation. So Ethan and I, at his father's request, went to live in that old home. Daily I saw his father failing in health, grieving for the happiness and loved ones he had lost. It was pitiful. One night, he wrote to Delia and gave the letter to Ethan.

'Take it to her,' he said, 'and tell her I haven't long to live and I must see her before I go. Bring her to me, Ethan.'

"All the old hatred returned to Ethan. That day he took upon his soul a sin that he has borne down through the years. He tore up the note and never went near Delia. A few days later, he returned to his father and told him that Delia refused to come; told him that she did not care to ever see him again." Mrs. Jeavons' voice broke, and she lowered her eyes to escape the steady, incredulous gaze of the lovely girl before her.

"Ethan did not tell his father, either, of the message Delia had sent one day, saying that she had given birth to a daughter and that she was not expected to live. She begged her father to forgive her and take her baby, or it would have to be given to charity. Her husband was dead, and she was destitute and broken-hearted.

"But Ethan was filled with bitterness. He let them both die without that last bit of happiness; without that

"Don't grieve for me," pleaded Delia. "You can't know what a joy it is just to know who my mother was."

baby being provided for. That baby was you—little Delia. It was not until years later that he told me of that awful secret that had eaten away his happiness—our happiness. It was like a black cloud haunting his vision. Then he tried to find you, but what a quest! At last, he gave that up in despair. Sometimes his punishment seemed too great to bear. He would watch for a face like his little half sister's in every crowd. Hoping—praying, and I praying with him, for our happiness. For only in righting that terrible wrong—in finding Delia's daughter, lay our hope of peace."

Delia sat staring fixedly at the white-haired man opposite. Slowly she rose and went to him and put a comforting hand on his shoulder.

"What you must have suffered!" she whispered. "Don't grieve for me. You can't know what a joy it is just to know who my mother was."

Ethan Jeavons got to his feet and drew her close.

"There is nothing in the world like remorse, little Delia," he said brokenly. "When the detective told me your story to-day, and had found you were undoubtedly Delia Jeavons' daughter, it was punishment enough! You—a servant in the Brewster home—the Brewsters, my friends; you, working in a shop, longing for your rightful heritage, and the proud Jeavons blood flowing in your veins! Oh, little Delia, can you ever forgive me? You can't know what a load is lifted from my heart! What I have is yours, and we'll all go away together and you'll see the world and take up the life intended for you!"

But Delia smiled and drew back.

"It's all so—so wonderful, I'd almost forgotten. I'm so happy to think we've discovered each other, Uncle Ethan, but, you see, I'm—I'm going to be married to-morrow!"

"Married?"

She nodded happily.

"Yes, at nine in the morning."

"And to whom?" asked Mrs. Jeavons, wide-eyed.

"To Larry—Larry Cullane. Oh, he's poor and all that, but I don't care. I love him. Think what this Christmas has brought me! I've found who my mother was and what she was like and both of you—and now, Larry wants to marry me! It's—why, it's just like a dream!"

"Cullane—Cullane," Mrs. Jeavons was saying. "I'm not familiar with that name."

"No, you wouldn't be, I'm afraid. But just wait till you see Larry, and you'll never forget him!"

Mrs. Jeavons and her husband exchanged startled glances.

"Of course!" she smiled graciously, after a moment, and shook a playful finger at Delia. "My, but this is exciting news—one thing after another. Your poor head must be going around in a whirl. Come, dear, you must go to bed. We've all put in the most trying day. What with cables from Mrs. Brewster in Italy and the detective's hourly reports from further discoveries about you! My dear, Harper Bentley will never forgive himself for bringing you good fortune. He was bent on destroying you in my eyes yesterday, but just see what he's brought about!"

Ethan Jeavons took Delia's hand in his and his eyes were kindly as he searched hers.

"This has been a day to remember, hasn't it? It's the beginning of a new life for us both, little Delia." He kissed her forehead, but, queerly, Delia wasn't thinking of what he said. She was thinking of Larry and nine o'clock in the morning.

It occurred to her, after they had gone, that they seemed to take this announcement of her forthcoming marriage very lightly. But she dismissed

the thought with a smile. She felt like Alice in Wonderland. Was it all true, or just a dream? But, no, Larry wasn't a dream! To-morrow—— She fell asleep in Paradise.

At an early hour she was awake. Her wedding day! She went about the room humming, hunting through Jeanie Brewster's frocks for the very finest. In an hour, she would go down to meet Larry. In two hours she would be——

There was a knock on the door. Perhaps he was sending her flowers to wear! She fled to the door. But a boy stood there with an envelope. Flushed and eager-eyed, she tore it open. The note inside read:

DEAR DELIA: I've been thinking things over since I saw you last night, and I'm wondering if we haven't made a mistake, after all. Maybe it was the moonlight, and maybe it was just two lonely people kidding themselves along about a golden dream.

Good-by, Delia. I've taken the eight o'clock train back to New York. But this was the best way I've found yet to spend Christmas. You'll forget me, Delia—for I'm not much to remember, but don't think hard of

LARRY.

She stood with the paper fluttering in her hand, her face suddenly white.

"What does he—he mean?" she stammered. "Oh—Larry! Could you do this to me? Could you, Larry?" She sank to her knees beside a chair.

For an hour she knelt there fighting back the waves of terror and fear and loneliness. Already she had forgotten that she was a member of Jeanie Brewster's world by every right. She only knew that love lay dead in her heart!

A pale, composed Delia admitted Mrs. Jeavons later on.

"You've been crying, my dear," she said with a great show of concern. "What is it?"

Delia handed her Larry's letter. She heard her say, with considerable arching of brows: "Are you surprised? They never take these things seriously, child. A Christmas flirtation. That's all it was. Don't be hard on the poor boy. You made him forget, probably, that Christmas is a lonely time. And he made you forget. But now that you've found your Uncle Ethan and me, life will really begin for you. My dear, when you've seen more of the world, a thing like this will not surprise you. It's all in the game, as the saying goes. Come, now! Pull yourself together! Just supposing this man had done this thing to you and you hadn't found us? What then? You see, there's always something to be grateful for!"

Perhaps Mrs. Jeavons was right. Maybe some day when she could learn to forget the things Larry had said to her—his smile, and the dreams they had whispered of together—perhaps, by then, faith in people would return. Perhaps she would have found some one else to believe in by that time—some one else who—— Tears blinded her as she brushed back the hair that caused Larry to want to call her "Glory!"

A new life opened before Delia that day, and it opened before a new Delia. Something of that old loveliness had gone from her eyes. Faith had died within her!

She knew what it was now to own fine clothes, to drive her own motor, to ride her own horse. She had a sable coat and a mink coat and frocks as lovely as any ever owned by Jeanie Brewster. Her room was lined with books, and tutors came and went religiously from the old Jeavons home.

Ethan Jeavons was most indulgent, and it seemed each day that he took a greater interest in life through Delia's pleasure in the things he gave her. She was popular with the very people who, in the past, she had waited on in the bookshop. She was now a member of

the Jeavons family, and looked upon favorably by the most exclusive sets. And Delia won them with her sweetness and charm. But there was sadness in her smile that months of pleasure could not efface. When men made love to her, she laughed at them—softly, of course—because to laugh at love is never kind. But she did not believe them; love didn't exist!

CHAPTER IV.

In June, the Jeavons' took her to England and the Continent. Sometimes, Delia almost forgot her secret sorrow in the beauties of the Old World. She visited the gayest places. There were trips to Italy and Spain and Switzerland, and an orgy of shopping in Paris.

December saw them returning to New York, and Christmas was not far off. Delia remembered that Christmas night a year ago, when she had told Larry how weary she was of society! She smiled now at that poor little Delia. What a silly child she had been! A baby telling fairy tales to a man of the world who had probably been laughing at her all the time.

Christmas Eve this year saw Delia about to make her bow to society. Her gown was a creation of a famous Parisian modiste. The old Jeavons home had been made into a flowery fairyland to welcome the guests. A diamond necklace was her uncle's gift. She stood beside the window, letting the late afternoon sunlight play with the rare stones as they lay in her hand. These jewels—worth a fortune, hers! And a year ago——

Every detail of that adventure raced through her mind and was magnified a thousand times. She had taken Sarah Murray's generous gift and Jeanie's clothes and sallied forth in quest of adventure!

An exquisite gift had been sent to Sarah Murray in Ireland, this year, for hadn't Sarah been the fairy godmother who brought it all about—the trip and Uncle Ethan and Larry?

She thought she had forgotten. She thought she had driven the memory of Larry Cullane from her heart and locked that little door and thrown the key away. But out of the mists that shrouded the aching memory of that interlude in her life, marched the vision of Larry with all the poignancy of an old grief.

She drew back the heavy damask draperies that sheltered the window seat, and threw herself in a shadowy corner of it and stared out at the snowy twilight, dreaming.

She did not know how long she had been there before she heard voices in the hall. They hesitated outside her door. Not realizing her presence, they slipped into two near-by chairs in her room.

One voice said—it was Aunt Milly's, of course: "Ethan, dear, Delia grows more beautiful each day. I'm wondering who will win her. What a rare little thing she is, with her love of beauty, her vivid imagination and her deep, emotional nature! You know, it's fortunate that her affair at Palm Beach, with that obscure man, was snuffed out so easily. Here is a card she received from him to-day. Fortunately, I found it first. It says:

There's a place by the sea with a pathway to the moon,
And I'm going to spend my Christmas there, Miss Delia Cloon.
I've got money in my pockets like any rich fella
To buy a slipper, maybe, but for another Cinderella!

"Now, isn't that absurd, Ethan? And in verse! As though it mattered a bit to Delia where he spent his Christmas. The presumption! You know, Ethan, I don't think I'll ever re-

cover from the man's agreeableness, last winter. I expected plenty of trouble when we went to him that night, and told him what an injustice he would be doing Delia if he insisted upon marrying her.

"I never dreamed he'd write that letter about not caring for her and give it to you to send her," she went on. "And when he said, 'You're right! She deserves a chance at life and happiness, and I won't stand in her way'—you know, Ethan, it was rather touching, considering——" She laughed softly. "But, then, one soon forgets when one is young like Delia. Thank Heaven, we rescued her in time from a life so commonplace, so unsuited to her as that would have been!"

"I often wonder," came Ethan Jeavons' voice, "what we would have done without her; how we lived before she came here. Oh, Milly, she has given me back life! Heaven help me, what those years were! I can go to sleep now without being haunted by her mother's accusing eyes. My father——" He broke off uncertainly.

"H'm!" he went on, clearing his throat, "Delia marry a shoe salesman! She'll marry the finest man in the country, if I have anything to say about it! Why, he couldn't keep her in slippers! But there was a look in that fellow's eyes I liked, when I asked him how much he would take to give her up. And when he said, 'It's a good thing for you that you've got white hair!'" He laughed reminiscently.

"He wasn't a bad sort, in his way. And I saw his hand tremble when he wrote that letter to her. But they're both better off. She'll be coming in, soon. Have you noticed how young Cartwright is mooning over her these days, Milly? Perhaps——" The voices died away, as steps sounded down the hall.

When she dared, Delia uncurled from her position against the curtained window. And just as a fairy godmother had touched poor Cinderella years ago, and the rags fell away and left fine raiment, something that had been lost came back to Delia's smile, and a small, red rose bloomed in either cheek, and stars came out in the violet heavens of her eyes. She went to her spinet desk and scribbled some words on her monogrammed note paper:

UNCLE, DEAR: You're right. I'm going to marry the finest man in the country—and he's Larry Cullane! Forgive me. I couldn't help hearing what you and Aunt Milly said. You've both been wonderful! DELIA.

And mumbling a broken prayer, and shakily drawing on wraps and gloves, Delia turned down the hall to the servants' stairs and went out into the crisp whiteness of another Christmas Eve.

There were angels in the sky—each star was an angel—and they were sounding silver trumpets; some were singing:

"There's a place by the sea with a pathway to the moon,
And I'm going to spend my Christmas there, Miss Delia Cloon!"

The length of the trip to Palm Beach varies. This time, it took Delia a thousand years. A fat old lady was her dinner partner this time. But Delia didn't care. Outside was another moon, even more beautiful than the Christmas moon last year.

Delia gazed at it mistily.

As the train crawled along, Delia wondered. Would he be there to meet her? Would he have received her telegram in time—or would, perhaps, another Cinderella be whispering to him by the sea?

For she had handed a telegram to an amazed clerk while she waited for the train. It read:

Larry Cullane, please meet my train, at eight thirty-two;
I'm running away from a fancy ball and my own début.
Don't squander the money that's in your pockets, or this day you'll live to rue!
For I need a young man to buy me a slipper—and that young man is you!

He was there—there to lift her almost from the step of the train, even in the crush of the Christmas crowd! Excitedly, Delia had waved to him through the window. Her cheeks were flushed with anticipation. Her heart thumped with a little leap. She was in his arms, madly! People were all so busy being merry that they didn't think anything, probably, of a man and a maid standing there locked in each other's arms, closely, silently, in a joy too deep for words. The very heart of each was pulsating its message of "I love you" to the other so eagerly—so surely, as their lips met in a kiss a little more lingering, perhaps, than most kisses given at the time of a greeting.

Larry said at last, in a voice that was husky:

"Moonyeen, darling—is it a dream that I'm seeing you here?"

She smiled up at him with love-lit eyes.

"I didn't know—I didn't know until to-day!" she crooned over and over. "Oh, Larry! And I thought you didn't care! When you went away and then wrote me that letter saying it was just a golden dream, I believed you. But,

The very heart of each was pulsating its message of "I love you" to the other so eagerly—so surely as Delia's lips met Larry's.

Larry, I heard a conversation between my aunt and uncle which made everything clear. Oh, Larry! They have been good to me in every possible way but this. To think of what they tried to do! I'm so glad you sent that card!"

Her voice was tender.

"But it wasn't fair of me, Moonyeen. I shouldn't have sent it, but I wanted you so! I wondered if you ever even remembered Larry, who hasn't a thing in the world to give you —but his love! Sweetheart, do you want me, as I do you, to love for ever and ever?"

Delia shyly hung her head a moment, then drew his arm snugly to her, as they walked along the board walk.

Suddenly they stopped and leaned over the railing, looking out upon the sea as they had done one other night.

"Darling," she said, "I do want you with all my heart! I'd rather marry a shoe salesman than—than the president! Besides, I wasn't meant for anything but a Cinderella! The world I've been living in doesn't belong to me!"

The moon shone down on a silver world, and in the distance came the murmur of the sea, peacefully now, it seemed, like a hushed choir of angels. Heaven was close at hand! The kiss he gave her was part of it, she was sure. The street ahead was white and silver.

"Moonyeen!" he said, with tenderness in his voice, "see that lighted Christmas cross against the sky up that street?"

She nodded happily.

"That's on top of a church, Moonyeen, and we're going there, now! We found love together last Christmas, and we are going to have the preacher tell us that it is to last throughout our mortal years."

A star, brighter than the others, twinkled merrily at Delia as they walked along.

"That's our star of love," she whispered, "and just like the one of old, it is leading us to happiness."

She Had Her Mother's Eyes

By
GWEN TOLLIVER

CONSIDERING all the circumstances, Winifred, I think it is best for me to release you from our engagement."

Every vestige of color was drained from Winifred Hazlam's face as her fiancé, Philip Strange, spoke in a voice which he forced to calmness. Pulling herself up proudly, she answered quietly:

"Of course, if you have stopped caring for me, I have no other choice than to consent to our engagement being broken, but——"

She hesitated, and her deep-blue eyes filled with tears, which hung on the black lashes like sparkling diamonds. Then something in the pained expression of his strong face caused her to end her stiff sentence by throwing herself into his arms and sobbing out:

"But you do love me still, don't you, Philip?"

A soft smile played about his firm mouth, making his rather stern face look very gentle. Stroking back the raven-black hair from her fair brow, he answered bravely:

"God knows I do, dear, so much that, believing it will in the end be for your

ultimate happiness, I have found strength to release you from our engagement."

"And supposing I refuse to be released?"

There was an unusual strength of purpose in the girl's voice as she asked the question, and her lover realized that this was no child he had to deal with, that, in the past few days, the girl he loved had suddenly grown out of girlhood into a strong, sweet woman, such a one as would be willing, if need be, to suffer or even to die for the love she bore him.

The knowledge brought a curious sensation of rest to his troubled heart; but, telling himself that he must do what he believed to be his duty, at whatever cost to himself, he answered gently:

"When I have explained matters, dear, I think you will agree with me that I am doing the right thing. Tell me, Winifred, are you willing to listen to a rather long explanation?"

She nodded her head gravely.

"I am quite ready to hear," she said, "only let me sit in my old place, will you? It may be the last time," she went on seriously, "though I don't think so. Loving each other as we do, I don't think you will be able to convince me that any circumstances whatever can be bad enough to separate us."

"God bless you for that, dear," he said, and kissed her reverently. She returned his kiss, then slipping to the floor at his feet, curled up like a child, and laid her head contentedly upon his knee.

"Now, stroke my hair," she commanded, "and get on with your explanations."

Obediently he stroked back the dark, clustering hair from the dainty temples as, obedient to her request, he explained the necessity for the engagement between them to cease.

"I hardly know how to start," he began hesitatingly. "Until dad died, two weeks ago, I thought my prospects in life were of the best." Here she interrupted him by lifting her hand and touching his with a tender sympathetic touch, for she knew how great had been his grief at the loss of his father, and her newly-awakened woman's heart had ached for him in his trouble.

"Thank you, dear," he said gratefully, "but you mustn't interrupt every few words or I shall never get to the end. Let me see, where was I?"

"Your prospects in life were of the best," she prompted him.

"That was it," slowly he went on.

"Being their only child, as you know, dad and mother had determined to give me every chance, and, as, wishing to follow my father's profession, I had chosen to be a doctor, they said I was to have the best training possible. But they had higher ambitions for me than that I should just spend my life in an obscure village, as dad had done, as a general practitioner. I was to specialize in some particular branch of surgery, and make a great name for myself. As you know, I chose the eye as my own particular branch of study, and was getting on remarkably well with my studies. All this you know, but what you don't know is that dad was unfortunate, and lost his fortune three years ago through standing security for a friend. The dear old man had purposely kept this from me, feeling that I should refuse to allow mother and him to sacrifice themselves as they did if I knew, and being determined that their loss should not interfere with my career. Dad worked hard, and they lived as carefully as possible through all those three years."

His voice broke with emotion, but, choking back the sobs, he continued:

"But even with all their striving, they couldn't keep out of debt. You see, after they had paid my fees and given me my allowance, there was very little

left out of the practice for them to live on. Though dad had always as much work as he could get through, his patients were mostly poor, and he couldn't bear to press for payment when he knew the struggle they had to make ends meet.

"They didn't trouble very much about it, though. They said to each other that it would soon be all right, that I should soon be making a great name for myself, and that in a few years the reward of my effort would be seen when big fees from wealthy patients came pouring in. All their dreams might have come true had not dad taken a chill by getting wet through in riding home from a case miles out in the country one pouring wet night. His life was the forfeit, and on his deathbed, with tears in his dear old eyes, he told me of these accumulated debts, and, of course, I promised to repay them as soon as possible.

"Now you understand the circumstances. All I have in the world is dad's practice. It is impossible for me to continue my special studies. Fortunately, I have my ordinary doctor's diploma, and so am quite qualified to take dad's place. Out of his practice I have to make enough to keep mother and myself, and to pay the debts contracted for my sake. It will take years of the strictest economy to do this, and I can't let mother suffer in any way. She is so broken down by dad's death that she must have every comfort. That's all, dear. Thank you for listening so patiently. It will be years before I can afford to marry, and a lifetime, I'm afraid, before I can make a home worthy of the daughter of Arthur Hazlam."

A pair of soft arms stole around his neck lovingly as he finished his long explanation, and, with her rosy mouth to his ear, she whispered tenderly:

"Silly boy. As if I shouldn't be willing to wait for years, if necessary, and be contented with the simplest of homes if only we might be together."

He pressed her to him passionately, and for a moment a wild hope surged in his heart that this disappointment need not be added to his already heavy heart. But the next moment the thought of her father, the proud old man, came to him, and, putting her gently from him, he held her at arm's length, and, looking steadily into the sweet eyes, he said gravely:

"Thank you, dear. It is sweet of you to say that, and for a moment I was tempted to take you at your word; but, Winifred, it may not be. Your father, when he hears the circumstances, will never agree to his daughter's marriage, after years of waiting, to an obscure country doctor. You will remember he only gave a reluctant consent to our engagement when he knew how bright were my prospects, believing that you would ultimately be the wife of a great surgeon. You know that is true; isn't it, sweetheart?"

She nodded in agreement. She knew well, none better, the proud heart of her old father, who, though so poor that he found the greatest difficulty in keeping up the old house, which had belonged to his family for generations, had yet great ambitions for his only child.

"Winifred shall marry wealth and carry on the family," he had been accustomed to say as the years went on and no son was born to him to carry on the proud old name, and it had only been after long and tearful pleadings and assurances from his daughter that Philip Strange had a great future before him that he had given a reluctant consent to the engagement.

Remembering this, the girl felt the truth of her lover's words, and was forced to acquiesce to them.

"Am I not right?" he urged. To which she was forced to answer brokenly:

"Quite right, dear."

"Then you consent to the breaking of our engagement?"

She looked bravely into his face, though her sweet eyes were swimming with tears.

"If you are sure it is for the best, I can do nothing else. But," she went on, as she choked back her sobs and tried to make her voice calm, "I shall keep myself free, and if, in the years to come you are able to claim me, you will find me waiting."

Reverently he bent down and kissed her once full upon the lips—a long, lingering kiss.

"Thank you for that promise, dear," he said brokenly. "I dare not hold you to it, but from my heart I thank you. It will be my greatest comfort through the lonely years to remember that, could you have done as you wished you would have sacrificed home and position for me."

Then putting her from him, he murmured a low benediction:

"May God bless you and give you all happiness."

With bowed head he left her and walked, with the gait of an old man, out into the spring sunshine, which seemed to mock him with its brightness.

"I must say, Winifred, that it is exceedingly honorable of young Strange to release you from your engagement under the trying circumstances. It would have been a painful matter if I had been obliged to take the initiative and break it off, and I really am very much obliged to him for saving me from what would have been a very disagreeable duty."

So spoke Arthur Hazlam when his daughter told him briefly that her engagement to Philip Strange was at an end.

"I really am very sorry," he went on, "that circumstances have made such a thing necessary. I really was growing very fond of him, and was becoming reconciled to your engagement and ultimate marriage to him."

His daughter bowed her head to hide the tears that persisted in rising to her eyes. Then, brushing them impatiently away, she lifted her head and faced the proud old man.

"I should like you to know, father," she said firmly, "that I still consider myself bound to Philip Strange, though there is now no actual engagement between us, and that, if ever he is in a position to ask me, I shall yet be his wife."

Arthur Hazlam looked at his daughter in surprise.

"You will still consider yourself bound to a man who has released you?" he asked incredulously. "Nonsense, child! We'll find a husband for you very soon who will place you in a far prouder position than ever Philip Strange could have done if his ambitions had been realized."

The girl faced him bravely.

"But, father, I can't marry any one but Philip. Loving each other as we do, it would be a sin for either of us to marry another; and I tell you that, though I will obey you in everything else, unless Philip comes to claim me eventually, I will go down to the grave unmarried."

"Nonsense. Winifred, you are unstrung. You'll think better of your words when you are calm. We won't talk of the matter any more at present."

With a cold kiss on her cheek, the nearest approach to a caress the proud old man ever permitted himself even toward his only child, who would, if he would have allowed her, have been only too willing to shower the wealth of her loving heart upon him, he left her alone with her sorrow.

It was a week later when, at breakfast one morning, Arthur Hazlam told

his daughter of his intention to let their house for the summer.

They were seated in the sunny morning room when he told her. The girl was looking fragile and pale after a succession of sleepless nights, and his chilly heart smote him as he noted the fact. So that it was in a gentler voice than usual that he explained matters.

"I've just received a letter from my old friend, Max Bridgewater," he said, "which contains an invitation for us both to spend a few months at his place in Canada.

" 'Your daughter will excuse the inconveniences of a bachelor establishment,' he says. 'Tell her I'll be delighted to have you both, and if the indoor comforts are somewhat lacking, I can promise her such a treat as far as scenery is concerned as will amply compensate for any lack of comfort indoors.'

"He's a fine fellow, Winifred," Arthur went on, "and I shall be glad to continue a friendship that was interrupted when he went away fifteen years ago. Fancy it being so long since! How time does fly, to be sure! He came over to say 'good-by,' I remember. He said he was a bit restless, and wanted to get out of America, to where he could find more space to breathe. I believe the truth was that he was in love with your mother, and couldn't get over the fact that she preferred me to him. He stuck it out, though, bravely for five years; I must say that for him. He even paid us an occasional visit; but I believe it was too much for him in the end.

"You were a baby of four years when he came to pay us his farewell visit," Arthur went on reminiscently; "I suppose you don't remember him, Winifred?"

"I believe I do a little," the girl answered, as a long-forgotten memory came to her of a strong, kind face that used to smile down at her half sadly. Out of the innermost recesses of that memory, too, she seemed to hear a deep voice saying to her wistfully:

"Come and kiss me, little Winifred. Do you know, child, you have eyes exactly like your mother's?"

So it was this man, whom she remembered vaguely as being always so very kind to her, because, she knew now, she had eyes like her mother's, who wanted them to visit him. It was very kind of him, and she thought with relief of the cool air of Canada, and felt that she would be glad of the change.

The thought of the long, close days of summer at home without the anticipation of her lover's daily letters was more than she could bear.

"I should like to go, father," she said quietly.

"Then that settles it, my dear; the change will do you good, and this invitation comes at the most opportune moment, for only yesterday I heard that a man I know wants to rent such a place as this for the summer. He'll pay handsomely; I'm in urgent need of a little extra money. I shall offer the house to him, and we'll get off to Canada before the hot weather sets in."

So it was all arranged. Winifred went about her preparations with more interest than she had believed possible for a visit to the home of this man who had loved her mother. She felt that, knowing herself, the trouble of being parted from the man she loved, she could sympathize with her father's friend, and in her innocent heart she prayed that she might in some measure bring comfort to him.

A week later found Arthur Hazlam and his daughter settled down in the handsome place which Max Bridgewater had, after many years of wandering, eventually made his home.

At the first sight of the sad-eyed, big, bronzed man her heart had gone out

to him with a great affection. There was something of the simplicity of a child about him; he seemed to have imbibed into his nature the strength of the mountains among which he dwelt. For years he had mixed little with the men of his own class, spending long hours in silent communion with nature. The result was a character of wonderful sweetness and tenderness, mingled with a natural rugged strength.

He was an artist. As she came to know him better, the girl would spend long hours by his side on the shore of some still mountain lake, or near some tumbling, sparkling stream, while he transferred to canvas, with wonderful skill, some especially beautiful piece of scenery.

In these excursions, while Arthur was away satisfying his great passion for mountaineering, the young girl and her father's friend became wonderfully intimate, and a great friendship sprang up between them.

Arthur was very willing that it should be so. He rubbed his hands with glee when he saw it; he told himself that the hope which had entered his heart when he received the invitation from his old friend was to be realized.

"It's the best thing that could happen to Winifred," he said to himself; "a marriage with Max Bridgewater would be a very good thing. He will supply the money and she the 'blue blood.' Besides, Bridgewater's family is good, if not quite so old as the Hazlam's. She seems to like him very well, and it's time that nonsense about waiting for young Strange was put an end to."

So he planned, while his daughter, all innocent of his wishes, enjoyed her holiday, and felt something of hope returning to her heart as she passed such pleasant days with her old friend.

"I'll tell him all about Philip some day," she promised herself as their intimacy grew. "It would be a comfort to talk about him, and I'm sure that Max would understand." He had taught her to call him by his first name very early in their acquaintance.

"You're so like your mother," he had explained to her, half shyly; "she was the only woman who ever called me by my Christian name since my own mother died, when I was just a bit of a chap."

The allusion to her mother and the half confession of his love for her had touched Winifred, and she had willingly consented.

Then one day her chance came. They were sitting together, as was their custom, when, looking at her over his easel, he said gently:

"Child, your eyes are exactly like your mother's."

"Do you know, Max," she answered, "I remember your saying that to me a long time ago when I was a tiny little child. Do you remember? It was when you were saying 'good-by' before you went away."

"Yes, I remember," he said dreamily. Then, suddenly putting his hand upon her shoulder and looking deeply into those same sweet eyes, he went on:

"Winifred, have you ever guessed my secret?"

She colored to the roots of her hair.

"Yes," she said simply, "at least, father helped me. He said he believed you used to be in love with my mother."

"He guessed, did he? Well, it was quite true. I'm not ashamed of it. My love was as pure as"—he paused for a simile, then went on—"as pure as your eyes, child, and I've no reason to be ashamed of it."

"I should think not, indeed," Winifred answered; and, lifting his hand almost reverently, she pressed it to her lips.

"I'll never forget the first time I saw your mother after you had come. She was carrying you, and there was the most wonderful love light in her beautiful eyes."

"I am so sorry for you, I understand," she breathed.

Low as was her whisper, he caught it.

"What is it, child?" he queried gently. "Won't you, for the sake of the love I bore your dead mother, let me try to take her place? Perhaps I can help you?"

She looked up at him with a very grateful smile.

"Oh, if you only could," she said brokenly; "it seems sometimes that I cannot bear it any longer alone."

"Don't try, dear. Let me share the trouble whatever it is."

So, there, out in God's beautiful world, unmarred by man's handiwork, seated by the side of a rollicking, tumbling mountain stream, with the great mountains towering far above them, the girl told the story of her engagement to the man who had loved her mother with a hopeless love.

He listened quietly to the end, never once interrupting, save from time to time he pressed her hand in sympathy.

When she had finished he said in his kind, grave way:

"What do you say is the name of this sweetheart of yours?"

"Philip Strange," she answered quietly, but at the lingering tenderness in her voice as she pronounced the loved name, Max Bridgewater swore to himself that, if it were within the power of man to do it, he would force the young doctor to accept his help.

"Philip Strange?" he said aloud. "Why, is it possible that his father was Geoffrey Strange? How long have they lived in Seacroft, and where did they come from?"

"I believe they came to Seacroft about fourteen years ago. Before that they lived somewhere in the West."

"In the West?" the big man repeated. "Then, I believe it's the same. If I'm not very much mistaken, your lover's father was my old college chum, Geoffrey Strange, and if that's so, it was he who financed me when I went abroad to study. If it is so, I owe him a debt which I can never repay. No one knows what he was to me in those first few years of my sorrow. Yes, assuredly, I owe his son more than the actual money."

"Was that a big sum?" the girl asked anxiously. "Will it be enough, with the sale of the practice, to keep his mother and to pay his expenses until he can make his name as a great eye specialist?"

"I'm afraid not," her big friend answered, with a twinkle in his eyes. "It was only a matter of a thousand dollars or so, and, so far as the actual money is concerned, I repaid it long ago."

A shadow crossed the girl's eyes.

"Then it's no good," she said in a tone of disappointment; "that was the only hope."

The big man put his great hands on either side of the girl's face, and raised it until he could look straight into the eyes, so like those of the woman he had worshiped.

"Why, child," he said heartily, "that was a very small part of what I owed him. Geoffrey Strange helped me in my need, so surely his son will allow me to help him in the same way."

Winifred shook her head doubtfully.

"I'm afraid not," she said sadly, "Philip is very proud, and would not take a loan when there was so little chance that he would ever be able to repay it."

The older man smiled reassuringly and spoke gently.

"Don't you trouble about that, little one. I'll make him see reason, mark my words, if I don't."

In spite of her fears Winifred felt a great elation at her heart. She felt every confidence in this man who was willing to do anything to procure her happiness for the sake of her dead mother.

The very next day Max Bridgewater pleaded urgent business in town and begged his guests to excuse him for a few days.

"My servants will see that you are made comfortable," he said; "just use the place as if it were your own. I'll be back very soon with, I hope, my business satisfactorily arranged." He smiled meaningly at Winifred as he spoke, a smile which she returned with gratitude.

"Wish me all luck," he whispered to her as he wished her good-by at the tiny, picturesque railway station, where she had accompanied him to see him off on his journey.

"May God speed you and bring you back safely," she whispered with shining eyes. Then she added softly:

"Give my dear love to Philip."

That was all that was said between them as to the reason of his journey. But it was enough. Max Bridgewater felt that the girl had every confidence in him.

"God bless her," he said to himself as the train sped on its way; "I'll give her lover back again to her by hook or by crook, or my name's not Max Bridgewater."

A day or two later Philip Strange entered his mother's tiny sitting room after an arduous round of visits to find a big, bronzed visitor with her.

"Philip, this is an old friend of your father's," she said, looking up at him with loving eyes.

Philip held out his hand.

"Any friend of my father's is more than welcome," he said softly. Then, turning to his mother, he went on:

"You didn't tell me the name of my father's friend, mother."

"Max Bridgewater, at your service," he answered for her. "I hope you have heard of me before," he went on wistfully.

"In more ways than one," the young doctor answered with feeling. "I was brought up on the story of yours and dad's friendship for each other; and, besides, if I am not much mistaken, you have had some friends of ours, Arthur Hazlam and his daughter, visiting you in Canada."

Max Bridgewater liked the tone of reverence in the young doctor's voice as he spoke of the girl he loved.

"Yes, they are there still," he answered. "I had to leave them for a few days to come over here on business. That business has to do with you," he went on bluntly, "if I could have a few minutes alone with you I could explain it better."

"Certainly," Philip Strange answered; "you'll excuse us, mother?"

Leading the way to his own private sanctum, he motioned his father's friend to be seated, and taking a chair opposite him, waited to hear what the business was.

For a moment or two Max Bridgewater hesitated. He was choosing the words most likely to carry conviction to his hearer.

"My business has to do with Winifred Hazlam. You love her, my boy?"

"With all my heart," the young doctor answered simply.

"As I loved her mother," the big man answered, with tears standing in his eyes, "for the sake of that mother, as well as for her own, I want to see Winifred happy. I want you to let me help. I owed a debt to your father."

"Which was repaid long ago," Philip Strange answered proudly, as an inkling of what his father's friend was driving at entered his mind.

"In actual money, yes, I'm not denying it; but his kindness to me in the day of my trouble I still owe. He is gone where he will never need any repayment of that, but I had hoped his son would let me pay that debt to him."

Philip Strange was touched by the man's delicate kindness, but he shook his head decidedly.

"I couldn't take any monetary help, if that is what you mean," he said firmly.

"Not even to save the girl you love from eating her heart out with longing for you?"

For a moment the young doctor hesitated; the thought of Winifred Hazlam almost made him yield.

"No; I can't lose my self-respect even for her. She promised to wait for me, and, please God, I'll make a position for her yet."

Max Bridgewater liked the look of determination in the young man's face. But he wished to gain his point, so said sarcastically:

"And in the meantime you'll both lose the best years of your life in waiting. Besides, my money will be yours and hers eventually. I have already made a will, leaving it all to you two jointly. It will only be anticipating it for a few years if you accept enough now to enable you to make a position for her. Besides, I am determined that the little girl with the eyes of the woman I loved shall have her happiness. Listen to me," he went on, "if you don't do as I wish, I'll return to Canada and tell her of your pig-headedness. Then I'll throw myself over the nearest precipice, and you'll be obliged to accept the money left to you when I'm dead."

The young doctor smiled involuntarily at the impulsive words of the simple-hearted man, and, seizing the opportune moment, Max Bridgewater said anxiously:

"You'll let me have my wish now and accept the money, won't you?"

"Since you threaten such drastic measures if I refuse, I dare not do anything but accept." Then he added, as he wrung the hand of his father's friend:

"Thank you for us both; she'll know how to thank you better than I can, and I'm going to arrange things so that I can run back with you for a few days and see Winifred, if you will let me."

After dinner a few nights later Winifred and Philip stood together on the porch of Max Bridgewater's home. Winifred's father and Max had discreetly gone for a walk.

The light from a full moon streamed down upon the lovers and a soft wind stirred the trees.

"Isn't this Canadian moonlight wonderful?" said Winifred, looking up at Philip.

"Yes, but not half as wonderful as the love light in your beautiful eyes."

"You are being romantic to-night," said Winifred, "and I don't wonder at it. I can hardly believe what Max has done for us. Isn't he just almost too good to be true?"

"Yes, he is almost too good to be true," said Philip, putting his arms around her, "but then so are you, my darling. Wonderful as our happiness is now, it is not any more wonderful to me than the promise you gave me when I wanted to release you from our engagement. If we had never been able to marry, I should, nevertheless, have derived a great deal of happiness from that promise."

"It's only what any girl would have done," Winifred whispered.

"No, it's not what any girl would have done," said Philip fervently, drawing her closer to him, "no one would have done it but you, my own darling girl."

He kissed her tenderly, and Max Bridgewater, coming up the path, uttered a benediction.

An Interrupted Engagement

by Mrs. Harry Pugh Smith

"WHAT an ugly face!" was Laurel Fane's thought the first time she saw Derek Moore.

She was having tea with Carter Dugan, her fiancé, on the veranda of the country club when she caught a glimpse of her father, piloting a huge, burly-looking stranger about. A few moments later they came up to her table.

"And this is my daughter," said Anthony Fane with the winning smile which was his greatest charm. "Laurel, my dear, I want you to meet Mr. Derek Moore."

Laurel bowed and offered her slim white hand. The stranger's coarse, rugged face flushed darkly and he gulped something unintelligible. It was plainly seen that he was quite flustered by the girl's young loveliness. To Laurel's relief her father and his friend did not sit down, but moved on to make other acquaintances.

"Who in Heaven's name can he be?" Carter Dugan asked as soon as the stranger was out of earshot. His handsome nose wrinkled distastefully. "Your father does have some of the queerest acquaintances!"

Laurel's lovely young face colored sensitively. She was passionately devoted to her father, and the fact that there was truth in her fiancé's words only made her the quicker to spring to Anthony Fane's defense.

"He's a business acquaintance of his, no doubt," she said stiffly. "But if he isn't"—her pretty nose tilted a trifle—"I am sure he is quite all right or he wouldn't be with father."

Carter Dugan's expression was plainly skeptical, but he wisely said nothing more on the subject. He had long ago learned that Laurel was unwilling to see any flaw in her idolized parent, and he had been compelled to realize that any effort on his part to open her eyes to such flaws resulted only in disaster for himself. So, whatever opinion he had of his future father-in-law, he kept it to himself.

But although she had promptly squelched Carter for attempting a criticism of Anthony Fane's associates, Laurel seized the first opportunity she had to question him about his unprepossessing companion. They were alone at dinner, and it seemed to her anxious gaze that Fane's eyes shifted slightly under hers.

"Moore?" he repeated, almost as if he were trying to gain time. "Oh,

Derek Moore's all right. He's here to see me on business, big business."

Laurel's sensitive young face clouded. "Must you always do business with such queer-looking people, daddy?"

It was as near as she had ever come to a criticism of her father's various business transactions, which, to tell the truth, she had never understood beyond the fact that he was a broker of some sort and that lately people had had a trick of lifting their eyebrows whenever his name was mentioned.

Even Carter Dugan, whom she was going to marry, did not like her father. She sensed that and resented it hotly even while some queer, uneasy fear kept her from questioning her fiancé on the subject. Not that she didn't believe in her father. She did, she did! Nothing on earth could shake her trust in him, and yet he constantly had very queer-looking people in tow, and there was a curious secrecy about his business. Even though she was so close to him, she really knew nothing about it.

Anthony Fane must have sensed what was going on in her mind, for he leaned over suddenly and patted her slim white hand.

"Would it please my little girl," he asked softly, "if I told her I was about to retire from business?"

Laurel's heart beat faster. To be freed from this strange fear which had been hanging over her for so long, would it please her? She laughed shakily.

"I would be awfully glad, daddy," she said softly, her eyes shining.

"Well, that's what I am about to do," he said in a gay voice. "If this deal with Derek Moore goes through, I'm going to call it a day. After all, when you are married and off my hands"—he pinched her cheek—"I won't need much. My own tastes are simple enough, and I think I'll settle down and take it easy."

"Oh, I hope you will!" cried Laurel earnestly.

A giant weight seemed to lift from her young heart. She realized that she had been terribly afraid for her father for a long time. What a relief not to feel that some hideous fate was lying in wait for them around every corner!

"But all this is on the condition that my deal with Derek Moore goes through," continued Fane with a subtle change in his voice. Laurel's heart dropped. "If I fail to sell Moore"—he shrugged his shoulders—"well, I'll have to keep my back to the wheel a little longer." He looked at the girl with an air of unconcern too elaborate to be genuine. "You can help if you want to, honey, by being a little nice to Derek the next few days."

It was not the first time her father had asked her to be nice to one of his unprepossessing customers, but somehow it left Laurel a little sick and shaken. Not, she told herself fiercely, that there could be anything wrong; she knew her father would not ask her to do anything that was not right.

"Why, of course, dad," she said steadily, "if it will help, I'll be glad to be nice to Mr. Moore."

Anthony Fane smiled at her.

"Thank you, dear," he said, bending over to give her a kiss. "You have always been a comfort to your old dad."

Laurel's heart contracted painfully. How could any one doubt him when he was so kind, so charming? Her hand closed convulsively over his. Certainly, she could not. All the vague fears which had been haunting her for weeks disappeared. He was her father, her handsome, distinguished-looking parent whom she adored and trusted.

There was a dance at the country club that evening. Laurel was going with her fiancé, her father having driven to the hotel for Derek Moore. Carter was waiting in the living room when she came down, a slim, girlish figure in

a simple white dress, a silver wreath about her small, beautifully shaped head with its close-cropped black hair, her violet eyes shining like stars above her softly flushed cheeks.

"How lovely you are, Laurel!" cried Carter, taking her in his arms almost fiercely. "Oh, Laurel, I love you so! Better than anything in all the world!"

He held her very close to his heart, which Laurel felt pounding wildly beneath hers. Her slim young arms crept up and around his neck.

"You know I love you, too," she whispered shyly.

Even though it was almost a month since she had promised to marry him, Laurel was still shy in his presence.

He tilted her chin up so he could gaze deep into her eyes.

"Yes, you love me, I know," he cried jealously, "but not half as much as I love you. Sometimes I think you care a lot more for your father than you do for me."

Laurel's slim young body stiffened slightly.

"I adore dad, Carter," she confessed simply. "I always have. He has been father, mother, brother, and sister to me. Until we came here we never stayed long enough in any one place to make lasting friendships. Dad was all I had. Of course I love him. But surely"—her tone was almost pleading—"there is room enough in my heart for you both."

"Of course, sweetheart"—he laughed somewhat sheepishly—"I was only teasing you. Although"—there was an obstinate ring in his voice—"I don't believe you would ever have gone against your father as I have my mother for your sake."

Laurel flushed. She had sensed all along, although he had never mentioned the fact before, that Carter's mother had not been pleased with her son's engagement. The Dugans were a wealthy and socially prominent family, and Carter, the only son, was considered a great matrimonial catch. Without a doubt, his mother had had other plans for him than marrying him off to the daughter of Anthony Fane. Very little was known about him, except that he was a handsome and distinguished-looking man with very charming manners, which had gained him an entrée into the best society when he came to town five years before and set up a brokerage business.

"Why doesn't your mother like me, Carter?" asked Laurel, a wistful note in her sweet voice.

Carter Dugan bit his lip. He had said more than he intended.

"It isn't you—er—she doesn't dislike you, Laurel," he stammered, realizing he was only making matters worse.

"I know," she said quietly, "it's my father. But what has she against him?"

Carter wriggled uncomfortably.

"She really hasn't anything, darling," he said at last. "It's only that—well, you know how people talk," he finished lamely.

Laurel's color was very high.

"No, Carter, I don't know how people talk about my father," she said quietly. "What do they say?"

"Well, they really don't say anything, only—only"—he wiped his perspiring brow—"a lot of folks think it is strange that he has moved about so much and never tells anything much about his past, not anything you could pin him down to, you know. And then there're these funny people he's always doing business with—and no one seems to know exactly what his business is, and yet he always has plenty of money. Oh, it's all a lot of bunk, Laurel, and you mustn't worry. People have to have something to talk about."

"I see," replied Laurel quietly, "and so they talk about my father. But you"—she gave him a searching glance—"you don't believe all this gossip about him, do you, Carter?"

He stooped and kissed her.

"Of course not," he said lightly. "He couldn't be your father and not be all right, sweetheart," he whispered.

But to the girl's sensitive ears the words did not ring quite true.

The country club was crowded when they arrived. The dancing had already begun. As Carter swung her out upon the floor Laurel caught a glimpse of her father. He was standing across the room, the center of a group of people who were, as usual, listening to him intently. No one could be more charming and entertaining than Anthony Fane when he chose. Just behind him she recognized the bulky, awkward body and ugly face of Derek Moore.

With a little shock she realized he was watching her every move. She shivered involuntarily. Carter gave her an anxious glance.

"What is it, dear?" he asked. "You aren't catching cold, I hope?"

She shook her head.

"It's nothing, Carter," she murmured with a shaky laugh. "Only a slight draft."

When the music ended Anthony Fane made his way straight to his daughter's side, Derek Moore lumbering after him across the room.

"If you haven't promised this dance, Laurel," said Fane with his charming smile, "Derek would like to have it."

Laurel was painfully conscious of Carter's scowl. She forced a smile.

"I'll be delighted to dance with Mr. Moore, dad," she said quietly.

Carter turned on his heel and walked away without a word. Anthony Fane stared after him with narrowed eyes. It struck Laurel suddenly that his face looked tired and worn. She laid her hand on his arm.

"Aren't you feeling well, dad?" she asked anxiously.

He straightened up with a little start.

"I never felt better in my life, honey!" he said gayly, but she was not deceived; that one glimpse she had had behind the mask he commonly wore had convinced her that something was wrong with her father's world.

The music began just then. Derek Moore held out his arms. Despite his heavy build he danced remarkably well. Laurel was agreeably surprised. He must have guessed her thoughts, for he looked down at her with a grin.

"You were all prepared to be mashed into the floor, I guess," he said with a laugh.

Laurel smiled.

"I didn't expect you to dance so well," she confessed.

"Anybody ought to be able to dance well with you," was his awkward attempt at a compliment.

There was something about his small, pale-blue eyes which Laurel did not like. They were a little sinister in expression. She had an idea that her sort of girl was very new to him, but that once the newness had worn away he could be both bold and offensive. She was glad when the music ended.

"She's some little dancer, this daughter of yours," he greeted her father.

Laurel flushed and even Anthony Fane winced a little at the other's vulgarity.

"Laurel does everything well," he said, slipping his arm about his daughter's waist. There was an apologetic note in his voice. "Her old dad thinks she's a little bit of all right."

Laurel stroked her father's arm by way of reply. Derek Moore laughed. There was something unpleasantly grating about his laugh.

"It's not hard to see who stands ace high with her," he said significantly.

To Laurel's relief the music began at this moment, and some one else claimed her. She was heartily glad to be out of Derek Moore's presence. There was something about the man's sinister blue eyes and ugly face which filled her with a vague uneasiness.

Laurel had an idea her sort of girl was new to Derek Moore. She was glad when the music ended.

Again she felt a sense of shock when she realized that he scarcely took his eyes off her during that and the succeeding dance. The unwinking stare of his little, piggish blue eyes began to get on her nerves. Her hope that her father would leave soon and take his unwelcome guest with him dwindled to dismay when at the end of the fourth dance Moore again approached her.

"May I have this dance, Miss Fane?" he asked, and there was an insolent note in his voice which she resented.

"Why, I——" she began and got no further.

"Miss Fane is dancing this with me." It was Carter who had interrupted her.

Laurel gave a little sigh of relief, which died away suddenly when she saw the curious little sinister spark in Derek Moore's pale eyes.

"The next then, Miss Fane?" he persisted.

"Why, I have the next, too, Mr. Moore," she faltered, hoping he would take the hint.

The man's powerful under jaw protruded unpleasantly.

"Then I'll have the one after that," he said coolly.

Realizing that he was not to be put off without unpleasantness, Laurel yielded. "Very well," she capitulated faintly.

Once out on the dance floor Carter burst out angrily.

"I hate that man, Laurel!" he cried stormily. "I wish you wouldn't dance with him. I can't bear to see you in his arms, my darling," he added in a whisper.

"I don't like him, either," faltered

Laurel. "There's something rather horrible about him, but he's a customer of father's and I can't very well insult him, you know." Again her voice was almost pleading.

Carter Dugan's handsome face flushed.

"Your father can take up with all sorts of queer people if he wants to, I suppose," he said in irritated tones; "but he has no right compelling you to accept them socially. This fellow looks like a regular cutthroat."

"Oh, but he isn't!" Laurel tried to laugh it off. "You know father wouldn't introduce me to any one who wasn't all right."

But her voice trembled a little.

"I'm not so sure," muttered Carter Dugan under his breath, but he took care that Laurel did not hear him.

It was with a real dread that Laurel awaited her next dance with Derek Moore. The man's personality, though ugly, possessed a sheer forcefulness of which she was unpleasantly aware. The timidity which he had at first shown in her presence had completely vanished. He held her very close, much too close for good breeding. At first she tried to ignore the fact. After a while she made a decided effort to draw herself away. Looking down at her with a sly smile which made her redden, he loosened his grasp.

"Beg pardon," he murmured coarsely. "I didn't realize I was holding you so tight. It's not every day I get a chance to dance with such a pretty girl as you."

Laurel bit her lip at his vulgarity. Surely her father did not realize the man's coarseness or he would never have asked her to show him any courtesies.

"You think a heap of that dad of yours," said Derek Moore with a smirk. "I guess there isn't anything you wouldn't do for him?"

There was an underlying significance in the question which startled the girl. Her heart gave a slow, painful throb.

"Of course I'd do anything I could for my father," she said slowly.

"I may remind you of that some day." There was no mistaking the grimness in his voice.

The music ended just then, but before he released her he gave her a bear-like hug. Red with humiliation, Laurel glanced up to find her father staring at them intently. That he had seen Derek Moore's boorish action she was positive, but he said nothing and made no move to speak to him about it. Again the girl was conscious of a sick feeling at the bottom of her heart. What was this common, vulgar man to her father? Why had he more or less pushed him off on her, and why did he not resent the fellow's boorish behavior? They were questions she dared not push too far. There must be some very good reason, she told herself loyally.

To her relief Derek Moore did not ask her for another dance until the evening was almost over. He and her father disappeared somewhere together, and she had decided with a feeling of unutterable relief that they had gone for good when the man appeared suddenly at her elbow and claimed the last dance but one.

"I couldn't leave without one more round with my little beauty," he said with a leer as they swung out upon the floor.

Laurel flushed angrily. He must have seen her annoyance, for he gave her no chance to speak.

"Don't get sore," he begged. "I didn't mean to be fresh. But you've kind of gone to my head, I guess. I don't mind saying you're the prettiest girl I ever saw." As he spoke his arms tightened about her.

"If you don't stop holding me so tightly, Mr. Moore," said Laurel coldly, "I shall stop dancing."

He went furiously red. For a moment Laurel thought he was going to make a scene. But, controlling his wrath by a mighty effort, he laughed hoarsely.

"Oh, all right, maybe I am rushing things a little," he said ill-humoredly.

He finished the dance, then, without giving her further cause for complaint. As he released her, however, he made her a mocking little bow.

"I'll be seeing you again," he said, his eyes glinting curiously. "Your father has invited me out to your house to-morrow for the rest of my stay here."

Laurel's heart sank, but she made an effort to control her trembling lips.

"Is that so?" was all she could find to say.

Carter turned on her angrily as soon as Moore was out of hearing.

"What does your father mean having that bounder out at your house?" he demanded.

Laurel's sensitive young face quivered.

"I am sure it is quite all right, Carter," she said unsteadily, "or father would not have asked him."

He kissed her good night and wisely said no more.

But Laurel was by no means as convinced that things were all right as her loyalty to her father forced her to pretend. On reaching home, she sat down at the head of the stairs to wait for the sound of Anthony Fane's latchkey in the lock. He did not dream she was waiting up, of course, and so she had a clear view of his face when he was off guard as he came slowly up the steps.

With a dull pang she realized that he did indeed look pale and worn. There were circles under his eyes and a weary droop to his lips which she had never noticed before.

"Laurel!" He started violently. "My dear, what are you doing up?"

Laurel slipped into the circle of his arms.

"I had to see you, daddy," she stammered. "It's about that man, Derek Moore. Have you really asked him out here to-morrow for the rest of his stay here?"

She felt the arms about her tighten, but Anthony Fane's voice betrayed no emotion when he spoke.

"Why, yes, I have, honey," he said. "You don't mind, do you?"

Laurel's heart was a lump in her throat. What hold could that terrible man have on her father?

"Well, yes, I do mind, father," she forced herself to say. "I think he's an awful creature. Don't you think so, dad?"

There was a slight pause, then Anthony Fane spoke, his voice as calm and drawling as ever.

"I'm sorry you found him so, honey," he said, "but I expect you are right. You usually are, only"—his arms tightened about her—"it means a lot to me just now—I told you if I could put over this deal with Moore I could retire. I don't want you to do anything that's against the grain, dear. But if you could bring yourself to overlook Derek's shortcomings, it would help me out of an awful hole, you understand."

"Of course, I'll do anything you want me to, dad dearest," murmured the girl, her arms creeping up about his neck.

But there was a sob in her heart she could hardly keep out of her voice. Why did her father have to deal with such men as Derek Moore, and what was the hole out of which Anthony Fane could crawl only by the help of such a scoundrel?

Derek Moore arrived with his baggage in the middle of the following morning. Anthony Fane, of course, was down at his office, so that it fell to Laurel to do the honors of the house. She hoped Moore would have sense enough to remain in his room, to which

she had had the old butler take him. But he came down almost immediately.

There was a little glitter in his eyes as he entered the morning room where she was arranging some pink roses in a tall vase.

"My, but this is something like," he said with a leer, coming so close Laurel instinctively moved back a step. "Anthony sure has a swell place down here." Laurel winced at his use of her father's first name. "The old boy must have been coining the money." Again there was a significant note in his voice which made the girl's heart throb. "Well, it's all right, I guess, as long as he can get by with it."

"Get by with what?" demanded Laurel sharply.

He laughed.

"I take it you don't know very much about your father's business," he said dryly.

Laurel's color was very high.

"What do you know about it?" she retorted quickly.

He grinned exasperatingly.

"Nothing, nothing at all," he said smoothly.

Too angry to trust herself to speak, she turned away. She paused across the room, straightening some music on the piano. He came up behind her so softly she did not hear him until he spoke at her very elbow.

"God, but you are beautiful!" he cried in a smothered voice.

Before she could guess his purpose he had seized her in his arms and crushed her to him.

"Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful!" he repeated.

He bent down to kiss her. Laurel sickened at the nearness of his thick lips. She struggled violently to free herself, but she was helpless as a child in his bearlike grasp. She knew one horrible moment when she felt that if he kissed her she would die, then there was the sound of footsteps outside and an opening door. Her father appeared on the threshold. Derek Moore released her instantly, but not before Anthony Fane had seen, Laurel was sure of that, although he betrayed neither by word nor look the slightest sign of having witnessed the humiliating scene.

"Ah, how do you do, everybody?" he called cheerfully. Laurel could hardly believe her ears. "Awfully glad you got out, Derek." He gave him his hand. "Has Laurel been looking after you all right?"

Derek Moore flashed the bewildered girl a strange, exultant glance.

"Miss Laurel and I have been getting along famously," he said with a sly smirk which filled the girl with a feeling of helpless chagrin.

Luncheon was served almost immediately. Anthony Fane and his guest carried on almost the whole of the conversation. Laurel sat silent and distrait in her seat. Again and again she looked at her father with troubled, puzzled eyes. Apparently he and Derek Moore were on the best of terms, and both seemed to be in a very good humor. Laurel's lips quivered. What could it mean?

To her relief her father was carrying the other man off to the country club for a round of golf as soon as luncheon was over. She managed to catch her father alone a minute before they got off.

"Dad"—she had a feeling that he wanted to avoid her—"I've got to talk to you a moment."

"All right, honey, but make it snappy." He did not look at her. "I'm in a hurry. What's the trouble?"

Laurel drew a long breath.

"I—it's about that man," she cried in a low voice. "Oh, dad, I hate him!"

He interrupted her almost as if he did not want to hear the rest of her story.

"I know, dear, he's awfully coarse and common, and I hate like thunder

pushing him off on you like this, but" —there was a strained note in his voice —"this deal with Derek means an awful lot to me just now. If you could bring yourself to put up with him for a day or two, it would help me out of a terrible jam."

Laurel stared at him wide eyed and heartsick. What sort of jam could her father be in that he would want her to accept the insults of a man like Derek Moore? For nothing could convince her that Anthony Fane had not taken in the significance of that disgusting scene in the morning room. He was bound to have seen Derek Moore forcing his unwelcome caresses upon her, and yet he asked her to be nice to him, to overlook his rudeness, and to put up with him a day or two longer.

Her heart was never so heavy as when she looked up at her father with a face gone pathetically white and murmured, "I'll try, daddy, if you want me to."

A spasm twisted Anthony Fane's mouth a little awry.

"God bless you, Laurel," he murmured huskily, "you're the best daughter any man ever had."

Then, as if he dared not trust himself to say more, he hurried off. Laurel stared after him with troubled eyes. She knew that there was something seriously wrong back of Anthony Fane's strange behavior. That it had to do with Derek Moore she would have sworn. For some reason her father feared him and was compelled to cater to him.

When Carter called, later in the afternoon, he found her pale and silent.

"What's the matter, dear?" he asked, taking her hand in his. "Aren't you feeling well?"

Laurel shook her head.

"I'm all right, just a little tired, that's all," she temporized.

But the eyes of love were not so easily deceived.

"Has that man been bothering you, Laurel?" Carter burst out. His hands clenched. "If I thought he had, I'd break every bone in his body."

Laurel thought distressfully of how different her lover's attitude was from her father's, who had determinedly shut his eyes to Derek Moore's disgraceful behavior. Carter was watching her narrowly.

"It is that fellow," he cried angrily. "He has been distressing you."

He looked so fierce Laurel had to summon all her powers of dissimulation.

"No, really, Carter," she said as convincingly as she could, "I'm tired, that's all."

"Well, I don't trust that scoundrel," declared Carter fiercely. "He looks like a crook, if ever I saw one. There's something familiar about his face, too, if I could only think where I have seen him before. Although I have no doubt it was in the rogues' gallery, for that's where he looks as if he belonged."

He kissed her solicitously and then left. His tenderness and solicitude had proved almost more than Laurel could bear. It had been all she could do to keep from flinging herself into his arms and sobbing out the whole story. She longed to tell him of her father's strange behavior in regard to Derek Moore and of the latter's disgraceful actions toward herself.

But somehow, much as she loved Carter, she could not bring herself to admit even to him any disloyalty toward her father, and so she let him go with a kiss.

She did not see her father and his guest again until dinner. They had evidently had an exciting round of golf, for Derek Moore especially was in high spirits. To her disgust he had been drinking. His ugly face was mottled, his eyes slightly bloodshot, and he talked constantly. Her father, who seldom drank anything, had had the but-

ler bring up a bottle of old wine. After a while she realized that, while he kept filling and refilling Derek Moore's glass, he barely touched his lips to his own. To her relief, when dinner was over he carried his half-drunken guest off to the library to talk business.

Laurel was too restless to stay indoors. Strolling out on the veranda, she sat down. She could just make out the murmur of conversation from the library, but after a while Derek Moore must have risen and walked over nearer the windows, for suddenly his voice came to her hoarsely but quite distinctly.

"Well, that's settled then," he was saying eagerly, "we're partners from now on, eh?" Her father's reply was unintelligible, but Derek Moore's next speech came startlingly clear: "We're bound to clear up a pile, too, or I'm a poor guesser; that is, if we can manage to stay clear of the cops."

Outside on the veranda the girl sat very still, her slim young body strangely tense. What sort of pact was this her father had entered into with Derek Moore? They were to be partners, her father was going into partnership with this terrible man who had just promised that they would clean up a pile if only they could steer clear of the police. Her father engaged in some sort of questionable business in which he had the police to fear! The thought was too terrible.

Tremblingly she made her way up the stairs to her room, where she lay face downward across her bed. All the vague, nameless fears which had tormented her for weeks had crystallized at last. She knew at last why people lifted their eyebrows when her father's name was mentioned and why his business transactions were with such queer-looking people. Her father, whom she adored, who had been all the world to her until she met Carter Dugan, was allied with crooks and thieves. He had promised her, if the deal with Derek Moore went through, to withdraw from business and settle down.

She was weeping silently, forlornly. But it was too late, for her eyes were opened at last. Her father was a crook.

The telephone on the night stand by her bed trilled softly. She picked up the receiver. It was Carter.

"I have just recollected where I saw Derek Moore's face," he began eagerly. "It was all in the papers about a year ago. He's a notorious crook from Chicago, a confidence man. They have had him up before the grand jury a dozen times, but they have never been able to get anything on him up to now, although every one knows he's a thorough rascal. But they'll land him some day. They always do. Sooner or later he'll make a misstep, every crook does, and they'll nab him."

"I suppose so," murmured Laurel dully, her heart a quivering ache in her breast.

"Sooner or later he'll make a misstep, every crook does, and they'll nab him," the words echoed dismally in her ears. Her father was a crook, too; sooner or later he, also, would make an error in judgment.

She dropped to her knees by the side of her bed and buried her face in her hands.

"Dear God," she prayed, "tell me what to do. Show me the right way."

After a while she sobbed herself to sleep.

The dull, gray dawn of the following morning found Laurel at her desk writing. She had at last made up her mind what to do. She wrote:

DEAR CARTER: I have discovered that I have made a terrible mistake. I do not love you enough to marry you. I am sorry, but I must ask you to release me from my promise. LAUREL.

It was an abrupt and merciless way to break such news. Laurel's face was

Laurel sat very still, her slim, young body strongly tense. What sort of pact was this her father had entered into with Derek Moore.

very white as she reread what she had written. But she could think of no easier way to tell her lover. She could not marry him, now that she knew the truth about her father. She could not bring into his life the shadow which had darkened her own. Sooner or later her father would make a misstep and the law would get him. She could not put any such worry on her lover's shoulders. He had said once that she did not love him as much as he loved her, but she loved him far too much to bring disgrace upon his name. Better, far better, never to see him again, never to feel the protecting shelter of his arms again, than to link him up with her father's dishonor.

And so with shaking hands she sealed her letter and sent it off by the first mail.

His mother would be glad, she knew that, and Carter—her lips trembled—would soon forget. He would marry some girl of whom his mother approved and forget he ever knew her. She sighed. Well, she wanted him to forget. She loved him too deeply, too sincerely, not to wish him every happiness. No matter how thorny the path her own feet were to tread, she wished only sunshine for Carter. The sooner he forgot her the better, she told herself with twisted lips.

Her father had gone when she came downstairs, but Derek Moore was wait-

ing in the morning room. If he noticed the constraint in her greeting he gave no sign.

"How's the little lady this morning?" he asked with a fulsome smile.

"I am quite all right," answered Laurel coldly.

She would have turned on her heel and walked away had he not planted himself in her way.

"Say," he began loudly, "I'm getting mighty fed up on these highbrow airs of yours!"

Laurel flushed, but her violet eyes met his steadily.

"It really doesn't interest me in the least what you think of my manners, Mr. Moore," she said coolly. "Let me by, please."

But he barred the path.

"Not so fast, not so fast," he cried angrily. "It may not interest you what I think of you, but I warn you here and now it interests your father a lot."

Laurel's heart contracted painfully.

"What do you mean?" she asked rather faintly.

He laughed harshly.

"I mean that your dad and I are side kicks. We're in cahoots together," he boasted, "and I don't mind telling you we are in up to our necks. He has a lot of reasons for not wanting to hurt my feelings, and if you know which side your bread's buttered on you'll follow suit and make up to Derek Moore, instead of trying to rile him up all the time."

His voice was harsh.

Laurel could not keep the scorn out of her violet eyes and curling red lips.

"The fact that my father has so far forgot himself as to become allied with you," she cried hotly, "is no reason why I should lower myself by countenancing the act. I don't like you, I never have, and I never shall. There is nothing so far from my intention as any idea of making up to you. Now let me by, please!"

But her angry outburst only inflamed him. He not only made no move to let her by, but, his eyes glinting, his face flushed, he reached out suddenly and seized her in his arms.

"You little wild cat," he cried through his teeth, "I'll tame you yet!"

Despite her furious struggles, he was slowly but surely bending her head back to meet his lips when the door was thrown open suddenly by a hasty hand and Carter Dugan appeared on the threshold.

There was a long, terrible minute when not one of the three moved or spoke. Then Derek Moore slowly released the girl. Still nobody spoke. White to the lips, Laurel stared at the man she loved. It was left to Carter Dugan himself to break that ominous silence.

"So," he cried bitterly, "this is why you have discovered all at once that you do not love me enough to marry me!" His voice rasped. Laurel's heart broke at the disillusion in his anguished eyes. "Oh, Laurel, Laurel, how could you?"

For a moment she had only one thought, to fling herself into his arms, to tell him she loved him better than anything in the world, yes, even better than her father, whom she had adored all her life. But she made no move. It was better that Carter should be thoroughly disillusioned about her once for all. The worse he thought of her the quicker he would be able to forget her.

And he must forget her. She could never saddle his young life with the shame and guilt which belonged to her father.

Summoning every ounce of her young strength, both physical and spiritual, she looked up at him with trembling lips.

"I'm sorry, Carter," she said in a voice which shook in spite of herself, "but you see how it is."

He staggered as if she had struck him, while behind her she heard Derek Moore draw an incredulous breath.

"Laurel, Laurel!" Carter's voice was almost a sob. Then his face hardened. His young mouth twisted bitterly. "I guess there is nothing more to be said," he cried harshly.

Laurel's eyes were misty.

Turning on his heel, he would have gone out of the room without another word had not the door been hastily opened a second time. On the threshold appeared Anthony Fane with two burly, grim-faced men in blue serge.

"There's your man," said Fane sharply.

His two companions crossed the room, and before any one could guess their purpose they had seized Derek Moore, one by each arm, and slipped a pair of handcuffs about his thick wrists.

"Hey, what does this mean?" blustered their captive. "What in the devil does this mean, Fane?"

Anthony Fane smiled wearily.

Anthony Fane appeared with two grim-faced men in blue. They seized Derek Moore, and slipped a pair of handcuffs about his thick wrists.

"It means the game's up, Derek," he said coolly, "Sooner or later every crook makes a misstep. You made yours when you let me persuade you that I was a crook like yourself. We've got the goods on you this time. You won't get off again without punishment. I've got the whole thing down in black and white in my desk here, with your signature at the end. It's the pen for you this trip, my friend."

"You low-lived, double-crossing skunk!" stormed Derek Moore, bursting into a stream of profane abuse.

Anthony Fane motioned to the two men in blue serge.

"Take him away," he said curtly. "They're expecting him down at headquarters."

As the two detectives dragged their fuming prisoner out of the room the older man looked back at Anthony Fane with a respectful smile.

"Your last job with the department has sure been a grand one, chief," he murmured. "It's too bad we've got to lose as fine a sleuth as you out of the game."

"Chief, sleuth!" gasped Laurel wonderingly.

Her father smiled at her.

"I've been with the secret service for many years, Laurel," he explained quietly. "That's why we've always moved around so much and why I've always had to have so much secrecy about my business as well as transactions with queer-looking people. But it's all over now, thank God. When I landed Derek Moore in a net I handed in my resignation. I'm going to settle down and spend the rest of my days in what I believe is a well-earned peace."

"Oh, daddy," cried Laurel brokenly, "can

For the first time since their engagement, Laurel's shyness vanished. Her arms crept about Carter's neck. "Of course I'll take you back," she said softly.

you ever forgive me? I didn't trust you. I let all sorts of ugly suspicions creep into my mind. I thought you were a crook. Oh, daddy, dear daddy, can you ever forgive me?"

He bent and kissed her. "Of course I forgive you," he whispered. "If it hadn't been for you I never could have trapped Derek Moore. You have proved again that you are the best little girl in the world."

When her father had left the room, Carter walked swiftly to Laurel's side.

"Laurel, Laurel," he breathed, "was it on account of your father that you broke our engagement?"

His voice was tender.

Laurel looked at him with brimming eyes and nodded.

"I couldn't bear to drag you into what I thought was our disgrace and dishonor," she murmured. "I didn't want the shadow of shame to touch my loved one's name."

Carter took her hands in his and kissed them almost reverently.

"Laurel, my dearest," he murmured brokenly, "and I thought you didn't love me as much as I loved you! As much as I love you, I doubt very much if I could ever have had the courage to write you that letter. You've taught me a lesson in loyalty and love that I shall remember all my life. Laurel, will you take me back and let me prove to you that I am remembering?"

For the first time since their engagement, her shyness vanished. She moved closer to him and her arms crept up about his neck. "Of course I'll take you back," she said softly.

"You darling!" said Carter fervently and kissed the beautiful lips lifted to his.

SIGNS AND LIGHTS FOR THE LUCKY LOVER

AS I came through the grass to-night
I stooped and plucked a four-leaved clover.
It grew in the fields 'mid the blossoms bright,
Where the bumblebee is a thieving rover;
Listen, Sweet! We are coming over,
The clover leaf and the lucky lover!

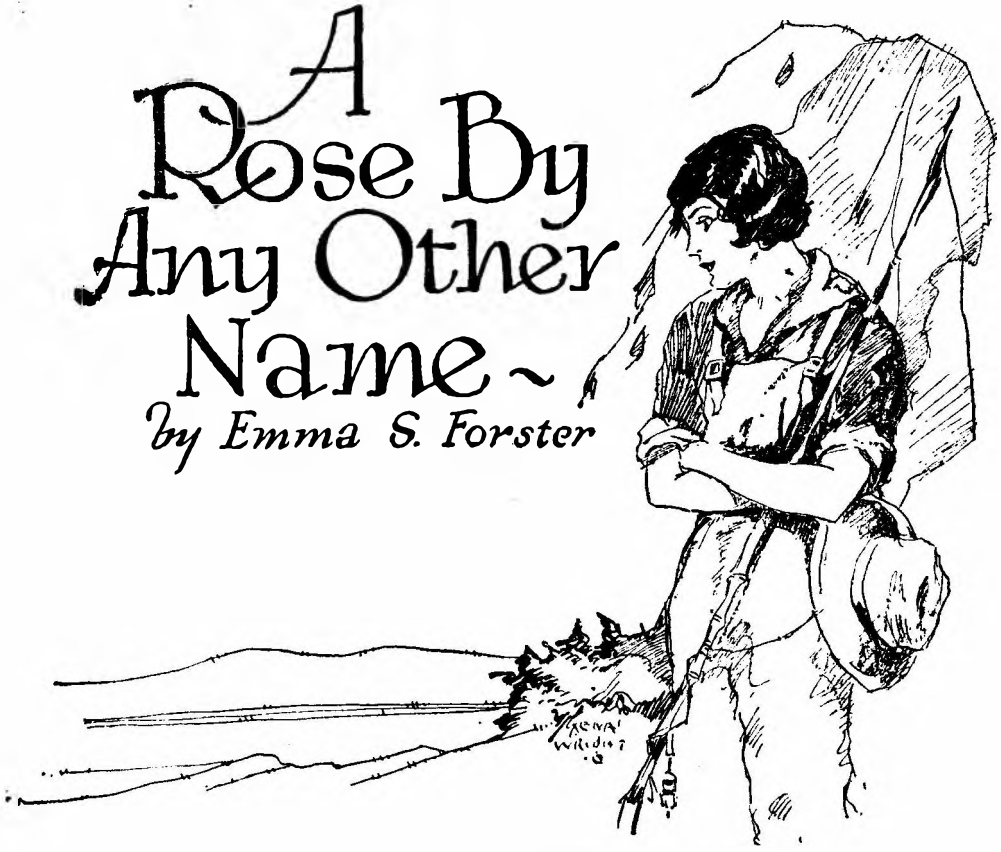
And I found a horseshoe in the road,
It was pointing straight in your direction!
Was it magnetized? For I swiftly rode,
Certainly drawn by a strong attraction;
No steel-shod hoofs were called to action.
A motor car was my quick selection.

I've just seen the moon, a silver sickle,
By glancing over my right shoulder!
Though Lady Luck is sometimes fickle,
To-night the signs have made me bolder;
Before the new moon is an hour older
Bright eyes will beam from my happy shoulder!

ROSE M. BURDICK.

A Rose By Any Other Name ~

by Emma S. Forster



I THINK it's a shame, dad. You only have one afternoon a week in summertime and it's not fair for you to have to spend it turning the ice-cream freezer, combing the lawn, and dusting the flower beds for that bunch of cake-eaters and bank clerks that Kathy and Virginia are trying to marry."

Blossom Minor delivered this tirade against her family with a vigor characteristic of her protest to most of the designs of her energetic mother and ambitious sisters.

Every one has known such a family as the Minors. The husband labors steadily on a conservative salary, yet by a dint of thrift and keen manipulation of dollars and cents, they manage to live in an attractive house, dress well, entertain nicely and still maintain the front ranks of the best social crowd in their town. But any of the Minors could tell you that it all depended on Mother Minor's getting the members of the family up early and started on their respective jobs.

The sweeping lawn that encircled the chaste white house with such an enticing setting, like a huge pearl in the center of an emerald, was moved, swept, and clipped, section by section, before Dad Minor left for the bank in the morning. And in the hush of evening after Kathy and Virginia Minor had departed for the country club to dance until dawn it was sprayed by his patient hands. The flowers, porches and rooms devolved to different girls who could paint woodwork, upholster furniture and transplant cuttings equal to a professional in any of these industries.

The wardrobes of "the beautiful Minor sisters," as the society items proudly referred to them, was an especial vanity of Mother Minor who could turn, dye, press, and clean dresses and

trim hats in a pinch, until her girls "stepped out" more carefully groomed than their wealthier neighbors. Each sister secretly cultivated some little art such as marcelling, manicuring and massage, a knowledge gathered on their brief visits to beauty shops, and then they pooled their talents to the general fund for family use.

Originally there had been five "beautiful Minor girls," but fortunately for the remaining three, two had married advantageously and were helping the other candidates to arrive at a similar successful finish.

It was popular sympathy that made people and papers class Blossom Minor, the youngest of the flock, in with the two older girls in this complimentary rating of beauty, for she was anything but pretty. She despised society heartily, was long legged, "colty" Virginia styled it, with lovely green-brown eyes hid by thick tortoise-shell spectacles. Her mop of titian hair was glorious and gave her her favorite and best-known name, "Brick."

She went in for tennis and golf, and wore overalls, heavy shoes, woolen hosiery; and her favorite loves were dad, fishing, swimming and books. Her pet aversions were bridge, sheiks, teas, dances, and most people in general.

Hunched in a knot over a book, perched over a stream, or knee-deep in its waters as she cast a fly, was the nearest approach to paradise that Brick Minor could imagine. Therefore her revolt against family compulsion on this summer afternoon could hardly be altruistic as she was to have shared her father's excursion to try out the new flies he had made.

"Brown and white bucktails would be fine to-day, dad!" she said. "They'd match the foliage exactly, and I made two new flies out of the feathers from my love bird tails. They look dandy and the water was so clear and smooth in Gates' Pool yesterday."

Her condolence turned into a volcanic explosion as Virginia entered the kitchen, cool and trim, in a very becoming dress. "Brick," she said, "you play such a good game of tennis we have arranged to have you take Madge's place this evening to fill out the doubles. She got sick at the last minute. It's time you were going out a bit and the Vincent boy will soon be home and we want to be ready for him. Leave off your glasses to-night. I've fixed your white middy up with a new tie, and try for goodness sake to act civilized to the boys. Just because you are homely you need not be vicious. Try to cultivate consideration and charm. It would really improve your looks and help your chances for a husband some day—perhaps."

"Ginger, you make me sick!" Brick almost shouted. "I'm not going to play tennis and I'm glad I'm vicious if that's what my being honest means. I will not angle and squirm for hours just to catch *men.* I'll take mine out on the fish. Just because somebody told you the Vincent heir was coming up to their new house as soon as it's completed and that he was strong for athletics, you girls will wear yourselves to bones trying to land him. Why don't you invent some kind of a net for this work and save time. I hope he is as soft as his name sounds—Perciful Vincent; ye gods, he's bound to be silly to hang on to a name like that after he is twenty-one. I'd go to court and change it." Her disgust with the subject blocked further utterances.

"Don't call me Ginger," flared the second Minor débutante. "That's right, because you lack pride and ambition, try to spoil our chances. Look what Martha and Veva have done for us since they made good marriages."

"Go on, Brick, be a good sport," counseled Dad Minor deeply pleased at his baby's rebellion. His life had become formulated to a purpose but there

was no reason hers should follow suit, and Brick was resolved it should not.

"I'll never marry, I'll go to work. If I should ever lose my mind and be so silly, you couldn't drive me to the altar with any man whose name was Perciful," snorted Brick with venom.

"If you don't change your tactics and disposition, you need have no fears that with your looks you'll ever get a chance," replied Virginia, with lofty disdain. "Competition is too great these days among the pretty, pleasing girls for a sour crab like you—homely as mud—to even get a look-in."

"Now, children," Mother Minor walked into the fray and by afternoon the big house and the girls were all the pink of perfection.

"It doesn't always take money," sighed Mother Minor regretfully as she surveyed the pleasing picture in a moment of rest before the guests arrived, "but it does take elbow grease and *thinking.*"

Brick descended into the maelstrom of sheiks, a cool vision, not "ugly as mud," as Virginia's angry statement of the morning had implied, but a slim, boyish girl, winsome and sweet. She missed her shell-rimmed glasses horribly and this, added to her native shyness and rare appearances, made her awkward and sarcastic.

Her tennis, usually a spectacular exhibition of speed and accuracy, was a slow and cruel failure. She couldn't see the balls in time. This made her bitter and she ended the evening in a burst of embarrassing anger and irritating controversy that shocked her sisters and guests.

"Mother, she is hopeless," said Virginia that night in the bedroom upstairs, as she recounted their humiliation.

"I hope the next time she is introduced in the family picture, I move off the screen," echoed Kathy.

"I know Tom Fischer will just break his neck running that Vincent boy over here after the compliments she handed him this evening; she is a disgrace," added Virginia.

"She is brutal," chimed in Kathy.

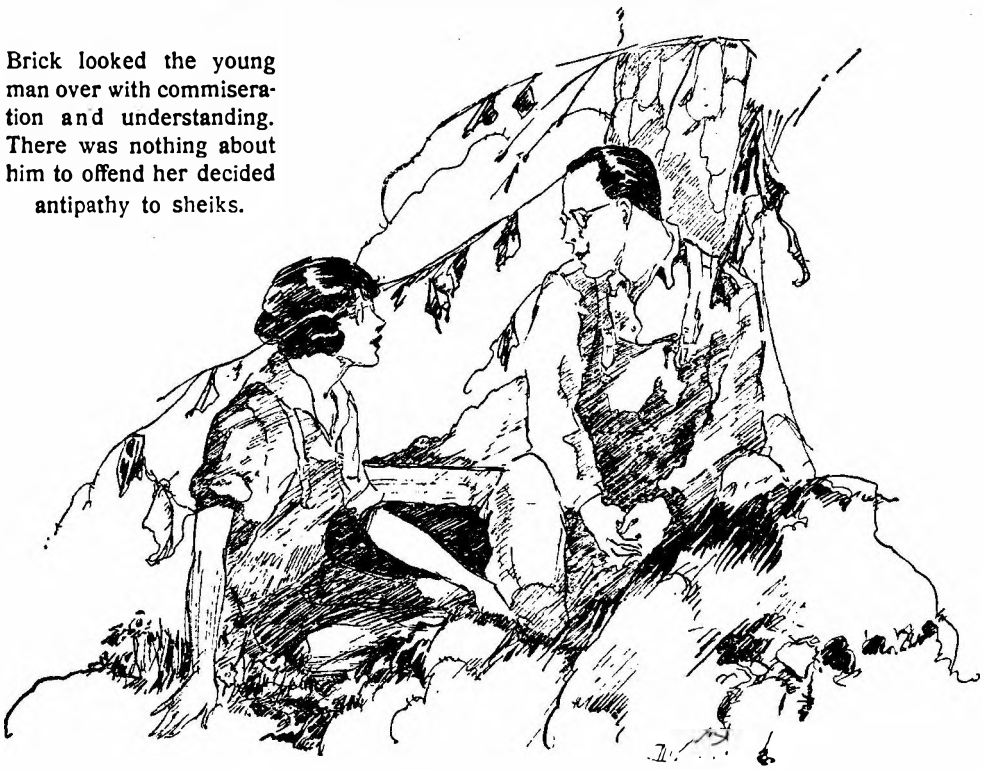
Mother Minor couldn't contradict what she had witnessed from the porch, but she felt a throb of pity for her shy ugly duckling and a warm glow around her heart as she remembered who saved her the most steps while the others were merrily dancing out the slippers it was such a task to provide. It would be nice, she reflected to have one child left at home, and Brick would be content with less than any of the others had demanded. Father and she had arrived at the age when they couldn't keep up this killing pace that was necessary to hold their own against the odds and power that money affords.

She sighed restfully as the girls continued their quarrel, safe in the privacy of her bed. Brick might be a note of contention but she was a restful consideration for the future.

Kathy's wedding was imminent and when Virginia had met and possibly anchored the Vincent boy, the expected opulent prospect, she sighed but was cheered by the memory of how the sisters were loyally supporting home interests.

Brick boiled indignantly all night. The idea of getting her down there to make a fool out of her, when she could whip every darn one of them at any game they chose! She knew her serving was punk, without Tom Fischer yelling "cut out your doubles," and "stop those balls."

She was up at dawn taking her tumult along with a fly rod to the big pool that lay two miles from home. The ride in the cool air on a dilapidated bicycle, clad in khaki overalls and a disreputable flopping hat that would have sent her conventional sisters into convulsions, had reduced her temper and she was nearly normal when she ar-



Brick looked the young man over with commiseration and understanding. There was nothing about him to offend her decided antipathy to sheiks.

rived at a sheltered spot and began her casting. As she flung aside her hat and cast out her fly she felt that life still held magic and she wished for dad.

Two hours sped in silence, save the rustling trees that whispered soothing messages to Brick's wounded spirits and she had already strung several beauties, when a timid voice at her elbow inquired, suddenly:

"Would you mind showing a fellow how you do it? I've tried every fly in my tackle box and I can't get a rise."

Brick looked him over with commiseration and understanding. He stood a patient subject for her to study—sunburned, a fresh coat, freckled, blue eyes; nice eyes covered by thick-lensed shell glasses like her own, and overalls, too, stained by soil and grease. There was nothing about him to offend Brick's decided antipathy to sheiks. He was earnest, too, and plainly chagrined that she was not a boy as he had at first supposed. But after she offered him one of dad's new brown-and-white bucktails and he immediately hooked a nice bass, he was loud in his praise of the artificial bait and they seemed well acquainted.

"Isn't it a nifty fly?" gloated Brick. "When it 'hits,' it 'sets,' you tell 'um." Her red mop shook in glee.

She found in deeper conversation that he was no dub at this sport and that his knowledge of wood lore and craft was extensive. His name was "Bugs" Perry and he was filling the greenhouses with a fancy line of orchids and doing the landscaping for the new Vincent home.

That sounds interesting, thought Brick, but what she said was, "And to think you're getting the real pleasure out of what that sap of a Perciful Vincent should be doing himself, skipping about Europe like a ballet dancer."

This was but the beginning of a new and clandestine friendship for Brick. She figured it all out that first morning

on her hot ride home; they had stayed until noon. If she told the girls, they would hector the life out of her because he was a sort of glorified gardener and her mother would forbid her to fish alone. If she told dad, he'd be fearful of complication that would involve him in mother's and the girls' wrath when it should be discovered. So Brick decided to permit herself the luxury of a rendezvous and she grew to enjoy her steady excursions.

Bugs Perry revealed his name to be the result of an affair at college. A scornful sophomore began it by saying, "That new freshie looks like a beetle," and another lordly soph spoke up with the command, "Don't forget yourself and try to hang Kipling's celebrated sobriquet on that fledgling. Call him *Bugs.*" And Bugs he had remained.

"I think that was a very clever idea," commented Brick confidentially. "Just imagine if you had been christened Thorndyke, Montague, or Heaven help you, Perciful, that would have been grief crying out loud. It's awful what they name babies, when they are absolutely helpless." She dropped her head in blushing confusion as she confessed, "Now my registered name is Blossom. I may have been flowerlike once but I have surely petrified since. Brick is a lot more appropriate and satisfactory now. People have no regard for babies, the liberty they take giving them names."

Bugs, who had perceptibly winced during her heated speech, agreed vehemently, too vehemently for Brick's astuteness who was prone to suspect that he found her and her name Blossom too obviously ridiculous by present comparison. However, she forgot it and they had a glorious time of it on their surreptitious wanderings. He taught her to help him with the wild ferns he was collecting for the Vincent place. They rode all over the countryside on the rickety old wheels, unchallenged and untrammeled like truant schoolboys. Sometimes they shivered and shook along wild paths in the coughing flivver which Bugs had.

Brick was careful to account for her time and make her exits and returns to avoid suspicion. One afternoon after two months of thrilling adventure Bugs took her over to the new house which they traversed from top to bottom.

Nothing in it, from imported doors, chandeliers or marble mantels elicited any commendation from Brick until they reached a small room off the library. There Bugs explained how he was fitting it up with guns and equipment for the new occupants. She was all in raptures over the cunning arrangements—the rod racks, the gun closets, and the fly cases. They called forth unstinted praise only to be followed by the scathing statement:

"How you're wasting your time. If Perciful was a regular fellow, he would not allow any one but himself to do all this. Like as not he'll never appreciate your trouble and knowledge but I do hope he likes it; I'd love it. Don't you wish it belonged to you?" There was a burden of desire in her voice that crowded close to tears.

"Yes, or to *you.* Then we both could use it *together.*" He said this very shyly, letting his arm slip from around her shoulder to her slim, graceful waist. It drew her close and stayed there. Brick felt her blood leaping like rockets. She was in a trance, sort of floating; it was delicious and so exciting. Her heart was pounding as if she had been running. Then she shook the arm loose, impatiently but not unkindly. In that little trance Brick had grown up.

Happiness trickled away and left her sober. Her secret was no longer an innocent comradeship. The brotherhood and fellowship had slipped out of their larking. Something grave and serious took its place. Brick didn't relish this new sensation. It wasn't according to

her code. Bugs Perry had been so nice and sensible—and comfy, just like her dad. The days that had flown in her happy delirium were turned into aching contemplation.

The next day Virginia Minor in search of wild ferns for the Minor gardens discovered the two, bent low over black, rolling cubes—gayly decorated with white spots. Brick was on her knees and swaying her body in unison to a crooning incantation familiar to all southern levees and sophisticated living rooms of to-day. She snapped her fingers and "faded," "passed," "moaned," and "plead with 'em" were some of her expressions.

"Brick Minor, you come home with me at once! What in the world do you mean by such conduct?"

"Meet my friend," insisted Brick valiantly, very much rattled but very brave. Virginia merely recognized the man's presence with a bow, replete with disapproval.

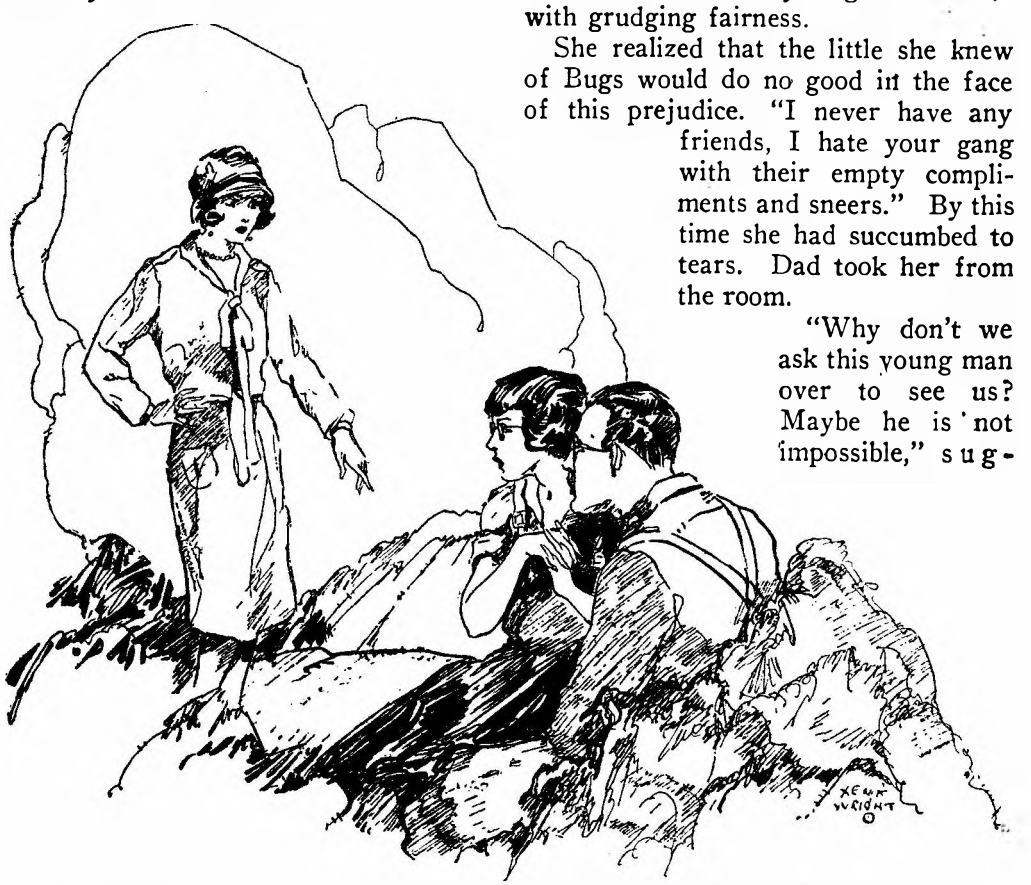
Thirty minutes later Brick faced the family council.

"It was perfectly horrible; her in overalls, playing dice with the Vincent gardener," trembled Virginia describing the affair.

"You call it shooting craps over at the country club," stormed Brick. "It ought to give her a kick to meet any one, even a gardener connected with the Vincents. Mother, stop Ginger always bossing. I'm eighteen years old and that boy is not a gardener, he is a landscape artist. And he's been to college and he can fish nearly as good as dad," with grudging fairness.

She realized that the little she knew of Bugs would do no good in the face of this prejudice. "I never have any friends, I hate your gang with their empty compliments and sneers." By this time she had succumbed to tears. Dad took her from the room.

"Why don't we ask this young man over to see us? Maybe he is not impossible," sug-



"Brick Minor, you come home with me at once," ordered Virginia. "What in the world do you mean by such conduct?"

gested dad to Kathy, Virginia and mother, later.

"Go take a look at that bird and then laugh that question off," said Virginia, so moved that she forgot her language in her indignation. "Just wait until Kathy and I marry this fall and then you and Brick can turn this house into a *hobo's rest.* Until then, please give us *our* chance."

They patrolled Brick's activities for the next two weeks and she grew sullen and restless, never opening up to any one but dad, who could always get a response for his affection and confidence. It broke Brick's heart to deceive him but she had discovered something in life that would not be denied and that she neither understood nor could control. At the end of the third week her bed was empty when dad went in for his morning's kiss and he found only the little rambling, pathetic note, which read:

DAD, HONEY: You are the only one that can or will try to understand, and you'll be grieved and disappointed in me, too. I'm running away to marry Bugs Perry. He's the only man I ever liked except you, and he knows you always will have to come first, but he loves me, too. I couldn't have him come to the house and be criticized, and I guess I'll have to stay away from home for good now, but Bugs wants you to come to see us as soon as we get a place to live. He has a little money, for this was a good job, and he has other work waiting for him, too. I guess you will be surprised to know he got your brown-and-white bucktail patented, and we have sold one hundred dollars' worth of flies. We will give you the money just as soon as we know we are not going to need it. I'll send you a wire as soon as we are married, and please tell mother and the girls I'll keep far enough away not to rub any vegetables on their feelings.

Guess Kathy will have a swell wedding. Hope Ginger lands the Vincent boy, Perciful. That would make my revenge complete for the way she has bullied me.

Don't stop loving me, dad. BRICK.

Mr. Minor sat down on the little white bed and wept. Then for the first time in all his life he went into the breakfast room and took his family to task. He declared himself for Brick and her independence.

His eyes flashed as he thundered: "She had a right to love and marry the man she wanted. If he suits her, he suits me. She is welcome to this home, it's hers as much as it belongs to the rest of you, and she's gotten very little sympathy or pleasure out of it."

His family was too stunned to interrupt as he charged them. "We are cruel parents to let this child go out alone to make her own decisions without our advice or confidence. What does she know of the world? If she suffers accident or disgrace, the blame is ours. I condemn myself equally with the rest of us."

He stumbled out, blinded by tears, to face his daily task at the bank.

The day following Brick's departure found the anxious family still unaware of the prodigal's fate. But two days later the two miscreants drove up to the immaculate gate of the Minors' impressive dwelling in Bugs Perry's rattling, choking flivver.

Grief had tempered their pride and condemnation of Brick's mad dash for liberty and love, and it was a very remorseful group that welcomed the creaking car and dusty travelers. Not a romping, impetuous bride, but a shamed, crestfallen Brick that tore at their hearts with wild and terrified surmises they were afraid to voice. All about her hovered the pall of tragedy.

"He looks fairly decent," Kathy managed to whisper to Ginger at the first opportunity.

Brick only waited until they reached the living room to explode the bomb that had whetted their curiosity with an intangible fear.

"Dad, what would you do to a man that had married you under false pretenses?" Brick stood a heartbroken little figure, eyes swollen and red from weeping.

The incorrigible husband took his little bride in his arms and kissed her tear-stained face. "I will be Bugs—always Bugs to you, Brick," he said.

"Why, Brick, what do you mean?" demanded Mr. Minor turning to glare at the mortified son-in-law.

Terror swept over the Minor ladies like an ocean of accusation. They were responsible for this! Self justification prompted Virginia to snap, "Well, it serves her right. When you roam about the country improperly clad and pick up strangers you can expect just what you usually get. No family and no pride. You're a disgrace, Brick Minor or Perry."

"It isn't either one of these," sobbed Brick plaintively from her father's shoulder. "That's what I'm kicking about. Bugs Perry was an assumed name; it isn't his own at all."

"Heaven protect us, child, what have you done?" gasped Mother Minor. "What is the boy's name?"

"The awfullest in the world," moaned Brick. Dad patted her gently; she was safe in his arms again. Complications—he'd meet them. No more separations. She was still his baby.

The others held their breath to catch her answer as Mother Minor insisted:

"What is the boy's name?"

"Perciful, Perciful Vincent," yelled Brick tearing herself out of dad's astonished arms; tears were streaming down her cheeks and she stamped in her rage.

Grave concern struggled with amusement as the former Bugs Perry calmly stated:

"Well, you admitted yourself that you weren't so much of a Blossom, what have you on me?" gibed the incorrigible husband as he took her into his arms and kissed her tear-stained face. "I will be Bugs, *always* Bugs to you, Brick."

Brick looked up at him and smiled through her tears. "All right then, if you promise never to call me Blossom, I won't torture you with Perciful."

"I promise," said Bugs, tightening his arms about her, "but most of the time I shall be calling you my own darling."

Born *for the* Stage

By GEORGETTE MACMILLAN

Part II.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Millicent Gower, tired of her life with her recluse father and her Aunt Annie, answers an advertisement for novices with well-trained voices for the Hilarity Theater. She is asked to call for a trial, and creates a very favorable impression on the manager.

Millicent knows nothing of her mother. John Gower had met his wife abroad. Fifteen years ago he had gone to his sister, then a housekeeper, and asked her to take charge of his house and child. When she asked about his wife, he said she was dead; but Annie Gower knew that, although she might be dead to her husband, she was not in the land of spirits. John Gower has not mentioned his wife since, and seems to shrink from his daughter.

Millicent persuades her aunt to take her for the voice trial and to tell her father that she is going to inquire about a position as companion. Alarmed at the thought of her deception, Aunt Annie takes counsel of her lifelong friend, Janet King, who keeps the boarding house at which they are staying, and, as no offer has yet been received from the manager of the Hilarity Theater, Mrs. King promises to keep Millicent with her for a time as her companion.

Millicent is given a part in the new play at the Hilarity. Papa Simmons is the manager, and Ronald Grainger is a friend who assists him.

Beryl Faversham, a favorite actress, gives an "At Home," to which come Grace Delamere, the actress who is taking the leading part in the comedy at the Hilarity; Cecil Cranwood, who is infatuated by Grace; Ronald Grainger, and others interested in the new play.

CHAPTER V.

EVENTS had turned out just as Millicent had hoped and her aunt had dreaded.

The morning after the voice trial brought an offer from the stage man-

ager of the Hilarity of a part in the new production, and a request that Miss Gower would call at the manager's office at twelve o'clock that day to discuss certain terms and sign her agreement.

This time Millicent made no objection to her aunt's company; so a very unhappy elderly lady and a very joyful young one set out in good time to wait on Mr. Dan Simmons.

Millicent and Mrs. King had a long talk early that morning, and the girl had agreed gladly and gratefully to live at Avonmore boarding house ostensibly as companion of the proprietress.

She was to have a good-sized airy room at the top of the house where she could practice her voice exercises without annoying the other guests, and she would pay a small sum out of her salary when she commenced to receive it.

It seemed an ideal arrangement to Millicent, who had already begun to wonder where and how she should live in the huge bustling city which, though it fascinated, yet filled her with something approaching fear when she contemplated the plunge she was about to make.

Here, then, on the very threshold of her new life, was a pleasant home, a kind businesslike friend, who was able to give her much useful information at the outset of her career.

Destiny was kind and Fortune smiled. Not even her aunt's nervous tremors could damp Millicent's spirits.

"What am I to say to your father?" wailed Miss Gower as a bus conveyed them toward the theater.

"Say!" said Millicent. "Say I have taken a position as companion, Aunt Annie! You need only keep it up for a little while. As soon as I have an assured position I'll write to him and tell him the truth."

"He'll never forgive me, or you either," said the elderly lady, with a doleful shake of the head.

"Why not?" asked Millicent a little impatiently. "There's no disgrace in the stage. Any other father would be proud of the fact that his daughter could make good use of her talents. All this fuss is simply silly!"

"But what I say is true nevertheless!" maintained Miss Gower mournfully. "It's the deception that matters!"

"Very well, auntie, don't worry!" said Millicent cheerfully. "If he really cuts up rough you can run away from the storm, and we'll have a little flat together. That's a great idea! Just lie low till I've got on a bit, dear; then you shall come to me first, and we'll tell him afterward!"

"We must get off here!" said Miss Gower as the vehicle drew up with a jerk. "Oh, I wish you'd give it up, Millie! I'm sure I could still arrange for you to stay with Janet King!"

"Not for worlds, auntie!" was the firm reply. "So please don't ask me again!"

A few minutes' brisk walking brought them to the Hilarity Theater: "To see Mr. Simmons, please, by appointment."

"What name, miss?" asked the smart, liveried attendant. "Oh, Miss Gower! This way, please!"

Millicent and her aunt were taken rapidly to the top of the building and directed to the manager's office.

Bidden to enter in response to a knock, the two ladies found themselves in the presence of Papa Simmons.

"Ah, my dear young lady," he said in his paternal manner, "pray be seated —and your mother?"

"My aunt—Miss Gower," said Millicent.

"Delighted to meet you!" said Mr. Simmons affably. "Your niece is both charming and talented, Miss Gower, but she has everything to learn."

Millicent looked up at him, a smile trembling on her soft, pretty lips.

"But I'll try so hard to learn," she murmured and Simmons beamed down upon her.

He pulled forward an easy-chair and put Miss Gower in it, taking his own place in front of the desk and producing an important-looking paper.

"I have been trying to persuade Millicent that she is too inexperienced to be of much use to you, Mr. Simmons!" said Aunt Annie nervously.

"And how do you feel about it?" the great man inquired glancing at the girl.

"It is true that I have had no stage experience," she replied calmly, "but my voice has been well trained, and I will do my very best to learn everything that is necessary, if you will give me a trial."

"Very good," replied Dan Simmons, "and spoken like a sensible girl! I don't wish to raise your hopes unduly, but I fancy you will do well—I may say, very well. Now, Miss Gower, you are, I presume, this young lady's guardian?"

"Yes," faltered Aunt Annie, in response to a command from Millicent's eyes.

"And she has your consent to signing this contract, if you approve of the terms?"

"Yes, I suppose so!"

"Ah, a reluctant consent, I gather! Well, well! To proceed! I offer to Miss Millicent Gower a part in the chorus of 'The Merry Maids' at thirty dollars a week, and I undertake that she shall be instructed in all the necessary business and taught to dance by a qualified instructor."

"Dance!" gasped Miss Gower feebly, while Millicent's eyes gleamed with excitement.

Without heeding the slight interruption, Papa Simmons went on:

"If the said Millicent Gower fulfills my expectations while in training, she is to be intrusted with a small part and a solo song. In this case her salary will be ten more per week from the beginning of the run of the piece. During her training and rehearsals no salary will be paid owing to the cost of the necessary instruction. The costumes for the part will be provided by the management."

"It seems quite fair and reasonable," admitted Miss Gower resignedly.

"I think it's simply splendid," said Millicent, "and I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Simmons, but I'll try to deserve it!"

"That's right, my dear!" said the manager. "Now suppose you sign here?"

Millicent wrote her name proudly, and the thing was accomplished.

"Now about your stage name!" said Mr. Simmons. "Are we to put you in the bill as Millicent Gower?"

"No, no!" protested Aunt Annie. "That won't do at all, Millie!"

"I suppose not," agreed the girl; "but I haven't thought of any other name! It didn't occur to me!"

"Well, let me know as soon as you can fix on one you like. Be careful to avoid both very outrageous and very commonplace names. Something simple and pretty—like yourself, my child," said Papa Simmons. "Now, I'll wish you both good morning! You will receive due notice when your attendance is required"—to Millicent. "Always be punctual and keep up your voice practice!"

The interview was over.

Millicent was definitely engaged for the run of "The Merry Maids," and could scarcely contain herself for joy. But Aunt Annie—torn between pride at her darling's success, terror at the thought of what might befall the girl in theaterland, and dread at again meeting her brother—was in a pitiable plight of nervous depression, and it took all Mrs. King's powers to soothe and cheer her that evening, as she alternated between self-pity and self-reproach.

"If only I'd never consented to her coming! If I hadn't been such a weak fool!" was the burden of her lament; but, upon Mrs. King's repeated promises to help, counsel, and guide Millicent

through the initial dangers of her career, she grew calmer and began to regard what had occurred as a ruling of Providence.

The next day she returned home. Alighting at the tiny station, Miss Gower looked around for the cart and stout pony which she expected to meet her, but neither Puck, the pony, nor James, the groom-gardener, was to be seen.

The minister's car was there, however, and the man came forward to meet her.

"My dear Miss Gower," he said as he shook hands, "I am the unfortunate bearer of bad news!"

"My brother?" faltered the unhappy lady, in whom a premonition of evil had been strong since she started from New York.

"Yes," was the reply, "your brother has met with an accident. He is lying unconscious."

"It's a judgment on me—a judgment!" exclaimed Miss Gower, amazed and horrified.

"Oh, you must not reproach yourself for leaving him!" said the minister soothingly. "Had you been at home it would have happened just the same."

"Tell me," was all Miss Gower could say. "Tell me the worst!"

"He went out as usual quite early," continued the minister, "and when he did not return at his accustomed hour James went in search of him. His habits are so regular that the servants soon felt anxious. He was found unconscious, with Puck cropping the grass not far off and going a little lame. The theory is that the pony put his foot in a rabbit hole and threw Mr. Gower, whose head evidently struck against a boulder. The accident has resulted in concussion of the brain, but Mr. Gower has a fine constitution, and Doctor Heslop thinks he will soon pull through. I came to break the news and drive you home."

"Thank you! It is most kind of you!" faltered Miss Gower. "Take me to him as quickly as you can, please!"

A short drive down the peaceful country lanes brought them to the pretty cottage which had been such a joy to Miss Gower's heart.

Again thanking the man for his kindness, she passed up the rose-bordered path to be met at the door by the frightened weeping maid.

"Oh, ma'am," she said, "I am so glad to see you! The poor master! I thought I should have fainted when they brought him in; he looked like death itself!"

"Is he conscious now, Bessie?"

"No, ma'am. He hasn't moved or opened his eyes. The nurse is with him now, and the doctor has sent for another one. He'll be back again himself very soon."

"Why didn't you wire to me, Bessie?"

"'Twasn't any good, ma'am. Your train had started before they brought the master home."

Like a person in some awful dream, Miss Gower went upstairs and into her brother's bedroom.

White and still he lay, giving very little sign of life beyond a faint uneven breathing.

"Oh, nurse, how awful!" whispered Miss Gower to the capable-looking woman in charge.

"Don't give way!" she replied, seeing that she was on the verge of collapse. "Doctor Heslop will be back very shortly. He has gone for another nurse. He believes Mr. Gower will soon recover consciousness, though he may be in for a long illness. There is a very nasty wound at the back of his head."

"Is he in danger?" asked Miss Gower.

"He has a fine constitution and has lived an abstemious life, so there is

every hope," replied the nurse. "But you will need all your strength and courage, Miss Gower. Do go and take a rest now! I will call you if there is any change. You look thoroughly done up!"

"You will let me know as soon as the doctor returns?" said Miss Gower, and the nurse promised.

Miss Gower sought her room.

She had returned home prepared to deceive her brother for the sake of the niece she adored, only to find him lying near to death; she could find but poor comfort in the nurse's reassuring words.

Ought she to send for Millicent? What should she tell her? If the girl came back, could she do any good? Would not her career be ruined?

Perplexed and troubled, she decided to wait until she had seen the doctor; then she endeavored to compose her startled nerves and master her trembling limbs.

When Doctor Heslop returned she was outwardly calm.

"Tell me the worst, doctor?" she asked. "Do you think he will recover?"

"It is difficult to tell you, Miss Gower," replied Doctor Heslop. "I believe he will pull through, but he probably has a long illness to face. The blow on the head is a severe one and has caused concussion. He will, I expect, be delirious when he wakes from unconsciousness. I am terribly grieved for you. It must have been a dreadful shock!"

"I can scarcely realize it yet!" murmured the poor lady.

"Anything I can do," said the doctor sympathetically, "I shall only be too happy. I have sent for a nurse. She will be here in a few hours. Do you think you can manage, or will you have another?"

"I shall do nicely, thank you, doctor! I am a good nurse myself and can take my share!"

The next few weeks proved a time of terrible anxiety. John Gower passed from unconsciousness to delirium, as the doctor predicted, and his temperature rose alarmingly, but Doctor Heslop never despaired.

"We shall pull him through all right," he declared. "Courage and patience, Miss Gower! We shall pull him through!"

And with this assurance Aunt Annie wrote bright, cheerful letters to Millicent.

Quite early in her brother's illness she decided not to alarm the girl or bring her back unless it became absolutely necessary to do so.

Millicent's letters were glowing with happiness. She loved her work. She was learning rapidly. Every one was kind, and Mrs. King was a darling.

She was dreadfully grieved to hear of poor father's accident, but glad he was going on all right. She would come home if Aunt Annie needed her, but she would have to give up her part. Mr. Simmons was very particular. She had to work hard at her singing and attend every rehearsal, besides various classes.

Then followed more details as to her dancing lessons and how she spent hours every day practicing.

And Millicent was content, never realizing the long, anxious hours of watching and nursing which passed day after day in that darkened quiet bedroom, of the sick dread which often arose in her aunt's mind as she sat by her brother's bedside or helped the nurse to control him in his fits of delirium.

He would rave of his wanderings with Isabel, his wife, calling her impassioned names, sometimes begging her to return, but more often raging in a blind fury against some man, who, he said, had taken her from him and whom could he but find he would kill.

So that was it, mused his sister sadly.

John's wife had left him for another —had been unfaithful to him. No wonder he was stern and had little of joy left in his life!

It accounted for his avoidance of Millicent, too.

One terrible cry escaped him which gave her a clew to his peculiar attitude toward the girl.

"The child!" he groaned. "How can I be certain she is my child? Yet how can I doubt it? Isabel was mine then —all mine. The ideal woman, the Heaven-sent wife! Yes; she is my child! She isn't even like her mother —she is more like mine, but the sight of her reminds me of the happiness I have lost!"

So he would rave, alternately blaming himself, his lost wife, and the man whose name he never mentioned. Then he would speak of his roses and what he intended to do to produce new specimens.

One day there came a change; the temperature went down; the ravings ceased. John Gower slept naturally and peacefully.

"He'll do now," said Doctor Heslop, heaving a sigh of relief. "He'll be as weak as a kitten, but when he wakes he'll be himself!"

Miss Gower wept tears of joy. The worst was over. John would recover.

All her womanly heart had yearned over this stern man who in illness had revealed his so carefully-guarded secret.

She would persuade him to talk to her, she reflected.

During the long hours of convalescence she would tactfully tell him that she knew of his sorrow, and his overburdened heart would be eased by her understanding and sympathy. They would draw close together; she would be able to tell him about Millicent's great career.

He would learn to love his girl better and to be proud of her; the future would see them all happy.

In her relief and thankfulness Miss Gower's dreams were all rose-tinted, but when her brother at last awoke from his long sleep he was conscious indeed; gentle, no longer raving or feverish, but conscious with the consciousness of a little child.

He remembered nothing of his accident or of his life before it, accepted food and services with a grateful smile, but over his mind was a thick cloud which blotted out the past.

Only when he was carried out into the sunny garden, where late roses bloomed in profusion, did his brain respond to previous experiences, and he soon began to tend them with his old skill and enthusiasm.

Otherwise his memory was completely gone.

CHAPTER VI.

So enthralling did Millicent find everything in her new life and surroundings that her past existence began to appear almost like a dream.

She found herself developing surprising powers, gaining an increased self-confidence, ripening into an assured personality as the busy days sped by, each filled with its quota of work, study, and pleasure. The very atmosphere of the theater was a pleasure to Millicent and her lessons were a source of pure delight.

Acting on the advice of Mrs. King, she was known to all her new acquaintances, both in the boarding-house and among professional people, as "Netta Wilding," this being the name she had chosen to assume.

She quickly made herself popular, her bright, sunny disposition and frank, pretty manners winning her friends even among those who were inclined to be jealous, for it was not long before the company knew that Miss Wilding was expected to make a hit and that Papa Simmons was as fussy over his find as a hen with one chick.

Her favorite among the members of "The Merry Maids" chorus—nearly all novices like herself—with whom she daily rehearsed, was a dark girl called Beatrice Jenner, who had attracted the attention of Ronald Grainger at the voice trial.

Beatrice, who lived with her widowed mother, was a sweet girl, refined, and delicate-looking, with big dark eyes set in a pale pure face.

She and Millicent became great friends, and Beatrice told Millicent the sad story of her father's death only a year ago.

It had plunged her mother and herself into poverty, since they had lived up to the limit of his income, and it was found that he had made no provision for their future.

Beatrice had been glad indeed to be one of the chosen "maids," for she would be able to obtain many comforts for her delicate mother when her salary commenced, but, although she possessed a well-trained voice, she had little or no aptitude for dramatic art.

Her shy modest ways, however, were exactly what were required for the forthcoming production, and Dan Simmons regarded her as one of his most promising recruits.

As for Ronald Grainger, he so often found a reason for being present at rehearsals that the stage manager began to look for the reason.

Ronald had fallen head over heels in love with Beatrice Jenner, rather to his friend's annoyance.

"Look here, Ronny, my boy," he said after a long afternoon's work, during which Grainger had succeeded at least twice in distracting Miss Jenner's attention, "it won't do! I told you my plan was to have a chorus of sweet, unsophisticated girls, and before they've been at work three weeks you begin to try to turn their heads! It's too bad, and not what I call playing the game!"

"Can't say I understand you, Dan!" drawled Ronald. Then, as he saw Beatrice about to go, "I'll be off! By-by! Important business at the office!"

"No, you don't!" replied Simmons firmly, planting himself in front of the other, his legs apart, his hands thrust deep into his trouser pockets, his hat on the back of his head. "You know well enough what I mean! You've been running after little Jenner ever since you first saw her, and I won't have it! She's as good a girl as they're made, and you are too clever for her, Ronny! I won't have my maids spoiled, and I thought I could depend on you!"

"So you can, Dan! Keep your hair on!" replied Ronald. "I'll go easy, if you like, until your piece is well launched, but, as you say, I have run after Miss Jenner, and I intend to do so until I catch her in my arms and make her my wife! So long, old man!"

And Ronald Grainger strolled out of the theater, leaving his friend dumb with astonishment.

Ronald was forty, a successful theatrical agent, and up to now no woman had succeeded in interesting him for more than a month.

He had also been wont to scoff at the marriage tie and jeer at the idea of permanent domestic happiness.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Papa Simmons as he gazed at the immaculately clad retreating figure. "So Ronny's caught at last! And the man who didn't believe in my scheme! Bless me! The idea's too good! If this sort of thing goes on there won't be a maid left at the end of the run—they'll all be married!"

As Beatrice and Millicent left the theater together they were surprised to see Miss Delamere's smart motor still at the stage door, with the actress herself occupying it.

"Ah!" she exclaimed as the girls appeared. "I've been waiting to see you, Miss Wilding! Will you come back with me to my flat? I want to talk over

our little business together and give you a few more tips."

Miss Delamere's patronage and kindness had done much for Millicent, whose special song and dance in the second act brought her into personal touch with the star.

From the first rehearsal Miss Delamere had been markedly kind to the clever novice, helping her in many little ways and instructing her in much of the minor business of the stage, so that the girl's improvement had been rapid, and her gratitude to Miss Delamere was as great as her admiration for that lady's mastery of her art and powers of fascination.

She hesitated slightly as she glanced at Beatrice.

"Miss Jenner was coming to tea with me," she said.

"Oh, please don't bother about me!" put in Beatrice. "Another day will do just as well, Netta, as Miss Delamere wants you!"

"If you really don't mind, Miss Jenner!" said Grace Delamere, and Beatrice, nodding brightly, walked briskly away; while, almost before she knew it, Millicent found herself in the car by Miss Delamere's side gliding in the direction where the popular actress lived.

Beatrice Jenner had not gone many yards before a voice just behind her made her start and turn to find Ronald Grainger at her elbow.

"I am lucky, Miss Jenner!" he said, as he raised his hat.

A faint color tinged the girl's cheeks, and her great dark eyes glowed with pleasure; but she lowered her lashes discreetly, and her tone was sedate as she replied:

"Why so, Mr. Grainger?"

"I saw you and Miss Wilding leave the theater together and hurried after you both to offer you tea, but you had disappeared, and I was going back to my office, which is not far from here, when I overtook you."

"Miss Delamere took Netta in her motor," explained Beatrice, "so I was going to take the tube home."

"I see," said Grainger. "Miss Delamere seems to have taken a great fancy to our rising star!"

"Oh, I am not surprised at any one taking a fancy to Netta!" said Beatrice warmly. "She is so clever and so beautiful! She is certain to succeed, don't you think so?"

"Yes, I certainly think Miss Wilding has every necessary qualification for the making of a great actress!" replied Ronald. "But won't you come now and have some tea with me? You must be tired out after all that rehearsing!"

His voice was strangely gentle.

"Thank you! I should like to very much," answered Beatrice demurely.

"Good!" said Ronald, hailing a passing taxi and giving the driver an address. "I've told him to go to a dear little tea-shop I know of," he said when they were speeding along. "We can have a long chat in a cozy corner all to ourselves—that is, if you are not in a hurry!"

"You are very kind!" answered Beatrice composedly, though her heart was beating wildly.

She had been strictly brought up, this dainty girl—the only and much-loved child of parents who were devoted to each other and to her.

Her father, by disposition an artist and dreamer, had been early compelled by necessity to seek uncongenial occupation as a bank clerk, from which he had risen to a prominent position. His home-life was his paradise, where he and his pretty wife forgot the outer world and his dreary work in their ideal happiness and artistic pursuits.

Their little house, which Ambrose Jenner had bought, was made beautiful by their own hands.

There they and their daughter had lived in modest luxury upon his income as head cashier.

When he had died suddenly, and at a comparatively early age, it was found that he had made no provision for the future, and that only a very small balance of his salary was in the bank, where he had spent so many years of his life.

A pension was granted to his widow, which she and Beatrice had contrived to live upon; but Mrs. Jenner seemed to grow more and more frail to her daughter's anxious eyes, and it did not seem possible that she could remain long parted from the husband she had adored.

Ronald Grainger, watching the pure profile and long dark lashes of the girl beside him, thought her the fairest woman he had ever seen, a delicate cameo compared with the more robust charms of her fellow-workers, a flower much too modest and sweet to bloom to perfection in the atmosphere of the theater.

He longed to gather this wonderful blossom and plant it in congenial soil, to foster and tend it until it developed into the fullness of its beauty in the sunshine of his love.

But he had given his word to Papa Simmons, and he intended to keep it. Besides, it was too early to speak yet. He must woo her gently and delicately.

All that was best and refined in the somewhat hardened man of the world awoke to new life in the presence of this pale girl.

Beatrice felt she could trust him.

It was with a feeling of serene happiness that she allowed Ronald Grainger to lead her to a screened corner of a pretty tea room, where the windows were hung with rose curtains and soft lights gleamed from rose shades on pink satin cushions.

A violin softly played made a delightful accompaniment to conversation. The attendants, refined and pretty, wore rose-colored linen frocks; the meal, when it appeared, was dainty and appetizing.

Ronald leaned back in a luxurious chair and watched his companion's slender white hands as she poured tea.

The day was very warm, and Beatrice wore a white dress, simply made, with a low turn-over collar showing the slim young throat, and a wide hat trimmed with a wreath of roses. She looked tired after her arduous hours of work, and there were rims around the big dark eyes which made him long to take her in his arms and pet her as he would a weary child.

When she had handed him his tea after the usual preliminary inquiries as to cream and sugar, he roused from his reverie and, with consummate tact, succeeded in inducing her to talk of herself, her own life, her dreams and ambitions.

In a very short time he had possessed himself of her sad and simple story.

"I don't think I am fitted for the stage," she said, shaking her head seriously, "but when I saw Mr. Simmons' advertisement I thought I would try for an engagement, as my voice was good, I knew. I am glad I succeeded, for now I can get some of the things the doctor says will help to strengthen the dear *mater.*"

"But you don't really like the life? You were not stage-struck and dying for a chance to appear?" inquired Ronald, eagerly.

"No," she replied. "I don't care for it at all! I had hoped to get some good concert engagements, but it is so dreadfully difficult, and when this chance came I felt compelled to take it."

"I shall be able to help you there, no doubt," said Ronald. "I know all the big concert agents, and can give you introductions when the run of 'The Merry Maids' is over. Your voice is beautiful, and this experience will help to strengthen it and will give you self-confidence also. But certainly you will be more at home on the concert platform than on the stage."

"Oh, how good you are!" she said, clasping her hands with a pretty gesture. "It's simply splendid of you! Why, all my difficulties seem to be melting away!"

"Will you regard me as your friend, Miss Jenner?" Ronald went on. "You may find yourself up against all sorts of little difficulties which you will not know how to deal with. Promise you will bring them all to me!" His tone was tender.

"I will do so gladly. I don't know how to thank you!" said Beatrice.

"I'll tell you some day—if you will let me," whispered Ronald. "But don't be surprised if you do not see me often at rehearsals in the future!"

In response to a look of inquiry he went on:

"My busy season is coming along—there are bookings to arrange, touring companies to engage, all the usual round to attend to. I'll look in occasionally, of course. Meanwhile, here is my card, with my telephone number. Ring me up if I can be of any service to you."

"Thank you!" said Beatrice, as she took the slip of pasteboard and put it in her purse. "It is good to know there is some one I can turn to when I want advice. I am so dreadfully ignorant of theatrical matters."

"And I am soaked and steeped in them, so can be of real service, I trust. Now, Miss Jenner, won't you give me your address? Some fine Sunday I should like to come around, if I may, and take you and your mother for a drive. It would do you both good."

So Beatrice gave it, and he wrote it down in his book. Then he took her to the nearest tube station and left her to return home, while he went back to his office to find a patient crowd of actors and actresses waiting to interview him.

Meanwhile Grace Delamere was busy making much of Millicent, winning her confidence, doing all in her power to gain the girl's affection and loyalty.

She had been quick to recognize a possible rival in Netta Wilding, for the newcomer was a born actress, with a charm and easy self-confidence which could not fail to carry her quickly into the front rank of the profession.

Miss Delamere could ill afford to brook so formidable a rival.

True, she intended to marry Cecil Cranwood, but it was no part of her scheme for another actress to leap into popularity before she herself quitted the scene of her triumphs to the sound of marriage bells, and, besides, Curly had not yet proposed.

The fact was that Curly—lazy, careless, and easy-going—was finding it difficult to break the news of his infatuation to his father.

To propose marriage to Grace would compel confession, for he was above all a man of honor. So, in spite of the power she exercised over him, he hesitated, and put off from day to day the declaration which would, he believed, crown his happiness.

Grace Delamere was fully aware that she must play her cards carefully.

She must bind her lover to her irretrievably as soon as possible, and she must keep her hold upon the public until this was accomplished.

She was wise enough to know that her career was at its zenith and that a false move would ruin her future.

She decided to make a friend of Netta Wilding as the best way of wielding some power over her, if necessary, and the easiest method of hoodwinking her if required.

So she had already been especially gracious to the newcomer when the action of the piece brought them together on the stage, teaching her the most telling way to deliver the few lines intrusted to her in the second act, and planning a little "business" which would assist her own exit effectively when she was obliged to leave Netta on the boards to sing her own special song—the song

which Miss Delamere already feared would do much to insure Miss Wilding's popularity.

The flat to which she drove Millicent this summer afternoon was large and luxurious, but as soon as the girl entered she was unpleasantly impressed by the air of negligence and disorder which prevailed.

After the punctilious neatness and cleanliness of her home, and the more formal but not less orderly arrangements of Mrs. King's boarding-house, this medley of expensive furniture and ornaments, jumbled together in careless profusion, struck her as senseless and inartistic.

The windows of the sitting room were closed. The atmosphere was heavy with scent and cigarette smoke. A large chesterfield, half covered with tumbled silken cushions of every shade, was stained with wine and coffee.

There was a tall lamp behind, with an elaborate befrilled shade and a long satin ribbon wound round its stem, ending in an enormous bow, but the shade and ribbon were both dingy with dust, as was the big artificial palm in another corner of the room.

Photographs, flowers, silver bon-bon boxes, scent bottles, and the hundred and one trifles a vain and frivolous woman collects littered the tables. One satin slipper lay on a chair, the other on the floor.

"Come in, my dear! This is my own special sanctum," said Miss Delamere. "Sit on that comfy chair and I'll ring for tea. You must be famished—I am!"

The door opened. A pert maid appeared. Her apron was small and frilled, her cap, large and coquettish, had a big black satin bow with floating ends, and the heels of her patent leather shoes were ridiculously high.

"Tea. Gertrude—at once, please, and plenty of cakes!" ordered the mistress, who then turned to her guest. "Well, my dear, how do you like my little den? Rather sweet, isn't it? I love pretty things, so I have plenty about me." Not waiting for a reply, she went on talking, meanwhile taking off her huge picture-hat, which she flung onto a chair, and arranging her red hair at the mirror over the fireplace. "You know, I've taken a great fancy to you, Netta. You're just the sweetest thing I've seen for many a long day!"

"It's awfully good of you!" said Millicent, flattered in spite of herself.

"I'm not the sort to be jealous of a girl because she's pretty and clever," proceeded Miss Delamere, seating herself before a small table, as the soubrette flounced in with an elaborately embroidered tablecloth.

"You have no need to be. You are so good-looking and so very clever yourself, and your voice is lovely!" said Millicent gravely.

"That's very handsome of you, my child! We shall be excellent friends, I see. Here comes the tea! Now be sure you make a good one!"

And Millicent obediently attacked the tempting cakes with a healthy appetite

"Is Netta Wilding your real name?" asked Miss Delamere suddenly.

Millicent flushed and stammered. The question was unexpected.

"No," she said unwillingly. "It's a stage name, but I want to be known by it for the present."

"Oh, please yourself! I did not want to be impertinent!" replied her hostess slightly huffily.

"I'm so sorry!" faltered Millicent. "It seems so ungracious after all your kindness, but there are reasons. I don't want my real name to be known yet to any one."

"Keep your secret, child!" said Miss Delamere good-humoredly now. "I'm sure I don't want to pry. Now, if you are quite sure you won't have anything more, we'll go through that scene of ours once or twice. I can tell you more

fully here what I want you to do and how to do it."

Millicent rose willingly, and they set to work in earnest, the young girl readily catching the dramatic spirit and playing with eager zest.

"Now, your own song, Netta! I'll accompany you!" said Miss Delamere when at last she was satisfied that every step, tone, and gesture were correct.

Placing the score of "The Merry Maids" on the piano, Grace rattled off a merry tune, and Millicent, facing an imaginary audience, had just commenced her song when the door was thrown open and the maid announced Cecil Cranwood.

CHAPTER VII.

"Hello, Curly!" said Miss Delamere, rising from the piano to greet her visitor. "I did not expect to see you this afternoon!"

"Sorry if I'm interrupting you," replied Cecil, "but I ran in to see if you would come out to dinner with me this evening! We can do a theater, too, if you like. Say 'Yes' and I'll go, dear, as I see you are engaged." He glanced at Millicent, who had retired discreetly into a bay window.

"Nonsense! Don't go yet! Sit down," said Miss Delamere. "Of course I'll come out this evening, with pleasure! Where are you hiding, Netta?" Then, as the girl turned, "Let me introduce you—Cecil Cranwood, better known as Curly; Miss Netta Wilding, first maid in the new piece and already an embryo star!"

Cecil bowed; so did Millicent. As the man's eyes met the laughing gray eyes fixed upon him with a frank scrutiny, he said:

"Thanks, Grace! I'll stay if you are quite sure I sha'n't be in the way!"

"You won't feel shy with an audience of one, my dear?" inquired Miss Delamere.

"No, I don't think so," answered Millicent; "that is, if Mr. Cranwood will be good enough to sit in a corner so that I can't see him."

"By all means! Will this do?" And Cranwood selected a deep armchair which almost entirely hid him, while he could see Millicent perfectly.

"Won't you come to the piano?" asked Miss Delamere, with a glance from her fine eyes.

"No, thanks! I'd like to hear this song to best advantage, since I am fortunate enough to have dropped in for a private rehearsal. If I come over there I can't see Miss Wilding. Now then, do go on and take no notice of me—regard me as a cipher!"

Miss Delamere said: "Smoke if you want to. We sha'n't be very long. Now, Netta, we'll start again! Strict time, please!"

And she broke brilliantly into the accompaniment, proving herself an accomplished pianist.

It was only a trivial song wedded to florid music, but cleverly designed to show off the flexible trills of which Millicent's voice was capable, and ending in a high note which she took as naturally and easily as a bird.

Cecil Cranwood almost held his breath as the girl sang.

Every note, each elaborate roulade, clear as crystal, liquid, true, and effortless, and the exquisite grace of the young actress seemed to exalt the meaningless lyric to the level of a perfect work of art.

Almost insensibly he began to compare the two women as he watched and listened from the depths of his armchair, smoking lazily the while.

What a contrast they presented!

At the piano sat she whom he intended to make his wife, whom he loved—or thought he loved—with a passionate devotion which veiled her obvious faults with clouds of romance.

Cecil had never even criticized Grace. Her beauty, wit, and charm had com-

pletely subjugated him. He had been flattered that one so clever and famous should accept his attentions, and he excused her slight tendency to vulgarity as a pleasant camaraderie, for was she not well known in bohemian circles as the best of good sorts?

He himself was a man with a comfortable income, inherited from his mother, and therefore free to marry where his fancy led. And it had led him to Grace Delamere—Grace of the red hair, the white skin, the perfect figure, with all of which he had fallen in love as he watched her over the footlights; Grace of the merry ways and witty tongue, who never made a fellow feel bored, and who had apparently the best heart in the world.

What if her long eyelashes were painted and the roses on her cheeks owed their beauty to a light touch of the hare's-foot?

After all, it was part of her profession, and he could easily induce her to drop these methods when they were married.

She was handsome enough without paint, and he knew her hair was all right, for had he not persuaded her once to allow him to let it down when it had rippled in a glorious red mass far below her waist?

Curly stirred a little uncomfortably. Why was he criticizing Grace? He had never done so before. What a cad he was becoming!

He smiled at her and caught her answering glance as she played the encore verse of Millicent's song.

"Now your dance, dear! Go on!" she commanded when Curly had expressed some of his appreciation with an emphatic:

"You can sing!"

"Oh, I can't dance in this!" said Millicent.

"This" meant a short walking skirt of blue serge of unmistakable country cut, and a plain linen blouse belted round the slim waist with black patent leather.

Millicent loved pretty clothes, and her plain frocks seemed dowdy and inadequate, but she was not receiving any salary, and the pocket-money her aunt was able to send her was barely enough for small expenses.

"I think you can manage," replied Miss Delamere. "Your skirt is wide. At any rate, do the first movement, and then we will let you off for to-day."

Millicent pleaded that she was tired, as indeed she was, but she also felt suddenly shy of the young man of whose admiring glance she was conscious.

"I'll go now, Miss Delamere!" she said, picking up the blue straw hat she had taken off and putting it on in front of the ornamental mirror. "Thank you ever so much for all your kindness! You really are awfully good to me."

"Wait a bit, child!" replied her hostess. "There is something I want to say to you. Will you go now, Curly? I'll be ready any time you like this evening, but I have a little more business with Miss Wilding."

"Certainly!" replied Cecil. "I am now and always yours to command. I'll call for you at half past seven. Will that do?"

"That will do beautifully!" replied Grace Delamere, graciously.

"Good-by till then! Good-by, Miss Wilding! I shall look forward more than ever to seeing the new piece!" And Curly departed, leaving the two women together, Millicent not a little puzzled to know what further Miss Delamere had to say to her.

"You've heard of Miss Beryl Faversham, of course?" began Grace Delamere, as soon as her lover had gone.

"Oh, yes!" answered Millicent. "She's our greatest living actress, isn't she?"

"Well, I should scarcely say that," replied Grace, "but she's very fine indeed in her own line. That's neither

here nor there. She is a very nice woman, and has an 'At Home' every Sunday. Would you care to go with me to the next one?"

"Oh, yes, indeed I would! Will you really take me?" said Millicent, scarcely believing her ears.

"Yes, of course I'll take you!" said Grace Delamere. "Why, you look as awestruck as if you were going to tea with the Queen! Now, don't be offended, child, but have you anything smart to wear? You will meet some very well-dressed people, you know!"

"I've nothing but this serge. It was new when I came."

"Nothing at all?" inquired Miss Delamere. "Dear me! That's a pity!"

"Only one or two cotton dresses that my aunt and I made between us," replied Millicent miserably, fully conscious of the defects of her wardrobe.

"Well, cheer up! We must see what we can do," replied Miss Delamere kindly. "The skirt hangs well, though it's rather an old-fashioned cut. Now, let me see! I've a blouse that's a trifle tight for me. It will suit you to a T, and with a pretty hat——"

"Oh, Miss Delamere!" said Millicent, flushing hotly. "I can't—I really can't take your things!"

"Oh, but you can, you really can, you silly one!" teased Grace good-naturedly. "Why, I've more clothes than I know what to do with, and if you don't have one or two odd things I shall only give them to Gertrude. The little greedy cat has got her eye on them already! Come to my bedroom! I insist!"—as Millicent still hesitated. "Why, you'll soon be able to buy any amount of pretties for yourself! Don't be too proud to accept a small present!"

Thus urged, Millicent overcame her scruples and followed her new friend intc a luxurious bedroom, which contained an enormous wardrobe.

While Miss Delamere turned over the contents of several drawers, Millicent glanced around the room, wondering if she would ever be able to furnish an abode for herself on the same sumptuous lines, for the sleeping apartment was neater than the sitting room, and its elegant appointments appealed strongly to her artistic sense.

The room was papered and carpeted in a dull shade of green-blue, against which its owner's glorious hair shone out in effective contrast. The furniture was of rather heavy, old-fashioned mahogany; the hangings and bedspread were all of gold satin; and the toilet articles shining on the big dressing-table were gold-backed and gold-topped.

"What a beautiful room!" exclaimed Millicent.

"Yes, it's not so dusty!" replied Miss Delamere from the depths of the wardrobe. "The furniture was willed to me by my grandmother, and I had it in storage for years because I could not afford a flat with a room large enough to hold it. Here, my dear—take this blouse! It's no earthly use to me, I assure you—far too small."

With a dazzling smile, which won Millicent's heart as much as the gift, she held out a dainty garment of lace and muslin, fine as a cobweb.

"I don't know how to thank you!" said the girl as she shook out the blouse and noted its tiny tucks and delicate embroidery.

"Here's a waistband to go with it, pale green—my pet color! It's studded with jade for luck, you see, and the clasps, too, are jade. Now for a hat! I think I've just the very one to suit you. Take yours off again, Netta!"

Millicent did as she was bid, and Miss Delamere placed on her fair hair a broad-brimmed cream straw hat with a black lining, which proved eminently becoming, showing off the transparent skin and wild rose coloring to perfection.

Miss Delamere clapped her hands.

"Couldn't be better!" she exclaimed

"You are a beauty, child! Now run away and take these things with you! Don't stay to thank me; I want to get dressed. Come here on Sunday, three o'clock."

Millicent kissed her warmly and departed with her treasures, her big gray eyes shining with pleasure and excitement.

When she had gone Miss Delamere lit a cigarette and smoked meditatively for a few minutes.

"I didn't like the way Curly looked at the girl," she said slowly to herself. "She's far too lovely and will be more so. It's necessary to act at once, secure him, and put a spoke in her wheel, too. I must be careful, though. It won't be easy."

Pacing up and down the room, she thought deeply.

"I must keep up the friendship with her," she mused; "it would never do to appear jealous. Pooh! Jealous! I? Of a chit like that? It's absurd! But she has spirit, fire, genius, and with that face and voice will go far. What if Cecil should take a fancy to her baby looks and innocence? He's in love with me now, but men are all alike, and the public run after something new like the pack of fools they are! No! No, Miss Netta Wilding, you shall not supplant me! Your turn can come when I'm Mrs. Cecil Cranwood, but no more poaching on my preserves, young woman!"

Still troubled by uneasy thoughts, she slipped off her satin afternoon gown, and her magnificent neck and shoulders gleamed white from her low-cut princess slip.

Touching a button, she flooded the room with light, and intently studied herself in the mirror of her dressing-table.

"Curly must propose to-night!" she said aloud, decisively.

Then, humming a dreamy tune in a low rich voice, she took from its enveloping wrappings a dress of apricot silk draped over tightly fitting gold tissue.

Carefully and deliberately she drew on the fine silk stockings to match and slipped her feet into golden kid slippers. The beautifully-arranged coiffure needed little attention beyond the addition of a barbaric gold ornament clasping a cloudy osprey.

A little more rouge, a soft dusting of scented powder, and then Grace Delamere stepped into the beautiful dress, passing her white arms through the narrow shoulder-straps of dull gold beads. Then she rang the bell, for certain fastenings were beyond her reach. She was well pleased with Gertrude's gasp of admiration as she entered.

"It's rather pretty, isn't it?" she asked nonchalantly.

"I never saw anything more lovely, madam!" replied the maid.

When Cecil Cranwood came to get her it was his turn to gasp.

"Grace," he said, "you are simply stunning! Enough to take one's breath away!"

"I'm glad you think I look decent, dear boy," said Grace. "You look nice to-night yourself!"

And indeed, well developed, well groomed, in perfectly tailored evening dress, Curly Cranwood was a cavalier to be proud of.

They dined together at a gay restaurant, where Grace, all charm and sparkle, drew many envious glances toward their reserved table.

"Where shall we go now?" inquired Cranwood as he paid the bill. "What do you fancy?"

Calling for a theater list, he quoted the principal attractions then running.

"I believe I'm tired of theaters," said Grace. "I've a touch of a headache, too—the rehearsal this afternoon was very long. I think, if you don't mind, I'd rather go home."

Two men, dining together at a table near the door, nodded familiarly to Cranwood as he followed his handsome companion.

"What? And waste all that splendor?" he inquired. Then quickly: "Poor dear girl! Have you really a headache? I'm so sorry!"

"Yes, really!" she replied. "I'd rather not do anything else to-night, but you shall come and talk to me, if you would like to."

"Like to! You know I'd love it!" he answered quickly. "It's just the thing I should enjoy! We don't get many real talks, Grace—you are always so busy."

"That's right, then; we shall both be pleased. Let us go at once," said Grace, and passed out to where the car was waiting.

Two men dining together at a table near the door nodded familiarly to Cranwood as he followed his handsome companion.

"I'm afraid it's a case with Curly," said one, when he was out of earshot. "Delamere has marked him for her own."

"Will he marry her, think you?" inquired the other.

"Oh, yes! Cranwood's a man through and through. He'll marry her right enough and repent at leisure."

"It's a pity—a great pity," said his friend.

Meanwhile Grace and Cecil were being carried swiftly to her flat. Arriving there, Cecil dismissed his car and followed Grace to her own den, which had been made neat and inviting.

The evening being somewhat chilly

and rainy, a small red fire burned in the low grate. The big chesterfield and an easy-chair were drawn close to the glow. The lamp was lighted, the certains were drawn, and on a small table were set out some dainty sandwiches.

The room looked delightfully comfortable.

"Grace, you're a good judge!" Cecil said. "Nothing could be better than this! How is your head, dear?"

"Rotten!" she replied. "I'll lie down a bit, Curly."

As she rested on the sofa and the lamplight fell on her glorious hair Cecil Cranwood's pulses stirred. She had never looked more beautiful even in the midst of her stage triumphs.

"Is there anything I can get for you?" he inquired, bending over her tenderly, passionate adoration in his eyes.

"Come and talk," she commanded.

Cranwood stretched luxuriously in the easy-chair and lighted a cigarette.

In a low voice, different from her usual light bantering tone, Grace began to talk, telling him of her early hopes and ambitions—of hard struggles with poverty before she made a hit and became a popular favorite.

This was a new Grace—a gentle, winsome woman; the artist, crowned and triumphant, for the while had departed, and a yearning tenderness filled the usually flashing eyes.

"Life is terribly hard for a lonely woman. There are so many temptations, so many pitfalls. One longs so often for a sweet security where there is no more strife or struggle."

Was he dreaming, or did tears fill those beautiful eyes—eyes sometimes nearly black, sometimes almost green, according to the emotions of their owner?

Cecil Cranwood flung his cigarette into the red embers and dropped on one knee by the side of the couch.

"Dear heart!" he said, taking one white hand between his own. "It's strange how little we lazy beggars realize how you dear women work and strive. We see you dance and act—we are entranced by your songs and the magic of your smiles. We never pause to think that your hearts may be aching all the time, that the success which looks so easy has been hardly won." He spoke tenderly.

"But it is so," she breathed. "There is no artist but has arrived through tears and suffering, not understandable by those who have never been in the battle." Her voice was soft.

"You're right!" Cecil replied. "Life is made far too easy for a lot of us, and far too difficult for many others. I never realized it till now, you sweet, brave woman! You are a popular favorite, a surcessful artist. It never occurred to me that there had been years of disappointment and struggling. I just accepted you as you were when I knew you first—some one to be worshiped, admired, and loved." His voice thrilled passionately.

"Do you love me, Curly?" she asked wistfully.

"Love you? I adore you!" he answered, and, flinging his arms around her, he drew her to him and pressed his lips to hers again and again unrebuked.

Long minutes passed, but there was no sound beyond the occasional dropping of an ember from the glowing grate.

Love held his court supreme, and with that wonderful golden woman in his arms Cecil Cranwood was content.

At last she withdrew with a little sigh and sank back among her silken cushions.

"Darling! Darling!" he whispered. "You'll not keep me waiting long? You'll marry me very soon?"

"Yes, my dearest, my own!" she answered. "Of course I'll marry you, but I must fullfil my contract at the Hilarity first."

"Oh, need you, Grace? Surely you

can get out of it?" he urged, thrilled to an urgent impatience.

"Well, at least I must see the new piece well on its way. Then we'll think about it. Oh, Curly dear, what a lovely ring! I've often seen it on your finger, but never really noticed how beautiful it was."

"It's a family relic," he explained. "It belonged to my mother, and she willed it to me."

As he spoke he slipped the ring from his finger and handed it to her. It was remarkable and very beautiful—a big square emerald was set in plain gold as a signet.

"It's a wonderful ring, dearest!"

"My father had it made for my mother," he replied. "It was her own personal property, and as I was her pet son she bequeathed it to me. It's a very sacred possession," he added gravely, "for it was her favorite ornament, and when she died I removed it from her finger. I have worn it ever since."

"Let me wear it now, dear heart, as an engagement ring," murmured Grace, slipping it onto her own finger.

Cecil Cranwood hesitated.

"I'd rather get you a new one, my darling! Come out with me to-morrow and choose which you like best."

"There isn't another ring in the world I'd prefer to this one!" she answered. "Let me have this, Cecil, or I shall doubt your love."

"Doubt anything but that, my sweet!" he responded ardently, again taking her in a long embrace. "I am your slave, your lover always! Keep the ring as a pledge of my devotion."

"Then put it on my finger yourself, my own dear boy!"

He slipped it over her finger and his lips again sought hers in a long kiss.

"Will you love me always, Curly?" Grace murmured, drawing his face down so that she looked long and tenderly into his eyes.

"Always, dear girl!" His reply had in it something of the fervent enthusiasm of a youth in his first love. "You are so beautiful—so lovely," he added softly.

"I want to stay always beautiful to you, dear." Grace drew the man's lips to hers and kissed him lingeringly.

"You could never be anything else!" His arms held her close against his heart in a passion of tenderness. "My darling! My little love!"

There was a little silence, during which Curly buried his face against the soft whiteness of Grace's neck. At length she moved.

"Now you must go!" she sighed. "Look, it's very late!"

He rose reluctantly.

"When shall I see you again?"

"Well, let me think. To-day is Friday. To-morrow I am very busy. Come on Sunday to luncheon with me, and we will go on to Beryl Faversham's. Netta Wilding is coming as well. Good night, beloved!"

"Good night, you dear, sweet thing! I can scarcely realize my luck yet. You do love me, Grace?"

"Better than anything on earth!"

So Cecil Cranwood tore himself away, an engaged man, and Grace Delamere, well pleased with her night's achievement, sought her gold-curtained bed, twisting contentedly on her finger the emerald ring.

CHAPTER VIII.

Looking very charming in the dainty blouse and picture-hat, which suited her to perfection and relieved the plainness of her blue serge suit, Millicent duly presented herself at Miss Delamere's flat at three thirty on the following Sunday.

Acting on the advice of Mrs. King, who took the greatest interest in her career and who was much attached to her, Millicent had bought herself new smart shoes and stockings of excellent

quality, and a pair of dainty white gloves.

The fresh, pretty clothes served to increase a beauty already remarkable, and as the young actress ascended to her friend's quarters she had a comfortable consciousness of looking well turned out.

She was happy on this bright August Sunday, for she was making rapid strides in her study of theatrical art, and had earned both praise from her teachers and friendly encouragement from Mr. Simmons at yesterday's rehearsal.

A letter received from home the previous evening had reported her father to be gaining steadily in bodily strength, though his mind still remained dim and clouded.

Still, her aunt wrote, there was no cause for worry or concern.

Millicent had more than once offered to give up her part and return to help her aunt, but this sacrifice the elder Miss Gower had emphatically refused. Her brother was up and about now, she wrote; there was practically nothing to be done but what she could accomplish with ease.

So ran the reassuring letters. Millicent, though genuinely grieved at the mishap which had befallen her father, felt that she could be of the best service both to herself and to her family by pursuing the course she had adopted and becoming self-supporting.

Another reason insensibly added to her present sense of content. She had caught the admiring appreciative look in the eyes of Cecil Cranwood when they had rested upon her, and, in spite of the fact that common gossip assigned him to Miss Delamere, the friendly glance of those gay brown eyes had stirred her heart.

She was happier because her appearance and singing had evidently pleased this personable young man. It was therefore a very bright and glowing girl who was presently announced to Grace Delamere as "Miss Netta Wilding."

Miss Delamere emerged from her bedroom and greeted her guest warmly.

"Come in, my dear! You are just in time! Why"—as she drew Millicent into the room and kissed her—"how awfully nice you look!"

"Thanks, Miss Delamere!" answered Millicent, heartily returning the salute. "I didn't realize how distinctly dowdy I was until I put on these pretty things."

"You were always too distinguished-looking to be dowdy, Netta."

"Don't make me vain," said the girl, "but certainly I never shall be while I have you to look at. What a beautiful dress, and oh, how lovely you look in it!"

"So glad you like it! It's new!"

Always well and elaborately dressed, she had taken special pains with her toilet that afternoon.

Her clinging gown of dark-blue silk, with its deep collar of old lace, suited to perfection her brilliant beauty and flaming hair, which was piled in elaborate puffs on her well-shaped head.

Her silk stockings and kid shoes were of the same shade of blue; two or three pale pink roses were tucked into her bodice. A diamond pendant on a slender gold chain sparkled at her throat.

There was a new triumph in her eyes, a new brilliancy in her manner.

Millicent was not left long in doubt as to the reason.

"Sit down, dear!" said Miss Delamere. "I'll put on my hat now. Curly is having a cigar in my den. He is going to take us in his motor. Congratulate me, Netta! We are going to be married very soon."

At this announcement, for some reason which Millicent could not explain to herself, her anticipatory pleasure in the afternoon's enjoyment vanished as suddenly and completely as if a dark cloud had obscured the sun.

She managed, however, to smile brightly and look genuinely pleased as she offered warm congratulations.

"Mr. Cranwood ought to think himself extremely lucky!" she said.

"I shall do my best to make him happy," replied Miss Delamere. "He has loved me for a long time, but I hesitated about accepting him. I feared his family might object to his marrying an actress."

"It does not matter what a woman is if a man really loves her," said Millicent seriously.

"Ah, my dear," said Miss Delamere, "you are very simple-minded! The world thinks more of what is called a suitable match than of real old-fashioned love. That is usually the last consideration nowadays."

But Millicent, glancing at the hard-faced though brilliantly beautiful woman, wondered dimly if the love she talked of so glibly had ever really visited her.

The toot of a motor horn interrupted the conversation, and the next minute Curly Cranwood knocked imperatively at the door, which Grace opened immediately.

"Are you ready, ladies?" he inquired. "Jenkins has brought the car. How do you do, Miss Wilding? I suppose Grace has told you she is about to make me the happiest man on earth?"

"Yes," replied Millicent quietly. "I have just heard of your engagement. I offer you my hearty congratulations, Mr. Cranwood!"

She gave him her hand as she spoke, and their eyes met.

"How lovely she is!" thought the man, as he pressed the little hand before releasing it, and a thrill ran through Millicent's whole being which was delightful, yet terrifying, for this fascinating person and the other fascinating person at present busy with her long white gloves were affianced lovers.

"Let me fasten those for you," said Curly, turning reluctantly from the gaze of those deep gray eyes.

He was long and loverlike over the task, while Millicent stared out of the window, her thoughts in a turmoil.

Soon they were all speeding along the quiet streets, and before long Millicent found herself following Miss Delamere into Beryl Faversham's restful drawing-room, and was shaking hands with her hostess, whom she at once decided was the most charming woman she had ever met.

"I am so glad you have come, Miss Wilding! I have been looking forward to meeting you," said Beryl, with sweet graciousness, at once putting her guest at her ease. "Grace, you look wonderfully well, and so do you, Curly!"

"We ought to be," replied the latter. "We're just engaged! You don't mind my telling every one, Grace?"—turning to her. "I'm so proud of you, I want every one to envy me!"

"Of course I don't mind!" said Miss Delamere, with a radiant smile.

The news ran around the crowded room like wildfire, and the two were soon surrounded by a laughing, congratulating crowd of friends.

Millicent felt rather forlorn.

She knew no one, for Miss Faversham's guests were nearly all celebrities, and she was almost entirely unknown, her only acquaintances being among "The Merry Maids" company, and none of these appeared to be present.

But no one ever felt neglected in Beryl Faversham's home for long, and it was not many minutes before the girl found herself in a low, comfortable chair, talking to her hostess.

Soon she was chatting confidentially, telling Miss Faversham of dreams, hopes, and ambitions, of her part in "The Merry Maids," of her home in Mrs. King's boarding-house, while Beryl listened with an interest which was not all assumed, encouraging her confidence by tactful questions.

It was Millicent herself who suddenly remembered that she was talking to a stranger whom she had only just met.

"How good of you to let me go on chattering about my own little affairs!" she said shyly. "But somehow I feel as if I had known you all my life."

"I am deeply interested," replied Beryl. "I have heard much of you, Miss Wilding, and am greatly looking forward to seeing your first performance. I must leave you now. Let me see! Whom can I find to amuse you? Ah"—as a tall, dark man appeared at the doorway—"here comes Malcolm Montressor! He can be a most delightful companion when he likes, and I am sure you'll get on with him. I'll bring him across to you." Then in a lower voice: "Do your best to make a good impression, my dear! He is a very powerful personage."

She smiled and moved away.

Millicent felt dreadfully nervous.

She had seen Mr. Montressor once or twice at the theater and was rather in awe of him, but she had never come directly in contact with him.

He had, she knew, an office in the building, but was not often there, being well satisfied to leave the flourishing concern in the capable hands of Dan Simmons and a smart business manager, while he himself sought new fields to conquer, new ways of adding to his already vast wealth.

He was assured that the new comedy was of the kind which spells success. The hard work could safely be intrusted to his excellent subordinates. He would attend and criticize the final rehearsals.

Malcolm Montressor gloried in the reputation he had earned at the clubs of being the best dressed, the most successful, and the most fascinating man in New York.

He bowed with graceful deference to Millicent as Beryl led him to her, then sank into the chair their hostess had vacated.

"Glad to meet you, Miss Wilding!" he began. "Simmons thinks a lot of you, and I think a lot of his judgment. You don't feel at all shaky about the first night?" he inquired, saving her the embarrassment of replying to his compliment.

"Oh, no!" she answered. "It's strange, but I feel as much at home on the stage as I do in this room—in fact, even more so."

"Really! Is that so?" Montressor asked interestedly. "But you do not come of a theatrical family, do you?"

"By no means," Millicent answered. "I don't think any of my people had anything to do with the stage."

"Ah, indeed! Well, perhaps it's a good thing. No stale traditions—nothing cut and dried—fresh pure genius! Yes, there's a lot in Dan Simmons' idea," he mused, as if to himself.

For the next half hour he exerted himself to keep his companion amused, while she, flattered by his interest, forgot her shyness and talked brightly and naturally.

Yet, although he never allowed his attention to wander and was as a matter of fact more attracted by the girl beside him than he would have acknowledged, his glance often followed Grace Delamere and her lover. Finally, during a pause in the conversation, he remarked:

"I suppose it will end in a match between those two."

"They are already engaged. Didn't you know?" she asked.

"Is that so?" His eyes narrowed. "Of course, every one expected it, but I was not aware it was actually an accomplished thing."

"Yesterday, I believe," Millicent murmured, "or Friday."

At that moment, which seemed tense with some suppressed excitement, Grace Delamere came toward them.

"How charming!" she exclaimed. "I see you two have been making friends.

I've only just spotted you, Malcolm! I want a chat with you!"

"And I with you!" the man responded, rising.

Millicent felt a little embarrassed, but her hostess, whose watchful eyes seldom missed an awkward situation, came to the rescue.

"I want to introduce you to ever so many people, Miss Wilding!" she said, as she approached. "Come, we must not let Mr. Montressor monopolize you!"

So she bore the girl off to make her known to other members of the great literary and artistic world, leaving Grace Delamere and Malcolm Montressor together.

"So you have achieved your great ambition!" he said in a low voice.

"Yes," she answered, with studied brevity.

"And you really believe you will be happy?"

"Pah!"—with a slight scornful gesture. "I shall be happy in my own way. I have no silly sentiments left, Malcolm. They were driven out of me long ago, by the cruelty and hardness of the world."

"So you prefer the fancy—probably a passing one—of a green boy, because he is of the upper ten, to the deeply rooted, constant love of a man who can gratify your every wish and who understands you better than any one else of your acquaintance?"

"Oh, don't worry me, Malcolm!" she exclaimed impatiently. "You know I care a lot for you, but I have set my heart on being a great lady. Once I was flouted by the world, and I swore I would pay it back in its own coin. To marry Curly Cranwood is another step on the way to victory."

"But what of his elder brother, who has the money?" persisted Montressor.

"He can't live long. I have it on good authority. He does not realize the danger, and is kidding himself that he will get stronger; indeed, he thinks now he will completely recover. He's even engaged, you know!"—and she laughed satirically.

"Ah! So you are sure of your facts! You know he is a doomed man. How did you manage it, Grace?"

"The doctor who attends him went for a holiday in the summer. He is elderly and old-fashioned; can't see farther than the end of his nose. He engaged a locum who happens to be a friend of mine and who told me Basil Cranwood won't live a year. The spine is diseased."

"Grace, you're a clever woman!" exclaimed Montressor. "And so you, red-headed witch that you are, will become a millionairess!"

"That is the program," she answered demurely, with only a glimmer of a smile in her eyes.

"And I, who have been waiting for years, put off with half promises, played with and fooled, am to go to the wall quietly, I suppose!" Montressor said angrily. "Take care, Grace! You are playing a dangerous game and playing it with edged tools!"

"Pooh!" she scoffed insolently, her eyes flashing. "Neither you nor any other man has a right to dictate to me! You have no power to harm me, Malcolm Montressor. There, don't be so silly!" she continued in softer tones, as she saw his face working with suppressed rage. "You know I do care for you, Malcolm, but this chance is too good to miss. Stop sulking! There is no reason why we should not continue to be friends after my marriage."

"Grace!" he breathed in her ear. "You will? You promise me—you won't throw me over?"

"I'll promise you anything if you'll do me a service now!"

"'Anything! What do you want? Money? Influence?"

"Neither! Only just a pleasant farce in which you must play leading man."

"Well," whispered Montressor, "out with it, Grace! What mischief now?"

"Hush!" she said. "Don't look at me; just glance round and smile, but listen!"

"I'm all attention!" he replied tensely, assuming an air of polite boredom.

"I'm afraid of the new girl, Netta Wilding," Miss Delamere went on, speaking quickly and nervously. "She's far too good in every way, and her career must be checked a little!"

"How?"

"If she were compromised somewhat——"

"My dear girl, what harm would that do to an actress?"

"Lots—to her! She is real innocent, knows nothing, as green as grass! That's a big part of the charm. It is fetching everybody, and it attracts Curly."

"I see! Jealous, eh, Grace?"

"Not exactly, but I'll not be supplanted, and if she drops to the level of any other ordinary chorus girl—well, she will no longer be the immaculate pearl of perfection which she now undoubtedly is. You see, I give her her due. It's an adventure after your own heart, Malcolm."

"I admit it has attractions," he answered. "And, if it's also to oblige you, Grace, I'll see if I can induce the angel to condescend to the pleasures of earth at my persuasion."

"But you'll not end by falling in love with her?" asked Grace, a little dubious of the wisdom of her scheme as she remembered the beauty of the girl whose pure reputation she sought to ruin.

"I am your slave—now and always. I love you, my dear, fiend that you are, with all my strength! Whatever you do, wherever you are, I shall always seek you, always adore you! You are my proper mate, and sooner or later we shall come together in spite of your will and your ambitions—in spite of fate itself! Are you satisfied?"

"I am quite satisfied, and I trust you entirely, my dear good pal!" she murmured gratefully. "We have been talking long enough. Good-by!"

She glided off among the brilliant crowd, chatting to one and another as she sought for Millicent to suggest it was time to depart.

She found the girl talking gayly to several well-known people.

"Are you ready, Netta?" She smiled. 'The motor will be getting restive."

Much to her surprise Millicent replied:

"Oh, do you mind, dear Miss Delamere, if I do not come back with you? I am sure you and Mr. Cranwood will be so much happier alone, and Miss Faversham has asked me to stay and dine quietly with her."

Managing to conceal her extreme annoyance, Grace replied:

"Of course, my dear! Just as you like! I am glad Miss Faversham has taken such a fancy to you. We shall meet at rehearsal to-morrow."

Beckoning to her fiancé, she made her farewells and departed, more determined than ever in her own mind to follow out her plan of checking at any cost Millicent's rapidly increasing success and popularity.

Her engagement had formed the chief topic of the afternoon.

She had been surrounded by congratulating friends and was apparently at the zenith of her career, envied, sought after, admired; but her inner consciousness warned her that before very long the gray-eyed country girl would supplant her. Something must be done, and quickly. Soon after Miss Delamere and Cecil had taken their leave Miss Faversham's drawing-room emptied quickly.

"Where's Ronald Grainger to-day?" inquired one of the departing guests.

"I can't think what has become of him," answered Beryl. "He has been very faithful to my Sunday 'At Homes'

for years. I must seek the cause of this desertion!"

Said a young comedian slyly: "Leave him alone, Miss Faversham! Our Ronald's in love!"

"Are you sure? Really? I'm very glad!" replied Beryl. "Who is it? Some one very nice, I hope!"

"Unless I've no eyes in my head, it's Miss Jenner."

"Miss Jenner?" echoed Beryl. "Do I know her?"

"No; but I do!" interrupted Millicent, who had been standing near her hostess and overheard the conversation. "She is a great friend of mine, and one of the nicest girls I have ever met. She is one of the chorus."

"Indeed! This is news!" said Beryl Faversham. "You must tell me all about her, Miss Wilding. I shall have to scold Ronald severely for not confiding in me!"

"Perhaps he is waiting until he has something definite to confide," replied the comedian. "Good-by! Good-by, Miss Wilding! You are coming to the first night on Saturday next, Miss Faversham?"

"Of course I am! I wouldn't miss it for worlds! Luckily I'm not playing this week. Good-by! The best of good luck!"

On this particular Sunday afternoon the unconscious subject of this conversation was enjoying a quiet drive with Beatrice Jenner and her mother.

Ronald Grainger had soon won the good opinion of the delicate elderly lady by his thoughtful consideration. She had a dread of cars, so a luxurious landau, with a quiet horse, frequently put in its appearance, and while the trio drove around he exerted himself to the utmost to amuse and interest the fragile widow, knowing full well there was no surer road to her daughter's heart.

He was amply rewarded as he watched Beatrice's dark eyes kindle at his coming and her red lips smile a demure welcome.

Baskets of flowers and fruit were delivered almost daily at the Jenners' house, and Ronald made many an excuse to bring up new books, an interesting batch of magazines, any dainty offering he could think of, to please the lady of his love.

But he did not attend the rehearsals of the new piece, pleading a stress of work, so he judged his wooing was a secret.

He had promised Dan Simmons he would not speak until the run of "The Merry Maids" was assured, but he waited impatiently for the opening night, and his love expressed itself so plainly in all but actual words that a great happiness grew in Beatrice's heart.

He loved her. He was wealthy and could give her mother all she needed; better still, she loved him with all the depth of her young heart, and as soon as he spoke she would tell him so.

Six more days of hard work, of hopes and fears, of heart-burnings, jealousies, and ambitions, and the great evening arrived.

At seven thirty on the following Saturday, the curtain of the Hilarity rang up on the first act of "The Merry Maids."

CHAPTER IX.

The great theater was packed. Many people had been turned away.

From ten o'clock in the morning enthusiastic "first-nighters" had waited in long queues outside the doors to the cheaper parts of the house, for "The Merry Maids" had been cleverly advertised, and the public was agog with interest.

Papa Simmons, who had been working day and night for the past week, viewed the vast audience with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "And not one of them will go away disappointed.

I'd stake my reputation on this show any day!"

Then as the band struck up the overture he turned to the stage to superintend the orderly marshaling of the first chorus. In a small box, all alone, sat Curly Cranwood. Ronald Grainger was in the second row. Reporters, musical and dramatic critics, leading representatives of the worlds of art and society chattered their surmises and expectations as to the wonderful feast of color, beauty, and music which had been promised them.

Behind the great curtains a wave of intense though suppressed excitement passed over the large company.

The principals were pale under their paint and somewhat nervous. The well-drilled chorus longed for, yet dreaded the moment when the curtains should part on the beautiful opening scene, which represented the most picturesque of villages where every cottage was a veritable bower of bright flowers.

The scene was the work of a celebrated artist and was a triumph of his craft.

When the curtains parted, punctually at the advertised time, a murmur of admiration was heard in the audience, and with a gay, rollicking chorus the musical comedy commenced its public career.

Millicent, standing ready for her first entrance, with a little crowd of panting, trembling girls behind her, felt like a person in a dream.

She was dressed in a short frock of pale lilac cotton with a white muslin apron and fichu; her stockings were lilac, and her shoes black patent leather with big silver buckles.

On her fair hair was a lilac sun-bonnet. She had a bunch of pink and mauve sweet peas in the front of her bodice, but no other ornament whatever, by request of the manager.

Her companions were all similarly dressed, half of them in pale pink, half in lilac.

Millicent's great gray eyes were shining with excitement, the rouge on her cheeks adding to their brightness.

She looked wonderfully lovely, and was far more self-possessed than the rest, who, in spite of their long drilling, were in a terrible state of nervousness.

Indeed, Beatrice Jenner touched her arm just before the cue for the entrance, and whispered in a shaking voice:

"It's no use, Netta! I can't go on. I shall faint or something silly!"

"Nonsense!" replied Millicent sharply. "You won't mind a bit, Bee, as soon as you are really at work, and you look perfectly sweet. I know that some one who is on the lookout for you will think so, too!"

Millicent was in her friend's confidence in regard to Ronald Grainger, and she smiled knowingly as she spoke.

"Yes, it is such a comfort to know he'll be there. I wouldn't let mother come. I couldn't have borne to have her here to-night."

"And there is no one at all to look for or welcome me," said Millicent wistfully, "except one kind friend."

"There soon will be, never fear!" answered Beatrice. "Sh—sh—we shall get into trouble. Oh, Netta! It's nearly our time to go on!"

One of the comedians was finishing a song, which won him applause and a recall.

Waiting, with every nerve tensely strung, till he had concluded the encore verse, Millicent listened for her cue, and as the familiar air warned her that it was time for her entrance, shutting her eyes tightly for the moment, she tripped on to the dazzling stage and down to the footlights, followed by the dainty crowd of débutantes.

There was a rustle of curiosity among the audience. Dozens of opera glasses were leveled at the girls, who had been so widely discussed.

Then the fresh young voices took up the chorus, at first a little waveringly,

then, warming to the work, with greater volume and effect, until it reached a triumphant finish. The effect was extremely good, and the audience was obviously pleased.

The girls were so pretty, so sweetly charming in their evident innocence and ingenuous grace; the blending of the simple faintly tinted dresses with the shy beauty of the young faces was an inspiration worthy of a master mind.

The chorus retired amid the cheerful sound of hearty approbation.

Then came Miss Delamere's first song, and the audience, in a thoroughly good humor, greeted the popular favorite rapturously and settled down to enjoyment.

The part assigned to Grace was that of a Russian princess, who had fallen in love with the village squire and had followed him to his home.

There were several fine songs and some dramatic acting in the first act, for the young squire fell head over heels in love with the pretty first maid, and the Russian vowed vengeance.

Grace played her part magnificently, her wonderful contralto voice filling the house with rich melody; her gusts of anger, storms of passion, and melting love scenes were all the perfection of art.

As the curtain fell she was recalled again and again; her red hair gleamed and shone; her fine eyes flashed; her red lips smiled.

The new production had brought yet another triumph to Grace Delamere, and as she sought her dressing room her heart beat high.

An attendant brought a note which said:

> Oh, my own darling! How splendid, how wonderful you are! There is no one to touch you! And you are mine! I envy every one of these moments—almost envy the art which makes you so marvelous—so different from every one else! I'm coming round after the next act. Don't refuse me. All yours,
>
> CURLY.

Grace tucked the note into her bodice. She was drinking deep of the wine of life! Surely the game was in her own hand! Why had she feared that slip of a girl?

Yet, remembering the plot of the play, she frowned. It was the maid who in the end paired off with the squire!

The second act brought in Netta Wilding's song and dance. It was that which Grace Delamere feared as she changed her dress and retouched her make-up with extra care.

For some reason, known only to the manufacturers of musical comedies, the scene was suddenly shifted to the South of Italy, where amid orange flowers, on the shores of sunlit seas, the company, still miraculously brought together, disported themselves with mad merrymaking in fancy dress.

The "merry maids" were a troupe of dancers; the Russian princess outvied Salome in audacity and splendor; the country squire was making holiday in the same salubrious spot, clothed in immaculate evening dress, and prepared to breathe the tenderest sentiments in a mellow tenor voice when the moon rose over the distant bay.

Miss Netta Wilding's turn was early in the act, and, again dressed ready for her part, Millicent was standing alone in one of the wings, when she was joined by Montressor, handsome and imposing in his evening dress.

"I have come to congratulate you, Miss Wilding," he said.

"Oh, but I have not yet earned it!" replied Millicent. "I only sang with the others; my big test is yet to come."

She smiled frankly at him, and his pulses quivered at the sight of her loveliness.

Bending over her, his mustache almost touched the fair head as he replied:

"Your success is assured, Miss Wilding. No one with your voice and your appearance can fail. Have you any idea how beautiful you are?"

The girl's glance fell, and her cheeks flushed.

"You are awfully kind!" she stammered.

"You are a lovely woman! Many men will soon tell you the same, if you have any doubts about it," he went on. "Have you ever been in love, Miss Wilding?"

"Oh, no!" she gasped, clasping her hands in front of her breast in a pretty gesture of embarrassment. "I don't know anything about love. I want to work and get to the top of the tree and earn a lot of money. I love acting and singing, that's all."

"Yes, that's all for the present, little lady! There! I mustn't talk to you any more. You must steady your mind for your work. Remember, we all expect great things of you!"

As he turned and left her he met Grace Delamere, radiant with success.

"Ah, my dear! Here you are!" he said, taking both her hands and drawing her behind a piece of scenery, where for a few brief moments they could be alone.

"How is it going, Malcolm?" she inquired anxiously.

"Wonderfully well! I never saw a better starter. You are excelling yourself, Grace! I must thank you, for it means my success as well as yours."

"I'm so glad you are pleased. I feel happy about it myself. This next act is better than the first, I think."

"So do I. Well, I've commenced the siege, Grace. I've just had a talk with Miss Wilding."

"That's good!" Miss Delamere said. "I'm afraid she'll go too well in her own number, and if you have excited her mind with flattery she may be a little uncertain or fluff her words."

"Give me one kiss, then—just for thank you!" Montressor begged.

"I oughtn't to, but—just one, Malcolm!"—and their lips met.

The next moment Miss Delamere glided to her place beside Millicent, and the other beginners for the second act appeared. As Malcolm Montressor reached his own box the curtain rang up.

Very soon Grace was on the stage, a radiant figure in floating draperies of bright green, emeralds and diamonds shining from her throat and hair.

She was engaged in a passionate love scene with a millionaire, for whom she had forsaken the country squire.

In order to increase her fascination, she broke into a wild Eastern dance, and Millicent almost forgot her coming ordeal in watching the wonderful sinuous movements of the artist.

But when the storm of applause which followed had died down she remembered that she was to appear alone before a great audience, and, in spite of her self-confidence and high courage, her knees trembled, and she felt ill with fright.

She was looking wonderfully lovely.

The two colors worn by the maids in the first act were reproduced in the simple chiffon gown she wore, pale mauve over pale pink in apparently endless layers, yet so cunningly hung and fitted that the lines of her slim young form defined themselves as she moved. The low-cut bodice was draped with a fichu of the chiffon, and again the pink and mauve sweet peas formed her only ornament except for a mauve satin ribbon which was twisted lightly across the blond hair.

The effect was a triumph of the art of simplicity, and Millicent's gray eyes glowed like two deep pools of liquid light.

For her entrance the glaring stage-lights were lowered, and a full moon rose over the water of the bay. As in a dream she heard the parting words of the actress; it was time for her short scene with Grace Delamere, then for her song and dance.

A touch on her arm roused her from a sense of unreality.

"Courage, my child!" said Papa Simmons. "Remember I have pinned my faith to you! Whatever you do, don't funk it! Go, there is your cue!"

She walked quietly onto the stage, and a little clatter of applause reached her ears, but, to her horror, every word of her part seemed to have deserted her brain.

Her head felt like wool, her feet like lead. Her tongue refused to obey her will.

She heard the prompter, but could not understand the words he said. A temptation to turn and run for miles assailed her. Grace Delamere saw at once what had happened. Netta Wilding was attacked by stage fright in its worst form.

Here was her chance—to desert the girl, to leave her to appear a fool and a failure in the eyes of manager and public! She would never get another chance if she failed now.

But some generous impulse—a feeling of sympathy and pity for one whom she knew to be capable of great things, or perhaps the strong artistic sense which dominated her—stirred in Grace Delamere and aroused all that was good in her nature.

Covering Millicent's momentary confusion—for it was only a moment—Grace improvised a laughing, impudent gag, and, crossing to Millicent, whispered sharply:

Netta smiled frankly at him, and Montressor's pulses quivered at the sight of her loveliness.

"Are you mad? Pull yourself together! Begin your first line and all will be well!"

She gave the girl the cue again, and, to Millicent's joy, everything was clear—words, song, business; she was herself.

She drew a long breath, and threw herself into the scene with a verve which assisted Miss Delamere's triumphant exit.

Then the lilting tune rang out from the orchestra, the conductor nodded to her, and the birdlike soprano rose.

When the last verse culminated in a wonderful high note the applause which followed was deafening.

Millicent responded with the encore verse, which ended in many trills, accomplished without effort. Then, picking up her floating chiffon skirts, she started to dance.

The audience had seen many more elaborate, more accomplished dancers, but never one more graceful or less self-conscious than this dainty, slender girl.

Grace Delamere, watching from the wings, ground her teeth furiously.

"Why—oh, why did I cure her stage fright?" she asked herself in bitter self-reproach. "She'll be the pet of New York after this!"

The audience rose.

Never had a débutante met with such a reception in the memory of man. Again and again Millicent was recalled, but at the command of Simmons, who was pale with excitement, she refused to dance again.

Then Grace Delamere's name was heard, and in response to many and hearty calls she appeared hand in hand with the new favorite, smiling and gracious, but with a welter of hate in her heart.

Two exquisite baskets of flowers were handed up by the conductor, one for each of the ladies, and, after more hand-clapping, the comedy resumed its interrupted progress.

Miss Delamere went at once to her dressing room, for she had some additions to make to her toilet, but Millicent rejoined her former companions, as her next appearance was again with the band of maids.

It was twelve o'clock before the curtain finally descended on a production whose success was assured.

There was more applause—a call for the leading artists, cheers for the chorus, the manager, the author, and the composer.

When the audience had gone there was more talk and back-patting until Millicent grew dazed with fatigue.

She had asked Mrs. King, who had been in the theater, to come to the stage door and wait for her, and she began to long for solitude in order to think out the wonderful events of the night.

She was just trying to steal away when she was stopped by Beryl Faversham.

"Dear child!" said the great actress. "You are indeed gifted. I congratulate you heartily on the most astonishing success I have ever witnessed!" She kissed Millicent warmly.

"Thank you! Oh, thank you!" the girl replied. "Praise from you is praise indeed! But I should have failed utterly and miserably if it hadn't been for Miss Delamere!"—and she related her experience to Beryl's sympathetic ear.

"Miss Delamere is always kind and clever," said Beryl.

"Yes, I must thank her before I go," answered Millicent, bidding Miss Faversham good-by.

Picking up her basket of flowers, she crossed to where Grace Delamere stood chatting to several members of the company.

"I want to thank you, Miss Delamere," said Millicent, loud enough for all the group to hear. "If it had not been for you I should never have appeared again!"

"That's all right, my dear!" answered Grace good-naturedly, touched by this frank open acknowledgment. "Who sent your flowers? I didn't know you boasted an admirer—yet!"

She smiled faintly.

"I don't know. I haven't had time to look!" replied Millicent, turning the card which was half concealed in the blossoms. "Oh, how kind!" She smiled and handed the card to Miss Delamere, who raised her eyebrows, frowning angrily, for the card was that of Cecil Cranwood.

There was evidently a bad five min-

utes in store for Curly, who at that moment appeared and inquired if he could drive Grace home.

Miss Delamere consented with some show of graciousness, and again Millicent was about to slip away, but Malcolm Montressor stopped her this time.

"One moment, Miss Wilding—one moment, Miss Delamere!" he said. "I want you both to promise to come to supper with me to-morrow. We must do something to celebrate this happy occasion, and you will be rested by to-morrow evening. You'll come of course, Cranwood—and you—and you?"—turning to two of the principal men who were standing near.

The invitation was accepted by every one, and at last Millicent found herself free to depart.

She hurried out.

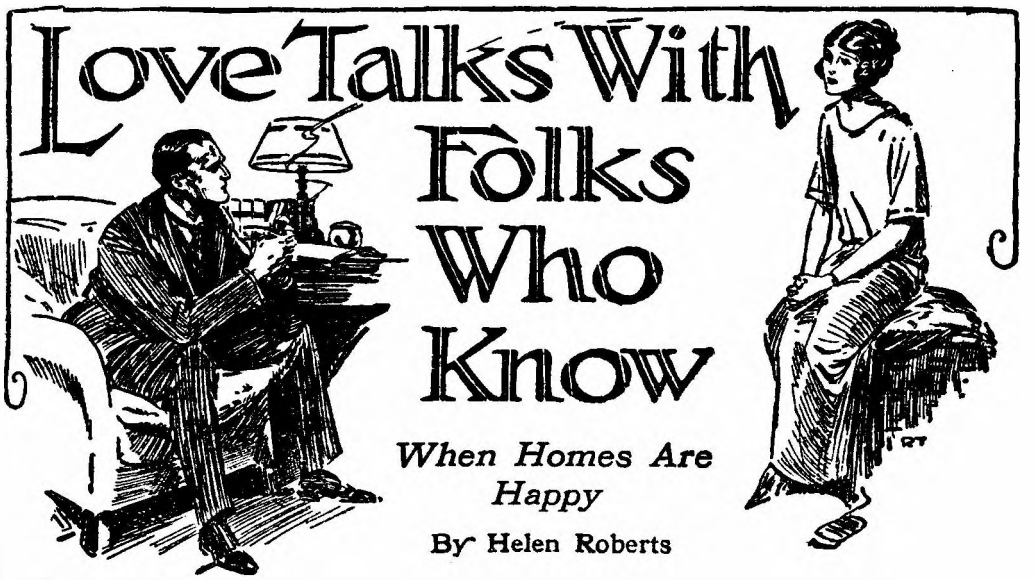
Tired, excited, happy beyond her wildest dreams, she was whirled home in the taxi which Mrs. King had ordered, and in which she found that lady waiting at the stage door.

SONNET TO AN ERSTWHILE FRIEND

MY dear, can this sweet miracle be true,
And can year's blindness vanish in a night?
In one short moment, rapture and delight
Quickened my heart and suddenly I knew
That you were something more than merely you.
For when you came and idly touched my hand
My pulses leaped. I could not understand
Why life should take a new and rosy hue.

Have all the years been wasted, and has Fate
Given me glimpse of Paradise too late,
Or is some magic laid upon my eyes
That makes a fragile web of lovely lies
Appear as truth? I neither know nor care;
I look into my heart and you are there!

CELIA CHEESMAN.



When Homes Are Happy

By Helen Roberts

ALL young wives have to go through it at one time or another, but the day Bob called our home the "Helter-Skelter House," and said: "You're getting more of that scared-cat look every day, old girl!" I went upstairs and wept because it seemed that Bob could not possibly love me any more.

If he did, he would not say such awful things. It was bitter, but I knew he was quite right. I *was* getting a scared-cat look.

I seemed to spend the whole of my day in one perpetual rush that was making me bad-tempered, irritable, and old before my time.

There was I, at twenty-six, heading straight for a nervous breakdown, simply because I couldn't organize my own home properly!

I found that lots of wives were like me—bothered to death by too many tasks, and it seemed to me then that a house wants to be run on the same lines as an office.

Instead of frittering one's energies over the little things, the big things should be tackled first.

First of all I drew up a time-table for each day, of Things To Be Done. These were put into the easiest working order, so that there was a minimum of running about. Then I added a "special" duty for each day. Monday, washing; Tuesday, ironing; Wednesday, upstairs cleaning; Thursday, downstairs cleaning, and so on.

I made up my mind, you see, that once a week is ample for many jobs, and that *I was going to stop frittering time.*

Two things I discovered waste time enormously in many households.

One is "running out" of anything, which can be really maddening. It is so easy to run out to a corner store in a hurry—but what a shocking waste of time! So now a big slate hangs in my kitchen, and I write things up as I find we are running out of them.

The other "time-waster" is cooking. Nowadays I have one grand baking morning every week.

The rest of the week is then practically clear of any very serious cooking. Half the secret of successful housekeeping lies in looking ahead. This method of cooking saves in every way.

The days of the helter-skelter house have long since passed, and now I feel that I can always meet Bob serenely, clothed in my right mind, when he comes home in the evenings.

Editor's Note: This department is conducted for the benefit of the readers of "Love Story Magazine" as well as for their entertainment, but neither the publishers nor the author can assume responsibility for the reliability of any statement made herein, for incorrect data is often furnished, even when the sender has every reason to believe it correct. Wynn does not make any claim whatever to superhuman knowledge or power, making all deductions by means of the positions of the planets alone, and the results must be taken for what they are worth in the light of your experience.

In order that the greatest number of readers may use the department, each is limited to asking one question. Your questions should be about yourself or your problems. No questions about lost articles, the stock market or gambling will be answered.

Give as much as you can of the following data: date, month, year and place of birth, the hour of the day or night if possible, and the sex.

MAKE THE MOST OF NEXT WEEK

Hours mentioned are Eastern standard time

Saturday, December 18th

Travel, literature, office work, inventions, and mechanical devices generally will feel the influence of the strong aspects in force for to-day, and if your occupation is connected with any of these things you, too, should be affected by them. The late evening is the best time of the day while the early morning is rather disappointing or adverse in some way, possibly for health.

Sunday, December 19th

A very active day, good for dealing with women or young people, with artistic or social matters, and also for love affairs. The early afternoon is very good for money matters, and a favorable time in which to ask favors or benefits. The evening may bring unwelcome and unexpected changes in your plans, however.

Monday, December 20th

Another active day favoring the exercise of persistence and well-laid plans rather than the use of impulse or intuition. Travel is quite important on this day, also everything dealing with fire and steel, chemicals, or machinery. Begin new enterprises to-day, particularly if they follow scientific lines in any respect.

Tuesday, December 21st

A confusing and restless influence characterizes this date, better than one would think, however, particularly if you are able to take advantage of its sudden changes and new opportunities. Rather early in the afternoon there are some slight but favorable aspects for the lighter side of life, such as dress and social activities.

Wednesday, December 22d

The morning is very strong for dealing with old people or old connections or for taking up matters which have been hanging fire for

some time. The coal and ice businesses should feel this aspect favorably also. The afternoon is not good, producing irritations, accidents, quarrels, and many disagreeable if not violent events about four to five. Be careful not to hurry or take unnecessary chances during these hours. The evening is poor.

Thursday, December 23d

The daylight hours seem dull and uninteresting to-day with very little marked influence throughout, but the evening should prove one of the most agreeable times imaginable, especially for entertaining, love affairs, theatrical work, money matters, or anything which tends toward the luxurious or extravagant.

Friday, December 24th

This must be the close of a very busy week for every one, for to-day again shows much energy spent in travel, communications, and messages, and with not very good results from one's efforts. Old people are adversely affected by this day's aspects, while deception and misunderstanding seem common. This is a good day to remain quiet and say little.

THE WHOLE WEEK

Saturn, our old enemy, the restrictive force of the Universe, is now leaving the sorely afflicted natives of the sign Scorpio, whom it has been holding down for the past two years or more, and is now entering the impulsive and aggressive sign Sagittarius. The people born around the 22d of November will now begin to feel depressed and find that efforts do not bear fruit quickly. These people are temperamentally more easily able to throw off adverse conditions than are men and women born in Scorpio, but should make it a point from now on to expect less than usual from their plans and enthusiasms.

Uranus is still affecting the lives of all those born near the 16th of March of any year. For the benefit of new readers, let us say that Uranus governs all sudden changes, the breaking up of established conditions in life, and is an erratic influence on the will and desires. Be prepared for many changes and unsettled conditions in the next few weeks if your birth date comes in this group.

Neptune is now passing over the point occupied by the Sun, the vital center, in the horoscopes of all those born near the 21st of August. This will produce artistic inspirations, emotional love affairs, the possibility of ocean voyages, and also some interest in psychic matters for these people within the near future.

Mars, the inflammatory red ray of the Solar System is now very powerful in the lives of those whose birthdays fall on the 25th of April. These people should beware of quarrels, accidents, fevers, or other acute physical disorders at this time. Luckily this influence lasts only a week or two.

The benefic Jupiter is now bringing opportunities for material and spiritual progress to those born about the 10th of February of years past. Good fortune is knocking at the doors of these people, and they should respond and make the most of their opportunities.

Answers to Questions

What about my health? Born July 20, 1869.
MRS. J. P.

I wish you had included your time of birth to enable me to give a more definite answer to this particular question. Probably you have a good constitution, with plenty of nervous energy and a tendency to wear yourself out because of this. Then, you are highly sensitive to suggestion and apt to think you have ailments which you do not really possess. You may, however, have some tendency to indigestion which is largely the result of nervousness. Just now, for the year 1927, that is, you have a few poor lunar aspects which may cause temporary difficulties, but I believe that strict adherence to the rules of hygiene and diet will bring you through these all right.

Should I marry a man older or younger than myself? Born February 16, 1899.
ELLA M.

This question is really a very interesting one. The young lady's letter goes on to say that after deciding several months ago to marry a man much older than herself, she suddenly finds herself wildly enamored of a young chap who pays her slight attention, but whom she feels is really in love with her, and would declare himself if it were not for the other man. Her horoscope shows both attractions, but describes the younger person by the aspect of Neptune. Don't marry a Neptune man, Ella. He is fascinating and lovable, but will not make a good husband. You'd always be as much at sea about him as you are now. Stick to the older person you chose first. He may not be as romantic, but he's far more reliable.

Should I invest in real estate or leave my money in the bank. Born March 22, 1872, 9 p. m. J. K. D.

Ordinarily I would advise against a speculation such as you describe, but the year 1927 will be so fortunate for you in money matters, particularly through risks or ventures, and your own chart is so good for land or real estate that I believe you can legitimately take the risk.

When will I marry? Born March 8, 1895. Miss F. B. P.

It is certainly strange that you have not married before this, particularly in 1918, which union would have been followed by a divorce, however. Are you sure you are not spoofing the astrologer? If you have never married or are free now to marry, then look forward to 1928.

Will my luck change? Born November 6, 1901. Fay.

You have been expecting something for nothing, Fay, and your luck won't change until you are ready to put into everything you do just as much as you expect to get out. You have ability of various sorts, but you concentrate too much upon yourself. That is true of you in business as well as in social life. You feel that you are nervous and have a right to be. Get over the idea that you have nerves, make yourself agreeable and necessary to people and you'll find your life changing greatly.

Should I go to Houston and take another job for the paper I am working for? Born December 13, 1898. Gladys.

Better stay in your home. That is where you belong. You probably could write fiction, however, if you are willing to work hard enough. Try to settle your mind a little more. You are restless and have a tendency to always try to do or get something different. Make the most of what you have.

Will I ever have an opportunity to better myself? Born May 4, 1904. Verna.

You would do well working where you come in contact with the public and you will soon have an opportunity to make a change in that direction. Marriage will come to you late in life.

Could I make good in the movies, or had I better remain a housewife and mother? Born December 18, 1907, Indianapolis, Indiana. Mrs. G.

Your field is rightly in your home. You can make more of that if you try. While your husband would probably be willing to let you go into the movies, neither of you know just what it would mean to you. Keep your own career of wife and mother and let your daughter go into the movies.

The Friend in Need

Department conducted by Laura Alston Brown

RUTH has received a great many letters. Here is one of them:

DEAR MRS. BROWN: Just a few words to poor little Ruth, the family slave, who has to work all day in daddy's garage, and do the housework at home. I do not think that Ruth's parents should impose on her, even though she is willing and goes about her tasks wholeheartedly. For why should parents allow partiality to creep in the home, and cast a shadow over one daughter while the other is the so-styled lady, who thinks herself too nice to work, but lets sister be her slave? I should think the older sister should love Ruth more and appreciate all she is doing for the entire family, and should lend Ruth a helping hand, as any true sister should or would do. I don't wonder that Ruth is disheartened, discouraged, and blue to be made a slave of.

Oh, how often do mothers make mistakes of this kind, and are blind to the true virtue and value of a self-sacrificing daughter until it is too late.

If I were Ruth I would just say: "Well, mother; well, dad, I've done my bit for you all, now let sister have a turn at the wheel and see how nice it feels." If Ruth would secure a good position elsewhere I am sure she would be much happier, and will teach this proud mother and sister of hers a lesson; and one they're not likely to forget, either.

Ruth has my sympathy, and it comes straight from the heart. If she continues as she is doing now her health will be impaired, and she will suffer a nervous breakdown, and then who will be the family slave? I am a mother and have a daughter sixteen, but she is the only child. If I had two I would never show the least partiality, for it hurts to the heart's core more than one can imagine, and causes so many good girls to stray or fall by the way. The work should be divided, so that Ruth should have her part to do and the older sister her part. That mother is going to shed oceans of tears later on for her thoughtlessness. Mother of Ruth, open your eyes wide, and change things before it is too late, and appreciate Ruth and treat her right, so that in later years you will have nothing to regret and let the other sister do her bit and give Ruth a vacation. MOTHER OF ONE.

Thank you for your letter. So many mother hearts have gone out to Ruth. It is hard to understand partiality in a home.

MY DEAR MRS. BROWN: I am nearly sixteen, and I like a certain boy. This boy is twenty. He says he cares a lot for me, but that we hadn't ought to be seen together because of our ages. Now, I do think he is right, but I can't stand the separation from him.

He is nice to me at all times, and he never says or does anything out of the way when I'm with him.

He is a junior in college, and I am a senior in high school. He is working his way through school, and is also helping his widowed mother support the rest of the family.

Should I discontinue to see him, and try to avoid him? Or should we continue to see each other? I said I liked him well, but I do believe I love him. R. E. F.

Since the young man himself suggests that you should not be seen together the only thing to do is to regard him as only an acquaintance.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: I am a girl of twenty, and as recently as two weeks ago I was turned over my mother's knees and spanked with a nice wide strap for fully five minutes. Here is how it happened: I was told to be in the house at ten thirty one night, and my friend brought me home at two a. m.

I thought I could get to bed before mother saw me, but just as I arrived at my bedroom door, mother called to me and told me she would be up to see me as soon as she dressed. I resigned myself to the trial of taking a scolding, and waited her arrival with stubborn impatience.

I had not long to wait when mother came

up and asked me to explain my actions. I made the same old excuses. Suddenly I saw on mother's face a sad, almost heartbroken expression, and I felt terribly sorry I had hurt her as I had. You can imagine my surprise when she said: "Nellie, I am going to do something that I have not done since you were a small child. I am going to give you a good, sound spanking." I began to cry and beg for another chance, promising I would mend my ways, but mother was not to be moved, and taking hold of me she forced me across her knee; then took from her pocket father's razor strap and began laying it on me. You can imagine how I felt, Mrs. Brown.

You probably wonder why I advocate spanking as a punishment, after the above, Mrs. Brown, but I do with all my heart, for it made a much better girl of me; and I know I will never merit another dose of the same medicine, but, if I do, I have the little mother who can and will administer it.

I think it positively revolting for girls in their teens to be spanked by their fathers. Of course it is perfectly all right to spank girls of ten or twelve years in this way, but when a girl has reached the age of eighteen she should be spanked by her mother.

ONE WHO HAS FELT THE STRAP.

If the girl who gets it can advocate a spanking then, surely, it must have a good effect. I hope you're going to be the kind of a daughter who won't need it in the future.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: Almost a year ago I met a boy that I fell for. He was nineteen and I was seventeen. We met at a party, and after that I saw more of him.

During the months that followed he said he loved me, and I liked him, too, but I wouldn't ever say I did. We had our first quarrel and wouldn't speak. After this he got to going with a rough crowd.

He would even skip classes and go riding with the worst girl of the bunch. This hurt me. So I began to speak to him and smile. This encouraged him. He did his best to pass the last part of school, but flunked.

His mother and father sent him away to school, and he comes home every week-end. Mrs. Brown, he came by one Sunday and said he was going to write Tuesday. I said I would answer if he wrote. True to his word he wrote, and I answered. He wrote one more letter, and that was all; because he came home to stay a month. When he came home he didn't or hasn't yet even come around. He has been to see two of my girl friends that live on the same street with me. The Sunday he came by he asked me if I still loved him. I told him maybe. Should I have said "Yes?" He swore he loved me still. Did he mean it?

He isn't the only boy I go with here, but he's the only one I like very much.

WAITING.

Boys who are so young change, my dear. Be friendly to the young man, but don't spend any thought on him. Make other friends.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: Elsie, our foster daughter, was a big girl when she came to make her home with my wife and I. There were very few years' difference in the girl's age and my wife's.

Of course, neighbors advised us not to try and raise a girl, because if she went wrong we would get the blame, because we were responsible for her conduct.

Elsie was a plump, pretty little blond girl. She made the eighth grade at school; was the honor pupil of her class, and a perfect housekeeper. Though she is now married, she is still a typical flapper.

When Elsie began to go with boys, we realized we had a problem to cope with. Not under any circumstances would we permit her to know but that we had the greatest confidence in her; but let me tell you what I did in my efforts to protect her, and the incidents that followed.

The parlor, which was some distance from our room—we could reach it only by passing through the dining room—was given over to her to receive her boy friends. Apparently there existed the greatest privacy. When, in reality, by going into the clothes closet of another room, and under a lower shelf, there was a tiny crevice through which all that happened in the parlor was under observation.

We did not object to late hours—that is, midnight—especially at a dance, and it is natural for some girls to love to pet or be petted, and Elsie was a very normal girl. Soon she dropped all of her boy friends except one—her steady. They had been having everything their way. I had been out of town on business. On this evening, it was about ten forty-five, I went to the closet, and in looking into the parlor there sat Elsie on the arm of her boy friend's chair. We'll call him George. She had his pocket comb, dolling his hair. When it was arranged she kissed him.

His arm encircled her waist, and with a little tug she was pulled into his lap without any resistance on her part.

He noticed a mole on her knee, and it called

for a caress. She reached for the evening paper, laying on the table, and making it into a tight roll for a club pounded him over the shoulders with it. When alone with Elsie the next day she told me she and George were engaged, but did not know when they would marry. They had made it a habit to spend his wages to the last dime. He has a good job with a large transfer company.

When George called that evening we got together, and I saw it was up to me to help them. Made him a small loan to make the first payment on a little bungalow and indorsed a note on the furniture.

They have been married now five months and are very happy, and he is meeting all of the obligations on their home.

Now, if there had been any delay in looking after Elsie's affairs, I would have had a different letter to write.

Are the methods justifiable when they accomplish a good purpose?

A FLAPPER'S DAD.

You were in a position to help those two young people in a way that has brought the most happiness to all of you. You seemed to be perfectly sure that Elsie knew her own heart and mind so your method was fine.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: We are two petted, pampered vamps, attractive in such a way as is peculiar to that species; both twenty-two years of age.

Ivah is about five feet four inches, with slender, boyish figure, hair black, violet eyes, fringed in black, very red lips, and fair skin. Her eyes have that come-hither look that is so irresistible to the opposite sex.

Nelah is taller than the former by two inches, slender figure, dark hair, and olive complexion, but her outstanding feature is her eyes—deep, dark, unfathomable. Both are well dressed. One is a private secretary and the other a stenographer, making good salaries.

We are in love with the same man! It is about to break our hearts, for we have been chums for ages, and we cannot give each other up. But it is impossible to go on as we are.

He seems fond of both, but as yet has not shown marked preference. We suppose this is punishment to us for our treatment of others; for we have flirted and then laughed in their faces.

The object of our worries is tall, handsome, and about thirty-five. He is very kind and courteous to all; and a fact that is not to be overlooked is that he is wealthy.

Our question is this—is he worth our friendship?

IVAH AND NELAH.

Perhaps the man has no desire to be more than just what he is—a friend to two girl chums. Better consider that side of the issue. When he shows a definite desire for the friendship of one of you, there will be plenty of time to think of changing your chumship. But why need he cost so heavy a price? If he does select one of you the other should just feel that there is some other man for her and go on with the friendship.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: I am a divorced woman of twenty with a little boy of four, and I still love my husband.

I guess I always will. That's the way of a woman, they say. Now I am going with a young man who is just wild about me and has asked me to marry him, knowing all. He is very nicely fixed and has a good job. He could make a wonderful home for me, which I never had, having always lived with my parents. The question is, shall I marry him, still loving my husband? But still every time I am with him I am happy. Do you think love will come gradually?

Should I marry him and have peace and contentment in a nice little home, which I am crazy for?

LOVE.

It is never wise to marry one man while your heart is with another, but I am not at all sure that your heart is with your former husband. I think you are imagining a condition which does not exist.

Test yourself in some way. Let two months pass without seeing the young man—tell him of your uncertain state and that you want time in which to come to an understanding of your own heart. If you find at the end of that time that you were just as happy without seeing him as you were with, then you'd better not marry him. Consider things well. And there is your child, too. Doubtless married to some good man you could give him more advantages than you can single-handed. Does the man like your child? That is important, too.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: When I was twelve years old I met a girl eleven, and we went to school together, and we have never been apart since then until a few months ago.

She met a new fellow and she goes out with him, and whenever she meets me she still acts the same as she used to. Should I ask her about the other fellow or say nothing and just leave her?

I am very sensitive, and I would not be second fiddle to anybody, but I am not suspicious and jealous; and it is not just gossip, but I have seen her with him myself.

If I leave her I don't know what I would do without her, and yet I can't go on sharing her with somebody else. V. D. C.

Yours was a boy-and-girl friendship, V. D. C. It is only natural that the girl should have other friends now. She may even marry another man, but that need not mean that your nice friendship must cease. Make other girl friends. It is not a question of playing second fiddle, but merely a matter of growing up.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: I am sixteen. I went with Robby for three months. Then we had a quarrel and parted.

He said that he loved me, and will always think of me. After that I went with his friend, but I did not care for him until after I went with him about three weeks. I had a party. My boy friend told me to invite Robby, so I sent him an invitation. He came and we spoke.

The fellow that I went with then told me that if I thought that I cared more for Robby than for him, that I could go with Robby, and that he would go with some one else. So I did. But it seemed that I could not get to care for him like I used to. We had another quarrel and parted again. The other fellow asked me to go with him again. I go with him now, but he is starting to pay attention to my girl friend. I do not care for him, either. In fact, I do not think I care for any boy.

I think that I will tell the other boy he cares for my girl friend better, that he can go with her, because he did the same for me once, and that there would be no hard feelings between us.

I am without any one, except my other girl friend. Robby called me up and wants to come back, but I am afraid to go back for fear that I do not know my own mind, and he will think that I am making a fool of him. BOBSY.

I know just what a problem all this is for your little girl heart, Bobsy, but I'm going to ask you not to take this matter of going with boys quite so seriously. Go around with all of them. Certainly let Robby come to see you, but don't make that his exclusive privilege. Let the other boy go to see your girl friend if he wants to.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: There is no other way that I can ease my troubled heart, but to write to you. And I shall await an answer very anxiously.

I am a married woman and twenty-eight. My husband is five years older. Have been married since January, after going together two years.

I love my husband, and as far as a woman is concerned I can trust him absolutely. For I know he would never bother with any one but me.

Yet there is one thing that is causing us to argue and quarrel most of the time. He goes out every night and leaves me after being away all day.

He won't take me, and I know he goes with no one; and when I ask him if he won't stay in, or perhaps I say I am going, too, he gets angry and tells me I am jealous, and asks me if I have to go with him all the time.

As it is now I only go out once a week with him, and I do so long for his company more.

He didn't do this when I first married him. Do you think he is doing it to spite me or what? I know that every man likes to go out once in a while without a woman with him, but it does hurt me to be alone all day and every night, too.

I work in my home, and out, too. And have two boarders besides. All this helps him as well as myself.

Please tell me what you think the trouble is, and shall I let him do as he wants, no matter if I do feel hurt about it?

PUZZLED.

There is nothing that is more futile than arguing with a husband, so don't do that. I'm going to leave that subject for a moment and ask you why you are doing so much? You practically have three jobs. You work out of your home. You have boarders and you keep house. Two of those jobs are enough to keep any woman busy. When you take more than that upon

yourself you are endangering your health and laying yourself liable to all sorts of things which come through strain. I suggest that you give up the boarders so that your home life can be more your own. That in itself will help to adjust the difficulties between your husband and yourself.

Next try to find some interests of your own. I know a wife should not have to do that. but sometimes it is necessary and it is much more conducive to happiness than staying at home and brooding. Go out with girls and come home happy and attractive. Keep smiling in spite of everything, and I'm sure that eventually you'll attract that husband so much that he'll be begging for dates with you.

Keep in mind the fact that men like happy women.

Write again.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: I am nineteen, a graduate of high school. popular with both sexes, and—well, the rest is where the difficulty lies.

To all appearances I am a girl whose face at once attracts attention. I have been told that I am beautiful. I have a very pretty form, lovely coloring, wavy, auburn hair, dark-blue eyes, long, black curling lashes, pretty teeth, and a very beautiful mouth.

I have had many proposals of marriage and offers to go on the stage, but here is the trouble: All this beauty is camouflage, a hand-painted picture, as it were, made by the appliance of cosmetics! So there's my story, and one that is causing me a lot of worry.

I feel such a cheat; and the one boy I care about is in love with the girl I make myself and not my homely self—for homely I am!

Of course I've told him, but I know he doesn't realize what a difference it makes when my make-up is removed. Instead of large dark eyes I have small-looking eyes, framed in colorless lashes and archless brows, and that takes from me what beauty I have.

Am I doing wrong by continuing to allow people to fall for a face that comes off every night? If I left off my make-up entirely I should become the laughingstock of the town, as one would never dream that I look the way I do.

Please some one tell me what he or she thinks on the matter. BOBBY.

Go right on being beautiful, my child. Time was when we thought cosmetics were not nice, but now we applaud the woman who can create beauty where it was not born.

There is just one danger and that is of going too far. Some girls I see on the street rouge their really quite pretty mouths until they look grotesque, and they put little round spots of color on their cheeks that make them really funny; but, of course, you don't do that. Then there is another way to beauty—the way of right food and plenty of exercise. Don't neglect that way. But you needn't feel guilty about your use of cosmetics as long as you use them sparingly and well.

Mrs. Brown will be glad to solve in these pages problems on which you desire her advice. Your letters will be regarded confidentially and signatures will be withheld.

Address Mrs. Laura Alston Brown, Love Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

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