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# That Little Room Upstairs

*A NOVELETTE*

By Eugene Brooks

AN INNOCENT LOOKING PLACE and, as for Sybil, she seemed gayly harmless as her chiffons. Yet for unsuspecting Jessica the tea room proved a trap and Sybil's "friendly assistance" a sinister scheme.

**Y**OU'RE really seeing far too much of Miss Parsons, John. Will you never learn to be discreet? People are horrid. I know, and they have no right to say things about you. But you ought to realize that the moment a man looks beneath him everybody agrees that he's out for an *affaire*. So do be careful! You, of all men, must keep your reputation clear."

Sybil Dalton, as she delivered her harangue, sat cuddled up in a fragrant heap before her boudoir fire. Her feet were tucked up under her in the big chair where she was reclining. It was characteristic of Sybil never to strike a conventional

attitude. At this moment she sat sideways, crumpled-up between the two broad arms of her chair, for all the world like a Jack-in-the-box. Her audacious snub nose was nestled into the bank of colorful cushions that had been piled behind her head by an attentive footman. She was smoking a cigarette with a simulation of languor, inhaling ruminatively and doing her best to appear of a large-minded seriousness. She was succeeding only in looking outlandishly expensive and pert and mischievous. Her teagown, frothing and sparkling around her, was cut very low. Now and then she would shift her position slightly and, leaning over to rearrange her fluffy robe

in becoming folds, she would innocently expose much of her perfect, gleaming-white flesh. As her husband had once said of her, "Sybil's clothes do their decent duty less than those of any other woman I've seen. The poor dear can't seem to have *any* privacy!"

"You, of all men, must keep your reputation clear," Sybil repeated in her bell-like tones that always sounded in tune for arch flirtation and that she couldn't succeed in modulating to the key of serious sermonizing. As she spoke, she took up her vanity case and, with lipstick poised for action, contemplated her image with sweet satisfaction.

"I am older than you, John," she pursued, smiling to herself at the thought that her childlike face had actually seen the light of day for twenty-seven years. "Besides, I am a married woman, and I know more of the world than you do. So you really will do well to listen to me and to take my advice." Impulsively, she bent over to him and laid one slender hand on his knee; frowning, he averted his glance from the flower-white, budding vista disclosed so innocently by her action. "You're not angry, John?" she coaxed. "You see that what I say is true?"

He got up abruptly from his chair.

Her little hand dropped at her side and she pouted. "Well—you needn't be such a bear!" she told him "If you resent my attempts to

help you, I'll be quiet and let you go to the devil if you want to."

John Wellington, standing now with his back to the fire and resting one arm on the mantel, shook his head reflectively two or three times. Then he said:

"I don't want to be a bear, Sybil; I'm sorry if I've acted like one. But I can't *abide* the standards of your particular crowd; that's all there is to it. I know you're a darling at heart; that's why your frittering, frivolous life makes me so hot. You and your friends spend twenty-four hours a day painting like Chinese dolls, dancing till you're worn out, flirting with one damned fool after another, gambling away the money your husbands give you to be charitable with, and buying dozens of gowns that you can be looked at through and under and over!"

Sybil threw her hands up over her head and burst into purling, infectious laughter.

"Oh, John, that's lovely!" she acknowledged. Chuckling, she went over his last remark. "Through, under, and over!" She clapped her hands delightedly. "The best description *yet* of the modern frock!"

John had joined her in her mirth. Now, however, he quieted down and continued his lecture.

"I wonder how many of the men you dance with and gamble with have any sense of decency. I could name a dozen of them right now—a dozen of your own set—who have establishments for chorus girls.



Why, the lives of most of them are unspeakable!"

Sybil nodded, then shuddered delicately.

"It is sordid, isn't it? But you're right, John. I could name a dozen myself." In all seriousness she began to drum out the list on one silken knee. "There are Nic Townsend and his Vera Duchette; Larry Gibbon and that tously-headed French girl in the Midnight Frolic—"

John interrupted.

"For heaven's sake, Sybil, be quiet. It seems to me you ought to be ashamed of yourself; instead of that, you take a positive delight in naming over the crimes of your intimates."

She shrugged.

"You misunderstand," she corrected him. "With society in its present deplorable state, all the men are rakes. We women find it useful to know about their peccadillos; otherwise we might believe what they tell us—and then we *would* be lost!"

John glared at her. She tossed her head petulantly at him, then buried her nose again in her cushions and began to hum a gay ditty. At last she faced him and remarked:

"I set aside this afternoon so that I might give you a dressing-down. Instead, you take things into your own hands and tell me what a nasty, immoral, disreputable hussy I am. I haven't time for such talk.

Perhaps I *am* beyond redemption. The point is, *you're* not and I want to save you."

"Save me!" John scoffed and threw up his hands in desperation.

She made an angry face at him and wagged her curly pate to give her words emphasis.

"Granted that society is what it is, there are certain things a man doesn't do. He doesn't pay attention to the secretary of his sister without being misinterpreted. You and Miss Parsons have been seen together at the theater, *even* at the opera. You can't deny it, John."

"Deny it!" he cried out. "But, good *God*, Sybil, who's attempting to deny it?"

She could meet this.

"*You* should be attempting just that. There are rumors already that you and she are carrying on an affair right under my nose. It puts me in a painful position, John. Moreover, it isn't right to the girl herself. She seems a nice, harmless, pretty little thing. But she *is* indiscreet; there's no denying it."

"You and your crowd call yourselves discreet, I suppose," John sneered. "Just because you act like a crowd of half-world women, you take it for granted people will understand that you're estimable. And here is a perfectly respectable, quiet, unassuming young girl who has been seen at the theater with me; and you all pounce like a pack of hounds on a rabbit for the simple

reason that she works for a living. You countenance it demurely when your men friends openly, shamelessly keep women of the stage; but you hold up your hands in horror when a man with some decency acts in a friendly way towards a girl who you all *know* is decent."

"It's the way of the world," Sybil rejoined philosophically. "Besides, we don't *know* that she's decent. But"—and she unwound her feet from the yards and yards of lacy train that had kept them fettered under her in her chair, and got up with graceful insouciance—"let's not talk any more about it, John. I have warned you. I ask you not to behave so carelessly in future. After all, you know, she is in my employ and, in a way, at my mercy. So please look out or public opinion may *compel* me to get rid of her."

After that broadside, she put her hands lightly on the shoulders of the astounded John and, lifting herself up on her tiptoes, looked into his eyes with a sweet wistfulness and gave him a soft kiss on the cheek. Then, with a gay laugh, she wound up: "The meeting is adjourned for the time being, *mon cher*," and swept, with a swirl of draperies and a graceful wave of one bare arm, out of the room.

## II

At seven-thirty that evening, Jessica Parsons sat at her desk in Mrs. Dalton's study and ran her eye cursorily over the list of dinner guests.

Nodding her head when she had completed her survey of the names and murmuring half-aloud, "*That's all right*," she thrust the paper aside. Her work to-day had been trying and her fingers ached; she exercised them for a moment, running them up and down the desk as if she were practicing scales on a piano, then she took up her pen and turned to the pile of unfinished correspondence that lay before her. "I wish to goodness she'd let me write these things on the typewriter," she mused.

Ten minutes later, she tossed her pen down and, stretching her arms above her head, fell to thinking. For some time now, Jessica had found herself a helpless victim of John Wellington's spell whenever she left off work and gave herself up to reflection. His eyes, his smile, his lean figure rose in her mind and usurped it. A pleasant languor would creep over her; it was as if his image were palpable, as if he were forever bending over her and kissing her on her offered lips. Jessica, a girl of acute imagination and, besides, a girl in love, often awoke with a start of surprise to the realization that she was not actually in the man's physical embrace.

Suddenly she dropped her arms to her sides and sprang up. "I have too much work to do to be maundering like this," she scolded herself. She rang and ordered her dinner-tray to be brought up at once. Then, still a bit unsteady

from her musings, she went to the window and pressed her forehead against the icy pane. Her dizzy thoughts slackened speed and resumed their customary precision gradually.

All at once, Jessica snapped her fingers with impatience and hurried to the door. She had noticed that the usual patch of light thrown upon the ground beneath her window from the conservatory was not visible to-night. It had been a stiff rule in the Dalton household from the days when old Mrs. Dalton had been a young matron that, on nights of festivity, the queer, boxlike, old-fashioned conservatory should be illuminated. Sybil was always making fun of this time-worn custom; but since her husband felt it a tribute to his mother to keep the old rite going, she gave in with good-humored raillery and always ordered lights in the "cucumber-frame."

Jessica, consulting her watch, had seen that it was almost eight and that the guests would be arriving almost at once. Knowing the bustle downstairs at times like this, she decided to go down herself and turn on the conservatory lights.

She was a bit startled, as she reached the threshold of the pitch-black room, to hear a sound within and to see the fiery tip of a cigar.

"I beg your pardon," she said, regaining her composure. "You won't mind if I turn on the lights?"

She advanced a step, her arm raised and her fingers groping for the switch. Before she was fully

conscious of what had happened, she felt her wrists caught in a firm, hot grasp; the next moment she was swept into the man's arms. He had thrown his cigar to the ground, and its small light sent a few crazy shadows of palm-fronds over the glass walls. Jessica shut her eyes, and it seemed to her that the sound of her heart as it leaped and fell in her bosom filled the universe. Then, close to her ear, she heard the hard, thumping, explosive beat of the man's pulses, and it seemed to her that the combined throbs of their hearts were as one tumultuous music that sang triumphantly of love.

She had dreamed of this moment—ah, how often! Her lips parted, fluttering open before her gasping breath. Then his lips were on hers, drinking in her ardor, crushing her mouth as if it were a flower that was being made to give up all its sweetness and fragrance. Half-fainting, she yet had enough energy to be afraid of this transport, to be ashamed of herself and of him for this sudden abandon, and finally to be angered at his well nigh brutal embrace. She tried to free herself, but he held her more closely; she strove frantically to rid herself of his lips, but to no avail. Then, with a stifled scream of mingled terror and fury, she regained all her strength in a rush; the blood forced a stinging way through her veins and she was able to strike him off with a quick, frenzied power.

"Who are you?" she gasped, her cold hands pressed to her face.

He laughed delightedly. "Who am I? As if you didn't know! If you're not sure, I'll show you." Swiftly he raised an arm and the lights twinkled on. "Lawrence Gibbon, at your service."

Jessica was full of self-loathing that she had been held in this man's arms and been kissed as one of his mistresses would have been kissed and all the time had felt that her visions of the past weeks had been fulfilled. This was what she had been fool enough to call her pure love for a good man! She had thought the caresses were John Wellington's; but that didn't make her blameless, that didn't vindicate her vivid response to those shameless kisses! She felt contaminated; she was sickened as she stood there.

Meanwhile, the rebuffed Larry was staring at her with real curiosity and, as he noted her ghastly pallor, with a growing contrition. Complete rake though he was, he was still as impressionable as a boy. His pleasant, candid face, with a thick flush induced by a preliminary bout of cocktails and also by the amorous bout of a minute ago, expressed at present nothing but boyish sheepishness and awkward pleading.

"I say—I *am* sorry!" he stammered. "I thought you knew, you see—I swear I did. I thought you liked me. That day I came to tea and Mrs. Dalton was late and *you* entertained me—do you remember? Why, I was positive—"

Jessica raised her head and, quite

calm at last, surveyed him with perfect coolness.

"I understand, Mr. Gibbon," she said in even tones. "I understand, of course. I don't think, however, that my politeness to you on that one occasion several weeks ago sufficiently excuses your action to-night." With this awkward answer to his apology, Jessica turned away and walked to the door.

Sybil Dalton, exquisite in a lustrous dinner gown of white satin, with a single rope of milky pearls around her throat and a great white Paradise fan in one little hand, stood on the threshold. She looked for all the world like a decadent twentieth century Frenchman's idea of an angel. She was dazzling in her whiteness, to be sure; but her eyes, looming big in her dainty face, had a glimmer of mockery and of mischief in their depths. She shook her head now several times in the direction of the abashed Gibbon and at the same time extended a solicitous hand to Jessica.

"My dear, I am so sorry!" she murmured in a tone of sweet condolence to the girl. "I haven't been watching or spying; I've only just arrived on the scene. But I know quite well what has happened. Larry, I am really getting beyond my endurance—so far as you're concerned. You have no right to accept my hospitality and then betray every trust as soon as you get the chance. I am vexed—more so than you think, perhaps."

With a delicious hauteur, she

threw up her lovely head and gave him a stern glance. Then, addressing Jessica once more, she remarked:

"Will you please come to me to-morrow morning at twelve-thirty, Miss Parsons? There's something I want to talk over with you, something very much to your advantage." Tenderly she bent over the girl and laid a cool little kiss on her flushed cheek. "Good night!"

Alone with Gibbon, Sybil said, all her sternness melting into thin air: "You are *too* dreadful. She simply won't stay in my house after this insult. But"—she shrugged prettily—"I'm not angry with you. I have other plans for her. You've done me a service with your dalliance, Larry. So I forgive you—though *you* had no idea you were helping me by kissing her under my cucumber-frame."

### III

"MR. GIBBON is an old friend of my husband's. I really can't see my way clear to forbidding him the house, Miss Parsons. But he's a persistent wretch; now that he has decided he likes you, he'll be waiting for you in every dark corner. It's so awkward!" Sybil, lying in her dainty bed with as much grace as a goddess lolling on a bank of puffy clouds, indulged in a fleeting frown. "Yes, it's awkward," she repeated, stretching out her bare, white arms and yawning with an obvious relish in her languorous sleepiness.

Jessica, who sat on a chair drawn up to the bed, hastened to agree.

"I realize, of course, that it's an absurd predicament for you, Mrs. Dalton. And for me it's intolerable—this being tracked down in the house of my employer. I really will have to leave; I see no other way."

Sybil reached out a hand and touched Jessica's face softly.

"You won't be glad to leave me, Miss Parsons?" she asked with pretty tenderness.

Jessica shook her head decisively. "No, indeed!" she exclaimed. "It has been very pleasant here—"

Sybil interrupted. "Please don't think I am planning to throw you over, to get *rid* of you," she cried. "I have the most delightful project for you, my dear. You have been working so hard; you look fagged. It's time you gave your brain a rest. Now, what should you say to a darling, smart little tea room—a snug, cozy place near the shopping district where my friends and I could drop in between fittings for a bite to eat?" She gave Jessica an intent scrutiny as she broached this proposition.

Jessica stiffened slightly in her chair.

"Ah, that's very kind indeed," she acknowledged. "But, since I *have* family and traditions back of me, I don't think I should like anything so commercial."

Mrs. Dalton pouted and in her wonderful eyes there was a look of



pain. She smiled bravely, however, to hide her sense of injury at this rebuff.

"But, my *dear* Miss Parsons," she protested, "it's quite the smart thing nowadays to control a small, artistic establishment of that sort. After all, you know, one is simply the hostess for one's friends. The waiters are mere servants, just as they are in one's own house. I should not have mentioned the plan if I hadn't felt you would understand. It's *the* passion to-day of decayed gentlefolk—this high-bred restaurant idea. I could name over a great many of my oldest friends who have had financial reverses and have been quite happy in ruling over some such duck of a place as I have in my mind's eye for *you*. Ah, Miss Parsons, *do* consider it—*do*!"

Jessica smiled and returned: "You make it sound most attractive, I admit. But even the tiniest place here in town is too expensive for me." The moment she had spoken, she regretted it. It sounded like a brazen hint.

It was Sybil's cue.

"Naturally, since it was in my house you were insulted, I feel responsible for you, Miss Parsons. Besides, my affection for you and my gratitude for your services during the past year make it my very *earnest* hope that you will let me help you in this." This elaborate speech was not at all characteristic of the inconsequent, erratic, elliptical Sybil; as a matter of fact, she had been rehearsing this particular

harangue for the past half-hour. Now, after its eloquent delivery, she flashed on Jessica a triumphant smile.

Jessica was too genuinely grateful at this moment to notice anything. There were tears in her eyes as she said: "Thank you—ah, *thank* you, Mrs. Dalton! You are extremely good."

Sybil darted up vivaciously to sitting posture. "Then, you agree? Then, we can go right to work?"

Jessica, startled out of a train of thought far removed from Sybil's dainty bed chamber, stammered out, without knowing exactly what she was saying, "I—I agree. I can never thank you enough, Mrs. Dalton."

That was sufficient for Sybil. She bent forward and enveloped her companion in a warm, fragrant embrace. Jessica felt as if a big dewy flower had suddenly come to life and were clasping her to its heavily-scented breast. Sybil's nightrobes always had this effect of great silken petals that waved and fluttered and surrounded her white body without in the slightest degree covering it or even veiling it.

"I am so glad," said Sybil. "We shan't lose a moment." She paused. Then: "Would you mind taking a few letters from dictation?" she asked.

Sybil was not without her practical side. Until the very day when Jessica would open her proposed tea room, she would be held down

by her sweet employer to every single duty possible to a secretary.

#### IV

JESSICA, by the time her trim little restaurant was ready for business, was simply captivated with the whole project. There was in her mind not the dimmest presage that in this frothy, dainty place the great crisis of her life was to occur, the darkest tragedy of her existence to be staged. It looked like a bright bird cage, her adorable tea room; it seemed framed for light-hearted songs and sunshine.

During the bustle of preparation, Jessica had seen almost nothing of John Wellington. Sybil had been indefatigable, wonderful in her dauntless energy. She, even more than Jessica, was responsible for the speed and precision with which the whole thing was put through. She handled landlords, plumbers, carpenters, and prospective chefs and waiters as if she had been born simply to haggle prettily and barter coaxingly and triumph slyly. She did triumph every time, too. The hardest mechanic always turned out mere wax in her white, deft hands. At last, when everything was completed but the few finishing touches, Sybil confided to Jessica that she had grown so to adore the little place that she wanted to be left alone with it for one glorious day.

"When the artistic in me gets working, I can't bear to have a soul around; it robs me of my inspira-

tion. And I have, in my soul at this moment, the vision of those few last touches." So she confessed to Jessica. Moreover, she insisted on the girl's taking a holiday—somewhere out in the big open spaces that Sybil loved to talk about but never looked at when she found herself in their midst.

Jessica had puckered her brow in the vain attempt to think up a big open space within a few minutes of New York. John Wellington, entering at that moment, had begged to be enlightened as to the cause of the intensely knitted brows. There was nothing for it, then, but to tell him.

"Splendid!" he had crowed. "I know just what you're after. I will take you in my motor and we can share the view!"

Sybil was in an indulgent mood. She said it would be very jolly, she was sure. When Jessica lifted an inquiring gaze, to make certain it was quite all right, Sybil smiled her complete approval. So it was arranged.

The day's outing formed, for Jessica, one of the serene periods of her perplexed existence; it was like a deep well of clear blue sky in a heaven banked with somber clouds. Alone in the world as she had been since the death of her father, her struggle against poverty had been persistent, uninterrupted. Reared in an atmosphere of well bred prosperity, she had had no suspicion that life could be a hazardous undertaking. Then her father, ruined

and broken by the collapse of his railroad interests, had succumbed to apoplexy, and she had found her sheltered life at an end. There was nothing for it but for her to step into the pushing world and begin her fight against odds. She had not hesitated. But henceforth she had had few breathing-spaces in the conflict. So to-day was a blessed respite, a balm to her tired nerves, a rejuvenation.

Wellington was perceptibly more tender and solicitous than he had ever allowed himself to be in the past. Yet the strange part of it was that at first Jessica had felt a slight indefinable depression, a hurt sense that he was holding off from her. Then, of a sudden she understood and felt her cheeks go hot with shame: there had still lingered in her mind the recollection of that embrace in the conservatory as *his* embrace. She shivered and shut her eyes to the recollection. Soon the realization that this man had never once kissed her stirred in her consciousness and brought its comfort.

It was difficult for Jessica to separate clearly the fact from the dream. Once she had got a firm hold on reality, however, she became flooded with a sweet content. She could see at last that Wellington was warming to her at present as he had never done before. He was tinglingly aware of her, happy to have her at his side and at the same time restless and uneasy from the augmented throb of his pulses. Jessica herself was vaguely tremulous.

Wellington was an extremely reticent man. To the world at large he passed as indifferent; as a matter of fact he was a deeply emotional man, and when a thing took hold of him, his very heart's blood was in it. He wasn't the sort to talk about his enthusiasms, that was all. To-day it seemed as if Jessica's presence exerted a spell over him, as if she cajoled from him a complete unbosoming of his innermost thoughts. He talked on and on in low tones about himself, not deliberately but involuntarily. It was evident to Jessica that she had become as close to him as his own consciousness, that he was incapable of keeping from her the thoughts that had always before formed his silent communion with himself.

"People think," he had said as they drove slowly along, his bright blue eyes never once leaving her face, "that I am wasting my time. It's generally believed that I went in for law just because it was the fad. The easiest way to loaf genteelly and make a bluff at working! That's not true, Jessica. No man has ever worked harder than I. I have slaved and toiled and worn myself out—in secret. Do you know why? There's no way that I can prove to you how much you mean to me; but I can hint at it when I say that I have never told a living soul—you will be the *first*, apart from the men actually associated with me—what my plans and hopes and longings are." He paused and guiding the motor to a protected spot at

the side of the road, brought it to a standstill. Then he bent closer to Jessica and took her hands.

"I was brought up in a sophisticated atmosphere," he pursued. "And long before I was out of college I began to think pretty deeply about things. I saw how thwarted the lives of my friends, my relatives, my own sister, were. I swore that I would find out the true cause. And I *have* found it. It's the gambling craze that makes men lose their equilibrium, their hold on themselves and, eventually, their decency. Drinking, immorality, every other vice follows gambling.

"*Gambling!*" He cried it out to the quiet landscape. "It's more pernicious because in the beginning it seems innocent enough. A person with decent instincts doesn't commit acts of physical impurity or make a beast of himself by getting drunk. But a man with decent instincts *does* allow himself to gamble, because it is at worst a venial sort of sin. After a few years, though, his ideals and his sense of values get damnably warped, and he's presently plunged into all the other vices that he would have abhorred in the past. Oh, I sound like a sniffling preacher, I suppose! But I've seen so many lives ruined that it's no wonder I want to shout protests. It's just the same with the lower classes, too, as with the rich. Gambling is the fountainhead of all evil, Jessica."

He smiled and patted her hands gently.

"Don't look so frightened, please," he begged. "I do sound like one of the real fire-and-brimstone gang, don't I? But the point of all this talk is that for three years I have been carrying on an investigation of illegal gambling in New York. It's been strictly on the quiet, but my work is going to bear fruit very soon, Jessica. In a year's time I hope enough will have happened to make you proud of me.

"Now I've made a clean breast of it. Can you guess why? I've told you this to—to work up my courage to ask you a question. I've showed you how much I trust you, how much I need you. I've showed myself, too, how wonderful it would be always to have you near me, always to be able to tell you my deepest secrets. I have given myself the courage, the courage of desperation. I've got to the point where I can't stand the uncertainty any longer."

He broke off, panting from excitement and from the breathless haste of his recital. For a tense second he watched her. His eyes were blazing and his hands, holding hers, shook uncontrollably. Jessica felt the warm color on her cheeks die away and a faintness creep through her veins. She tried to speak, but tears choked her. Somewhere under the pallor of her face, however, there was a glow of joy and exaltation that irradiated her skin like a candle-flame held between the hands. Wellington saw it and needed no words to force home its meaning.

"Jessica, Jessica," he whispered and swiftly swept her into his arms.

She clung to him silently, head forced back, her eyes closed. Her body was pressed to his, and she felt of a sudden his lips on her throat, on her cheeks, on her eyes, then at last on her mouth. Her longed-for moment had come. She knew now how feeble had been her imaginings in contrast to the fulfillment.

But Jessica was still very young. She expected this embrace of her true lover to be utterly different from the embrace of the worthless Gibbon. She had hoped that the transport would be somehow spiritualized, etherealized when she was in Wellington's arms. Instead, she found it acutely physical, a sharply-sweet playing upon the chords of sex. And of a sudden a slight recurrence of the remorse she had experienced before stirred in her. Ah, her heart was throbbing now as it had throbbed then; Wellington's whole frame was being shaken by the hammer-like blows of his pulses. Was this true love; could she be horribly mistaken? Jessica felt afraid and abashed and even miserable as she remained there in Wellington's arms.

Of a sudden, she pushed him away with impatience, recoiled from him and burst into bitter sobs.

Wellington was at once solicitous, tender, the ardent lover in him giving way to the sympathetic companion.

"But Jessica, Jessica!" he pleaded. "What is it? Tell me what the matter is." A quick fear awoke in him and he asked: "You—you *do* love me, Jessica?"

She was still crying pitifully. But she smiled with a rueful softness at this and returned:

"Oh, yes, yes. I love you. But I feel *ashamed* of myself. Don't ask me why, please. I couldn't explain; I'm afraid I am a silly fool."

They were both happy again in a moment. But in the future those words of Jessica's, "I feel *ashamed* of myself," were destined to ring diabolically in Wellington's ears.

## V

WELLINGTON, before they had returned to New York that day, had begged Jessica to marry him without delay. She had been obdurate, insisting that she was bound in honor to remain at the helm of her little restaurant until she had established it on a paying basis. In a year's time, perhaps, she would be able to break in somebody else and vanish gracefully without being missed. Wellington had grumbled a bit. After all, he let her know, Sybil would be the better for the knowledge that other people's existences weren't entirely dependent upon her caprices. But Jessica had remained firm. She owed Mrs. Dalton this, and she couldn't be happy if she funk'd it.

The opening of the restaurant



proved a delightful success. Jessica had been unable to sleep the night before. She had imagined the most impossible and hair-raising mishaps. She had shuddered at the thought of how much she was at the mercy of the chef. Suppose he should be incompetent or unreliable! *Why* had he insisted on lobsters for the first dinner? She had read such fiendish things about whole parties being poisoned and killed off with abominable convulsions as a result of eating lobster! With the coming of dawn, however, her fears had vanished. The day of busy preparation had been simply inspiring. Sybil had fluttered in and out, giving deft suggestions; incidentally, she had wanted to hear again and again from Jessica and her own friends, who dropped in to have a look at the pretty place, all the delightful compliments about her own genius as a decorator. Sybil adored flattery; to-day she couldn't bear to leave the restaurant for a moment, for fear she might miss people's gracious comments.

The place threw open its modest white-and-gold doors at six o'clock for dinner. Sybil had supervised the sending out of the cards of announcement. "You want only smart people," she had declared. "If the other kind should blunder in ever, let them see they're intruders."

To-night the room was pleasantly full: all the tables had been engaged ahead and Jessica found herself playing hostess, as it were, to a very fashionable throng. Every

few moments she would wander up the pretty Colonial staircase at the back of the main restaurant on some pretext or other; as a matter of fact, these excursions were made with the sole idea of getting the place in bird's-eye view. It was a charming, indeed a brilliant scene. The dining room itself, simple and judiciously decorated, seemed part of a spacious private house at a time of festivity. The tables were set well apart from each other; the linen was lustrous, the silver glinted, the flowers made warm patches of cloudy brightness. The polished floor reflected the lights from the shaded candles in rose-colored circles; the wall-sconces and the central chandelier were reflected in trickling rivulets of flame, like harbor lights in water. The walls were a perfect background of a pale yellow damask with here and there an ivory-white door.

She drew in her breath sharply from sheer ecstasy at the thought that this adorable bower was *hers*. Of course, it was really Sybil's. Her dainty fancy was evident in every slightest detail. It was her conception of a cozy, modest tea room. When she had handed her husband the bills for it, with a slightly incoherent explanation about the fabulous prices one had to pay for the *cheapest* sort of furnishings, he had raised his brows indulgently and, tossing aside the bills, had drawn her down on his knee with the comment, "You little expensive devil!" But Sybil had pouted and

looked injured and explained with a delicious simulation of haughtiness that it was simply her charitable motives, her desire to aid poor Miss Parsons, that had induced her to carry the thing through.

Jessica's patrons to-night were dressed with a daintiness and an elaborateness that set off the restaurant like a charm. Sybil had engaged one-half of the room and, at a long table, presided over a carefully picked dinner company. Her very presence in a room was enough to communicate an electric thrill to the atmosphere; she could galvanize the most corpselike fossils to a semblance of gaiety.

To-night she set the pace of the restaurant opening and managed to make the event something charming and extraordinary. It all went off like the pop of a champagne cork. It is not often that the success of a venture is assured the moment the thing is launched. Jessica was elated, excited, jubilant; but she couldn't help reminding herself that it was not her fault that the dinner had proved such a rip-roaring success. Every bit of credit was due the incomparable Sybil.

As Jessica stood on the landing of the stairs just before the Dalton party broke up, she murmured to herself in deep gratitude, "How immensely I am in her debt! Oh, dear, it's an obligation that I shall never be able to repay." She wasn't even vaguely aware that the demurely roguish Mrs. Dalton was just as

conscious of that debt as she was herself.

Sybil was not the sort to point her knowledge, of course; she was much too clever for that. She was extravagantly complimentary, going out of her way on every possible occasion to load Jessica down with thanks and to assert that she and all her friends could never show their appreciation enough for the service Jessica was doing them. And the place was so exquisitely run, the servants so well ordered, the cuisine so delicious! Jessica was both pleased and abashed by these exalted praises. Her heart was warmed to Sybil at last. She felt that, for all this frivolous madcap's weakness, she was genuinely kind. It would have been quite easy for Mrs. Dalton to take the credit to herself and to treat Jessica as a mere automaton. But, no! Jessica was the guiding spirit; Mrs. Dalton could not say enough nice things about her. So, after the triumphant opening and the consequent publicity the newspapers gave the restaurant, Jessica was straightway the proprietor of an extremely flourishing establishment. She became the vogue; a night seldom went by with a table unengaged in advance. And she felt she owed it all to Sybil.

Sybil and her friends continued to patronize the main dining room for a couple of weeks. Then one morning she had tripped blithely in upon Jessica with a new proposition. Jessica was in her model

kitchen discussing the menu with her chef (who also had turned out to be a model) when the swing-door from the pantry was pushed open and in glided Sybil. She made an incongruous figure, in her great billowy chinchilla cloak, with her extravagant Paradise-plumed hat and her famous pearls about her neck; but, then, Sybil loved to be an incongruous figure.

Here she was, magnificently attired, in a kitchen; and at once she began to apologize for her appearance.

"Please don't look at me, Miss Parsons," she pleaded prettily. "I had to rush out early, and I just flung all my old rags about me. Do let me sit down here where it's warm." And she drew up a chair beside the big range and proceeded to toast her hands and her little feet.

"I've come on a very special mission," she pursued in a moment. "It's about that private supper room we fixed up on the second floor. You remember, I said we might just as well pay no attention to it till we'd found out whether the main room was too big or too little for the diners?"

Jessica nodded.

"Oh, that *lovely* little room! I have been longing to use it, Mrs. Dalton. And really the crowds *are* getting too large to be accommodated with comfort downstairs."

Sybil smiled radiantly.

"You *are* a wonderful person, Miss Parsons. My husband is amazed; he was positive the thing wouldn't last a month. He takes off his hat to you, and no mistake. That's just what I came here for to-day—not to tell you what my husband thinks, but to talk about that private room. Don't you think that my little dinner-parties could be accommodated best up there? I don't have many people, but there are usually enough to hog most of the space downstairs. I *love* it downstairs—but I think I would like the supper room just as well. I'm bringing some people Thursday night. Shall we open up the private room? I leave it to your judgment, Miss Parsons."

Jessica did not attempt to conceal her joy. "Ah, yes!" she cried. "Do let me get it ready for Thursday night."

So Sybil, on her next visit to the restaurant, entertained her guests in the exquisite little white-and-gold room upstairs.

"It's so adorable and cozy here," she remarked to Jessica as they stood together in the doorway; and touching her caressingly with her great orange fan, she continued, "It's the sort of place one *lingers* in, my dear. Heaven only knows when we'll get away. So just serve us dinner and then forget us; it would be simply imposition to keep *your* servants running around for us. I've brought some champagne with me and one of my footmen. He'll attend to us. Now, remember,

Miss Parsons! After dinner's over, just slide in a cake of ice for the champagne and pay no more attention to us."

Jessica echoed Sybil's gay burst of laughter; she was so happy at the brilliant picture her supper room presented that she had followed only vaguely the other woman's innocent prattle. Later in the evening, however, she began to wonder at the whole business. Somehow the jolly party had a clandestine air about it; Jessica, tallying up the guests silently, realized that they comprised Mrs. Dalton's gayest but not her most estimable associates. Besides—and this struck Jessica as particularly ominous—Mr. Dalton himself was not one of the gathering. But she had soon decided that there was no need to worry; restaurant proprietors couldn't afford to be too fussy, and there wasn't a place in New York, however smart, that wouldn't have envied her that party in her adored supper room. So she threw off her uneasiness, gave orders that Mrs. Dalton and her guests were to be let alone after dinner, and promptly forgot that Sybil's presence might be problematical.

Jessica's place was always well patronized by the better sort of theatergoers who, after the play or the opera was over, wanted a bite of something dainty without the accompanying confusion of music and dancing. From eleven to twelve, the main dining room was sure to be occupied by some half dozen discreet and well bred parties who discussed

in low, eager tones the merits of the performances they had just seen.

On the night of Sybil's party in the supper room there was a particularly conservative company downstairs. By this hour, Mrs. Dalton and her guests were obviously in an uproarious mood. Though the door of the supper room was shut, the unmistakable sounds of revelry floated down the staircase. Extremely frequent bursts of laughter reached every nook and corner of the restaurant; the unrestrained shouts of men accompanied by the lighter gush of feminine mirth. Even at a distance, it was obvious that the merriment was of that helpless, almost delirious kind that results from the imbibing of champagne and from nothing else in the world. Now and then there would be heard the scraping of chairs and the impact of feet on the floor above would cause the ceiling of the downstairs room to echo dully.

Jessica was by this time distinctly nervous. As she walked up and down between the tables and exchanged polite remarks with her patrons, her mind was busy thinking up possible ways in which she could approach Sybil and ask her frankly to be a little more careful in future. Really, the babble and hubbub that was filtering down the stairs sounded simply orgiastic; she'd *have* to impose some restraint, that was all there was to it. At this point in her reflections, she was startled by the sound of a man's voice singing in a stentorian tone a

ribald parody of "The Rosary." His slightly tipsy outburst was followed by thunderous hand-clapping.

Jessica, her cheeks darkly flushed, felt a gentle tug at the sleeve of her dress. "Yes?" she said mechanically, and bent down in all politeness to hear what the stiffly brocaded, profusely begemmed but frigidly austere woman who had signaled to her might have to impart.

"I only wished to say," the dignified creature remarked, "that we sympathize with you. Your place is extremely nice, extremely dainty. It's a great pity that your neighbors upstairs can't resemble you. My husband is a lawyer—" and she waved a vague hand in the direction of the man opposite to her— "and he tells me you should have no difficulty in having these others ejected from the building. I don't wish to intrude, but I felt you might appreciate a suggestion." She smiled with a chill attempt at cordiality.

Jessica was terribly at a loss. She remained for a moment in a seething confusion, then, hardly knowing what she said, stammered out:

"Thank you—thank you. It's most kind of you. . . ."

She turned away with uneasy abruptness, pretending that she was being signaled from another table.

A moment later, the door of the supper room burst open with an explosive report, and Jessica, pale now and trembling, heard the sound of feet in the corridor upstairs.

Voices rang out sharply, with an undercurrent of light laughter and heavy guffaws. Presently the staircase was inundated by a brilliant flood of multicolored gowns and dazzling cloaks, with here and there the soft fluttering of fans. Above the sea of frocks rose the women's faces, pretty, flushed, slightly mazed as to expression; and the poppy-red countenances of the men made big splotches of crude color against the dainty, pastel-like tints of the women. Aware that the eyes of the quieter diners were all fixed in astonishment upon them, Sybil and her guests proceeded to play up to their audience. The procession down the staircase resolved itself into a daring, flirtatious frolic.

Jessica looked on in a frenzy of dread. She found herself praying fervently that the champagne-flushed troop would, when they reached the foot of the staircase, continue straight on into the side-corridor. The amazed patrons might think then that she had consented to allow the people from the "other restaurant" to use her stairs when they left. An absurd idea, of course, but she stuck to it. Her heart gave a great throb of relief when she noted that indeed Sybil's guests *were* turning when they reached the ground floor and filing out into the corridor.

But of course Sybil was not the sort to make a modest get-away. She had been in the very center of the crowd as they swept triumphantly down the stairs. When she



reached the foot, she separated herself from the rest, stood still for a moment to enable all the frumps in the dining room to get a good look at her, then swam impulsively up to Jessica.

Grasping both the girl's hands, she shook them vivaciously and cried out:

"Ah, Miss Parsons, it is simply delightful in the supper room. So quiet and out-of-the-way; really, it was like a picnic in a dear old Colonial house in the New England woods. We couldn't believe we were still in New York." She looked demurely around after this absurd simile, then wound up: "We all wish to thank you and to tell you we want the darling place *every* Thursday night for the next hundred years." Whereupon, she released Jessica's hands and, with a radiant smile and a bright "Good night, my dear, and thanks again," she swept, like an apparition of froth and sable and diamonds, out of the room. Jessica noted with weary despair how she bumped smartly against one of the tables and, flashing a slightly bewildered smile, murmured a sweet apology.

So *this* was the kind of festivity her lovely little place was fated to house! She shut her eyes tight for a moment in an effort to gain control of herself.

The next thing she heard was the voice of the lawyer whose wife had proffered such unfortunate aid.

"Waiter, waiter!" the lawyer's

voice snapped out in fuming dignity. "My check—and at once."

## VI

"BUT, my *dear*, it was a perfectly respectable party. If the people downstairs didn't approve they must have been excessively narrow. It's *our* sort that help restaurants; the other sort of patronage wouldn't support you. So don't worry any more, please."

Thus the solicitous and facile Sybil. Jessica had gone to Mrs. Dalton's house on the morning after the first rousing Thursday night dinner. She was extremely vexed, extremely indignant at what she considered Sybil's underhanded ruse. She had gone straight to the point with the announcement:

"I am very sorry to have to say this, Mrs. Dalton. But, really, if you have been kind and generous to me simply in order to be able to stage parties at my place that you wouldn't care to put on at your own house, I shall have to retire and let you get somebody else." There were angry tears in her eyes as she spoke.

In fifteen minutes, however, Sybil had succeeded in drawing such a roseate veil over the bald facts that Jessica had become convinced of her own unseemly haste in arriving at conclusions.

"Good Heavens, Miss Parsons, if you expect the people in your private dining room to be as quiet as mice you'd better shut it up right

off. Now *don't* be a horrid, blue-nosed little Puritan. Be sensible and resigned to a little noise. And we'll do our best to behave more prettily next time."

So Jessica found herself involved helplessly. She must needs accept those overgay occasions; her hands were tied by a strange inability to combat Sybil in her dazzling unreason, and by her painful knowledge of the obligations under which she was weighted. The process was, in a way, gradual. By the time she had at last seen clearly through Mrs. Dalton's intentions, she had already shut her eyes to so many things, had accepted so much, that a protest at this late day was quite absurd.

Her will seemed somehow paralyzed. She felt desperately weary, weakly reluctant to cross swords with Sybil. Every sparring match between them ended in victory for Sybil and a duller acceptance than ever before from Jessica. The Thursday nights went on apace, gathering impetus with each successive occasion, and before long Jessica knew when the dreadful day dawned that she would go to bed that night with a splitting headache, induced by the nervous strain and by the actual assaults of the festive tumult on her poor eardrums.

The result of Sybil's parties, so far as the reputation of the dainty restaurant was concerned, was inevitable. The nice, quiet people dropped away; their places downstairs were taken by a bright, extravagant throng that flaunted the

reddest lips and the barest backs and the most painfully unmodulated voices. On one point, however, Jessica was obdurate: whatever went on upstairs, down here people must behave decently or she would have them ejected. The conduct of her colorful guests, therefore, was much more decorous than their costumes. But, little by little, Jessica's establishment acquired the reputation of "one of those ripping places where—well, you know; where the lid's off."

Jessica was hurt often at the contrast between her present patrons and the sedate crowd of a few weeks back; but it never occurred to her that her restaurant could be acquiring a sinister name. A thing like that simply *couldn't* happen. Had she harbored the slightest suspicion that men were actually shadowing her, that two detectives were watching events shrewdly from a house across the areaway, she would have sprung to action at once and disentangled herself from these toils with one indignant movement.

John Wellington at this period was Jessica's only haven of rest. He was fiendishly busy with his secret work, but this did not prevent him from dining at least four times a week at Jessica's restaurant. At the dinner hour, there was nothing in the atmosphere of the place to arouse suspicions; and Wellington was too immersed in his labors to have time to hear rumors or to visit the little place late in the evening. Jessica, knowing that he had much

to worry him, refrained from broaching to him her own problems. To his eager questions, she always returned that everything was going delightfully, that Sybil had been marvelous, a perfect fairy godmother.

Then, by a stroke of mocking fate, John arrived one night—one Thursday night—at about half past nine. Sybil and her crowd were still decently under control, but already Jessica could hear a loud outburst now and then, like a preluding note of the imminent uproar. They were beginning to tune up, as it were.

John, as he shook hands with Jessica, remarked in an undertone: "Ah, you look fagged, dearest! If only we could have one more day in the country! Please sit down and talk to me, Jessica. You are quite worn out."

Obediently she sank into a chair across the table from him. Of a sudden, the desire to be free of it all, to come to rest at last in this man's arms, to shut her eyes to everything but the throbbing lure of sex, swept over her like a flame, and she shuddered. She leaned across impulsively, her eyes flashing, her breathing uneven. At that moment she was on the point of saying: "I can't go on. I can't go on like this. I've been misled, hoodwinked by Sybil. Take me away from this place. Ah, John, marry me; that's all I want in the world—now."

But Wellington was deep in thought and did not see her. She hesitated, and before she could find courage to speak, he had said:

"Do you know, this refuge of yours is simply providential. My work has piled up and up until it's way over my head. If you'd married me when I wanted you to, you or my mission would have suffered." He smiled. "In other words, my mission would have suffered. But now, by giving my undivided attention to my work, I shall have it done by the end of the year and on your wedding day you'll have a husband who won't be considered the *dub* he's thought to-day."

Jessica, very pale and calm now, smiled her pride. She was about to speak when a shout of laughter from the upper room interrupted her.

"Hello! What's up? Have you taken to staging bachelor dinners, darling?" John asked humorously.

Jessica's face was suffused on the instant with a hot flush. "No, indeed," she returned with apparent uneasiness. "Your sister is giving a little dinner to-night upstairs."

"Really?" John seemed pleased. "Why, it's months since I've seen Sybil," he cried. "At least, it seems so. May I run up now and give her my brotherly greeting?"

Jessica felt herself go faint and, shutting her eyes, fought against her dizziness. They were silent for a long moment, while John in astonishment watched the miserable girl. At last, she straightened and opened her eyes.

"No, don't go up," she said. "She doesn't like being interrupted."

"But surely, in the case of her beloved brother—?" he pressed.

She shook her head impatiently.

"Not even for her beloved brother," she told him. "She'll be annoyed with me if I let you go up. Besides, the door is locked. She'll refuse to see you."

"Refuse to see me!" He whistled. "What mischief are you and that little imp up to, anyhow?" His tone was bantering, but there was a note of earnestness behind it.

"I'm sure I haven't an idea what she does it for," Jessica defended herself stoutly. "She brings her own champagne, and I believe she's afraid to let us see how much her guests consume." It was the first time Jessica had ever allowed herself to criticize Sybil to Wellington; she was sorry, as soon as she had spoken, for her bitterness.

"Look here, Jessica"—Wellington's voice was urgent: "is Sybil taking advantage of you in any way?"

She shrugged the question away.

"No, indeed. She has *made* my place; she has *accomplished* miracles." Scrupulously she kept all irony out of her words.

They fell silent. Then, suddenly aware of a stir in the corridor outside, Jessica sprang up. She gave a quick glance about her and remarked: "I hear somebody fighting a way in. People *never* will believe the man at the door when he says there are no tables to be had. It's

always up to me to conciliate them."

She gave Wellington a tender smile and hurried out of the room. When she reached the corridor, the first thing she noted was the pale, scared face of the attendant at the door. He was whimpering out incoherent protests to four men who stood in front of him, and with their backs turned squarely to Jessica. With her eyes on those massive shoulders, Jessica felt herself suddenly at a loss. "Good heavens," she thought, "if those brutes demand a table and I refuse them, they may get ugly and smash things. They're probably drunk."

But she summoned her courage and, walking deliberately up to them, said in her sweetest tones:

"I am so sorry. But there won't be a table for half an hour. Could you come back then?"

The hugest and brawniest of the four intruders swung around and faced her.

"We don't want a table," he thundered. "Not one to eat off, anyhow! Are you Miss Jessica Parsons?"

She stiffened and, with her head high, replied: "I am Miss Parsons. And I must ask you to leave my place unless you can act like a gentleman." At a loss, vaguely fearful as to the meaning of the man's enigmatical smile, she repeated in her haughtiest way, "There are no tables. Please go."

"Oh, come now!" her antagonist continued, this time with clumsy

good-humor. "Drop the air of injured innocence. We have come to demand entrance to the private dining room upstairs. Is that definite enough? Do you understand now?"

Jessica recoiled with a stifled cry and, with her hands pressed against her turbulent heart, gazed wide-eyed at the ominous group before her. The other three men had turned now and were facing her with knowing grins. One of them, like the man who had spoken to her first, was in plain clothes; the other two were policemen. They stood in front of her in a semicircle, like four great dogs who have trapped a timid hare.

"Don't try any heroics, miss," the first man went on. "It won't do any good. All you've got to do is to escort us politely into that supper room. No harm in that, is there, seeing as everything that goes on up there is so nicely on the level?" He winked meaningly at his subordinates and, advancing with offhand cordiality, grasped Jessica by the arm.

She wrenched herself free savagely, her eyes blazing.

"This is an outrage!" she cried. "I am fully licensed. I refuse to allow you admittance to that room. Do you think I owe nothing to my patrons?"

"Never mind what you owe them; what we want to know is what *they* owe *you*. So you won't let us in up there?" He jerked a huge thumb at the ceiling.

She shook her head decisively.

"I've told you I wouldn't."

"Stubborn little devil," remarked the gang's spokesman in a philosophical tone. "I'm sorry, miss. That means we'll have to break down your pretty door."

He beckoned to his followers, and, brushing past Jessica, who was cowering against the wall, they strode heavily through the corridor. Just before they reached the side door at the rear of the dining room, she sprang forward and cried:

"Wait!"

The leader's hand shot out at once.

"You're going to give me that key after all?" he put it up to her.

She was in a panic by this time. In the mad, dizzy whirl of her thoughts, the one idea that leaped clear of the turbulence was the wild desire to hide all this from her lover. Faint and stricken as she was, she was unable to explain her motive; she only knew that she was being swept into a perilous maelstrom, that somehow she *must* not let Wellington suspect. So she remarked, with an effort after steadiness:

"If you insist on it, at least don't go through my main dining room." She forced a gently pleading smile. "Let me take you through the pantries and up the back stairway."

"You may be stubborn, but you've got an eye to business, I'll say," commented her chief opponent. "If



you must be raided, let it be by the back way so nobody but the cook'll know." He roared at his pleasantry and the others joined in obediently.

"Well," he shrugged, "we might as well go up one way as another. And there's no use talking, I *do* approve of a woman with an eye to business. Lead the way, miss."

He bowed profoundly, and Jessica, with an attempt at dignity but with a perfect comprehension of what an absurd figure she was cutting, opened a door and ushered her unbidden guests into the pantries.

A moment later they stood before the fragile white-and-gold door of the supper room. The chief raised his hand, commanding silence, and they listened with intensity. By this time, Sybil and her friends had passed the tuning-up period and were in the full swing of their gaiety.

"Do you hear anything?" the chief asked in a hissing whisper.

"Nothing—only people talking and laughing and drinking," replied one of his subordinates mysteriously.

The next instant, the leader of the band flung up his arm and brought his fist down with a smashing blow on the panels of the door.

The noise within the room died on the instant. Perfect silence! Then Sybil's voice, gentle and caressing:

"Yes, Miss Parsons? Everything is perfect, the dinner was enchanting, particularly this delicious new kind of sorbet we're eating now."

At once the dinner-party resumed

its gay babble, but this time the noise was more hectic, more tumultuous than ever before. Sybil had been clever enough to know that the crashing blow on the door had not come from Jessica; she was evidently inciting her friends to make a prodigious racket while, under cover of that tumult, some mysterious concealment, some swift sleight-of-hand might go on, as it were.

But the minions of the law were no fools. The leader swung off and hit the door another bang.

"Open *at once*!" he shouted. "Open at once, or we'll break the door down."

Sybil's reply was full of a bright insouciance.

"How peremptory you are! Has Miss Parsons discovered that the oysters came from insanitary beds? Are you the doctor sent to save us?" She laughed gayly.

Her unknown, unseen opponent was furious now.

"Do what I say, do you hear?" He rattled the knob and, grabbing a pistol from one of the policemen, cracked a panel of the door with one blow. "Now, then, you see I mean business!" he shouted. "Open. — — — it!"

"Presently, blasphemer!" Sybil's voice was prettily censorious. "As soon as I can get this wretched key to turn."

That was too much for the man on the other side of the flimsy wooden barrier.

"Never mind your damned key," he cried. "Just stand out of the way if you don't want to get hurt!"

The next moment he had his powerful shoulder up, and, with a spring forward into the air, had landed squarely against the door. There followed the raucous, hideous sound of splintering wood; there was a big ragged hole torn in the central panel. The man thrust in his great fist, turned the key inside neatly, and on the instant had rushed across the threshold.

Jessica, who was trembling uncontrollably now, without in the least knowing why, leaned helplessly against the wall. A murky cloud had suddenly swept across her vision; she gasped for breath. But, by a supreme effort, by a convulsive assertion of will, she succeeded in controlling to a steadier beat the tumult of her pulses. She lifted her head high, like a tired swimmer who, after sinking once in the stormy welter, has managed to rise once more to the surface. With an anguished curiosity, her glance darted to the door of the supper room.

She could see nothing but the broad backs of the four intruders close together in the entrance. Sybil's voice could be heard, still archly defiant, but with a strident note in it now; it was obvious that she was angry and finding it difficult to simulate mocking coquetry.

"But, my dear man, this is absurd, preposterous! I'm sure none of us knew we were being objectionable. That makes no difference?

Why, I never *heard* of such a thing! I warn you to take care; my husband is a hot-tempered man, apt to act on the spur of the moment. You will have to answer to him. Come, take my advice and go away quietly. Scenes are so vulgar! You look reasonable and gentlemanly; I'm sure you detest scenes quite as much as I. Ah, *do* be sane and sensible—"

But her opponent was adamant, a perfect stone wall against which Sybil's ineffectual words purled sweetly in vain.

"It's no use, madam, no use at all," he told her. "You might as well face the music. I don't care who the hell your husband is; if he objects to my actions to-night, he'll have to fight the whole police force of New York City." He glared around him. "Where is the gentleman?" he asked. "P'raps he and I can come to an understanding; I never did like to argue with a woman."

Sybil managed to laugh out a cordial response to this.

"I'm sorry, I'm sure, to have to disappoint you. My husband was called away on business about fifteen minutes ago."

Jessica could stand the suspense no longer. She walked firmly to the door and, touching one of the policemen on the arm, said:

"Will you let me in, please?" He made way for her with a clumsy deference and gave her a look of sheepish sympathy. "Thank you," she rewarded him with a grateful

smile. She crossed the threshold and was in the room.

Sybil swept up to her, flushed, nervous, excited.

"My dear, this is so unfortunate, so inopportune! But I'm sure it's nothing serious: it can be arranged without difficulty—if only people will be reasonable and *sane*." This reiteration of her desire was made in a harsh tone that pointed her real weariness and fear. "By the way"—and she turned to her inflexible antagonist—"what is the fine you are planning to collect? I'm quite willing to pay any amount—within reason—"

The man gave her a thunderous scowl.

"I said nothing about a fine, madam," he informed her. "It's no question of that. This isn't going to be a silent, pussy-footing raid; this is for example and not for cash."

While Sybil had been speaking, Jessica had turned her eyes to the huddled guests of the evening. They were clustered in a palpitating semi-circle about a mysterious object in the right-hand corner of the room. Of a sudden, Jessica's eyes had become fixed in a stare of utter amazement. Her heart stopped dead, then, gaining way against the rush of blood that had choked back into it from her veins, gave an explosive bound. The force of that fierce beat shook her whole frame. In a flash she had seen the truth.

Directly back of the hysterical

group of Sybil's friends, Jessica had seen a half-open narrow door. The sight of this aperture in what she had thought an unbroken wall had at first bewildered her, but the next moment her intuition had leaped forward and seized the meaning of the thing. With perfect calm, she stepped forward and walked across the room in the direction of that door. Her eyes, unwinking and unnaturally dilated, took in with cold scorn the furtive, half-simpering, half-bold glances that Sybil's friends cast at her. She paid no attention to them.

When she was halfway across the room, the chief of the raiding expedition raised his voice in a warning shout.

"Don't you touch those little toys, miss. Do you hear me? Don't touch them."

Jessica stopped short. She had forgotten the existence of anything in the world but the secret panel in the wall and its deplorable contents. Now, however, recalled to the actual crisis, she felt herself reeling. Catching at the air blindly, she felt a chair-back under her hand. Swiftly she sank down on the chair and, with her elbows on the dining-table, buried her face in her hands. She did not weep; she had no inclination to do that. In her mind now there was only one sensation: hot, bitter anger against Sybil. She saw with brutal clearness what the events of to-night would mean. For herself, financial ruin, utter loss of reputa-

tion, an inevitable break with Wellington; for Sybil, a slight worry and annoyance for perhaps a week, then a delicious little anecdote of adventure and guile with which to regale a dinner company from time to time. Oh, it was wrong, wrong!

Jessica wished desperately at this moment that it was in her power to rise up and denounce Sybil in a manner that would be convincing. But she knew the impossibility of this. What ordinary mortal would credit her story? Who but a fool would believe that she herself could have been so completely, miserably hoodwinked and cheated? No, it would only do her harm to tell the truth. She could do nothing, *nothing*, but acquiesce dumbly in whatever charges were brought against her. She could see Sybil now and then steal at her a glance full of an uneasy, ineffectual compassion. Yes, this woman pitied her, was repentant just now for what she had done, but lacked utterly the courage to confess her own guilt. Jessica's fury burned higher. She wanted to spring up and do some reckless sort of physical violence to the other woman in her impregnable armor of social strength.

All at once she heard the chief speaking.

"Listen to me, Miss Parsons. I suppose you've seen that I got in here before your guests had a chance to lock those things away safely in the dinky little secret panel?"

Jessica raised her head.

"Yes, I see," she answered dully.

"Well, I've looked 'em over," the man went on. "A fairly complete gambling outfit, I must say. You don't do things by halves, miss. A fairly complete outfit," he repeated. "*In*-cluding a roulette table." He accented the first syllable of *including* as if he attached immense significance to that trick of speech.

"Including a roulette table," Jessica murmured. She got up from her chair. "Do you wish to make an inventory and have me check it up? Let me see—" She took a step forward, and, as the chief waved her back warningly, she smiled with ineffable weariness. "I won't do anything violent, I promise," she said. "I simply wish to have a last look."

She went over to the corner and examined with fierce intensity the array of gaming accessories ranged on shelves in the secret closet. The roulette table had been drawn out into the room and had evidently been pushed halfway into the closet when the door was broken down. The strong arm of the law had arrested its progress to its hiding-place, and there it stood disclosed, looking for all the world like some innocent kind of children's Christmas game.

Jessica bent over it.

"*My* roulette table," she said, with a scornful glance at Sybil. She waved her arm in the direction of the closet. "*My* lovely outfit!"

She broke off and gave a low, delirious laugh.

Sybil, evidently feeling the twinges of conscience less when she was doing the talking herself, turned with hectic vivacity on the glowering chief.

"But you must, you *must* fine us. My dear man, money is the only sensible thing to deal in in an emergency like this. Now, wouldn't five thousand dollars be adequate? Speaking of example, don't you think that five thousand dollars directed by you into the proper channels for doing good would be more effective than the slight newspaper notoriety this—er—raid of ours might get?"

The man squared his shoulders and shook a big fist furiously in Sybil's face.

"See here, madam," he bellowed, "if you want to get me hot, just repeat that damned bribe of yours *once* more."

"Bribe?" Sybil was incredulous. "Bribe?"

"Yes, bribe!" he shouted. "That's what I said, and that's exactly what I meant."

Jessica broke in at this point with weary exasperation.

"Please stop arguing; it can't do any good. We'll simply have to accept the inevitable. We are in this man's hands. He's been sent by his superior to hunt for a gambling outfit. Well, he's found what he was after, and that's all there is to it." Her voice was harsh, fagged, but there was a note of command in her tone that even Sybil couldn't resist.

"All right, then," Sybil shrugged. "Have you a police patrol or something equally cozy waiting for us in the street?" She grimaced archly at the obdurate chief.

Then it was that Jessica, with a hoarse cry of protest, an involuntary outburst of deep bitterness at the hideous injustice, of her lot, shrank against the wall and hid her face in her hands. She had perceived, framed in the open doorway, the figure of John Wellington.

"What is the row?" John's voice was heard. He stood on the threshold and blinked at the brilliantly lighted scene as if he had just emerged from a dark room. "Such a fearful racket you've been making. Sybil—Jessica—" He became silent and looked in amazement from the one to the other.

All at once, he uttered a bewildered exclamation and sprang into the room.

"Parker!" He addressed the head of the raiders with a peremptory sharpness. "What's the matter here?"

Parker beamed proudly upon him.

"Just the neatest kind of a job for your inspection, sir. Tomlinson's orders, sir. But we didn't expect *you*, Mr. Wellington."

Jessica's resistance, her self-control, had broken down now. She turned her face to the wall and burst into agonized, racking sobs.

Parker's voice went jubilantly on.

"Tomlinson said you'd be cer-

tainly glad to hear of this job's being put through successfully, sir. A nice haul!" He bent over Wellington with elaborate confidence and hissed out: "Roulette, sir, and everything—all fitted into that closet there, like a glove, as you might say."

Throughout this harangue, Sybil had been uttering exclamations of unbelief, of protest, of ill concealed joy. Now she burst out loudly:

"John, my dear boy, how astounding! So *this* is the wonderful career you hinted at so often! Ah, I knew it was something noble and self-sacrificing. Haven't I always showed it in my attitude, even though I was completely in the dark? My poor, poor boy, this is most inopportune! Because, don't you see, instead of reaping glory and all that sort of thing from to-night's work, you'll have to sacrifice yourself again and get Miss Parsons and myself out of this miserable mess we've blundered into. I am sorry, terribly sorry. But you really will have to do this. Raiding one's own sister simply isn't *done*, John."

With a gasp, Jessica took a swift step forward. Her arms had dropped to her sides. She had determined at that moment to face John and tell him the whole wretched tale of her stupidity and ignorance. Surely he would see the truth; surely he of all men would trust her and believe in her words, preposterous as they might sound to all the world besides. So she hastened forward, her eyes

feverishly bright through her tears, her breast heaving unevenly.

"John!" she cried—and ceased.

He had given her one quick glance that had struck her like a crushing blow. His whole face seemed suddenly to have changed from flesh to rock; every muscle was set to an implacable hardness. And his eyes, as they flashed their light over her, seemed to give out a cold, searching flame that froze Jessica's blood on the instant. For a moment she remained standing, though she had already lost consciousness. Then her body, robbed of warmth and spirit and life, tottered crazily and, before anyone could give assistance, had crashed to the floor.

Wellington, with his warm love turned to hatred by this spectacle of Jessica's deceit and cowardly connivance with his sister, was yet incapable of dismissing all pity at the plight of the miserable girl. Sybil too was stricken to the heart now, and, dropping to her knees, she lifted Jessica's head from the floor and pillowed it in her arms. Wellington was at her side in an instant. Dipping his fingers into a glass of water that somebody had presented to him, he moistened the forehead of the girl he had so loved and trusted. Bitterly he remembered the sharp, tingling thrill through his whole body that the slightest contact with her flesh had brought him in the past. And now—he pitied her as he would have pitied a woman of the streets who had come to grief.

But love, passion? That had died on the instant she had shrunk away from him and buried her guilty head in her hands.

Sybil, at his side, murmured:

"I am afraid, John, this is more than an ordinary faint. The shock, you know—" She paused. Then: "You will let me take her to my house? I'm afraid she will need a great deal of care. Poor girl!"

Sybil looked straight at Wellington. For a moment her heart throbbed with a quickened beat; her lips trembled and upon them were the first words of a complete confession. Then, with a shiver, she thought of her husband.

"John," she said, "you'll really have to drop this affair. No one must know. George—" The very mention of her husband's name made it impossible for her to go on.

Wellington got up wearily from the floor. With despair at his heart, with his love and his mission in life seared away by this night's events, he faced his subordinates and said:

"I will have to ask you to leave us. I am sorry you should have had all this trouble for nothing. Tell Tomlinson I will see him in the morning and explain everything."

A look of dismay, of utter unbelief, then of disillusion and disappointment crossed simultaneously the faces of the four men. It was evident that their dogged devotion to this man was on the instant shaken to its foundation. Wellington saw this and sighed wearily.

"I will explain to Tomlinson," he repeated. "Good night—and thanks."

The men turned around silently and filed out of the room, two and two, with as lugubrious solemnity as if they had been carrying out a coffin.

Wellington was quite calm now. He turned to one of Sybil's awe-struck guests.

"Will you have Mrs. Dalton's motor brought around at once?" he asked.

The man hurried away. Then Wellington stooped and caught up Jessica in his arms. To him this moment was that of supreme defeat and despair. The girl whose heart had smote against his side giddily as they had clung together just a little while ago, whose body pressed to his had seemed by some miraculous fusion to become his body, whose lips had sent a fire through his whole being—this girl was now as dead to him as if in fact her spirit had left her. Her head was on his shoulder, her lips but a few inches from his, her body swaying against his. And all he felt for her was a scornful pity! Not by a single quiver did his nerves betray that this was the woman who had so often played upon them irresistibly by her very touch.

So, with his arms about her, Wellington strode down the stairs, out into the corridor, and through the door to the street. Sybil's motor was waiting, the footman holding

open the door and trying not to appear curious. Wellington stood at one side till his sister had got in; then he put Jessica down gently beside her, helped to arrange the head of the unconscious girl in the other woman's lap, and afterwards, stepping out quietly, he raised his hat and walked away.

Suddenly he stopped short. And in the darkness of the street he uttered an inarticulate cry. He had seen her for the last time! His past was a closed book. What would his future be?

## VII

WELLINGTON had left New York the next evening. He had had a long talk with Tomlinson, his assistant in the gambling investigations that had been destined—or so he had foolishly thought—to be his great life work. To-day he had been quite frank with Tomlinson, telling him that he had found himself incapable of bringing justice down on the heads of his own flesh and blood. That raid, conducted on the side by the enthusiastic Tomlinson with a view to surprising and delighting his chief, had been of importance in one respect: it had proved to Wellington that he wasn't fit for his big mission. So, despite the violent protests of Tomlinson, Wellington had resigned his responsible office and had insisted on raising the bewildered assistant to the position of chief.

"You're a better man for it than

I am, Tom," Wellington had said as he shook hands at parting. "Go ahead and make a big thing of it. My very best wishes will go with you."

Eight o'clock that night found him in a fast train on the way to Canada. Wellington owned a camp in the New Brunswick woods; it was there he meant to bury himself till he should have regained his hold upon himself and life. The cozy dwelling built deep in a hollow in the midst of the whispering forest had been for him a refuge many times when he had been at grip with some problem. He had come to look upon it as his home, his haven of peace, the place fitted pre-eminently for his big sorrows, his momentous decisions and his supreme joys. He longed to shut himself up there now, away from everything but himself. He recalled bitterly, as the train sped along, how on the day of his happy excursion with Jessica, that day when she had puzzled him by murmuring, "I feel *ashamed* of myself," he had told her of his camp in Canada and, while he held her in his arms, had whispered: "We'll go there—on our wedding-day. We'll spend our first month together there." And she had assented dreamily, while his lips, seeking hers, had imposed upon them both the silence of supreme moments.

For three weeks Wellington remained at his camp. They were weeks of anguish for him. Often he would get up in the morning re-



solved to go away before night; his refuge this time had proved but a torture and he grew to loathe it more and more. But a lethargy had stolen over him, and he hadn't the energy to escape. The man and the woman who lived in his camp all the year and who acted as his servants during his visits, saw the change in him and bothered him fearfully by their tentative curiosity and their officious plans for his greater comfort. Several times he lost his temper and scared them out of his presence. He had come here to reach a decision, he kept telling himself; instead, he simply moped about and found himself incapable of sustained, connected thought. This was no way to regain possession of his old sanity, he knew; but he didn't care now.

It was the vision of Jessica as a bride in these silent rooms that maddened him. The fading out, on that tragic night of the raid, of her physical attraction for him had proved but a temporary dulling of his sensations. Here, where he had planned to install her as his wife, he felt once more and with increased fervor the delicate spell of her sweetness. She was before his eyes every moment of the day. He saw her, with a terrible sense of the mockery of it, as he had visualized her in his happy dreams.

When he sat at the table in the dining room, she was there, facing him and smiling at him. As he tramped doggedly through the snows, she strode at his side; at times, he

could scarcely repress a start to see that the track of his feet in the white landscape was not accompanied by the impression of smaller feet. But it was at night that he could least bear the solitude. He would lie wakeful and despairing in his bed and wince at the thought that this room had been destined to be their bridal chamber. He would sneer weakly, scornfully, at the dizzying visions sweeping through him. After all, he would reflect, what under the sun did she mean to him but a prospect of bodily satisfaction? How would his life with her have been different from the career of a man and his mistress? Why not chuck all this damned regret, go back to New York, find *any* woman, and bring her back here to this room? Wouldn't that expel Jessica's haunting presence effectually? But through the turbulent singing of his blood he would of a sudden hear her soft voice, see her lovely dusky eyes fixed in a dumb protest upon him. Then, overwhelmed by a swift unreasoning remorse, he would fling off the bedclothes and, muttering: "I didn't mean it, good God, I didn't mean it. Whatever she is, she isn't *that*. Whatever she is, she's clean," he would stride up and down the length of the icy room, oblivious to the cold, oblivious to everything but his humble plea: "Forgive me, Jessica. Forgive me!"

How long Wellington would have remained in this state of bitter, useless stagnation it is impossible to conjecture. At the end of the three

weeks a telegram reached him, and on the instant it was as if a chill, bracing wind had blown upon him and scattered the clouds of his unrest and indecision. The message read:

"Come back to New York at once. Have good news for you. Something to explain away what happened two weeks ago Thursday

GEORGE.

George! George Dalton! "How the hell," Wellington mused, "has he found out about it?"

One thing: Sybil had certainly not given her husband any information. Moreover, George was such an indulgent, easy-going chap that it would never have occurred to him to suspect anything, to begin any sort of investigation. Could it be that Jessica herself had in some way cleared the mystery up?

At any rate, Wellington jumped upon the first train and was in George Dalton's library just forty-eight hours after the wire had reached him. Those two days had been nerve-racking. His spirits had soared on bright pinions one moment, and the next had dropped like lead.

"It cannot be that Jessica is vindicated," he kept telling himself. "It simply means that George has found out somehow about Sybil, and that now he's calling me back to tell me her latest lie, thinking it was because of *her* I cleared out." Despite this deliberate check upon his hopes, he was unable to steel himself against great sweeping

waves of exultation that took him off the earth in a flash and left him swinging giddily in space. Suppose there had been some horrible mistake? Suppose Jessica had been innocent? At that, he would shake his head savagely and tell himself he was a damned fool to think of such a thing.

George had got right down to business the moment the welcoming handshake was over.

"You probably think I've brought you here on a wild goose chase, John," he began with a smile. "But you'll find out you're wrong." He clapped him on the shoulder and pushed him into a chair.

Wellington, helping himself to a cigar while George mixed a stiff high ball, dropped with an attempt at the casual note:

"It's something about Sybil?"

George straightened.

"Yes, something about Sybil. Poor, silly, adorable, unscrupulous little liar! Yes, she's in my story—up to her ears."

Wellington's heart sank.

"Oh!" he said, trying to make the exclamation sound like interest. He set his jaws hard and told himself silently that he *had* been a **d**amned fool.

George had been quick to note the shadow that had descended of a sudden on Wellington's face. As he handed the younger man his drink, he bent over him and remarked:

"It wasn't on account of my poor

rattlebrained wife that I summoned you, John. It was because of somebody else. You must think I'm a rotten sort of dried-up fish, if you think I've never noticed about you and Miss Parsons—"

Wellington sprang up and faced Dalton.

"Jessica!" he cried out. "What about her? Tell me, George. Oh, for God's sake don't stand there gaping! Tell me, damn it!"

Dalton couldn't suppress a slight smile. "I mean to tell you, my boy, if you'll give me two minutes of your time," he remonstrated indulgently. "Just sit down again and keep quiet and I'll begin."

"I have a double purpose in all this," Dalton remarked after Wellington had sunk resignedly into his chair. "First of all, I want to give you back your Miss Parsons. Secondly, I feel it my duty to give my wife the fright of her life—she deserves it, John; she deserves it—and, when I've done that, to save her from jail by consenting to let her have a gambling-joint right here in my house. I suppose that's a pretty weak surrender on my part, but the truth of it is, Sybil's got the gambling fever, and she'd sell her shirt—and mine—in order to satisfy her craving." He smiled rather grimly, then went on: "I don't blame the little devil; she's been trained from the cradle to believe that *anything* she does is quite all right and perfectly innocent. Take this fearful mix-up of Miss Parsons; Sybil was

damned sorry and penitent, but she couldn't get over the idea that a neat sum of money would fix the poor-girl up. And she couldn't believe her eyes when Miss Parsons, the minute she was strong enough to move, got up and bolted out of the house without a sound—"

John sat up suddenly.

"When was that?" he asked.

"The very day after your little raid," supplied Dalton.

"Where did you hear of that raid?" John asked sharply. "Not—not from Sybil?"

The other man couldn't restrain a chuckle at this. "Good God, no!" he cried.

Wellington's impatience got the better of him now.

"Honestly, George," he said, "I don't want to hear the whole story, if you don't mind. I want to know that Jessica's innocent, and then I want you to tell me where she is."

"She *is* innocent, and I know where she is," returned Dalton.

Wellington sprang up again, but his companion laid a restraining hand on his shoulder.

"I'm doing you a service, old man," he said. "And you've got to show your gratitude by listening to me and helping me. If you can't bear to sit down quietly, just walk up and down; the room's big enough."

Wellington, too excited to return the other's humorous smile, obeyed

his suggestion and began to thresh up and down the room while Dalton talked.

"Of course I saw something was wrong—*awfully* wrong—the moment Miss Parsons bolted out of the house. Sybil was as nervous as a bag of fleas, but tried to pretend she was perfectly calm and unconcerned. I knew, of course, that the Thursday night parties at the restaurant had an air of mystery about them. Sybil had been damned careful to pick Thursday, knowing that was the day I always spent in my Philadelphia office. About a month ago I had a rotten cold—you remember?—and had to give up my Thursday jaunt. My wife was very apologetic about leaving me—but she didn't require much persuasion. *And*—she took Knut with her. I've noticed for years that whenever Sybil carts that particular footman along, she's up to mischief. Of course *you* know Knut—"

Wellington nodded. The man was an old family servant; he had been Sybil's abject slave from the time when she was a petulant child of three.

"Indeed I *do* know the old rascal," John interpolated. "If Sybil wanted him to, he'd blow up the whole of New York."

"I'd always had the idea, when that pair stole away together, that gambling was in the wind," Dalton continued. "Your father used to tell us. I remember, about Knut's early career at Canfield's and how he

smuggled a gay crowd, including your Dad, out the window one night. I can imagine the tip he got from your Dad! No wonder he was glad to enter the Wellington house when he decided to be straight and narrow in his ways! I recall so well—"

Wellington swung around.

"Now, for God's sake, George," he snapped, "don't begin to tell me stale anecdotes about Dad's career. What about Sybil—and Jessica?"

Dalton was unruffled.

"Well, the day after the raid—I knew nothing of it then—I strolled around to Miss Parsons' place. Picture my astonishment when I read a big 'Closed Till Further Notice' pasted on the door. The entrance was locked, so I sauntered around to the back door. Just in time, too! That old dog of a Knut was standing up in a van superintending the loading of a lot of carefully wrapped up bundles. I didn't make my presence known, just walked out into the street, hailed a taxi, and waited for the van. I followed the thing, old Knut sitting up, looking important, beside the driver. They stopped at a queer rickety storehouse. Then I stepped out of my lair, greeted the reverend knave, and, when the load had been packed away in a room and the van had disappeared, I told him he was to unpack those things at once and before me. I guess I was a brute to the poor old fool that day, because he broke down finally and told me the whole story." George paused, then shook his head, and said:

"I ought to have given Sybil her way at the start, and let her put up her gambling things right in the house. But at the time I forbade it, I had *no* idea she'd go to these extremes. See here, John: I suppose I'd better tell you that my money—*anonymously*—has been behind your fight against gambling. You had no idea I suspected what you were up to, did you? Well, it was because I was so crazy over your scheme that I refused pointblank to have any gambling at my house."

Wellington stopped short, aghast. Then, with a stammered, incoherent flood of thanks, he grasped the other man's hand.

"That's wonderful, George, wonderful! And I never suspected—"

Dalton veered the conversation neatly.

"I've got old Knut so pie-eyed with fright at my inhuman cruelty that he has confessed to me everything my wife has entrusted him with in the past fortnight. If he keeps anything back, out he goes, say I; if he tells Sybil one word of my interference I'll hear of it soon and—*out he goes!* To be torn away from his adored Sybil would be death to Knut. So he's like wax in my hands." Dalton drew a long breath and smiled delightedly at the fixed, impatient glare of his brother-in-law. "Not much about Miss Parsons yet, is there?" he asked. "But—just be patient. We can talk about her in the motor—on our way to give Sybil her scare. For two

weeks after the raid, Sybil swore up and down to Knut that she's never, *never* gamble again. Then all of a sudden she changed her mind, had the gambling apparatus brought out of the storehouse and sent to a new place—the proprietor of this one has been in gambling scrapes before, and Sybil held her in reserve, thinking a person like Jessica was safer, so far as the authorities went." Dalton blew out his breath loudly. "My God, what a tangled web that little piece of Dresden china can weave!" he moaned. Then:

"Sybil's dining at this place to-night—for the first time. Get your things on now, John. I'll join you in the hall. You and I are going there, too. Only instead of marching through the front door, we're going to *break* our way in."

With that enigmatic statement, he broke off abruptly and strode out of the room with a mumbled:

"Got to get my things, too. Meet you in hall—five minutes."

## VIII

FIFTEEN minutes later, Wellington and Dalton were perched on a narrow back fire-escape on the top floor of a six-story house. Wellington had heard, on the way in the motor, the tidings of Jessica for which his heart had yearned ever since he had been summoned by Dalton's telegram. His heart was beating tumultuously from sheer rhapsodic joy. His present mission was

for him too unimportant to keep his mind from wandering blissfully in the regions of rosy romance. As he stood there with his back against the flimsy railing of the fire-escape, he was in fancy closing upon himself and his wife the door of their bridal chamber in the Canadian wilds.

Suddenly Dalton clutched his arm.

"No sentimental maundering just yet, my boy," he growled. "Wait till this little farce has been played out."

Wellington shook himself and managed to dissipate the warm dreams that had been in his heart. He brought himself back to the present and looked about him. It was obvious that Sybil, this time, had decided that a lofty perch was safest. The window on the fire-escape was heavily draped; one could see the shadow of the thick hangings upon the drawn-down blind of the window. A faint buzz of voices, accompanied by a soft blurred laughter floated out to the two men. In the midst of the confused murmur, Sybil's voice, light and gay, could be made out.

Dalton shrugged wearily.

"The little devil's incorrigible—no doubt of that!" he grumbled.

Then, without warning, he swiftly raised his walking-stick and brought the heavy knob of it down with all his might on the windowpane. There came a metallic, tinkling jangle of broken glass; Dalton's hand darted through the jagged hole he had

smashed, and, turning the lock, he threw the window wide open. In his haste, he had given himself an ugly cut; but, not even aware of his wound, he had straddled the sill and leaped into the room before his wife and her guests had recovered from their first accession of astonishment and fright.

Wellington followed Dalton quickly into the room. To him, what ensued was all a confusion of wreckage and furious denunciation and outlandish din. Dalton, like a gored bull, had rushed upon Sybil and flung at her **one** frenzied epithet of insult after **another**. For one moment, she had striven to appear audacious and amused at his tirade; but he had interrupted her in the midst of a bright laugh by seizing her roughly and throwing her down upon a chair with such violence that she was left gasping.

"What do you and your ——d friends think I am?" George roared. "A poor fool that's not worth bothering about, eh? Somebody to pay your filthy bills, somebody to hoodwink, somebody to laugh at! And this is the way you spend your time! Do you suppose I intend to put up with it? You find it very easy to sneak away from your own house whenever you please for a little gambling. I've come to my senses now, Sybil. I have found you out in one little lie. I don't propose to wait around to be fooled in some **other** worse way, too. I'm through. **You're** a liar and a sneak. You'd better get out of my house at once and get

your divorce, and then marry one of your fine friends—if any of them will have you. You've tried to deceive me once too often, my dear. Now you've got to face the music."

Sybil had been sitting quite still in her chair. Now, however, she got up and faced her husband. Her face was deathly pale, but her eyes shone with a courageous defiance.

"I suppose it's true; I *have* pulled the wool over your eyes, George," she said, her voice hard and steady. "But, remember, I warned you first. I told you how I loved this sort of thing, how the gambling fever had been in my veins for years. I asked you to humor me; you refused, and I didn't make a very profound secret of what I was doing. But you're right; I admit I've fooled you for three years." She paused, and drew in her breath sharply. "But you have no right to accuse me of hoodwinking you in that other way. If you believe me capable of *that*—if you have the slightest suspicion of it—I'll be glad to leave you at once. We could never live together again with a thing like that between us. It seems to me you're cruel and unjust to think it; but perhaps I'm wrong; perhaps I've driven you too far, and it's only natural you should believe anything of me. If that's the case—very well! I won't go back to your house." She held her head high, but in the depths of her great black eyes there was a frightened pain, a desperate timidity before the new future of loneliness and helplessness.

Dalton had not waited for her to finish. He had elbowed aside the cowering figure of Knut beside the roulette table and had proceeded to smash things right and left. Sybil's last defiant words were lost amid the sound of splintering wood, snapping wires, and bellowing curses.

She turned now to Wellington.

"John, can't you *do* something?" she asked. "This is disgraceful."

Dalton turned on her a purple countenance. "*This* raid," he announced, "is official. There are men outside—waiting. There's to be no begging off to-night."

Sybil caught her breath. Then suddenly she sank down into a chair and, covering her face with her hands, burst into incoherent protests and a torrent of weeping. For a time, there was complete silence in the room except for her sobs and murmured excuses, which were so muffled by her tiny handkerchief as to be incomprehensible.

All at once, she ceased abruptly. Only the tremulous pouting of her upper lip betrayed her emotion. She shot a furtive, petulant glance at her husband.

"Well—" she remarked— "I'm glad of it. I'm glad the men are here. I'd much rather spend the night in jail than at your house, George. At least in jail they won't suspect me of more than one thing at a time. Besides, they won't behave like bears and smash the furniture in my cell." Miserable, unhap-

py, she yet was having difficulty in suppressing her sense of humor. On her deathbed, Sybil would relish her perverse witticisms. So now she turned sweetly to Knut and announced: "Knut, have the police patrol at the door in five minutes." Then she burst into a fit of delirious mirth and, making a wry face at her husband, turned her back on him. At that moment, however, the desolate sweep of her future suddenly unrolled itself before her eyes. She saw herself alone, deserted by this man she had always loved in her mocking, ironic way, this man she had never respected but had adored after her own whimsical, dishonest fashion.

She faced about abruptly, made her way impulsively up to Dalton and said:

"*I am a liar.* I lied when I said I didn't want to go back to your house under suspicion. Even if you suspect me of being disreputable and immoral—a perfect jade—won't you please take me back until you've proved it? Ah, George, *won't* you? If I promise never to gamble again, except maybe bridge in somebody's house? If I go down on my dishonorable knees and swear—for the hundredth time—on my honor and my hope of salvation?" She was speaking in a soft, ingratiating way. A half smile played over her lips.

But Dalton, looking into her deep eyes, saw fear in them and despair and loneliness. For the first time in her life, Sybil was face to face with tragedy, the tragedy of her own

weaving. She knew it; she knew that if her husband turned away from her now, she was lost. She had learned a lesson to-night, and an important one. In future, indeed in a day's time, she would be the same incorrigible creature, for the most part, that she had always been. She would continue to tell her pretty fibs, to hoodwink Dalton delicately; but henceforth her ways would never precipitate a real crisis and her deceit would be of a sort that could do no one real harm. And, in fooling Dalton, she would be careful first to drop a decided hint for his benefit. So, though she would still have the satisfaction of believing herself the mischievous trickster, the whole thing would really be a game of blind-man's buff in which Dalton was given the privilege to peek. Sybil was done with reaping the whirlwind. To-night had been immensely valuable to her in showing her the danger for herself of going too far. The vista of her own ruin had been sufficiently horrible to impress indelibly even the charming, piquant, and frivolous Sybil.

So, with a heart that shuddered and quaked rather than beat, she waited for a long moment for her husband to speak. He watched her narrowly, saw the blind terror in her eyes grow, noticed the convulsive trembling of her whole frame. Then, gruffly, he announced:

"Very well, you may come home with me. But, remember, it's to be on *strict* probation."



Sybil gasped, and for a moment found nothing to say.

"Hadn't John better call his men away?" she asked at length. Then, catching a quick interchange between her brother and husband, she exclaimed: "As if I had believed for a *minute* that this was a genuine raid!" She chuckled gayly. It was the first harmless lie of the new life she was to lead.

Dalton said nothing, but beckoning her sternly to his side and, nodding to Knut to unlock the door, he stalked out of the room. Sybil flashed a radiant smile of farewell upon the assembled company and disappeared flutteringly. At that moment, Dalton underneath his savage scowl was reflecting, "Little devil! In a month the big room on the top floor of my house will be boasting a whole gambling outfit."

## IX

THAT night, the beginning of a new life with Sybil and George Dalton, was also the commencement of a deeper and truer love for Jessica and Wellington. Dalton had told his brother-in-law of Jessica's existence during those tragic three weeks. At first, all of Dalton's efforts to locate her had been unavailing. At her small apartment, the janitress downstairs had proclaimed volubly that Miss Parsons had gone away, where she did not know. From that time on, there had been a mad search for clues. For a fort-

night, Dalton would report every morning to the janitress and learn nothing; Jessica's movements from the moment she had left the Dalton house were shrouded in impenetrable mystery. Then, without warning one morning the janitress had buttonholed Dalton, taken him into her own little sitting room, and confessed. She had got to the point of believing that this good-humored gentleman had the girl's interest at heart. So she told him that Miss Parsons had never left her rooms since the day, over two weeks before, when she had returned home ill and broken. She had remained in her bed and the janitress had served her. She had at last come to the conclusion that something must be done.

"So I'm blabbing it all to you," she told Dalton. "My God, the poor dear'll give me the devil if she finds out," she had wound up.

"Don't let her find out," Dalton had said. He had gone directly to a telegraph office and wired Wellington.

In the motor with Dalton on the way to Sybil's second raid, Wellington had protested:

"But how can she be innocent? How could she be ignorant of that devilish gambling outfit?"

Dalton had laid a hand on his shoulder.

"That business was all installed—secret panel and everything—that day you and Miss Parsons went

junketing all over the country. That was why Sybil sent you off. And—don't you see—every Thursday night Sybil locked herself into that supper room. Of course they made such a racket no one could hear the little buzz of a roulette wheel."

So it was that Wellington, making his way up the stairs of Jessica's house, stationed himself outside her door and cried out to her his pleas, his love, his threats to commit suicide unless she opened the door to him. At first not a sound had answered his voice; but, knowing she was there, he had kept up his clamor. In the end, she had been forced to open to him. Five minutes later, after he had explained everything to her brokenly, incoherently, passionately, she had crept into his arms and remained there while he kissed her hair, her

somber eyes, her quivering lips. She had been called from her bed by his summons; as he held her to him, he was intensely aware that beneath her heavy morning-wrap she wore only a flimsy, lacy nightdress. So he had released her, not daring to hold her longer, and they had separated with a final kiss.

Two weeks later, however, Wellington, opening the door of their bedroom in the Canadian wilds, murmured softly, "This is *our* room," and, sweeping her to him, no longer felt afraid to trust himself with her. And, as their lips met, Jessica could smile with a faint bliss, without any thought in her mind that remotely resembled shame. She knew now that the surging music in her pulses could be listened to with exultation, with a joy unmingled with pain or fear.

## In or Out?

By Leslie Nelson Jennings

SHE would have wept had we been caught  
Playing our silly game, or fought.

I kissed her in a casual way—  
Of course, I hadn't meant to stay.

But she—she smiled and turned the key—  
And oh, the difference to me!

# Their Bridal Night

By Walter De Leon

IT WAS ALL A PRACTICAL JOKE, but this bride and groom saw nothing funny in what happened after they missed their train. But can you help laughing at the unromantic mix-up that resulted?

*10:00 P. M.*

**T**HE wedding celebration was proceeding in an entirely gratifying manner. The bride, dimpling, demure, divinely confident with the sweet assurance of nineteen, presented a picture that had driven the unmarried guests to envy, the married ones to the punchbowl, and her mother to tears.

The groom throughout the evening had been in the places he was expected to be at the moments he was supposed to occupy them. He had remembered to put the ring where it could be located at the crucial moment. Altogether a model groom.

For the fortieth time that evening, the groom satisfied himself that a certain envelope still reposed in the inside pocket of his coat, an envelope containing a Pullman car drawing-room reservation and two

railroad tickets to Niagara Falls. For the fortieth time, he surreptitiously consulted his watch. It seemed to Donny that the evening was dragging interminably.

His roadster was hidden in a clump of trees at one side of the road a short distance from the bride's family's farmhouse. It was a five-mile drive to the station, from which a train would bear them into New York a scant half hour before the Buffalo Express was due to depart at eleven thirty. Cautiously, slowly, Donny removed two suitcases from behind the woodpile on the back porch where his bride had secreted them. Tiptoeing through the darkness in the yard, he put the suitcases with his hat and overcoat in his car. His heart thrilled in anticipation of the surprise presently awaiting the guests whose laughter and shouts were wafted toward him, when they should dis-

cover that the bride had elusively disappeared into the night.

Again Donny glanced at his watch. The hands had not moved since last he had looked at them. A wave of giddiness swept over him as he remembered he had not wound the watch that blithesome nuptial morn.

The young man ran unsteadily back to the house, through the kitchen to the door of the dining room. He caught his bride's eye and discreetly beckoned. Three minutes later they were silently running arm in arm down the lane.

Donny stepped on the starter of the roadster. Only the grinding of cogs followed. Hurried manipulation of gas and spark levers proved unavailing.

"Something must be wrong, I guess, dear." Donny tried to speak casually.

Flashlight in hand, he peered under the hood of the car. The four spark plugs had been removed and laid neatly atop the cylinder block.

"Well, well!" Donny forced a thin laugh. "That certainly is a joke on us, isn't it, dear?"

"Yes, isn't it, dear?" echoed his bride.

Donny climbed back into his seat, wiping grimy hands on a perfectly new white handkerchief. The engine coughed, sputtered, and settled down to a steady, confidence-inspiring pur. Donny slipped in the clutch. A succession of jarring bumps ensued.

"Feels like a flat tire, doesn't it, dear?" It was—two of them.

"There's such a thing as carrying a joke too far," quoth the perspiring groom before pumping up the second tire.

"Much too far," agreed his bride.

When they were finally speeding toward the station, Donny reached over and, patting his wife's hand, said brightly:

"You—you know we're going to miss our train, don't you, dear?"

"Not the Niagara Falls train?" Gazelda quavered.

"I'm afraid so. There's a later train we can take, though. We may not be able, at this hour, to secure a drawing-room on it, but—"

"Oh, Donny dear," cooed the bride, "now that we've really started, I just know everything is going to be perfectly lovely."

12:00 C.M.

DONNY approached the Pullman ticket window at the Grand Central Terminal with his best effort at a winning smile.

"I missed the eleven thirty," he told the clerk.

"Half an hour ago," that individual replied.

"Yes. When does the next Buffalo train leave?"

"Twelve twenty-five," the clerk informed him.

"Good!" cried Donny, delighted.

"Only twenty-five minutes to wait. Give me a drawing-room, please."

"Sorry, but I haven't a drawing-room on her."

"Have you a compartment?"

"No compartments."

"Well, then, a lower." Donny was determined to be cheerful.

"All sold out," the clerk returned. "I haven't a thing left on the train." He glanced at his charts. "Wait a second. Here's one just turned back." The groom's spirits soared ceilingward. "Car 102, upper 6. Right in the middle of the car."

"Wh-wh-when does the next train after this one leave?" Donny asked, drawing his hand across his moist forehead and leaving a narrow trail of grease thereon.

"Eight thirty in the morning," the clerk said.

Donny walked slowly over to his bride.

"Listen, sweetheart, there is only one thing for us to do. We'd better go to a hotel to-night. The only thing I can get is an upper berth, and they are so unhandy to get in and out of."

"Donny, dear, your face is dirty," Gazelda murmured.

"Thanks." Donny endeavored to erase the narrow trail with the heel of his palm and succeeded in drawing a parallel black line. "It will be nicer, I think, to take the morning train and make the trip by daylight."

"Whatever you think best, dear," Gazelda smiled, her eyes soft in blissful surrender.

Bags in hand, they sallied forth and entered the first large hotel that met their youthful gaze. They were shocked to learn that the accommodating clerk was unable to accommodate them. "The Auto Show," he explained. "The city is overrun with visitors. Try the Commodore."

The Commodore was equally as sorry and equally as congested. Furthermore, all that the clerks in four other near-by hotels could offer Mr. and Mrs. Brantine were their condolences. Donny's burden was beginning to bear heavily upon him. He swore inaudibly as he stooped to wind his handkerchief around the handle of the bulkiest suitcase.

"You poor dear!" Gazelda sympathized prettily. "You must be worn out lugging those heavy bags. I wouldn't have put in my electric iron if I'd known. Unless we soon find a room you'll be simply exhausted. Can't you leave them somewhere?"

"Of course," Donny cried. "I'll check them at the station. What a wonderful, thoughtful little wife you are!" He stole a hasty kiss.

"Donny! On the street!" Gazelda scolded alluringly.

"I can't seem to get any place else to kiss you," the groom defended.

Removing the weight from his arms apparently reacted on Don-

ny's spirits, lifting them out of the depression into which they had sunk during the previous half hour.

"Perhaps," he squeezed Gazelda's soft, rounded forearm—"perhaps we would have a better chance at a smaller, not so well known hotel like—like that one across the corner."

"It's a bit dingy, isn't it, dear?"

"That's only the outside. Probably the interior is quite comfortable. At least we can find out."

Behind the desk, an elderly clerk of varied experience watched the solicitous manner in which Donny opened the door for the girl, watched the wide-eyed appraisal Gazelda made of the small lobby, watched the bell boy scurry toward them for the suitcases that were conspicuous by their absence.

Donny seated his wife and walked to the desk.

"I'd like a room with bath, please."

The clerk removed a cigar from his lips, which but emphasized the tired expression of his countenance.

"Nothing doing, buddy," he drawled.

Something in the man's tone made Donny unaccountably ill at ease.

"Have you a room without bath?" he persisted.

"I can't do a thing for you," the clerk told him. "Try a rooming house." Then, as Donny opened his mouth to speak, he added: "No. I couldn't tell you where to go. Good night."

Young Mr. Brantine scowled at the clerk, swung abruptly on his heel, took his wife on his arm, and stalked out to the sidewalk.

"What was the matter with that man?" Gazelda questioned. "I didn't like the tone of his voice a little bit. And the silly grin he gave me—it was positively insulting."

"Did he grin at you?" Donny's protective instincts surged wildly. "I'll go back and—"

"No, Donny, please," Gazelda begged earnestly. "I—I guess it was just my imagination." Quickly she sought to divert her husband's mind. "Look. Isn't that a hotel on the next block there?"

"Perhaps if we went uptown, further away from the station, we might have better luck," Donny suggested. "I suppose a great many people miss trains every night and go to the nearest hotels. And, beside, almost any place will do us for one night, you know, dear."

"Any place that is respectable," amended his blushing bride.

2:00 A. M.

MR. AND MRS. BRANTINE, their steps sagging and weary, accosted a taxicab driver on Fifty-ninth Street near Broadway.

"We missed our train and can't find hotel accommodations. Can you recommend some place?" Donny rattled the loose change in his pocket.

"You're traveling, you say?" the chauffeur asked.

"Yes."

The driver looked in vain for handbag or suitcase and immediately misinterpreted the clinking of the coins in Donny's pocket.

"Hop in. I know a place."

Within the taxi, Gazelda yielded tenderly to the connubial embraces of her husband as the car sped along the dark streets.

"No matter if the room isn't very elegant," Donny whispered, "it is a lot better than sitting up in a day coach all night."

"I should say so." And Gazelda snuggled closer to her new lord and master.

The taxi turned a corner and slackened speed as it approached a sign, hanging over the sidewalk, reading "Transients." Just before the car came to a stop, a police patrol wagon, with clanging gong, dashed past and pulled up directly in front of the taxi. A dozen men jumped out and ran up the stairs over which hung the illuminated sign.

"What's the matter?" Donny asked his driver.

"A raid—they're pinching the place," answered the chauffeur, shifting gears with alacrity and backing toward the corner.

Donny frowned.

"I don't understand."

"They're raiding the joint there where I was taking you. That's all right. I know another place."

"What!" shouted the outraged groom.

"What's eating you now?" the driver queried.

Donny puffed and purpled with indignation. "What are you *thinking* of—to take us to such a place! You ought to be arrested. What do you take us for, anyway? Let me tell you—"

"Wait a shake," interrupted their guide and counselor. "Let me tell you something. Why don't you let me take you to a pawnshop where you can buy a cheap bag or something? I could do a lot better—"

"Stop!" Donny wondered dizzily how much of it all Gazelda comprehended and resented. "Drive us back to the Grand Central. My bags are checked there."

"You mean you left your bags in the station when you started room hunting?" There was stark unbelief in the driver's inflection.

"Certainly."

The driver stared a moment in silence.

"You ought to go out through the Park some day," he advised. "What a wonderful welcome the squirrels would give you two."

Jolting back toward the Terminal, Donny waited anxiously for Gazelda's first words.

"Donny dear," she at length whispered, "wasn't it lucky we weren't in that hotel when they started to raid it?"

"Lucky!" exclaimed her youthful spouse, with a twofold sigh of relief. "Can you imagine going to sleep on your wedding night and being waked up by a policeman!"

The bride shuddered.

"Oh, Donny! They shouldn't allow such things."

"Such things as what, dear?"

"Raids."

Once again at the station, the pungent odors of the lunchroom assailed the pallid pilgrims as they wended their despondent way toward the main waiting room.

"Suppose before we start out again we rest a few minutes and have some lunch and hot coffee," Donny suggested.

"Coffee?" Gazelda was dubious. "Aren't you afraid it might keep us awake all night, dear?"

"Well," Donny debated, "under ordinary circumstances it might, but I think a little stimulant would really be good for you."

"Whatever you think best, dear," the gentle Gazelda vouchsafed, enticingly acquiescent.

During the course of their refreshment, Donny evolved a new method of procedure. After paying his check, he made his way to the clerk at the Pullman ticket window.

"Isn't there any place in this town where a man can find a bed except in jail or the hospital?" he began jovially.

The Pullman agent laughed. "I

have a friend who couldn't even get into a hospital this week. And he was sick, too."

"He's no sicker than I'm getting," Donny replied.

He glanced compassionately at his bride sitting a few feet away. Even the coffee had failed to bring back the color to her cheeks. Her hands drooped pathetically. He noted the dark circles under her heavy eyes, and her hat, slipped far over on the wrong side.

"Listen, friend," he pleaded. "Can't you give me any tip?"

The clerk looked into the burning eyes before him, at the muscles working convulsively in Donny's face. He scribbled a few words on a piece of paper.

"Try this place," he said. "The night clerk is a personal friend of mine. It's a small family hotel, but he may be able to do something for you."

Donny secured their suitcases from the checkroom, and, giving them to a Red Cap, requested him to lead them to a taxi.

4:00 A. M.

YOUNG MR. BRANTINE presented the Pullman agent's note to the night clerk at the Benedict. That gentleman scratched his head.

"I'm afraid I haven't a thing," he said, "except—" Two fond hearts thumped painfully.

The clerk saw an opportunity to



combine pleasure with business, to favor his friend with profit to himself. The man in Suite 302 had that day left word he would be out of the city for several days.

"I've a suite—Three Hundred and Two—sitting room, bedroom, and bath, with twin beds, on a light-well, a fine room, but rather expensive."

Expense! Donny snorted. What was expense at four o'clock on a night like this!

"How much?" he asked, carelessly.

"Fifteen dollars a day," ventured the clerk.

Donny stripped two bills from the roll in his pocket.

"I'll take it."

A few moments afterward, the bell boy deposited their bags on the table in the sitting room and closed the door behind him. Bride and groom flew into each other's arms and smiled rapturously.

"Isn't this a heavenly room?" Gazelda sighed, her fair head nestling on Donny's proud shoulder. "I just knew everything would be all right."

"I'm the luckiest and happiest man in the world," proclaimed the groom in clarion tones, pressing the girl closer to him.

Through the opened window on the light-well there came a querulous masculine voice.

"Would you mind pulling down

the blind? I'm insomniac enough as it is."

Ten minutes later, Donny, in pure white silk pajamas and brand new dressing gown, switched out the lights in the sitting room and walked to the door of the twin-bed room. The rattle of a key in the hall door behind him abruptly checked his footsteps. Before he could reach it, the door opened and a large, rotund gentleman of genial appearance, exuding the aroma of Forbidden Juice, entered smiling, slightly swaying, his hat pushed far back on his gray-ing head. His eyes focused on Donny and he extended a pudgy hand.

"Hello, frien'," he wheezed. "Glad to meet you. Did Eddie give you a key too?"

Donny calculated the gentleman's weight at sixty pounds more than his own. Diplomacy was by all means to be employed.

"Guess you're in the wrong room, mister." The young man was sternly courteous. "You've been drinking, haven't you?"

"Guilty as charged," replied the big man affably. "That's why I'm going to bed."

"But not in this room," corrected Donny, forcing a smile.

A slight movement of the bedroom door informed him that Gazelda was watching his every move.

"Not in this room? Isn't possible I've made a mistake? This is Room Three. O, Two, ain't it?"

"It is, but—"

"Then, this where I belong. I'm going to bed." The large gentleman started to remove his coat.

"Just a minute!" Donny halted him. "This room—er—the bedroom is occupied."

The other man smiled paternally.

"That's all right. That don't worry me. I'll sleep in here on the couch."

"Oh, no, you won't, old man."

"Oh, yes, I will."

"I say no. My wife and I engaged this room—"

The jovial gentleman interrupted with a majestic motion of his hand.

"Wait. Let me understand you. You say your wife and you engaged this room?"

"Yes."

The heavy gentleman wagged his head solemnly.

"Can't be. My friend Eddie engages this room by the month. Eddie gave me the key this morning because I had important business engagement and expected to miss last train home."

Donny decided to bluff.

"That doesn't make any difference at all. I paid for this room, and I intend using it."

"Who'd you pay?" demanded Eddie's friend.

"The night clerk, of course. Now, please get out." Donny placed his hand on the man's arm and began

easing him gently through the open door.

"Wait a minute." The genial intruder caught the jamb and effectually resisted the attempt to guide his steps further. "This is serious matter. This room was paid for once. Eddie pays by the month. If the clerk took your money he's a grafter."

The harassed groom quickly took advantage of this new opening.

"Why don't you go downstairs and have it out with the clerk?" he asked eagerly.

"Good idea," the big man complimented. "We'll both go. Come on."

"I can't—in these." And Donny pointed to his garb.

The inebriated one gravely studied the situation.

"Listen," he said, "do you like those light silk pajamas? I always wear the good old-fashioned—"

"Never mind what you wear." Donny's slow temper was visibly heating. "This is my room. I paid for it, and I'm going to use it. If you have any complaint, make it to the night clerk." The vicious shove Donny gave caught the big fellow unprepared, and he went staggering out into the hall. In a second the door was slammed shut and the night bolt slid into place.

"I never heard of such a thing!" gasped Gazelda, righteously indignant. "The very idea of a drunken man walking right in here where—"

"He's out now," her husband exulted savagely. "If he goes down and bothers the night clerk, he'll get thrown out by the house detective."

"Detective?" Gazelda queried.

"Yes. All hotels have them."

"Why?"

"Oh, for protection and—and—" Donny broke off with a startled exclamation. "By George?"

"What's the matter?" Gazelda's overwrought nerves became taut.

"I forgot to tell the clerk what time to call us in the morning." A sudden new thought sprang full-formed into his head. "Listen, sweetheart, it's so late now, suppose instead of trying to catch the eight-thirty train, we wait over and—"

A loud knock on the hall door cut the balance of his suggestion short. Donny hopped out of bed and into the other room.

"What do you want?" he demanded angrily.

"Open the door," came the night clerk's strident tones through the transom.

"I will not!" Donny refused vehemently.

"Listen, friend," the alcoholically inclined gentleman intervened. "Clerk and me, we just want to explain."

"There's nothing to explain," shouted Donny.

"It seems I made a mistake," the

clerk apologized. "I'm very sorry. This gentleman is a friend of Mr. Brown, the guest whose room I let you have. Mr. Brown gave this gentleman his key and permission to use the room. You see, he really is entitled to it."

"I gave you fifteen dollars. Doesn't that entitle me to anything?" Donny rasped.

"Sh! Please—not so loud!" the clerk begged.

"I paid fifteen for *this* room. Not some other room, but *this* room. didn't I?" cried Donny, doubling his tone.

"I'll be glad to return it to you. Only, please don't talk so loud."

"I'll not give up this room, and I'll talk as loud as I d—n please," yelled Donny, beside himself.

"Now, don't get funny with me, or I'll have you put out," the clerk snapped.

The shrill feminine shriek that came from the bedroom carried away the last shred of Donny's self-control.

"Put out," he squealed. "Come on and try it. Call a cop! I wish you would. You took my money under false pretenses. You're a cheap crook, and I'll tell the first policeman I see that you *are* a cheap crook."

Across the light-well, an insomniac sufferer tottered to the telephone and in a querulous voice called up the nearest police station and turned in a riot call.

At the same moment, the Benedict house detective pussyfooted around the turn of the hall leading to Suite Three Hundred and Two in search of the disturbance.

"What's the trouble, Bill?" he inquired of the night clerk.

Briefly the clerk detailed his dilemma. The bibulous gent insisted on sleeping in his friend's room. Brown, whose room it was, was a guest of long standing. If his friend were refused admittance because the clerk had rerented the room, the complaint Brown would undoubtedly lodge would result in the engagement of a new night clerk. On the other horn, the hectic gentleman at present behind the bolted door persisted in remaining where he was. If he were physically forced to vacate, there was nothing to prevent him from carrying out his threat to expose the clerk's petty graft. In which case also, said clerk would presently be looking for a new position of trust.

McGurk, the detective, thought it all over, seeking a loophole.

Bang! A thick fist thudded on the panel of the door.

"Open up!" thundered McGurk.

The unexpected blow to his quivering nerves shook Donny from head to heels.

"Open it yourself," he shouted.

"You're going to save yourself a lot of trouble by doing as I say," McGurk's tone was ominous. "I'm the house detective."

"I don't care if you're Sherlock Holmes. I won't unlock the door. The sooner you fellows get that into your thick heads the quicker my wife and I can—"

"Did you say your wife?" McGurk interrupted.

"I did. W-i-f-e, wife."

The detective turned to the night clerk.

"Did he register her plainly, Bill?"

Before the clerk could answer, Donny yelled: "You bet I registered her plainly—'D. W. Brantine *and wife*'!"

"That is, you *say* she's your wife." McGurk fancied he had discovered the loophole. "How long have you been married?"

"To-night! We—er—we just got married."

"Oho!" The exclamation reeked with suspicious sarcasm. "Just married, eh? Now, tell me, are you *sure* you really were married to-night?"

A bundle of white lace and chiffon, trailing ribbons and perfume, streaked out of the bedroom toward the hall door.

"How *dare* you!" Gazelda quavered, her modest delicacy and virtuous pride ravished and affronted beyond all bearing. "*How dare you!*"

"But, lady," protested the detective, lowering his voice, "how do I *know* you're married?"

"My ring—my wedding ring! I

can show you my ring," the bride stated triumphantly.

"Aw, wedding rings is cheap. That don't mean nothing. Show me your marriage license—your wedding certificate."

Simultaneously, Donny looked inquiringly to Gazelda, and Gazelda looked inquiringly to Donny. Both shook their heads negatively.

"I gave it to the minister to sign," whispered Donny. "I thought I saw him return it to you. Didn't he give you a long white envelope?"

"The only envelope he gave me had a 'Happy Thought For Every Hour' calendar in it," the bride moaned.

"Listen, officer." Donny was attempting an ease and sang-froid he was far from possessing. "It seems that I haven't our wedding certificate with us."

"I'd be more surprised if I hadn't expected to hear you say that," McGurk replied.

"You see, immediately after the ceremony, my wife and I left for a trip to Niagara Falls. I neglected to get the certificate from the minister. Now—er—officer, are you a married man?"

"I am."

"Well, do you always carry your wedding license with you when you go out of town for a few days with your wife?"

"I never go out of town for a few days—with my wife." McGurk

pleasantly reflected that he had sufficient grounds to justify an eviction. "Listen, you in there: I'll give you five minutes. If you ain't out of the room by then I'm coming in and drag you out."

Gazelda, on the floor, a wretched heap of trousseau and trouble, sprang to her feet.

"Don't you *dare* break in here until I'm dressed!" She staggered into the bedroom and feverishly searched for her stockings.

"Come and drag me out," defied Donny. "I'll sue this hotel till it begs for mercy. And I'll collect. There isn't a jury in the world—male or female—but wouldn't give me damages when I tell them what you have done to me." Donny started yanking on his trousers.

"Donny, dear"—Gazelda was tossing lingerie and apparel about in unrestrained confusion—"I can't find the skirt to my suit."

"Never mind your skirt. Get dressed," Donny ordered, trying to button his collar to the neck of his pajama coat.

"Look here, Mac," the clerk whispered to his friend, "if they are on the level and we put 'em out, you know where we get off, don't you?"

"You told me to get 'em out of the room, didn't you?" replied McGurk, adroitly passing the buck.

"Sure, but—"

"Listen," the inebriated gentleman begged. "Do I go to bed or do I stand up in the hall all night?"

There came the rapid patter of running feet on the staircase. Five burly uniformed police dashed down the hallway.

"Where's the trouble?" a Sergeant asked.

The sleepy gentleman pointed to the door of Room 302.

"In there, Chief."

The squad listened for a second to the racking sounds of the complete hysteria to which Gazelda had abandoned herself. A panel splintered as two of the officers crashed against the door.

"Come on!" yelled Donny, stuffing an armful of clothes into a suitcase. "Put me out. Put me out."

"Don't worry!" shouted one of New York's very finest and largest. "You're coming out."

"Was it you that turned in the riot call?" the Sergeant asked McGurk.

"Not me. I don't know where it came from."

"Wait!" Donny implored the men breaking through the door. The complexion of the situation had changed. A riot call signified that the wagon was waiting below. Also, it was one thing to be ejected by the hotel employees on suspicion, and entirely a different thing to be taken out by the police on a charge of disorderly conduct.

"Listen," the young man besought, as a possible and more dignified way out flashed across his racing rea-

son. "I'll open the door. I'll unlock it. We'll go quietly—do anything you say. Just give my wife a couple of minutes to finish dressing."

He pushed back the night-bolt. The eight men entered and posted themselves around the room.

Donny had worked quickly to make a small-sized roll of a large-sized bill. When the house detective, McGurk, entered, the young man walked over and stood in front of him with his back toward the detective, the money showing in the hand he held behind him.

"What have you to say for yourself?" the Sergeant demanded of Mr. Brantine.

"Not a thing. I got into an argument with the clerk about the room. The detective came along and mixed up in the fight. I—I've had a hard day and what with one thing and another I became very angry and started a noisy row." Donny felt the bill being slowly removed from his hand. "I suppose someone heard the racket and phoned for you gentlemen." He turned to the clerk. "And right here let me say that now I've cooled off; I see the clerk was absolutely right. Mr. Clerk, you don't owe me a cent." The smile of relief which followed told Donny of another enemy vanquished. "You understand, Sergeant, my wife—we intend catching the morning train to Niagara Falls—she was here and something was said that I thought shouldn't have been said. However,

I leave it to the clerk. Ask him if he wishes to lodge a complaint."

"Not one," heartily affirmed the clerk. "Mr. Brantine is a little excitable and hot-headed, maybe, but as for anything of a serious nature, why, he hasn't done a thing."

"What do *you* say, McGurk?" questioned the Sergeant.

"Me? Anybody can tell by looking at him that he wouldn't harm a mosquito. And his sweet little wife here—you didn't know, Sergeant, that they'd just been married, did you? Just this evening—by a minister. See the lady's ring? Let me congratulate you, missus." McGurk wrapped a huge paw around Gazelda's frozen hand.

Donny extracted another yellow-backed bill from his roll.

"Sergeant, I wish you would take this and see that my wife gets some coffee and—er—something sustaining while your men take me to the station house."

The policeman waved away the bill.

"There'll be no taking anybody to the station house," he asserted. "Every cell and bed there is filled now."

From the couch came the voice of the large plump gentleman.

"I wish to God you guys would get out and let me go to sleep."

At the Sergeant's signal, two policemen seized the traveling bags and followed the bride and groom

to the street. A shining, brightly polished auto patrol was backed up to the curb.

"Step in and we'll drive you to the Grand Central," the Sergeant invited.

Gazelda's limp, wilting form stiffened rigidly for a second and then slumped quietly to the pavement.

"Thanks, Sergeant," Donny declined, struggling to raise the inert figure, "I think a little walk would do us a world of good."

6:00 A.M.

RED CAP Number Twenty-three wondered idly what the two forlorn, desolate, disheveled persons reclining against each other in the far corner of the waiting room might be talking of.

"Only two hours and a half more to wait, dear." Gazelda's mouth quivered piteously and a scalding tear streaked her storm-tossed countenance. "They're just getting up, down on the farm."

"If I only knew why!" Donny muttered. "What did we do to deserve a honeymoon like this?"

The window of the Pullman ticket office was raised.

"Lean against the wall a minute, will you, sweetheart?" Donny asked his bride.

He stood up and walked stiffly away. Gazelda indulged herself in an orgy of weeping.

In a few moments Donny returned,

a colored pasteboard in his grimy hand, a wan smile on his pale features. He slipped a consoling arm about his wife's shoulders.

"Look, darling. I got a drawing room on the eight thirty. Unless

you'd rather look at the scenery, we can sleep all the way to Buffalo."

"Whatever you think best, dear," Gazelda sobbed with conjugal complaisance.



## Would You Believe It!

By Harry J. Williams

HER head was on his shoulder,  
Her breath was on his cheek,  
Which should have made him bolder,  
Though he was far from meek.

He guessed that peaceful slumber  
Had closed her pretty eyes,  
And kisses without number  
Could be his luscious prize.

But, though in tempting fashion,  
Her ruby lips were pursed,  
He viewed them with dispassion—  
In tears she could have burst.

And there he sat, abstracted,  
And gazed into the fire;  
To kiss this maid, distracted,  
Evincing no desire.

Now, don't get wroth and spiely  
About this strange display;  
It could not happen, really—  
It didn't, anyway!



# Mei-Li the Beautiful

*A Story of the Chinese Underworld*

By Jay Gelzer

**"YET IS BEAUTY A TROUBLED POSSESSION"** . . . Mei-Li, with greater beauty than is granted most women, when she looked for love, found a great strife.

**M**OY YENG, who had loved her, found Mei-Li the Beautiful floating face upward in the silver waters of the sunken pool, agitated goldfish flashing away to either side of her in swift red flight, upon her slim throat the violet imprints of ten powerful fingers.

And because, even in death, she was still fair, Moy Yeng, who was both poet and artist, disregarded his grief to pay involuntary tribute to that deathless loveliness.

"Mei-Li . . . always the Beautiful!" he sighed sorrowfully, looking downward to where silver rays of moonlight impacted against that floating face. And then:

"Yet is beauty a troubled possession!"

And indeed, in the tragically brief life of Mei-Li from its beginning in the yamen of a mighty official of China to the moment when that same life flickered out in a gasping struggle in the waters of the sunken pool, the single fact of her amazing beauty stands out starkly, like the scarlet thread coloring a bit of dull old tapestry.

Every crisis in her life was produced and decided by that beauty; the various people influencing her destiny themselves reacted to it, each in his own fashion, with emotions of jealousy, envy, hate, or love.

Mei-Li was the daughter of a powerful Chinese official and his concubine, unwanted, in the beginning, in view of her sex. Later the fact of her promised beauty endowed her with a prestige of her own which reflected upon the mother, a circumstance of which the concubine was not slow to take advantage.

"See, O Lord of My Heart," would purr the slave girl contentedly to the official. "Regard what beauty has my child, which is also thine—like a lotus bud newly unfolded, or a willow tree in spring. . . . *Ahi!* Nowhere in all this land is such a one!"

And: "Does not this child come rightly by her heritage of beauty, O Most Fair?" would argue the official politely. "Is not the beauty of her mother like to the full moon floating in the midnight skies, or to a flowering cherry tree?"

"Such compliments for a lowly one purchased for a handful of Chinese silver?" would protest the slave girl then, leaning back happily against the broad shoulder clad in silken robes of state, the fragrance of peach-blossom reaching him from her shining black hair, carmined lips drooping into a childish pout of pleasure.

And, listening, all the content in the heart of the Great Wife of the official, whose beauty was *not* like to a full moon floating in midnight skies, curdled into the acid of jealousy.

"Truly the clucking of the slave

woman over the beauty of this little female dog does offend my ears!" she said to herself more than once.

Wherefore, at her command, the child was stolen at dawn from the side of the sleeping mother, to be thrown into the near-by river.

But that same beauty which had so incensed the Great Wife, softened the heart of the coolie carrying out her instructions. Standing upon the muddy banks of the swirling river, he gazed dubiously from the tiny upturned face in his arms to the eddying depths of water.

"The fate that yawns greedily for its victim will not be cheated," reflected the coolie to himself sapiently. "If this child be meant to die by drowning, then die by drowning she will, regardless of me. Wherefore it will be unnecessary for my hand to assist in the accomplishment of destiny. Thus, by refraining from the actual act of drowning, will I gain both in peace of mind and in standing with the gods for a deed of mercy."

So thinking, he shrugged aside responsibility by leaving the infant in its wrappings beside the road which followed the river, and returned to the palace where the slave girl, awakening to an emptiness of shielding arm, was destroying the peace of dawn with her lamentations.

Eventually, under the influence of coercion the mere relation of which would be horrifying to occidental ears, the coolie confessed his crime.

But by this time Mei-Li had vanished entirely, and, sitting beside a window facing the river, watching buzzards wheeling in the air and thinking of the horrible fate that had possibly overtaken the frail blossom of her flesh, the slave girl dropped and pined and finally died.

By the side of the river-road along which he was fleeing the just wrath of the Dowager Empress because of his unwise political activities, Chang Yung, a Chinese gentleman learned in matters of Celestial art, chanced upon the bundle wrapping Mei-Li.

"A girl child!" he exclaimed in disappointment and moved a few steps onward.

Then, remembering the promised beauty of that tiny face, Chang Yung, gentle of heart and lover of all things beautiful, was irresistibly drawn back, resuming his flight with Mei-Li cradled in his arms.

The girl which had seemed sheer folly passed the height of wisdom. Because of the child in his arms, the watching soldiers of the port failed to recognize in Chang Yung the distinguished politician and he gained a ship sailing for Australia.

In Melbourne, in the Street of a Thousand Delights which duplicates with its sights and smells and its lack of sanitation the cluttered streets of China, Chang Yung, taking the price from the quilted money jacket which he wore, purchased a shop from a countryman desiring in his old age to return to the land which had given him birth.

The rooms above the shop he furnished gorgeously with lacquered furniture, quaint flowerpots bearing insignia of dragon and chrysanthemum, embroidered screens, couches heaped high with pillows of purple and gold and crimson, the finest of dishes and copper cooking implements, and, lastly, a shrine with its attendant incense pots.

Behind the shop he laid out a courtyard which might have been lifted bodily from that land he had so loved, with its tiny pagodaed tea house, its trailing vines covering rough stone walls, its paths tracing between gorgeous flower beds, and its sunken goldfish pool.

And here, for fifteen years thereafter, Chang Yung lived in great peace and tranquillity, respected by all and happy in his business of selling things of beauty. From one to another of his rare bits of porcelain or carving he would pass in ecstasy, now raising a piece of clear, spinach-green, translucent jade to admire the matchless shading of color, now holding up a bit of rare embroidery to catch the light on its faded tones, now balancing, with a thrill of sheer delight, a tiny Ming figurine cunningly fashioned by fingers long since turned to dust. And sometimes, with a feeling akin to reverence, he would strike softly upon a gong fished from some ancient temple, reconstructing from its mellow chimes the scene of its original setting: the immense figure of the Goddess of Mercy, perhaps, with the thousand yellow-painted hands and

row upon row of candles, the gray-robed old priests, the petitioning women worshipers, and the wailing beggars without.

And then, for a brief interval, the heart of the exile would be heavy with hunger for the banished land with its superstitions and its cruelties, its streets cluttered with cheap life, its rivers crowded with sampans, and its gardens fragrant with plum and cherry. But always across the drift of his memories the thought of Mei-Li the Beautiful would cut like a pungent and arresting perfume, dissipating them into mist.

Something of the ecstasy he had for his rare objects of art blended subtly in his feeling for Mei-Li. She was perfect to look upon, little Mei-Li. No sculptor in pink marble could have given her more delicate lines or more tender modeling of dainty limbs. Straight, dark hair piled high over a delicately broad forehead, tiny ears, hands, and feet, dark slanting eyes, and a crimson flower of a mouth—the meekness of the slave mother and the fire of the haughty official . . . all these were Mei-Li the Beautiful.

“Truly in the land from which we came your feet would have been bound to insure their smallness,” would sigh Chang Yung, gazing upon the untrammelled Mei-Li, darting around the garden in her satin trousers. “And yet, watching you dance, I am reminded of tall lilies swaying in the breeze.”

She was reared in the cloistered

seclusion of a maiden of old China, little Mei-Li, in ways of modesty and decorum. Not for her the freedom of the noisy streets with their inevitable harvest of unsavory knowledge. For as Chang Yung, smoking in company with his associates at the Gathering Place of the Most High, often said: “She is as beautiful as the pink of unfolding dawn . . . and as unspotted with the taint of evil.”

Just to look at her with her gowns of gay brocade, her ornaments of pearl and jade and beaten gold, her perfumes of sandalwood and musk and jessamine, her shining hair smoothed into elaborate coiffure, her skilled fingers drawing from silver lute or quaint guitar the melodies of the far East, was to see a vision lifted from the courtyard of some old Chinese castle. Chang Yung, in his hunger for the banished land, never tired of seeing her dance beside the sunken pool in her gleaming satins, or of hearing her sing in her clear, sweet voice some saccharinely sweet melody of flowers blooming, of blue skies and a pair of lovers.

Sitting placidly in the shadow, his thin yellow face calm and peaceful under its black skullcap, his body decorously clothed in dark satin as befitting a man of substance, white silken socks protruding from black velvet padded slippers, Chang Yung would sit and dream beneath the magic of that limpid voice, refilling his tiny tasseled pipe time and time again from a pot of rare tobacco.

So, all in all, Mei-Li was an unceasing joy to him. Every luxury he could procure was hers, and when sometimes she would protest against his extravagance, he would hold his head a little to one side, like some kindly old bird, and retort:

"Sufficient to the jewel must be its setting—and I ask you: where is there jewel more worthy of its setting?"

But if in his careful rearing of Mei-Li Chang Yung followed the customs of old China, in one thing he departed from ancient rule. When, through the Street of a Thousand Delights, rumor spread a report of the beauty of Mei-Li, bringing suitors in plenty for her hand, always, disregarding the advantages of the proposed match, Chang Yung made the same reluctant answer to each:

"When the fruit leaves the tree, then is it gone forever. . . . Wherefore should it be allowed to ripen fully upon the tree!" he would say in his gentle way. A pause; and then: "Moreover, some things there are in my stock of wares which I sell to any purchaser. But other things there are—and which I have loved the best—which I do not sell until the right purchaser comes. For always is there the rightful owner for everything of beauty. And what have I more beautiful than Mei-Li the Beautiful?"

Because Chang Yung was highly respected in the Street of a Thou-

sand Delights, patiently the suitors bided their time—all except Hugh Sing, the importer.

He was both rich and powerful, the tall, lean, wrinkled Hugh Sing, with his flat forehead, his tiny pig-eyes spraying out fanwise into lines, and his enormous, sinewy, yellow hands. In the Sing Tong of which he was head, all members rose to their feet when he entered, and remained standing until he was comfortably and deliberately seated upon his heap of cushions. Quite naturally, since he was accustomed to deference in all things, Hugh Sing was irked by the edict of Chang Yung.

"Truly," he pointed out with dignity to the inappreciative Chang Yung, "is it an honor for the head of the Sing Tong to ask in marriage a girl found abandoned upon a roadside. How know I that the marriage will meet with the favor of the gods? Yet because of her exceeding beauty—which burns in my heart like flame—will I overlook the matter of her ancestors. Moreover"—his desire for Mei-Li overcoming his natural thrift—"will I give you a thousand pounds English."

But Chang Yung, his eyes fixed placidly on a strip of yellow satin covered with Chinese ideographs setting forth sayings of the unknown Chinese philosopher who came before Confucius, smiled indifferently.

"There are in my shop articles not for sale at any price—save to the rightful owner," he repeated.

"Many summers have passed over your august head, O Prince of Merchants, insuring wisdom. Yet is wisdom not admired by the young, requiring the savor of maturity for full appreciation. Youth calls to youth, O Most Wise. Mei-Li the Beautiful is but a humming-bird flying in the sun of youth, while you, O Highly Respected One, are a beetle courting the shadows of age. And it is the nature of a humming-bird to yearn for a humming-bird. Some day there will be for Mei-Li the Beautiful another humming-bird, a *male* humming-bird. O Most High. . . ."

His gentle old eyes brooded off into space. He seemed oblivious of the presence of Hugh Sing.

White with rage, Hugh Sing took himself away, to plot and connive in secret, desire for the beauty of Mei-Li gnawing at his very soul.

Another year passed, during which Moy Yeng, nephew of Chang Yung and generously educated at his expense, came from England to help care for the shop and to sit beside Chang Yung, while pretty Mei-Li danced in the moonlight. Together the two young people made music for the gentle old man, the tall, solemn young Chinese with his deep brown eyes and his carefully spoken English, and dainty Mei-Li with her dreaming face and her laugh like a cadence of tiny silver bells.

Sometimes, catching the eyes of Moy Yeng fixed upon her, Mei-Li would feel a dawning glory in her heart, causing her breath to flutter

with its very sweetness. And Moy Yeng, gazing upon the tender beauty of Mei-Li, would feel, with a sudden dimness of vision, a rush in his brain not unlike the whirring of a flock of teal into motion. But between the two at that time was only a wistful drawing of each to each, which, given time and opportunity, would ripen into the love not yet present.

So, in the house of Chang Yung life was very pleasant in those days, but in the dwelling place of Hugh Sing with its bare floors, its enamel furniture, and its costly beds hung with scarlet curtains, life was not so pleasant. Madam Ah Tsi, mother of Hugh Sing, and San Me, his wife, no longer in her first bloom, clung together in mutual amity, burying their grievances against each other as the craving of Hugh Sing for the beauty of Mei-Li quickened his temper and hardened his hand.

"Truly," queried Madam Ah Tsi acidly of her son, hitting at his accustomed stinginess, "does thy purse gape with coin eager for the spending? And is not the symbol for trouble two women under one roof? Then, wherefore add to trouble by putting *three* women under one roof?"

"Had I mountains of silver I would give them all for Mei-Li!" retorted the infatuated Hugh Sing, growing more sullen as time passed.

"Truly," complained San Me in secret, "I know not whether it be worse if he win this interloper or

worse if he fail?" Then, raising her voice to the point of tears in complaint: "Have I not been a good wife? Have I not been the mother of sons to mourn at his grave—long distant be that day? Have I not been docile, obedient, patient? In what have I failed?"

"All these things have you been," consoled the mother-in-law. "Yet are these things as nothing when love enters the heart of a man. For what is past is past. And what is to be . . . will be!"

Whatever his ultimate plans for Mei-Li, Chang Yung did not live to see them fulfilled. Unexpectedly he dropped asleep, sitting in a great armchair, caressing an exquisite bit of carved jade with his thin yellow fingers. From that sleep he never awakened, and in due time, in a handsome metallic coffin, he went back to that land which had driven him forth, and which opened to receive him again into its vast silence, affording him the futile pomp of fifty mourners clad in white and a procession of ten shaven-headed Buddhist priests intoning the virtues of the departed.

And on the very day that Chang Yung went back to China, Hugh Sing, repairing to the Gathering Place of the Most High to enjoy a pipe of choicest chandoo, entered there into deep converse with two others of the Sing Tong, the brothers Lu.

"I hear the esteemed Chang Yung

has ascended the dragon," said Hugh Sing decorously when the small black cube was sizzling in the blue flame.

"Indeed so," assented the elder brother, a plump little man with beady eyes not unlike the currants in an English bun.

"Before he most regrettably—ah—passed on, he did promise to me in marriage Mei-Li the Beautiful," purred Hugh Sing.

"A most auspicious marriage!" pronounced the other agreeably.

"Yet the nephew, Moy Yeng, not knowing of this promise, may demur," pursued Hugh Sing. "Wherefore, were you and your highly esteemed brother witness to the promise of Chang Yung, it would be most fortunate . . . and worth much money to me."

The eyes of his two listeners met, narrowing swiftly.

"The possession of a good memory outweighs the value of precious jewels!" proclaimed the younger brother. "As clearly as a pond mirrors the bending sky, do we remember the occasion of which you speak."

Whereupon the three fared forth to the shop of Moy Yeng, finding him in ecstatic contemplation of a consignment of rare tapestries.

"Chang Yung, who is no more and regrettably cannot testify, had promised to me Mei-Li the Beautiful," informed Hugh Sing smoothly, after the customary flowery Chinese

courtesies had been duly observed and the four were comfortably seated on cushions in the room behind the shop.

"Indeed!" retorted Moy Yeng thoughtfully. "Yet he made no mention of his wish to me."

"Who can foretell to-day what to-morrow will bring forth?" shrugged Hugh Sing. "Would Chang Yung know that the days of his life were numbered? Moreover"—indicating the brothers Lu—"are these two witnesses of his agreement with me."

"We are witness," proclaimed the brothers sonorously.

A silence. Hugh Sing took up the argument again.

"You stand in place of a son to Chang Yung, who regrettably had no son of his blood to mourn for him," he said softly. "And the first wish of a dutiful son is to honor the command of the dead, thus insuring peace to the departed spirit."

"It is true," agreed Moy Yeng, frowning. "And yet . . ."

Something of the gossip he had heard regarding the shrewish mother of Hugh Sing filtered into his disturbed mind. Involuntarily he thought of the tender beauty of Mei-Li at the mercy of unkind hands.

"It is the duty of a Chinese son to honor the wish of the dead," repeated Hugh Sing inexorably.

And at that, the weight of accumulated centuries of deference to the wishes of dead ancestors brought pressure upon Moy Yeng, overruling

his personal reluctance, offsetting all the years of his education in a foreign land.

"If the marriage pleased my uncle, it pleases me." Moy Yeng spoke politely, but with something of regret pulsing beneath his courteous words.

Palm met palm, sealing the agreement.

After Hugh Sing had departed with his silent witnesses, Moy Yeng sat on in the deserted room, thinking over the coming marriage. Presently he went slowly out to where Mei-Li, sitting upon the stone coping of the sunken pool, was throwing breadcrumbs to the goldfish.

"Soon must you exchange the snowy garments of mourning for the crimson ones of rejoicing," he said haltingly to her.

The bread in her slender fingers dropped unheeded to the ground. Into the eyes of Mei-Li came a softness. One hand went up to her slim throat.

"Soon you go with your belongings to the house of Hugh Sing, who is, when all is said, a man of wealth and power," continued Moy Yeng.

And then, without looking at her, he knew that all the brightness had vanished from her face.

"I . . . must leave you?" whispered Mei-Li the Beautiful, regarding him with the eyes of a child given a blow where a caress was expected.

"Chang Yung, who was my uncle,



arranged the marriage. And in all things must his wish be obeyed," explained Moy Yeng, wondering at his own feeling of guilt.

"I did not think that Chang Yung, after many years of kindness, would prove unkind at last," said Mei-Li gently.

"Yet must his wish be honored," insisted Moy Yeng, gazing upon her beauty with a troubled hunger. "We are not as the foreign devils, living for ourselves alone. Always do we honor the wish of the dead before that of the living."

And then, looking at the clean young strength of Moy Yeng with a sort of wistfulness that held a prevision of the vanished youth and shrunken ugliness of Hugh Sing, Mei-Li flamed surprisingly to words of protest.

"Was I saved from the river for this?" she demanded passionately of the startled Moy Yeng. "Must the life of a Chinese woman be doomed to the hazard of unhappiness from birth? And is love, which is the song of all the world, to be left always to chance, when life without love has a grayness like unto a weeping day? How know I if Hugh Sing be young or old, handsome as the dawn, or ugly beyond compare?"

Remembering Hugh Sing, Moy Yeng was moved to pity.

"The wish of Chang Yung must be obeyed," he repeated dully.

As suddenly as it had come, revolt died out of Mei-Li; the deeply

ingrained habit of obedience reasserted itself.

"What is left for me but to obey?" she murmured. "Truly is life a flower with many thorns!"

With hanging head she moved away, and Moy Yeng, watching the drooping figure recede, felt as if in some way he had betrayed a trust.

"Truly is the path of duty set with sharp stones for the feet of the unwary!" he sighed to himself. "Yet always, beyond all else, must the wish of the dead be honored."

So, in a rented hack decked with crimson, Mei-Li went to Hugh Sing, and with her first glance at his wrinkled face the sense of being cheated strengthened until it overshadowed all else.

Hugh Sing was kind. Moreover, under the influence of the alien emotion that flamed in his middle-aged breast, he was generous. Gifts without number he showered upon his bride, delighting in the beauty which so enthralled him. And, seeing, Madam Ah Tsi, his mother, and San Me, his wife, waxed sullen and resentful.

Always Mei-Li was conscious of their unchanging enmity. Their fulsome compliments were spiced with insincerity, their frequent criticisms with the malice of envy.

"He has given to this waterfowl dresses of silk and satin and rare jewels, yet to me, the mother of his sons, has he given nothing at all!" sobbed San Me angrily to Madam Ah Tsi.

Madam Ah Tsi spread her hands in a gesture of resignation.

"When love comes in at the door, wisdom goes out at the window." Placidly she filled a cup with tea, sun-dried, with yellow flowers of jessamine. "And certainly Hugh Sing loves Mei-Li the Beautiful!"

"Her beauty blooms in his heart like some exquisite flower, making him young again," wailed San Me in a tone of anguish. "And me—I am old!"

The slanting eyes of Madam Ah Tsi narrowed.

"Likewise am I old," she acknowledged. "But in my life have I seen many strange things. Even have I seen love used as a weapon to destroy the thing beloved! Moreover, though he bar with gold his silver door, a man cannot keep the wife who loves him not."

"You are most wise, O Honorable Mother," returned San Me respectfully, her nimble fingers busy with a strip of fine embroidery. "Yet could thy wisdom rid this house of the hated Mei-Li, then would I hail thy wisdom as greatest in all the world."

In her turn, Madam Ah Tsi regarded the pale, red-eyed San Me with something of sympathy.

"You have been a dutiful daughter to me," she said, not unkindly. "And it is not right that a mother of sons be shoved aside for a newcomer with beauty, since, after all, more precious in a woman is a vir-

tuous heart than a face of beauty." She filled and drank another cup of scalding tea deliberately. "To him who waits comes ever his opportunity . . . even for revenge. Wait, then, O Mother of Sons, for the opportunity which will be ours."

"Seven causes are there for the putting away of a wife," suggested San Me hopefully.

Madam Ah Tsi sniffed scornfully.

"And were there seventy times seven, Hugh Sing in his folly would hold Mei-Li the Beautiful!"

She reflected, passing one hand in deep thought over the scalp blackened carefully to conceal her baldness.

"If the door of a cage be left open, will not the caged bird fly?" she brought out at last. And smiled—a smile which left the watching San Me slightly chilled by its underlying malevolence.

There followed for Mei-Li the Beautiful lonely days in the house of Hugh Sing, when, fleeing the actuality of her aging lord with his wearying compliments and his gloating delight in her beauty, her romantic fancy returned to other days and the society of Moy Yeng of the luxuriantly-lashed brown eyes and gentle voice. Sitting listlessly, day after day, behind closely shuttered windows, gazing out through a shimmering haze of golden light that revealed indiscriminately the clutter and disorder of the Street of a Thousand Delights and touched the cobalt blue of the distant ocean

with splashes of silver and rose and emerald, occasionally she recognized the tall, lithe figure of Moy Yeng, following it through the crowds with something of wistful pain.

No longer was there any joy in the elaborate toilet she made each morning, arranging her shining hair in satin smoothness, rubbing perfumed honey upon her white skin and dusting it into creamy whiteness with rice powder before she painted delicate circles of unfading pink upon the even whiteness. Even in the contemplation of her own beauty there was no longer any happiness for Mei-Li.

And, in his turn, Moy Yeng never failed to gaze up at the shuttered windows as he passed the dwelling of Hugh Sing, remembering Mei-Li dancing in her young beauty beside the sunken pool, and recalling the extinguished gladness of her face when he had told her of the coming marriage.

A time came when Moy Yeng found his garden haunted with memories, and when the poignant thoughts of Mei-Li turned ever more often to the round ball of sleep which has afforded escape to many a Chinese bride.

And Madam Ah Tsi, watching the changing emotions upon the face of Mei-Li, judged the time ripe for interference.

"Always does my tender heart sorrow for a caged bird mourning its freedom," she spoke softly to Mei-Li one day when Hugh Sing

was away on a business trip, stealthily regarding the tears forcing down from under the girl's full white eyelids.

Mei-Li failed to reply, and craftily she proceeded.

"Moreover, where a bird flies willingly into a cage, who shall be blamed for shutting the door? Yet where the bird is caged by a trick, then is advantage taken unfairly."

"There is a meaning in thy words, O Honorable Mother, which does escape the slowness of my wits," returned Mei-Li heavily.

And then, watching carefully, seeing the sudden rush of angry color in the young face opposite, Madam Ah Tsi related the tale of Hugh Sing's trickery with the witnesses.

"Never did the highly respected Chang Yung mean you to marry Hugh Sing," she finished. "Many times did he refuse him, saying: 'Always for everything of beauty is there the rightful owner.'" She paused. "Hugh Sing would be most angry if he knew I told you of this," she finished. "Yet is right right and wrong wrong, and the tongue of a liar forms a noose by which many a wise man has been hung."

Softly she withdrew, seeking the society of San Me.

"Seed have I sown which will bear fruit," she told the eager San Me. "There remains but to wait."

In which she was entirely right. To the heavy heart of Mei-Li her

words brought a storm of emotion, the feeling of having been cheated and betrayed deepening into actual hatred of the wrinkled Hugh Sing. Close upon this came a glory of hope: Chang Yung had not meant her to marry Hugh Sing! Perhaps there would yet be escape from this dreary prison, escape from the gloating fondness of Hugh Sing. . . . Perhaps in that garden she had so loved, Moy Yeng still remembered. . .

Later, on that same evening, Madam Ah Tsi and San Me awaited Hugh Sing, dressed in their best, and with triumph in their bearing.

He came on eager feet.

"Where is my Lotus Bud?" he demanded with his first breath. "Many and rare gifts have I brought to her: necklaces for her neck whiter than the pearl of which they are made, silks for the beauty of her tender flesh, ornaments for her hair which shames the blackness of the night. . . ."

Madam Ah Tsi smiled at him placidly.

"More precious in a woman is a virtuous heart than a face of beauty," she replied pointedly. "Mei-Li the Beautiful, after days of grieving, has returned to Moy Yeng who was her lover before she was thy wife."

"Ahi!" whispered Hugh Sing, the little veins in his temples swelling into prominence, his small pig-eyes glazing over. Again he heard the slightly mocking voice of Chang Yung: "*Some day for Mei-Li the*

*Beautiful there will be another humming-bird . . . a male humming-bird.*"

"Wherefore, because of this thing does the shining honor of Hugh Sing bear a stain," finished Madam Ah Tsi.

The eyes of the two women met. San Me shivered with fright.

A silence followed during which breath came unevenly through the sagging lips of Hugh Sing.

"Honor which bears a stain must be cleansed," he affirmed at last. "Men die, women die, love dies—" his voice trembled—"yet is honor a deathless thing, handed down from father to son."

Deliberately he moved toward the door with a new and terrible decision contracting his enormous yellow hands.

"Is it not a wise mother who knows her own son?" inquired Madam Ah Tsi composedly of the shrinking San Me. "Said I not that love becomes a weapon to destroy the thing beloved?"

"He will kill her!" whimpered the frightened San Me, regarding the carefully painted face of Madam Ah Tsi in baleful fascination.

"He will kill her," affirmed Madam Ah Tsi indifferently, filling her tiny scarlet tasseled pipe with a single pinch of tobacco. "With his great yellow hands, he will wring the life from her reluctant body as easily as I twist a flower between my fingers."

Then, emptying the tiny pipe, and regarding the trembling agitation of San Me with kindly contempt:

"Every age has its compensation, O Sheep-Hearted One," spoke Ma-dam Ah Tsi sapiently. "To Mei-Li was given much beauty, yet to me is given much wisdom. And wisdom is ever a match for beauty."

In the garden Chang Yung had built, Mei-Li and Moy Yeng were together, Mei-Li coming upon him, the living embodiment of the dream that haunted his evenings: the same wide, dark eyes, the haunting smile, half sweet, half sad, the same poignant delicacy of throat and face, which caught his heart and melted it into tenderness.

"Mei-Li!" he cried aloud in wonder.

"I have come back!" she said, with a sob of sheer happiness. And then, holding out both hands to him: "Why have you given me to Hugh Sing?" she demanded reproachfully.

"Because my uncle Chang Yung so willed," returned the puzzled Moy Yeng.

"And if Chang Yung had not so willed?" inquired Mei-Li with dainty coquetry.

"Ah!" sighed Moy Yeng regretfully.

Mei-Li came closer, walking straight into the arms which involuntarily closed around her, and to him came the perfume of sandalwood from her clinging satins, the scent of peach-blossom from her

shining hair—all the mysterious allure which was hers.

"Do you love me?" asked Mei-Li, looking deep into his eyes.

Moy Yeng endeavored to regain his firmness of purpose.

"A Chinese wife does not seek refuge from her husband," he pointed out. "Did the loungers on the street know you were here, your name would be a jest upon their lips."

"Do you love me?" she insisted tremulously. "Am I not Mei-Li the Beautiful?"

And then, stammering, Moy Yeng made it very clear that to her beauty his very soul paid homage, that his heart beat in time with the sweetness which was hers, and that to him the world without Mei-Li was but a place of arid waste.

"Ah!" sighed Mei-Li gratefully, letting her head droop to his shoulder. "These words have my ears long hungered to hear!"

Still leaning against him, she poured out the tale of Hugh Sing and his duplicity, feeling the shoulder beneath her head stiffen into rigidity.

"It is not permitted any man of honor to steal the wife of his friend," said Moy Yeng when she had finished, sucking in his breath sharply. "Yet is it permitted any man to regain what has been stolen unlawfully from him?"

Then, holding to him closely all the beauty which was Mei-Li, he reflected aloud anxiously:

"Long is the arm of the Sing Tong, wherefore we must fly beyond reach of that arm. There is, far away, another land, my Plum-blossom, a land to which entrance is sometimes denied. Yet for those with money are there arrangements which can be made—"

"And in this land we shall be, each to the other, enough!" murmured Mei-Li happily.

"And we shall be, each to the other, all in all!" assured Moy Yeng gravely. "And what against this is a matter of rare tapestries, or jade, or houses, or gardens? . . . Wherefore I will go at once, O Rose of Happiness Which Blooms for Me, to arrange our passage. By the kindness of the Lord Buddha, there is a boat sailing this night."

"Hugh Sing returns to-night," shivered Mei-Li, and caught him suddenly with frantically clinging arms. "Do not leave me!" she implored.

"I go but to return," reassured Moy Yeng. "See, Little Frightened Dove, I go to arrange passage to the new land where we shall be happy."

But Mei-Li sobbed pitifully.

"The shadow of something terrible has crossed my heart, clouding the sun of my happiness!" she told him between sobs.

Gently Moy Yeng endeavored to soothe her fears.

"Here where we met, you will wait for me, My Lotus Bud," he said tenderly. "And memory of thy beauty will speed my returning footsteps. See, Most Beautiful, let me go!"

Reluctantly the clinging hands relaxed.

"There is no place you go so distant I shall not follow!" said Mei-Li strangely. "Nor is there any wait so long we shall not be together again!" Looking deep into his eyes, she smiled. "For where two are in their hearts as one, then is no separation possible!" finished little Mei-Li softly.

When he had gone, she dropped on her knees beside the stone coping of the sunken pool, watching the goldfish swim lazily back and forth, of a sudden holding up both slim arms to the full-blown moon riding in a tranquil sky.

"Little Sister Moon—I am so happy!" sang Mei-Li the Beautiful liltily. "Never was anyone quite so happy!"

But in the very moment of saying it a chill wind blew across her heart, from every shadow and rustling leaf exhaling a subtle menace.

Then, gazing down into the clear water of the sunken pool, with terrified eyes she saw reflected there the figure of Hugh Sing behind her, immense and terrible.



# Treat 'Em Rough

By Katharine Metcalf Roof

IS WOMAN CLOSER TO THE SAVAGE THAN MAN? Now, don't get angry, for how do you know, if you were the girl, you mightn't have preferred the dark-haired bandit of this play?

*THE curtain rises on a dark room. Voices are heard without, and the sound of a hand feeling for the door knob. Two people are heard entering. A moving point of light from a pocket electric torch pierces the darkness.*

A MAN'S VOICE

It's all right, come on in. Don't be afraid.

A GIRL'S VOICE

But it's so dark. Why is the house so dark?

MAN'S VOICE

Wait till I strike a light.

*(The point of light is seen crossing the stage. The man finds a candle on the mantelpiece and lights it, revealing a girl, young and pretty, standing surrounded by her traveling bags and rugs. The room is quite empty except for a rickety chair with a broken seat, and a pile of miscellaneous rubbish in a dark corner. The room has the indescribably desolate look of the aban-*

*doned house gradually crumbling to ruin. A strong wind rattles the loose windowpanes.)*

THE GIRL (*shivering*)

How cold it is! . . . Why—this can't be my room—

*(The man, having lighted the candle, turns and faces her. He is seen to be a young man with a mop of picturesque black hair. He wears a soft black hat of the Spanish brigand type and a vivid scarlet tie.)*

MAN (*with a grin*)

You don't seem to be expected! I guess they didn't get your letter.

GIRL

But this can't be the place. The room is empty . . . the whole house is empty!

MAN

Maybe they're out taking a moonlight swim in that bottomless pool we just passed.

GIRL (*striving to control her trembling voice*)

But there isn't any moon. It's all dark outside.

(*Man crosses the room behind her back, closes the door, locks it, puts the key in his pocket, and stands with his back against it in a negligent pose, his hands in his trousers pockets.*)

MAN

That was a pretty little love story you told me coming from the station about how you ran away from that boy that wouldn't stop proposing to you. (*A sinister note coming into his voice*) I hope you're not going to regret having scorned a good man's love.

GIRL (*cockily*)

Regret nothing! He was a horrid, conceited boy who made a wager with some other horrid boy that he could make me accept him in forty-eight hours.

MAN

So you couldn't love him—I suppose he was personally repulsive-looking?

GIRL

No. He is very good-looking—and knows it.

MAN (*grimly*)

Well, you're out of his reach now.

GIRL (*startled*)

What do you mean?

MAN (*slowly, approaching her*)

Have you any idea where you are?

GIRL

You told me you were taking me to Rosebud Cottage at the Roof Tree Inn.

MAN

No, you're wrong. That's where you told me to take you.

GIRL (*looking fearfully about*)

Then . . . where am I?

MAN (*slowly, with deliberate effect*)

Forty miles in the opposite direction, on a lonely road where no one passes. You are in a deserted house, absolutely at the mercy of a man who has brought you here to—

(*With a cry, the girl runs to the door, tries to open it, finds it locked, leans against it, panting with fright. As the man comes toward her, she screams again and puts out both hands. The man utters a smothered oath.*) I'll give you something to scream about! (*Seizes her by the arm and flings her roughly from the door against the wall, where she drops, half fainting, to the floor. He follows her and stands threateningly before her with folded arms.*) Now, you keep still, or I'll beat you to a pulp before I take your sparklers. How much money have you got on you?

GIRL (*trembling*)

It's in here. (*Indicates her bead bag. He snatches it roughly.*)

MAN

Where's your jewelry?

GIRL

In my handbag.



MAN (*taking the bag*)  
What else have you got?

GIRL  
Nothing much.

MAN (*brutally*)  
Yes, you have. Get up. (*She struggles to her feet.*) I see a gold chain on your neck. (*He seizes it, roughly dragging her toward him by the chain, which contains a pendant. He snatches it off. He then systematically rummages her person, taking everything of value from her. When he is through he flings her from him.*) Now, make yourself comfortable on your own luggage. I don't see anything else to sit on but this chair (*drawing it forward*), and I need that myself. (*He sits down on it and begins to smoke, surveying her insolently.*) Got anything in your stocking?

GIRL (*in surprise*)  
In my stocking! (*As he rises.*)  
Oh, no, no!

MAN  
Sure? Guess I'd better look. (*Comes toward her. The girl seizes the edge of her skirt with a shriek.*) You're quite sure? What's that lump I see about there? (*Indicating the region above her knee with the bowl of his pipe.*)

GIRL (*beginning to cry*)  
It's n-n-nothing but the bu-b-b-buckle on my garter.  
MAN (*making a movement as if to inspect it*)

A diamond buckle?

GIRL  
No, oh, no! Only silver.

MAN  
Silver's worth something these days. However—I'll let you keep them. (*Draws a piece of rope from his hip pocket.*) Now, I'll just make you safe for democracy and say good-by. (*He binds her hand and foot, stands considering her a moment.*) Do you think you can stand perfectly still there? (*The girl nods, her terror-stricken eyes fixed upon his face.*) You'd better, you know, or we might have a little accident. . . . I'd like to have a bit of target practice before I go. (*He stands a few feet off and draws his revolver from his belt.*)

GIRL (*in a low, terror-stricken voice*)  
Are you going to kill me?

MAN (*easily, examining his revolver*)

I hope not—not if you keep still. I am aiming (*as he takes aim*), as you see, over your head. Now, you just imagine that you're a soldier standing against the wall to be shot; that'll give you the necessary courage. Ready? Now steady—there—(*He discharges his revolver three times. At the last shot, the girl drops. The man calls to her easily.*) Did I hit you? I'm awfully sorry. I didn't mean to, on my word. (*The girl is sobbing softly. He kneels beside her, examines her none too gently, then rises.*) Not hurt at all, just frightened. I thought you had more nerve. (*Pockets his revolver, relights his pipe, and surveys her carelessly.*) Shall I leave you there? Or would you rather lie on the rugs?

GIRL

Oh, you aren't going to leave me here all alone?

MAN (*with a grin*)

Did you want me to spend the night?

GIRL

Oh, oh, oh—!

(*The man picks up the rugs and throws them on the floor beside her, lifting her to a comfortable position on them.*)

MAN (*with relish*)

There! Pleasant dreams. Shall I leave the light? That candle won't last long. Soon you'll be all alone in the dark.

(*He crosses to the door, unlocks it, stands a moment, then goes out, locking the door behind him. The girl, left alone, cries softly, then, rousing herself, begins to call for help. After a moment the sound of feet is heard without. Someone begins to batter down the door. At last it gives way and flies open. A blond young man rushes wildly in. The girl shrieks.*)

THE BOY

Marie!

GIRL (*looking up and giving a cry of joy*)

Oh, Billy, Billy Chalmers! Is it really you?

BILLY (*rushing up to her*)

Marie, my poor little girl! (*Kneels beside her, cutting the cords that bind her.*) God, I wish I'd killed the brute that did this! Are you hurt? Poor little delicate wrists!

(*Kisses them.*) Now, can you stand? (*She rises, stands falteringly, reaching out a hand toward him for support.*)

MARIE

I guess I'm all right, Billy. (*Looking up at him.*) How wonderful that you should have come down this lonely road just at this minute to save my life!

BILLY

Not so wonderful. You see, I followed you to Windhurst station. I was in the car behind. I saw you drive away with that thug and followed you. But he gave me the slip at the last crossroad, so I got here a little late. (*With a shudder.*) Thank God, not too late! I caught him just as he was stepping into his Ford. (*Savagely.*) And I guess I gave him his all right!

MARIE (*incredulously*)

You mean you thrashed him—you?

BILLY

You better bet I did! I'm thinking he'll find a few highly colored spots on his anatomy to-morrow morning.

MARIE

You thrashed that brutal, powerful bandit?

BILLY (*exhibiting his hands*)

Single—or, strictly speaking, double-handed—I thrashed him.

MARIE

I never would have believed it!

BILLY

I'll prove it.

(*Draws forth her purse, her bag,*

and her jewelry from his pockets and exhibits them.)

MARIE (*convinced and overcome*)

Billy! You've saved my life.

BILLY (*striking a negligent pose*)

It was nothing. Any other chap'd have done the same.

MARIE

But no other chap did! Oh, Billy!

(*He goes eagerly toward her. She draws back. He stops, looking crest-fallen.*)

BILLY (*handling the loot*)

Any reward offered for recovery of jewels?

MARIE

Reward?

BILLY

If I were to ask you once more—

MARIE

To marry you?

BILLY

That's the idea.

MARIE

No, Billy dear—anything but that.

BILLY

But that's the only thing I want. (*As she shakes her head.*) Say, what do you think would have become of you if I'd left you here weltering in your own gore? (*Marie shudders.*) Yes, well—then, don't you feel that you owe me a little something?

MARIE

Yes . . . but not everything.

BILLY

Say, what is your objection to me, anyhow? Just because I fell in love with you at sight? Just because I

knew a good thing as soon as I saw it? Why get down on me because it didn't take me a solid year to find out?

MARIE

But the wager—that low, vulgar wager!

BILLY

Low? Vulgar? Because I said I'd make you marry me in forty-eight hours, and Uncle Dick said if I could do it he'd give me a job to get married on? I don't see anything the matter with that—except your failure to cooperate.

MARIE (*turning aside*)

I'm very much obliged to you for saving my life and my bead purse, but, you see—I don't love you, Billy.

BILLY

Well, then, I play my last card. I hate to say it, Marie, but you're compromised. When it's known that you and I have been alone together all night in this lonely spot your reputation will be ruined—unless you marry me.

MARIE (*airily*)

Pooh! Nobody would believe a thing like that about me.

BILLY (*struggling to survive the shock*)

They *wouldn't*, eh? Don't you know that old cats *love* to believe things like that about a pretty little girl like you?

MARIE (*inconsequently*)

Well—let them.

BILLY (*staring*)

You are shameless!

MARIE (*with bent head*)

No—I'm in love.

BILLY

In love? With someone else? Oh, no, no, Marie! Say it isn't that.

MARIE

I'm sorry, Billy, but I have fallen in love (*her eyes taking fire*) with a stronger man.

BILLY (*passionately*)

Curse him! (*He flings her money and jewels at her feet and covers his face with his hands. After a moment, in a low, broken voice*) His name?

MARIE (*with an inspired face*)

I have always felt that I could love a caveman.

BILLY (*huskily*)

His name—

MARIE (*still exalted*)

I don't know.

BILLY

You are just trying to torture me.

MARIE

It's the truth, Billy. I don't know his name. It's—it's the man you saved me from to-night.

BILLY

That thug—that crook!

(*He turns away, leaning against the mantel, his face hidden, apparently overcome by a conflict of wild emotions.*)

MARIE (*gently*)

Billy dear, don't take it like that. I'm awfully sorry, especially after your saving me like this. But, you see, I couldn't help it—love comes unbidden.

BILLY (*raving*)

You can't love him, you *can't*—that thug who beat you up, and stole your jewels, and left you here at the mercy of—of *anything* that passed!

MARIE (*with a thrill in her voice*)

And set me up against the wall and shot at me three times!

BILLY

Oh, they were nothing but blank cartridges.

MARIE (*indignantly*)

No such thing! They were real, live bullets! What do you know about it?

BILLY

Oh, I forced his story from him with my gun against his teeth.

MARIE (*grimly*)

Didn't that make it a little difficult for him to tell it?

BILLY

Oh, Marie darling, you don't mean it—you couldn't love a brute beast like that!

MARIE

Love him? I *adore* him! I would give a year of my life to see him come in that door.

BILLY (*after a moment, savagely*)

All right! If you want him—take him! (*Crosses to door and opens it.*) I left him out there, bound hand and foot not twenty feet away.

MARIE (*rustling toward the door*)

Out there!

BILLY (*putting up his arm to bar the way*)

Wait. I will give you up to the

stronger man, but I can't let you play with another manly heart as you have played with mine. You must be quite, quite sure.

MARIE

Oh, I am sure, I am! If he were standing there in your place I'd marry him this minute.

BILLY (*intensely*)

On your word?

MARIE

On my word.

BILLY

Your hand on it. (*Marie puts her hand in his. After a moment, in a husky, broken voice*) God bless you, little girl. Be happy with your caveman. . . . Good-by! (*In the voice of a soldier*) Shall I call him in?

MARIE (*her voice a whisper*)

Yes.

(*Billy goes out, leaving Marie staring ecstatically into space. In the dim corner where the pile of rubbish is stacked the mound begins to heave up and down. The form of a man slowly uncoils, rises, and steals toward her. He is seen to be a very disreputable-looking, unshaven tramp. Marie, hearing his approach, looks up and screams.*)

TRAMP

Quiet, young lady—I won't hurt you if you keep quiet. I don't want anything but these. (*He goes toward the pile of jewelry and money that Billy has flung on the floor.*)

MARIE (*making a brave stand*)

There are two men outside that

door. And one of them has a gun.

TRAMP (*with a grin*)

So have I, and I guess I'd better use it first! (*He goes toward her, Marie screams. He covers her mouth with his hand. She wrenches herself free. The tramp, gathering up a handful of loot as he goes, follows her with pointed revolver until he gets her with her back against the wall beside the door.*) Now, if you move I'll shoot. And if anyone else comes in that door I'll shoot him first. (*He slips the jewelry and money into his pocket with his left hand while he covers her with the revolver.*) Your rescuers seem to be a trifle slow. Guess they're giving me time to collect a kiss or two.

(*He begins to walk toward her. Marie shrieks and, forgetting his firearm, runs swiftly from him toward the other side of the room. In turning to pursue and cover her, the tramp is forced to take his eyes from the door. He slowly approaches the cowering girl, who shrinks against the wall, her eyes on his face. Just as he is upon her, the dark-haired bandit rushes in, leaps upon his back, knocks his revolver from his hand, seizes his hands and rapidly binds them together behind his back, throws him into the rickety chair, ties him to it, disarms him, takes back Marie's stolen property, and stands surveying him.*)

BANDIT

You rat! You scum of the earth! You bale of stable straw—

TRAMP (*beginning to weep*)

Hold your peace, brother; you are addressing a man of God.

BANDIT

You blasphemous crook!

TRAMP (*sniveling*)

It's the truth. I swear it. I once stood in the pulpit of the Second Methodist Church of Pink Store, New York, and preached the gospel. Then, one day—Wall Street brought me to this.

BANDIT

Oh, no, oh, no! You never cracked a safe in Wall Street.

TRAMP (*haughtily*)

Cracked a safe! Sir, I am a minister of the Gospel. I *speculated* in Wall Street and lost.

BANDIT

Sunday school collections don't go far to-day, do they? (*Drawing a handkerchief from his pocket.*) We aren't interested in the story of your life. (*Ties the handkerchief about the tramp's face and turns him, face about, to the wall. To Marie*) Girl, what I want I take. (*Seizes her violently and kisses her. Marie succumbs to his embrace.*) You gave your word to that poor boob out there that you'd marry me to-night. If you don't keep it I'll kill you!

MARIE (*rapturously*)

When I die I want to die that way! (*With a change of tone.*) But just now—I'd rather live and be your wife.

BANDIT

You love me, eh? I thought so.

MARIE (*intensely*)

I loved you from the minute you threw me against the wall.

BANDIT (*consulting his watch*)

Three-thirty. It must be growing light. (*Goes to the window and raises the shade, letting in the pink light of sunrise.*) We'll make Westbrook Junction in half an hour and drag some parson out of bed to tie the knot. If you want to make a wedding toilet, there's a glass in the next room.

MARIE (*putting hasty hands to her head*)

Oh, do I look a fright?

(*She hurries into the next room. The bandit closes the door behind her, then cautiously removes his hat. The mop of dark hair comes with it leaving the blond head and face of Billy Chalmers completely exposed. He makes a hasty toilet, replaces the hat, adjusts the wig and, putting on his hat again, is setting it down well over his eyes as Marie enters.*)

BANDIT

My girl! (*Embraces her violently.*)

MARIE (*speaking softly and rapturously*)

My cave man!

BANDIT (*releasing her*)

To the parson! Pick up your bags. (*Marie obediently picks up the heavy bags under which she staggers. In a generous, relenting tone*) Here, I'll take that one. (*He takes the small handbag. They move toward the door.*)

MARIE (*pausing to look about*)  
 Poor Billy! Do you think he's  
 killed himself?

BANDIT

Probably. But don't worry about  
 that milk-and-water Billy. The last  
 words he said were (*reproducing the*  
*noble tone*): "It's all right, old chap,  
 I understand. She loved the better  
 man."

MARIE (*brushing away a tear*)

Dear old Billy! I used to think  
 I could love him—until you came!

(*As they are about to pass out*  
*the bandit catches sight of the*  
*gagged and bound tramp. He*  
*strides across the room and turns*  
*him about.*)

BANDIT

About that Methodist Church—

TRAMP (*through his bandage*)  
 Wf-f-f-f-f-f-f-f-f-f—

BANDIT

I daresay you're right, whatever  
 it is. (*Removes bandage.*)

TRAMP

My left vest-pocket—the paper  
 there. (*Bandit draws out a dirty*  
*folded paper and glances at it.*) It's  
 straight! This broken blossom was  
 ordained minister of the Second

Methodist Church in Pink Store,  
 New York, in 1887! (*Considers the*  
*bound man, an idea strikes him.*)

I say! Why waken a parson at  
 Westbrook Junction when we've got  
 one right here? (*To the tramp.*)  
 I suppose you can tie us without the  
 aid of hands and feet? Good! Then  
 marry us right now and I'll give  
 you your freedom for a marriage  
 fee.

(*He draws the tramp to his feet.*  
*They stand before him.*)

TRAMP (*with a sudden change to a*  
*ministerial voice*)

Marie, do you take this man to be  
 your wedded husband? Will you  
 love, honor, and obey him so long  
 as ye both shall live?

MARIE (*rapturously*)

I will.

TRAMP (*to bandit*)

Your name?

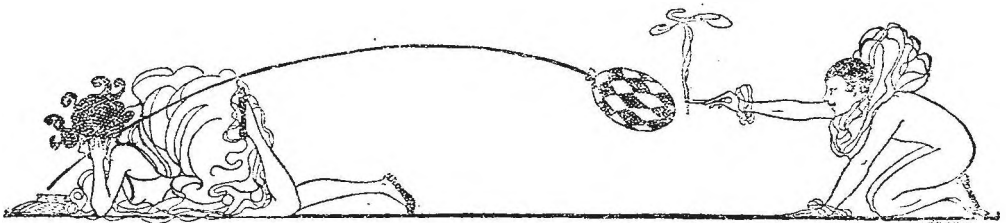
BANDIT (*after a brief hesitation*)  
 William de Gorganzola de Pa-  
 prika Tabasco. . . .

MARIE (*ecstatically*)

Spanish blood! How wonderful!

TRAMP (*as the curtain falls*)

William, do you take this woman  
 to be your wedded wife—



# The Star Girl

By Robert E. Hewes

**T**HE sky throbs alive to-night, and the stars melt in a warmth of purple. The pulsating rhythm of flowing light in the great stream of heaven sends waves of color rippling throughout that jeweled sea. From my window I see the Pleiades, the six celestial sisters, that "glitter like a swarm of fireflies tangled in a silver braid." There is melancholy Merope . . . shameless Alcyone . . . laughing Maia . . . bold Electra . . . dancing Celæno . . . and the blushing maiden Pleione. . . . But, oh, how shy they veil their blushes! . . . Tremble they still for that wanton sister!

For the tale tells that a seventh Pleiad left her sensuous couch of purple to love a mortal. . . . And the sisters, paled at her waywardness, have ever since trembled shy!

Long ages have mortals sought the lost maid of the skies, and through many weary vigils have the stars awaited her return . . . but both seek in vain. Mayhap the night shall come when the wanton shall creep back to her couch, the blush of shame in her cheeks and the light of knowledge in her eyes. . . . And shall her daring love be forgiven? I wonder. . . . Strange thoughts stir me to-night . . . wild fancies burn in my heart. Some sweet secret tantalizes me . . . cajoles . . . eludes. . . .

A warm presence stirs behind me . . . the dusk of voluptuous hair touches my cheek . . . the scent of roses intoxicates me . . . a petal drips red to my lap. A thousand years in Hell for one moment with those soft arms about my neck, those lips melted on mine!

Tremble, you pale watchers in the blue-black sea! . . . For though you wait through all eternity you must never see your strayed beauty return . . . *for to-night I hold her in my arms!*



## Forbidden Fruit

By Cynthia Woolford

**I** AM the forbidden fruit!

I am the luscious ripe, rounded thing that all men have sought from the first age, when Eve and Adam walked together in Paradise. Men have died for me, cities have fallen because of me. Bright sunlight has fallen on my cheek, glinting softly gold and scarlet, and shadows have enfolded me, half hiding my lusciousness; and men have still sought me. I am at surface sweet and thirst-appeasing, and at core bitter. Men have known this from all time, yet have they still desired me. For I am the bitter-sweet that is necessary to all life and love and death.

I am a peach!



# A Bedroom Farce

By Ray Cummings

DO BEDROOM FARCES EVER REALLY HAPPEN? The hero (?) of this story said they never do, except on the stage—and then . .

**T**HE St. Georgian is a residential and transient hotel, one of the largest of its kind in New York City. It has a spacious, onyx lobby, and upstairs its several hundred rooms open onto long, narrow hallways of concrete, cold and gloomy-looking. Under its great roof life brings many joys and sorrows, comedies and tragedies. And sometimes a little of whimsicality.

For instance:

The older man carelessly flicked his cigar ash on the rug of his little parlor and smiled cheerfully.

"Of course I liked it, Harry. But—"

They were friends of a year's standing—both lawyers, permanent residents of the hotel. Their names were James Hart and Harry Lynn. They had just been to the theater together and were sitting in the little parlor of Hart's two-room suite.

6—S. S.

Lynn had gone straight to the theater from his office that evening. He tossed his leather briefcase on Hart's couch, laid his hat and gloves on the table, and sat down luxuriously in the only big chair in the room.

"Oh, well, it was diverting, of course," he answered his friend's declaration. "But honestly now, Jim, you wouldn't consider that realism now, would you? It wasn't exactly 'holding the mirror up to nature,' now was it?"

"You mean a French bedroom farce never could happen in real life?"

"Exactly."

Hart puffed on his cigar thoughtfully.

"I'm not so sure things like that couldn't happen—life is very whimsical sometimes."

"Nonsense! I never saw a farce yet that—"

"But I do not agree," Hart interrupted, "that a bedroom farce is entirely untrue to life. I think that, given the proper, necessary chain of circumstances—all of them logical, usual, in fact—a situation equally as 'impossible' as some of those we saw to-night would develop—quite naturally and inevitably."

"Rats!" said Lynn. "It never could."

And they let it go at that.

Lynn picked up his hat and gloves ten minutes later.

"All right, if you've got work to do yet to-night I'll quit you. I'll take a walk and turn in." He occupied a single room in another part of the hotel. At the hall door he stopped. "By the way, Jim, my fiancée's coming down from college to-morrow—going south to her folks for Easter. She'll stop over a day. I'll introduce you."

Hart was already at his desk and only answered with a wave of his hand.

Lynn grinned at this abrupt dismissal. "I'll phone you to-morrow evening. You'll like Ruth—peach of a girl."

Left alone, Hart worked at his desk for nearly an hour. The hotel was very quiet—only the footsteps of an occasional passer in the corridor broke the stillness. He was deeply immersed in his work when, sometime after one o'clock it must have been, he heard a door slam violently near at hand, followed by a

low, suppressed feminine cry. Lynn had left the hall door partly open, and the sounds seemed to come from just outside.

Hart left his desk and, crossing the room swiftly, looked into the hall. Hardly more than six feet away a young girl stood fumbling with the knob of the door next to his. Hart stared in amazement, for the girl was clothed only in a filmy pink nightdress. Her long brown hair fell in two braids over her shoulders as she stood bending forward.

For an instant Hart remained confused and undecided. The girl had not noticed him, but went on fumbling the doorknob, with low cries of dismay. Reaching a sudden decision, he turned back hastily and from his bedroom got his dressing gown and slippers. As he stepped into the hall again the girl looked up. He could see she was a very pretty girl, hardly more than twenty. As he hesitantly approached her, she shrank up against the unyielding door. He tried to look past her vacantly, and offered the dressing gown, in which she immediately wrapped herself.

"It's cold out here," he said. He wondered if he were speaking as impersonally as he hoped. "Here, take these." He offered the slippers. "You mustn't stand on this cold floor in your bare feet."

A sudden sense of the absurdity of his matter-of-fact manner struck him, and he added confusedly:

"I—I beg your pardon—"

The girl put on the slippers swiftly.

"I'm—I'm locked out." She stood up and faced him. Her face was very red, but she met his grave glance steadily. "I'm locked out. I'd just gotten to sleep when something woke me up. I thought it was a fire-alarm or something—this is my first night here. And—and I got up to look out into the hall. The door must have blown shut behind me. I don't know—I was only half awake. And—and now I'm locked out."

She poured out the words swiftly.

"Oh, dear, I don't know what I'll do! I can't get in—the door's locked now and—" She broke off and managed a smile. "It's very good of you—" She stopped again helplessly, holding his sheltering dressing gown closer around her.

His glance followed hers down the empty corridor. Someone might come along at any moment. It would be awkward for her, to say the least. He tried her door.

"It is locked," he said. "But they have a duplicate key in the office. I'll go down and get it for you—I won't be a minute." He thought that better than phoning; he could report her predicament more impersonally to the night clerk that way.

He started down the hall. Then he stopped abruptly. He would be five minutes or more at the very least. Meanwhile she was standing there in the corridor. Someone

would almost surely come along. And, besides, it was cold out there.

"You'd better wait in my sitting room," he said with sudden decision. He indicated his open door. "No one will notice you then—and it's warm in there. I won't be long."

At the head of the stairs (it was only one flight down to the lobby) he paused again. Just how would he explain it to that particularly suspicious, uncivil night clerk? He could just see the little clerk's side-wise glance and his nasty smile; he would listen as though he didn't believe a word of it.

Footsteps from down the corridor aroused Hart from these unpleasant thoughts. The girl had disappeared—into his apartment evidently. From where he was standing he could see his hall door still partly open.

Just past his door a branch of the corridor turned abruptly to the right; some distance beyond this, in the other corridor, a second stairway led to the lobby below. As Hart stood confusedly listening to the approaching footsteps, Harry Lynn appeared suddenly from around this corner. He did not notice Hart, who was standing some distance away, partly hidden by an angle of wall; and before the older man could call out to stop him, Lynn, seeing his friend's opened door, had pushed it wide unceremoniously and entered.

Hart hurried back toward his room. Had the girl really gone in?

He wondered why he did not already hear their voices. As he got to his threshold he saw Lynn, with his leather briefcase in his hand, just crossing the sitting room toward the bedroom door.

"I forgot my case," he greeted Hart. "Where the deuce were you? I thought maybe you were in taking a bath or something—only, your front door was open. I was just going in to look."

"No," said Hart. "I—"

He stopped. Where *was* the girl? He glanced around the room uncertainly; through the doorway he could see a part of his bedroom—empty. Had he better go in and see if she were there, or explain to Lynn first?

"Funny thing, Harry," he said. He wondered if he looked as guilty as he felt. "You know just a few minutes ago—"

He stopped transfixed. At his bedroom door stood the girl, with his dressing gown wrapped tightly around her, braided brown hair falling nearly to her waist, and beneath the dressing gown his bedroom slippers looming grotesquely large on her bare little feet. The expression

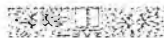
of her face confused him even more than her sudden appearance. And on Lynn's face Hart saw a look of horrified recognition.

The girl stood only an instant; then she flung herself forward and into Lynn's reluctant arms.

"Oh, Harry dear!" she sobbed on his shoulder. "I—I thought I'd surprise you—I came down a day ahead of time. I phoned your room when I registered, and they said you—you were out. So I—I just c-came upstairs and went to bed. I was going to surprise you in the morning!"

Ten minutes later when Ruth had gone back to bed and Lynn had recovered somewhat from his first shock of surprise, Hart reverted to his former argument.

"I don't agree, Harry, that the farce, as we see it on the stage, never occurs in real life." He smiled quizzically as he quoted his words of an hour before. "I believe that, given the necessary chain of circumstances—all of them logical, usual, in fact—an 'impossible' farcical situation can occur—quite naturally. You see I'm right, Harry. Don't you?"



WOMEN are always suspicious of men except when they are being told something of which they should be suspicious.

# The Return of David Belasco

*(An Uncritical Review)*

By Thomas Grant Springer

**D**AVID BELASCO, our own David Belasco, has returned to us. For a long time—for, lo, these many seasons, he has been wandering in the vague vaporings of the spirit world. At all times, while we were trailing after him, we did not exactly follow him. It began, I think, with "The Return of Peter Grimm"—this Oliver Lodge meandering after the whatness of the which. Then came "The Case of Becky," that startled Starr study of the bughouse ward. "Vanderdecken," the Flying Dutchman, flew too high or too low, but evidently got in Dutch and struck a reef and came to grief outside the dramatic port of New York, and Broadway harbored him not. But "Tiger, Tiger" coaxed us into "the jungles of the night" and lost us in its misty and passionate mazes, and "One," the twisted, twining twin of an uncertain destiny, still leaves us vaguely whispering, "What is it?"

But now he comes to us with Sacha Guitry's "Deburau," leading by the hand that sterling actor Lionel Atwill to join the Pleiades of Broadway. Here is the old Belasco, the Belasco of "DuBarry," of "The Rose of the Rancho," and "The Darling of the Gods," and so once more the darling of the adoring public. "Deburau" is nothing short of dramatic philanthropy, the elaborateness of its production, the fidelity of its costuming and character, the pageantry of its setting and figures make it an artistic rather than a financial success. All the support that the public can give it will never repay the outlay of time, money, and thought that has been spent upon it. For a long time the theater has been a gray waste of realism lighted now and then by the foolish flutter of farcical lingerie, but this season has witnessed a renaissance of the romantic, and none more welcome than "Deburau."

which, besides being laid in the picturesque period of 1839, is rendered from the French in rime by Granville Barker. The fact that Mr. Atwill triumphed over the handicap—for three hours of rime delivery is nothing short of that—was the greatest proof of the mastery of his art. This is no discredit to Mr. Barker, for verse at its best is like wit, happiest in its brevity. The mere discovery of enough English rimes to keep a play moving is in itself an achievement, if not a literary one.

First of all, Deburau is of the theater, by the theater, and for the theater, like the theoretic principles of our great country. It deals of the stage, front and back, through the life story of Paris' greatest Pierrot. Like Pagliacci of the opera, it shows the tragedy of the comedian, who, like the literary wits and the flippant dramatic reviewer, is a man saddened by his art. Publicly he shakes the cap and bells, privately he shakes his head—and is often shaken. His white mask often conceals a shy and tender soul as a fat man's avoirdupois hides a sentimental heart. So let us look at Deburau behind his painted mask, look into his mind and heart, as his admiring public never had a chance to do.

We are invited to step into the auditorium of the Follies Theater on the night Paris really discovered the artist. The mighty ones of Paris' intellectual world have assembled to do him honor, and the

theater, until then obscure, is made. Then we witness a snatch of the performance itself—rather educational it was, too, for, aside from Winthrop Ames' production of "Pierrot the Prodigal," we know little enough of real pantomime. And then the audience leave and the players come out of their dressing rooms to discuss the hit of Deburau. Of course there is petty professional jealousy, bickering and backbiting, for no actor is ever an artist to his fellows, then or now. The fact that the critics have been kind and the manager has raised his salary do not tend to make Deburau any more popular with his own. When he appears in street clothes there is no round of applause from the inner circle, and Deburau, being a sensitive man, is hurt by it. But there are compensations to his art, for almost every night ladies wait for him, and it is even so this eve. But Deburau is a very peculiar actor: he doesn't fall for them just because they fall for him. No, sir, Deburau is not a bad actor off the stage. He is a married man with a young son, and he isn't playing around after business hours. For instance, witness:

CLARE

She's waiting. There, see the tip of her dress.

DEBURAU

What a nuisance. Don't leave me whatever you do.

(*Goes to lady.*)

Madam, are you waiting to see me?

THE LADY

Rather to hear you speak.

It's uncanny to have so much to say in silence.

DEBURAU

The whole thing lies in the art of listening.

THE LADY

Forgive me—would you turn your eyes to the left a little?

Your friends here are experts in the art, I fear.

So suppose we went—anywhere  
A little less crowded—and empty.  
My carriage is in the square.

DEBURAU

Quite so— (*Begins feeling in his pocket.*)

THE LADY

Your watch. It's not late.

DEBURAU

No, not my watch—a miniature. Here we are.

THE LADY

What is it?

DEBURAU (*showing it*)

My wife. Pretty, isn't she?

THE LADY

Very.

DEBURAU

Most women think so. I wish she were here,

But if one day you care to pay her a visit

I'd so like you to meet her. May I tell her we met?

THE LADY

I regret

I've detained you

DEBURAU

I fear

That I'm more satisfactory seen and not heard.

THE LADY

No, indeed, you're quite magnificent.

Good night. Give your wife my congratulations.

Which was a fine hint for actors. If they would only carry their wife's picture about, but they usually carry their own.

But, ladies, I beg you not to be discouraged, for after all Deburau was only a man, and man is not as sure-footed as the proverbial mule when he is on the rocky path of virtue. No matter how they try to watch their step they are liable to trip, tangled up in a skirt. There is another lady waiting for him. And what a lady! The moment we saw her we bet he wouldn't pull any miniature on her. And he didn't; in fact, he didn't even pull an argument. He just went right along, and I'll bet right there that his wife had a long wait for him that evening, for, as the curtain fell we were pretty sure it was curtains for him.

Now, if you read your Dumas *fil's*, and most of us have, you will remember Marie Duplessis, the Lady of the Camellias. Well, she is the one who has lured Deburau from his happy home, and we find him at hers, where he has been for a week, and still going strong. But he isn't playing pantomime, at least when the curtain rises. Not much! He is so full of poetical conversation that he is running off at the head like a spring freshet. Believe me, he isn't talking like a respectable married man, not to Marie.

DEBURAU

I'm not going to pose to you—  
Silly riddles about the past. You're a woman, you're a mystery.  
Well, stay so for me  
While I hold the present fast.  
Or, if I only sit beside you,  
Sit and look and look,  
That's enough.

Things that are the very stuff  
Of life—one should look them through  
and through,  
So quickly they pass.  
Think what a fool if I never took  
My chance to tear the veils that hide  
you.

Now I ask you, is that any way  
for a married man to talk to another woman?

Well, he keeps right on like that, only worse, until Madame Rabouin is announced. Now, Madame is an old lady who sells perfumes and tells fortunes, but most of all acts as go-between for ladies like Marie and their admirers. Being a sensible sort of woman, she isn't as strong for Deburau as Marie seems to be. His sort of love doesn't pay—in cash—and that is the basis that Madame figures on. So she manages to tell Deburau's fortune by his hand, prophesies disaster, and so he turns on her in a tirade and leaves in a huff. At least he sees Madame's game, if not Marie's.

Having gotten rid of Deburau, Madame says what she has come to say to Marie. She is afraid that the girl is serious over the affair, but Marie assures her that she is never serious over love; she leaves that to the other sex. She takes all but gives nothing, and her stock in trade is that she can take without giving. Deburau has been an amusement. She has drained him of all interest and is tired already. Madame is delighted at this, for she had a young man who is crazy to meet Marie, a gentleman with much wealth beside his wealth of love. He

is willing to pay, and pay generously for her favors—also, we take it, a commission to Madame—and she begs Marie to consider him seriously. Marie does, for that is the only kind of gentlemen whom she does consider seriously. So Madame lets him in, and Marie takes him in, as has ever been the way with women.

YOUNG MAN (*at Marie's feet*)  
Where shall I find the words in which  
to tell you  
All that it means to be at your feet?  
No worth of wealth of mine that can  
compel you  
To squander on me of your store complete  
Of beauty and of tenderness one glance.  
Pity me for the little that I have  
To bring you, but your love can make  
it more.

I love you, and I love you, that is all.

MARIE

But words of love sound always new  
and real  
When the voice speaking them is new.  
If I know that you love me  
What more need I know?  
We often lose beauty in life because  
we shrink  
From looking at things close enough.  
We should look them through and  
through.  
When they are the very stuff  
Of life—don't you think?  
What's amiss?

YOUNG MAN

Nothing. But I can't speak.  
Oh, the touch of your very dress  
Seems to have life in it!

MARIE

Touch with your hand  
The tip of my ribbon—no, not with  
your lips—  
That I shall feel for sure.  
Very well, lay it against your cheek.  
Yes, a current indefinite



Of pain, of joy, somehow slips  
Its way to my heart.

YOUNG MAN

Oh, my heart!  
You can't send me away now? I can't  
endure  
To be sent away.

MARIE

Well, for a little while stay.

And just then in walks Deburau on the tableau, and he has with him his little boy, a bird in a cage, and a dog. As a matter of fact, it looks as if he is ready to move right in with his family—well, all of the family that is left—for his wife has left him after he left her, and now he finds himself left with Marie. He explains it all to her.

Rather nice of him, too, I thought, for few men are such good losers. So Marie hears his tale of woe out and then introduces him to her new lover, who wants to meet him, finding out he is Deburau, but not knowing that he is stepping into the actor's shoes. And the curtain falls on the fall of Deburau, and he isn't the first man who has fallen for a woman who was ready to chuck him for the next.

We are asked now to let seven years elapse before we step into Deburau's apartment in Paris. We find him grown much older, sick, a bit down and out, and his son a boy of seventeen, with much of his father in him. All the time Deburau has not forgotten Marie, though it is more than evident that she has forgotten him. He is waiting for her to show up almost every day, which showed us that the old boy

is a bit cracked in the dome. It's all very well to wait for a woman seven hours, or even seven days, but when it comes to seven years that's stretching a lover's patience a bit too much.

Young Charles is doing a bit of waiting on his own account, but not for a woman. He is waiting to step into his father's shoes, who now seems to have laid them aside forever, for he too wants to be an actor. But Deburau is still jealous of his name and fame, and in spite of the fact that the boy shows undoubted talent he is for holding on a while or letting the youngster make things for himself.

And then one of the company from the Follies comes in to visit the sick man. He chats about how bad business is with him out of the cast, gets the boy up at the window reading a book, and then comes to the real point of his gossip.

ROBILLARD

Well, you wanted to know what had become—

DEBURAU

Of my wife. I suppose I did.

ROBILLARD

I've seen her, not three hours back. I thought I should never get on her track.

DEBURAU

Go on. I suppose it's as we feared. The poor wretch has come to utter grief?

ROBILLARD

No, she's all right. She appeared a little older perhaps—and plumper—But more content. That was the chief thing that I noticed. I hadn't to pump her.

She wanted to tell me, and so I let her.  
Well, there she is with a man  
Who keeps a big jeweler's shop.

I gather he's very well-to-do.  
She was charmingly dressed, not at all  
the frump  
She used to be. It seems he's good  
sort of fellow, too.

DEBURAU

A tradesman. Rather a drop  
From what she was used to with me.

ROBILLARD

She's all but married to him, you see,  
Calls herself Madame—

DEBURAU

She's taken his name  
And given up mine?

ROBILLARD

Well, you mustn't blame  
Her for that.

DEBURAU

But what taste!  
Here's a nice touch of irony.  
I honor that creature with my name,  
She flings it back to me at the very  
same  
Moment her son is up to the felony  
Of trying to steal it. Oh, but why  
waste

Time on a woman who, without a  
pang,  
Let's her husband go hang!

ROBILLARD

But had you a flood of tears ready to  
fall  
For her loss?

DEBURAU

Not at all.  
I never told her with my eyes full of  
tears  
And a sob in my voice and my arms  
round her neck  
That I'd die if she left me. But for  
ten solid years  
She said that to me about once a week.

ROBILLARD

I'm sure she meant it  
And she suffered then,  
When the smash came.  
But she couldn't prevent it,

So she picked up the pieces and started  
again.

Women do.

DEBURAU

Do men?

ROBILLARD

Yes, why shouldn't they do the same?

DEBURAU

Because  
There are different laws  
A man loves under.

Which of course we couldn't see,  
even if he did. If he wanted to love  
Marie, I don't see why his wife  
should stick around and not love  
somebody else. She had better be  
the mistress of a good jeweler than  
the wife of a bad actor. Deburau  
seemed to have hard luck with his  
women.

And just then he thought it had  
turned to good luck, for here comes  
Marie herself to call on him. He  
sends the boy and his friend out and  
perks up amazingly when left alone  
with her. But it doesn't last long,  
for all too soon he finds out that she  
didn't come of her own accord, but  
because some of the bunch at the  
theater wrote that he was sick.

DEBURAU

It took that to bring you.  
Never a thought of me when I was  
well.

MARIE

Yes, I have thought of you very often.

DEBURAU

Still loving me?

MARIE

Still loving you—  
As much as ever.

DEBURAU

You should not have come.  
Are you unhappy?

MARIE

I have some unhappy times,  
But since I love him I prefer to be  
Unhappy.

DEBURAU

At last you understand.  
Now we can sing love's litany  
Together, hand in hand.

MARIE

Why did you sing love's litany to me?  
I think that taught me to believe in it.  
You were the first to tell me—

DEBURAU

Now you are wiser than I.  
Now what's the trouble? Let's have it  
laid bare.  
You must give me my share.

MARIE

They want me to leave him for good  
and all,

His father wants him to marry.  
He came this morning to tell me so.  
The maid said, "Monsieur Duval's in  
the hall."

Some joke of Armand's, I thought.  
He walked his father.

Would I please let his son go?

He put it a little crudely.

I told him I would, just to get rid of  
him.

DEBURAU

Will you?

MARIE

Never, never, never!

So, after all, her visit doesn't do  
Deburau much good. But she has  
brought her doctor, having a cough  
herself, and insists on his seeing him  
while she runs along.

Now, Deburau doesn't want to see  
the doctor at all. He knows what  
is the matter with him better than  
the doctor, and his medicine has  
been handed him by pretty, but  
cruel hands. He swallows the bitter  
pill and listens idly to the doctor  
diagnosing his case as nerves and

recommending diversion, prescribing  
the theater. Not knowing who  
Deburau is, he tells him to go and  
see the one man in Paris who will  
make him forget himself, make him  
laugh and cry and see things of real  
interest behind the mask of *Pierrot*.  
This bucks Deburau up a bit. He  
thinks he is still worth something,  
even if his wife has gone with an-  
other man and his sweetheart loves  
still another. He realizes that there  
is something else in the world be-  
sides women, and if he can't have  
them he can have fame. Just then  
his son comes in.

DEBURAU

Show the doctor out.

*(Charles shows him into the passage,  
returning almost immediately.)*

He's right—

That's the way.

What have you been about?

CHARLES

I've been to the theater. I saw—

DEBURAU

Well?

CHARLES

*Pierrot on the seesaw.*

DEBURAU

What are they playing to-night?

CHARLES

They're playing "Old Clo'."

DEBURAU

Who plays the part?

CHARLES

Legrand.

DEBURAU

Does he, indeed? That's a poor  
sort of joke.

Give me my hat, give me my cloak.

Don't stand there and stare.

Run on and tell them I'll be there

And ready to start.

I fear Legrand's prospects are hardly  
bright.

I play to-night.

And as the curtain falls he is off to show the matinee girls that he is still worth looking at, even if a couple of women have thrown him down.

The last act shows us the backstage of the Follies and Deburau trying to come back. But, like many an athlete, dramatic and otherwise, it can't be done. After a woman has put a man down for the count, he is out, and so it is with Deburau. Having turned out a bad actor off the stage, the audience are for turning him out as a bad actor on, and in place of the old time applause now comes hisses and boos from a displeased populace.

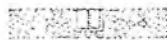
At last the curtain falls, and with it Deburau. He realizes that he has made his last appearance. There is another show to be played that night, but he hasn't the ghost of a show to play it. The ghost, in fact, has walked for the last time for him. The manager is up in the air, and if they close now the house is ruined. He has got to put on the second show and must send for the deposed Legrand.

At this Deburau bucks. He will name his own successor and not let his name go off the bill. His own son shall go on. Deburau will still

be Deburau, the boy will have his chance. He has always wanted it, he is up in all the parts, he has the fire of youth banked by the ashes of old age. The boy will have his chance. And so his father makes him up, gives him instructions out of the years of past success, sets his feet upon the boards, and from the prompter's place in the wings, age coaches youth to follow in its footsteps.

So the curtain is rung down and up. The boys goes on, and we hear the crowd acclaim him. "*Le Roi est mort, vive le Roi.*" We see the dancing feet of youth moving to the rhythm of a young heart, and then the lights fade out, leaving only Deburau's face revealed to us in the prompter's place. Slowly it fades as the applause rises. He is passing, passing, and youth is dancing in his shoes. And so finishes Deburau, in every sense of the word.

And so Belasco has returned to us, the Belasco of old and happier days. We thank him, not only for the magnificence of the production, the beauty of the pictures, the carefulness of the staging, but the introduction of a new star, one who, we hope, and think, will brighten the more or less Milky Way of Broadway with a steady, artistic glow.



MARRIAGE is the greatest blessing man was ever cursed with.

# Folly in Love

## *A TWO-PART STORY—PART II*

By W. Carey Wonderly

### *THE PREVIOUS INSTALMENT TOLD HOW*

FOLLY OF THE CABARET finds herself without a job when the ginger-ale law forces Little Romany to close down. The sick boy Barker, whom she has been nursing in the hallroom next to hers, is moved in her absence to a hospital and she is unable to trace him. Martinez, a repellent South American, is pursuing her. He knows she is without both money and work, and he urges her to marry him. But she fears him and refuses.

Alec Hollister, a writer of established reputation, offers Folly a situation at this crisis in her affairs. Hollister has written nothing for two years, since Richard, the youth whom he calls his adopted son, has disappeared. Now Hollister's arm is broken, and he is ordered to his Long Island estate for a complete rest. Folly, with her whimsical wit, has tickled his sense of humor at Little Romany one night. Hollister offers her a salary to stay with him at Tranby until he recovers. Folly agrees to clown to him, an audience of one, in place of the nightly cabaret crowd.

**T**HE Hollister place on Long Island, Tranby, was on the brow of a hill, and from the broad, sunny verandas one got a glimpse of the Atlantic itself. The house faced the south, and March was ushered in with a promise of finer weather, so that the household, transplanted from steam-heated New York, faced the future with steadily rising spirits.

Of the household only Hollister's man William knew that Folly wasn't exactly the "young lady" who helped Mr. Hollister "write his books."

Mr. Hollister wasn't writing at present, that was true, but Miss Fontaine was always at hand in case the arm mended and Doctor Faris gave his permission to resume work. Folly was familiar with this pleasant romance, and while her love of fairness told her she ought to rebel and stand in her true colors before the servants, she . . . yes, she held her peace. But she wasn't the secretary; though the cap and bells were unseen, she was nevertheless Alec Hollister's clown. How she tried always to remember that!

It was a difficult role. When she joined Hollister after breakfast, often she had to torture herself with memories of Little Romany, of Nita and Gladys and Irene, of Joe Martinez, in order to remember the part she was engaged to play. It was usual for them to spend the morning together in the library. There were books and magazines and newspapers—invariably Alec would offer her the different journals first. Then talk. . . . It was a bit bewildering to stand upon one's head so quickly after reading about politics, the theater, obituary notices. Folly felt that her clowning wasn't as successful as in the past, though she tried nobly.

On fine days they went motoring in the afternoon. Hollister's diseased spirits were a greater calamity than his broken arm. Faris wanted him out in the air and the sunshine; Ashby wanted Folly along, so that the author might continue to study her under all conditions. She confessed she had never ridden in a private car before. Little by little, Hollister learned there were unbelievably many things of which Folly knew little or nothing. She had been born on a farm—that seemed to slip out in an unguarded moment, and immediately she was in character again.

"Oh, dear, yes; on a farm! A hundred acres more or less at Newport, along the ocean front. Everybody who was anybody came to us for week-ends. We had titles where other people only have children.

I should have married a Russian prince, only an English duke prevented it; he prevented it with an expose—whatever that is. But I didn't marry him—either him. The expose was directed at me, you understand. But it was a delightful farm, with us all milking cows—"

"Milking cows?" questioned Alec, who thought he detected a flaw in her painting.

"Why, of course! In imitation of that French queen who set her court to dairying when all other games grew stale. We were real toffs!"

Such odds and ends she had learned from the cinema, and while Hollister admitted the screen's possibilities as an educator, an odd feeling, which may have been jealousy, led him to ask himself why he shouldn't do as much for Folly as the pictures had done. She was eager to learn, quick to grasp. Once or twice he caught her peeping into the books in his library.

So it came to pass that Alec Hollister challenged the movies, and undertook to teach Folly at least as much as they could. Garrett Ashby one afternoon found Alec and Folly with their heads close together over a French grammar. The picture they made was a bit disturbing until Ashby had time to assure himself that Hollister was no philosopher, or if he was, Folly wasn't to be taken seriously. Some men turned to butterflies, and others to coin collecting, in moments of brain-fag, and Alec to this odd girl.

At table the publisher had a further chance to study Folly. In the first place, though old Alec didn't appear to notice the difference, the other man concluded her entire salary had been expended for clothes: dark, simple things. The serviceable navy blue frock she was wearing didn't transform her into a howling beauty—such things are sacred to the drama; but it did lend a simple dignity to Folly which stood her well throughout Ashby's visit.

After dinner the two men went into the library to smoke, and Folly was footloose for the evening.

"You are teaching her French," Ashby started in. "Does that mean you are tired of her comedy? I suppose you find her efforts with the Gallic tongue amusing enough. In spite of your genius, you were always a splendid business man, you know."

Hollister laughed.

"One has to be, with fellows like you to deal with," he retorted. "You'd make a penny puzzle out of Gioconda's smile. As for Folly, I have never uncovered such fertile soil in all my life. She simply absorbs ideas. And heaven knows I owe her something, after all she has done for me! I'd be in a strait-jacket before this, if it weren't for her—I'm serious!"

Ashby nodded thoughtfully.

"But are you quite fair?" he asked, after a moment. "Why fill the girl's head with French, to go

back to Little Romany and . . . dance the shimmy?"

The smile that struggled to escape as he pronounced the final word was sufficient to kill the thought in back of his speech, and Hollister found himself grinning like a mischievous schoolboy.

"Ah, my friend," he cried, "it is better that I should teach her French, than that she should teach me . . . the wiggly dance you just mentioned. An old dog, a sad dog, if you will, but not a gay dog. I can't."

"You can't—what?"

"Shimmy—either on tea or *terra firma*. Garrett, I wish Richard were home. Tranby isn't half-bad with spring in the air. I got out my writing pads and pencils the other night, after everybody had gone to bed. If Richard were here and Faris were decent about my using my arm, I—I believe there is something I might say."

"You've heard nothing from the detective agency regarding Richard?"

"Not a word."

Ashby was silent for a minute.

"At least you have the satisfaction of knowing that the best agency in the country is handling the case for you, Alec. Buck up! With—spring in the air, who could resist Tranby? Some day Richard will come home when you're least expecting him. . . . Shall we join Folly? I think I hear the pianola."

"It was Folly herself. Her touch is a bit mechanical at present. She is just learning," explained Hollister, with pride in the subject.

The men rose together and went towards the drawing room.

## IX

AT the end of the month, Hollister begged for an additional two weeks' grace, and Folly, upon reflection, which was acting pure and simple, said with such dignity as she could command that she would stay. Stay! There was nothing she desired more. The very thought of returning to New York, of living under the Hibberd boarding-house roof, earning her bread and bed in the old way, and eluding Joe Martinez as frequently as she could—the very thought was a nightmare and unnerved her for hours! From the moment she had arrived at Tranby, she had been shut off from her old world. At times she tried to tell herself it was all a bad dream, but that some day there must be a returning, if not to Little Romany, then to some other resort of the same character, Folly believed deep down in her heart.

"I'd rather make a hole in the river," she reflected, while the very thought of Martinez turned her faint. Once away from Hollister and Tranby, Joe would find her, and, once found, she would never escape him again. Often she wondered how it was he hadn't traced her here. She knew the man she

had to deal with. He had selected her for his mate, and such an honor wasn't to be lightly cast aside. Once the gates of Tranby closed upon her, there was nothing left her but suicide or marriage with Joe.

When such thoughts crowded, it seemed a foolish, wasteful thing to spend hours pouring over books, to bother her head with history, English, music, French. What good would they do her when she left Tranby?

Then she would peep into Alec's workshop and glimpse him at his desk, she would walk out on the veranda and discover spring at every turn, she would hear the bark of dogs and the coo of pigeons, and feel heartily ashamed. Life itself was but a season. If her portion was to be a day, then that day must count. Folly worked all the harder for her fits of depression.

She had many hours to herself now. Alec was at work again. He had triumphed over circumstance, come to think of it! He had learned to write with his left hand. One of those authors who could never express himself fully by dictation. Hollister was in the habit of filling block after block of paper with words and more words, and then engaging a secretary to copy his manuscript.

When Doctor Faris continued to forbid him making use of his right hand and words fought for expression, Alec had taught himself to hold his pencil with his



left fingers. The time had come when he had to write!

He never spoke of his work to Folly; Hollister had never discussed unfinished work with anyone. In the morning he slipped away quietly to his desk, and he started guiltily when anyone, even his servants, caught him with pencil and paper.

Folly had ransacked the library and failed to discover a single volume of Alec's, but a note and a money order to his publisher, brought her, one at a time, his eight novels. And she devoured them as secretly as Hollister wrote—read and wondered afresh at the man with the boyish grin and the erect, athletic carriage at forty.

Her last day at Tranby was up on Monday. She would return to New York that night. Without the faintest idea of what her future was to be, without a plan, Folly had made up her mind that nothing could induce her to remain at Tranby an hour after sundown. Come to think of it, it had been a long time since she had clowned for Hollister's amusement. That is what they had engaged her for. She hadn't earned her salary in weeks, and honesty, if nothing else, forbade her remaining longer in his house.

The servants, with whom she was a favorite, knew Folly was leaving, and there had been little offerings from the housekeeper and the gardener, while the cook had

made her a frosted cake. The household seemed to buzz with the announcement of her departure, but Alec, at his desk, worked on, obliviously. Of course a man who wrote such books as he wasn't to be expected to take account of . . . a clown's exit. Stoutly Folly maintained this point, and all alone went to say good-by to the dogs, the horses, the pigeons, all the many wonderful things that made Tranby the most wonderful spot in all the world.

She spent an hour out-of-doors, and then turned back, to find the household topsy-turvy, with servants bristling with excitement, and most important things at loose ends.

Just inside the library stood Alec and Ashby, an awed and dazed Alec, a rather important Ashby, who talked in undertones and gesticulated like a small time actor. There was no need to be told that trouble had descended upon Tranby, and Folly was too sympathetic to question Hollister. She turned away, though his hand went after her in mute appeal; but this, of course, she didn't know.

The housekeeper, Mrs. Dickson, came to her in the upper hall.

"Just to think! They've found Mr. Richard!" said the woman in tragic tones.

Folly looked at her and didn't understand. This should be an occasion for joy. Then:

"You don't mean he is. . . dead?"

"It's dying they believe he is, Miss Fontaine. The detectives found him in a hospital, mind you! Mr. Ashby was communicated with, and now Doctor Faris is bringing the young gentleman down to Tranby, with nurses and such, while Mr. Ashby came ahead to prepare Mr. Hollister. Did you notice him? He looks like he needs a doctor himself, say I."

On the stairs, Folly came upon Garrett Ashby, who was coming in search of her, he said. Folly had been going to him.

"Mrs. Dickson told me. How terrible for Mr. Hollister! Surely there is hope?"

"Well, you may depend on it that everything possible will be done now," said Ashby, with a long breath. "Poor Alec is cut up. You've got to stay and help, you know. One of the servants said you were leaving, but you can't quit us like this. The household is all at sixes and sevens—nobody worth a picayune. Faris, with Richard and the two nurses, will be here in less than half an hour."

"Is there a room ready?" asked Folly.

"I doubt it. Everyone's off his head."

Folly nodded.

"I'll do what I can," she declared. "I suppose I can't leave now. I'll stay the night, at least."

She retraced her steps upstairs

and set to work bringing order out of chaos. When the ambulance arrived, the room was in readiness, and Alec Hollister had swallowed a pony of brandy while Folly stood by and watched him take it.

"You won't go?" he said, turning to Folly, when she attempted to coax him into the drawing room, beyond sight and sound of the slow-moving procession which heralded Richard's home-coming.

"No, I shan't go now," she promised and was rewarded by his eyes.

Doctor Faris was in the sick-room, watching beside the bed, and when Folly appeared in the doorway, he beckoned her to him, not wishing to leave the boy for a moment.

"Come in, you won't disturb him," he said.

Instinctively, as one does in a sick chamber, Folly tiptoed towards the bed, glad of the opportunity to get a glimpse of Richard. She had heard about him constantly since coming to Tranby, knew that Alec blamed himself for the boy's disappearance, and had spent many uncomfortable months in consequence. This homecoming was far from being an occasion for joy, but at least he was home. Folly leaned forward eagerly, even while her heart was filled with pity for both the patient and his guardian. But what she saw froze the smile on her lips. She was left speechless.

Richard was the man Barker, of Mrs. Hibberd's third-floor back

## X

DOCTOR FARIS whispered a few words without taking his eyes off the sick boy, to which Folly replied mechanically, and a moment later she was in the hall again, alone. Outside the door she stopped short, really to collect her wits. Her imagination was running wild; surprise swept her off her feet. She had no recollection of what the doctor had said to her.

It seemed to Folly a wonderful thing that the boy Richard, whom Alec Hollister loved as a son, should be the youngster she had nursed in her incompetent but honest way in the lodging house in the West Forties. It seemed as glorious as any fairy tale—he would get well soon; there would be a happy ending, of course. Both Richard and Alec had suffered so deeply! She had never ceased to think of the sick boy; there was never a morning that she hadn't searched the obituary columns in the papers, fearfully, for the name of Barker.

Footsteps on the stairs, and she turned just too late to escape Hollister and Ashby. Word had gone forth that Alec could visit the sick room and he was on his way there, suddenly grave and old, with all the boyishness gone from his face. He passed into the room without speaking, but to her surprise, Garrett Ashby remained outside with her.

"You've seen Richard?" the publisher asked, after a moment.

"Yes, I've seen him," Folly answered. And then, because she could see no reason for withholding the truth, she added, "I know him."

Ashby's eyes were on her face in an instant. "What?" he demanded. "Why, what do you mean?"

"I mean exactly that—I know him," Folly declared. "He lived in the same house with me—his room was just across the hall. They took him to the hospital one night while I was at work—the very night I met you and Mr. Hollister at Little Romany. He was desperately ill then."

"Good heavens! In the same house with you, while Alec was searching the city! Have you told Alec this?"

"No, I hadn't time, and then—I wasn't sure—" She put the question squarely to Ashby. "Should I tell him—I mean everything? I shall say to-morrow, probably, that I had met Richard in New York, but . . . he was terribly poor. He owed Mrs. Hibberd for two weeks—there was money for neither food nor medicine. Surely Mr. Hollister needn't know that!"

"No, no. He blames himself—you . . . did what you could?"

"I did what I could, yes. But it wasn't much, wasn't enough. My salary at Little Romany was small—the show closed down without paying our last half week's salary, you know. If Mr. Hollister knew the true facts, I am sure he would worry himself ill!"

"Probably you're right. Nothing had better be said, for the present, at least," agreed Ashby.

After hours with only defeat staring them in the face, a defeat which Faris and Alec refused to acknowledge, the boy had taken a turn for the better, and it was reported that he had spent a comfortable night. Doctor Faris said if Richard had been sent anywhere but to Tranby, where he received all the care and attention that money could provide, he would have died. Probably this would have been better, Garrett Ashby decided privately, for there wasn't any doubt that Richard's mind was affected, though knowledge of this had been carefully kept from Hollister.

"He will mend quickly now," pronounced Faris. "In a week he will be down in his chair on the veranda." But he said nothing about the patient's mental condition, leaving that phase to a specialist he was bringing down to Tranby.

Alec Hollister looked like a man who had gone through a long siege of illness, and when the crisis in Richard's case was safely passed, Folly half expected him to go to bed. He was still dazed for the rest of the week, but the vigor that was his even approaching forty stood him in good stead, and the spring sunshine and south winds did the rest. For instance, Folly insisted on daily motor rides, and she donned the cap and bells again, hoping to bring forgetfulness with her clowning.

Presently he resumed his work, and Folly continued her studies, and the household settled down in its former comfortable routine, unconsciously waiting, perhaps, all of them, for that day when Richard was himself again.

It was during one of their automobile rides that Folly decided to speak to Alec of those days at Mrs. Hibberd's.

"I didn't tell you before," she commenced, "that I had met Richard before he came to Tranby. It was at my lodging house—we both had a room at the same address. It was at Mrs. Hibberd's that he was taken ill, you know."

Hollister was surprised and showed it. The thoughtful, anxious look had returned to his face almost with Folly's first words, and as she continued she was conscious of a decided frown, which might have been born of the reopening of an old wound.

"Why didn't you tell me before that you were acquainted with Richard?" Alec demanded, after a short silence.

Her voice was gentle.

"I didn't know that the boy who was my neighbor in New York was your Richard. He was called Barker, at Mrs. Hibberd's. I didn't know until I saw him the night Doctor Faris called me into the sick-room. Then I discovered that his patient and my patient were one and the same. I spoke to Mr. Ashby. We concluded I had better

wait to tell you until another day."

"This is another day," said Hollister, with a certain grimness. "Suppose you tell me now."

And so Folly spoke of the house in the Forties, of the lodgers one met on the stairs and in the halls, and touched humorously upon the Hibberd basement boudoir, where she had found the paper with the account of Alec's accident. That Richard was ill in the room across from hers, that she had nursed him and lost him when he was sent to the hospital while she was at work, she touched on as lightly as possible. Her one thought was to spare Alec, and she didn't realize that this very lightness robbed her story of sincerity. Her effort to play up the character of Mrs. Hibberd, to make him laugh at the droll sketches of the rooming house, fell somewhat flat, and her auditor got the impression that there was something she was trying to conceal.

"In the morning there was one grand rush for the bathroom. You would have imagined that Mrs. Hibberd's menagerie was whiter than the driven snow, but in the words of the poet, you'd be surprised. Talk about the charge of the Light Brigade! And the patter of little feet! My word, Augustus! Probably you've seen the queue of galleryites outside of the Metropolitan on gala nights? Even so Madam Hibberd's, outside the bathroom door. We brought camp-stools and newspapers. If cleanliness is next to godliness, that

madhouse would have gone to glory à la Abraham."

She won a smile, but the effort must have been apparent even to herself.

## XI

LATER, Alec paid a visit to the house in the West Forties and had an interview with Mrs. Hibberd in the very room which Folly had described so humorously. This visit wasn't occasioned solely because Hollister doubted Folly's story; it was because he wanted to hear more about Richard. Incidentally he discovered from the landlady that the boy's rent was unpaid and that Richard was indebted to her for a hundred and one different comforts and kindnesses. The moment she glimpsed Hollister, Mrs. Hibberd was ready with her sympathy and tears, until the man came away half-inclined to believe that Folly had been unduly harsh with the woman.

"That he is alive to-day, I don't mind saying is due almost entirely to me," was Mrs. Hibberd's parting shot. "I got the doctor, and arranged to send the young man to the hospital. There was one creature living here at the time that was so jealous of your boy, Mr. Hollister, that she tried to nurse him herself, without letting anybody else get near him. But I fixed her."

It was with the strangest sensation imaginable that Alec Hollis-

ter came away from the house in the West Forties, a feeling of disappointment, of disillusion. He knew now that Richard had been hungry—and that Mrs. Hibberd had provided him with broth and milk. He knew that she had sent the boy to the hospital in order to save his life—for the landlady, of course, said nothing about the new lodger who was set down in Richard's room almost before the bed was cold. Folly was called a "creature," who had watched Dick jealously—Mrs. Hibberd thought the "girl" must have known there was "money in the family."

"My God!" breathed Alec, wiping his brow. He had to stop and look up at the sky to make sure that the sun was still there.

Heartily he cursed himself for coming to New York. He had heard more than Folly had told him about Richard—he had heard too much!

"It isn't true," he said to himself, as he walked to the Astor in search of a taxicab, but whether he referred to Richard's destitution or Folly's treachery, who can say?

It was May at Tranby, and Richard had been coming down on the south veranda for several weeks. The trained nurse had given way to a man, who was convalescent attendant. He was with Richard when Alec returned from town. The boy had filled out, and looked quite normal again; he spoke breezily to Hollister, and put down his magazine and cigarette. To all ap-

pearances, he was his former brilliant self. But his conversations were limited; he had a trick of forgetting, so that often from day to day he failed to recall the servants' names; and his books were mostly illustrations. Mr. Payson, the attendant, was always at his elbow to prompt him.

"Here comes Mr. Hollister now," he said. And the boy, taking his cue like an actor, cried:

"Howdy, Hollister! Have a smoke?"

Richard had called him Uncle Alec in his school days, and later, when grown to young manhood, he had been simply Alec. It wasn't the old Richard who called him Hollister, but at least it was Richard, and for the rest the great specialists were most encouraging. Rest, cheerful quiet, sunshine, and time would bring him around, they averred.

Hollister dropped into a chair and accepted a cigarette from the box that Richard proffered.

"I have been in town," said Alec slowly, "to have an interview with Mrs. Hibberd—Mrs. Hibberd who lives in the West Forties."

"Ah, the ladies!" smiled Richard. "All dressed up and playing the society game, eh? Mrs. Hibberd!" He turned the name over on his tongue, but his face remained as bland as ever. "A little widow is a dangerous thing, they tell us, Hollister."

Alec stifled a groan and rose.

"The woman keeps a rooming house, and I'm sure I haven't the faintest idea whether she's a widow or not," he said, with some trace of bitterness. "It was business, not society, this afternoon."

"Have it your way." The smile and shrug was the Richard of yesterday; and yesterday Richard forgot.

As Hollister was leaving, Folly came out on the porch and, seeing Alec, she would have returned to the house, but Richard had glimpsed and waved a friendly hand at her.

"Why, it is Miss Fontaine!" prompted Mr. Payson, in an undertone; and Richard cried:

"Why are you running away, Miss Fontaine?" He had been known to confuse her with Miss Leightner, the nurse, and sometimes he called the pretty housemaid Folly. The pity of it all was almost more than Hollister could bear at times.

When Folly had joined the group Alec dropped back in his chair and set himself deliberately to watch—yes, just that. He wanted to study this boy and this girl together, to look into her eyes, and listen for unguarded speeches. Richard was quite gay with Folly, but then he was gay with everyone, generous, full of laughter. Once the boy called her Mrs. Dickson, and that he and Folly had ever met away from Tranby was furthest from his thoughts. That was it—he accepted to-day, lived to-day. Whatever they had been to each other

in the past, it remained for Folly herself, or time, to disclose.

Hollister tried to make himself believe that he read mysterious somethings in the girl's manner, if not in her words. When she was tender he thought it was love which couldn't quite disguise itself; when she was boyishly frank and boisterously gay, Alec said she was acting. He reminded himself of her ability to get beneath the characterization of Farrar's *Carmen*.

"She is a born actress," he reflected, referring to Folly.

During these anxious days and weeks it was usual to find both Doctor Faris and Garrett Ashby at the Hollister home over Sunday, visits which to all appearances were purely social ones, but which Folly knew included a professional examination of Richard. It was the physician's theory that one of these fine days the boy's mind would become normal, and his past return to him quite without warning, somewhat in the manner of a magician producing a live rabbit from out the clear sky.

Now Folly said that when Richard was himself again she would leave Tranby. Often from his work-room window Hollister would see her with Dick, either on the verandas or in the garden, the girl always intent upon the task she had set herself, urging the boy to talk of his youthful days, questioning him about the dogs and horses on the place. When he "remembered" that the colt, My Friend,

was foaled the first day of March two years ago, and the household verified his statement, she was overjoyed and most encouraged. For it was a fact that he had never been able to recall either his own or Alec's birthday. He knew the collic was Jock Stuart and the terrier was Beans now.

"Yes, indeed! I do notice improvement, Miss Fontaine," Mr. Payson assured her, when she spoke of these things to him.

Arriving for the week-end, Faris was pleased to report most favorably of the boy's progress. The doctor took full credit for the condition of the patient, and prepared himself for an enjoyable visit. On the other hand, Garrett Ashby was prompted at last to speak outright to his friend Hollister about his forthcoming book. He knew from Folly and the servants that Alec was at work again, but so far the author had maintained a stony silence on the subject.

"I've been wondering," said he, "when we may reasonably expect the first draft of your new novel, Alec?"

Hollister merely looked at him with replying for a moment or two.

"But I'm not writing a new novel, Garrett," he declared at last.

"Not writing—! Good heavens, what are you doing, then?" demanded the publisher.

Alec glanced across the drawing room, where Richard and Faris

were gathered around Folly at the piano and, finding them preoccupied, he beckoned to Ashby to come with him into the library.

"I'll take you into my confidence and show you the work which has been occupying my time for the past few months," he said, with a visible satisfaction.

## XII

WHEN Garrett Ashby returned to the drawing room, an hour later, his features were so distorted with anger that Folly, alone in the room, was frightened. She didn't grasp for a moment or two that it was anger which moved him so strongly, and, jumping at conclusions, her first thought was that something had happened to someone of the household.

"What is it?" she cried, rising to her feet and laying down the book she had been reading. "Is it—Richard?"

"Where is he?" Ashby asked.

"Gone for a game of billiards with Doctor Faris. Is there anything wrong, Mr. Ashby?"

She came towards him; they were alone. Hollister had slipped out on the veranda for a cigarette in the moonlight. Going over the events of the day, Ashby decided that this was the time to act, with no one near, and with Folly all to himself.

"Sit down," he said, not unkindly. "Yes, something has happened.



I am going to be frank with you, frank because I believe I can be. May I add that I have always considered you a most unusual young woman? When you've heard what I have to say I'm satisfied that you will see things in my light—in other words, you will understand. You know that I am Alec Hollister's friend even before I am his publisher, I think?"

She inclined her head. "Yes, I know you are good friends."

"Then you must believe that I have his interest at heart—that Alec Hollister's career and *standard* are very close and dear to me. We have always published his books, my father before me. Therefore it is safe to assume that we know what the public demands of him. Alec has gone far, but he can go further. A man in his position can't stand still. If he doesn't go ahead, he will slip back. You know, I believe, that Hollister has published nothing in two years. That was because of Richard's escapade, of course."

He paused, and Folly spoke quickly, eagerly.

"But Mr. Hollister is at work on a new book now, isn't he?"

"He has just shown me his work," Ashby replied. "Because his former novels have been of a certain high excellence, Alec Hollister's public has remained faithful to him during his two years of silence. His readers have remained faithful—and waiting. His new book will sell a hundred thousand copies, *but* . . .

it must be at least as fine a piece of writing as his former efforts. The composition he has just shown me is . . . trash, coming from Hollister's pen."

Her low little cry of horror, of disappointment, was most genuine.

"Oh, no, Mr. Ashby! You must be mistaken! Why, Mr. Hollister has been so—so *full* of this new work— His enthusiasm was wonderful, beautiful! You must be mistaken."

"I am not mistaken, I have read it. It is piffle! For one thing, he has attempted something entirely foreign to his style, his sympathies. He has taken for his subject—what do you think, Folly?"

Her hands lay clasped in her lap; everything about her breathed sincerity.

"I don't know. I could never guess. I know I am dying to read—"

Ashby interrupted dryly.

"You won't have to read it, you've *lived* it. Alec's written about Little Romany."

"Oh, no!"

"Yes."

"But . . . he has never done anything of that sort before!"

"Let's hope he never does again," said Ashby grimly. "It's not his sort of stuff. He'll ruin his career if it's published. You're a most interesting girl in the flesh, as I tried to point out to him, but when

he attempts to transfer you to paper—”

“Me! You said me? He has written a book about me?”

“About a girl of your . . . profession. Good stuff, good for a laugh, from anybody but Hollister. Leaving out the question as to whether it was quite fair to you to bring you to Tranby and then turn you inside out—”

“Oh!” She seemed propelled from the chair, and began pacing the room with nervous steps, her hands pressed to her breast. “As for *that*—”

Ashby rose and came towards her.

“Folly, you understand, don’t you? Alec Hollister comes within an ace of being a really great man. He mustn’t be allowed to ruin everything in this manner. He must never finish this novel.”

She questioned him dumbly with her eyes.

“In the vernacular, it is up to you,” Ashby continued. “Without you near him to study, to inspire him, I believe he will never finish the book. Now, I think you had planned once before to return to New York—”

“Of course!” She dabbed shamefacedly at her eyes. “Never fear; I shall leave Tranby to-night.”

“No! In the first place, there isn’t any train at this hour. I am returning to New York on the seven fifteen in the morning. That is before the household here is

awake. If you’d care to come with me—I shall be most happy to look after you until you get settled. If you should care to go . . . west—”

“Oh, don’t mind me! I can get along—”

“But. . . I want to think about you,” Ashby told her. “Simply because one man chooses to regard you solely as a subject, something to study under a microscope, is no reason for you to suppose that another isn’t your friend. If you’d prefer to leave Tranby quietly, without farewells, say, and seek your fortune in the West somewhere—”

Her back was towards him, and he could study the heaving shoulders, the unsteady hand that clutched the handkerchief.

“Yes, probably that would be best. I think I shall go to my room now. Excuse me. . . . What time did you say the early train left the station here?”

Long after the house grew still and the lights in the living rooms downstairs were extinguished, Folly sat on the side of her bed, trying to piece together the odds and ends of her shattered world. For a long time, anger and sorrow had waged a merry battle—anger to think that Alec should have used her for commercial purposes, sorrow that he should endanger his reputation as a writer because of the perverted inspiration come from her. . . . When she spoke of going before, he had asked her to stay, not because

of Richard's illness, but because the book wasn't ready. It wasn't ready now—it must never be finished!

Anger returned and the flush of indignation appeared in her cheeks, so that she sprang to her feet, fighting mad. Of course she had clowned—clowned in an effort to make him whole, make him forget. Hadn't he been able to see it was all acting, as much acting as her imitation of Farrar? Why did he suppose she went through life with a quip on the end of her tongue? Often she had to laugh in order to hide the tears.

Crossing the room, Folly opened the door and then crept along the corridor and down the stairs, quietly. Only the night lights were burning in the lower hall. She stopped at the library, felt with her fingers for the switch in the wall, and pressed the button. Beyond this was the little room known as Alec's workshop.

Desk and drawers were open, for in Alec Hollister's world there was no need for lock and key. Quickly Folly found what she wanted and, taking a handful of the precious blocks of paper into the library, prepared to burn them. There had been a log fire smoldering on the open grate all evening, but the servants had smothered it for the night, and Folly experienced some little difficulty in getting a blaze. She was down on her knees before the dying flame, when the door opened and Richard walked into

the room. From the other side of the table he observed the girl for a minute or two without speaking, scarcely breathing. Then, when she rose, picked up a block of manuscript and tossed it into the fire, he shouted.

Looking at him, she knew. . . that something happened. Pose, speech, eyes—all were different. Richard had become another man. It had come just as the doctor said it would—of a sudden, without warning, the boy was himself again!

"What are you doing?" he repeated when she didn't answer.

In her surprise, her great joy, Folly's anger melted; she forgot to be sullen and bent on revenge. Her arms went out to him; he might have been a child, for all the difference it made. Her one thought was that he was whole, was indeed Richard, and something that sounded suspiciously like "Thank God!" rose to her lips.

But Dick looked very stern and unbending.

"What are you doing with Mr. Hollister's manuscript?" he demanded.

Folly glanced at the charred paper on the hearth and sighed.

"It wasn't only his story, it was my heart, as well," she said.

"Your what?"

"Alec Hollister had put me under a microscope and set down word for word what he saw through the glass."

Richard came around the table, looking down at the several blocks she had under her hands, ready to add to the flame.

"You mean that Alec has made you the heroine of his new book?" he said.

Her smile was distorted and unpleasant.

"Is my sort of girl ever a heroine?" she asked. "No! Just a clown: his clown, perhaps, but never his heroine. He has written all about... Little Romany and Mrs. Hibberd's. You remember Mrs. Hibberd's in the West Forties, Richard?"

He said he did, said "Yes" because it dawned upon him that he had said "No" so often, just a little while ago.

"I thought Mr. Hollister wanted me here to—to sort of cheer him up," Folly continued. "I didn't mind playing fool for him. But when it comes to writing me up, to putting me out at so much a copy for the public to chuckle over— Besides, it's a poor book, anyway."

"How do you know it's a poor book? Have you read it?"

"No."

"How do you know, then?" demanded Richard.

He picked up a block of manuscript and read steadily for several minutes.

"It isn't a book at all, it's a play," he announced at last.

### XIII

IN the morning, when Folly crept downstairs, ready to steal out of the house and out of Alec Hollister's life as well, she found the author waiting for her in the lower hall.

Alec took her bag from her, opened the library door, and urged her gently into the room.

"I don't want you to leave us yet awhile, please," he said. "Something very wonderful has happened to Richard, for one thing. After you had gone to your room last evening and I returned to the library, I noticed a... great restlessness had seized the boy. I spoke to Faris, and he said that probably the moment had come for the brain's awakening. We went for a walk together, we three. By the time we got back to the house, the old Richard had returned."

There were tears in her eyes; she made a little expressive gesture with her hands.

"Then, you see? You don't need me any longer. Your arm is quite all right, and Richard has come back to you—"

"I need you, Folly," was all he said.

She couldn't bring herself to look at him, to raise eyes to his—not after last night. She wanted to go away and hide, or else to die, quite alone, like a villain in a photoplay.

Richard came bounding into the

room, the new Richard, clear-eyed, ready-tongued, eager. Seeing Folly, he hesitated, but only for a moment. After a cheery "Good morning," he turned impatiently to Hollister.

"If we're going to have our tramp before breakfast, Alec—"

"Right with you, old fellow," echoed Hollister, and his nod was so completely dismissal that Richard went out on the veranda to cool his heels.

Left alone with Folly, Alec drew a step nearer and perhaps unconsciously his voice took on a softer note.

"You won't leave us, at least until you've heard me," he begged. "There's something I want to say to you. It's rambling and far-reaching, I'm afraid, and I haven't time to speak my little piece just now, but . . . wait. Will you do that? I suppose your conscience has been at work again, and it's told you that you've overstayed your time at Tranby and that New York needs you." Smilingly he shook his head. "Don't believe Friend Conscience this once. Let me tell you how necessary you are to . . . Tranby's very peace of mind. Please don't run away like this."

The two men were going on a three-mile hike before breakfast, as they had done in the old days, and Hollister didn't dream, naturally, that it had been deliberately planned by Richard as the best possible means to get the older man quite alone for an hour, nor that the boy

was wholly lacking in that sentiment which so completely was a part of himself.

"Quite like old times," declared Alec, as they cut through the kitchen garden and sought the highway by means of the back entrance.

"There is something I want to tell you, Alec," Dick commenced, as they walked along. "I want to tell you at once—now—so that you can never say I remained an hour under your roof without your knowing—well, everything. I couldn't tell you before, but since last night—I think I lay awake until dawn. I was tempted to try the theatrical, but—it must be the truth. I can be nothing less than absolutely honest with you. Have—have you never guessed?"

"Guessed? Guessed what?" demanded Hollister.

"I see you haven't." Richard sighed. "Well, here goes—I am going to marry Folly Fontaine. I am going to marry her at once, so that this time neither God nor man can intervene."

Alec stood stock still in the middle of the road, and when he spoke his voice sounded strangely unfamiliar to his own ears.

"I must confess I don't understand . . ."

"What more can I say?"

Alec leaned a little forward, for the truth was he was short-sighted, and he wanted to see Richard's face.

"You said something about . . . Folly, I think."

"I'm going to marry her. Nothing you can say will make me change my mind. If you decide to turn us out of doors, I—I can't help it. This recent illness has made a different man of me, Alec—that must be it. I feel . . . stronger, both mentally and physically. I shan't run off and hide like a baby this time. I can work for my wife, if necessary."

Hollister continued to stare.

"This time!" he muttered, as if to himself.

Richard nodded.

"Before, when I told you I was going to marry a chorus girl, you threatened me like a child. You forbade me—absolutely! And because I hadn't any money of my own and had never worked, I grew panicky. I—I postponed my wedding. And then I fell ill. There was Folly near to nurse me, but—I should have married her before; I shouldn't have let you frighten me the way you did."

After a moment, Hollister said, way down in his throat:

"But I didn't want you to marry a chorus girl."

"Just the same. I am going to do it," replied the boy.

"Meaning . . . Folly?"

"Yes, Folly."

Hollister looked away.

"But that is different," he said

in a shocked tone. "Folly is Folly."

"She was Folly a year ago, Alec."

"Eh? What the devil are you talking about, Richard? You say you want to marry Folly Fontaine. Well, what has Miss Fontaine to do with that—that young woman you were infatuated with a year ago?"

Richard's jaw dropped.

"It was always Folly," he said. And then he laughed very loudly. "It was Folly a year ago too!" he cried. "Good Lord, didn't you know that? Folly Fontaine is the chorus girl I wanted to marry, the girl you called uncomplimentary names, and—and kicked up such a fuss about generally that I turned idiot and ran away? Folly is Folly. Thank God, we are together again and can marry without delay!"

Hollister had started to walk again, head down, eyes straight ahead on the road. Swinging along beside him, Richard now and again shot him curious, questioning glances, but wisely held his peace. Old Alec must have time to digest this piece of news. For an imaginative fellow, the old boy was the slowest witted person he had ever met, Richard decided, and this despite his sentimental side.

Patience was rewarded at last, and Hollister broke the silence. It was almost as if he thought out loud.

"Folly is the girl! I must have forgotten the name or possibly I never heard it."

"If you're talking about what happened a year ago, you'd never let me state my case, if you remember," said Dick. "Probably you never heard the girl's name, but, if so, it was because you wouldn't let me tell you about her. She was always 'that young woman.' Good God, if I had died without making Folly my wife!"

Hollister shot him a quick, questioning glance. "She . . . cares for you? Still cares?—you're sure of it?"

Richard seemed bewildered, dazed. "Why, I don't know what you mean, Alec!"

"And yet I speak plainly in everyday English!" His voice was harsh, his manner abrupt. "I asked you if you were sure Folly still cared? It's been a year, you know."

Now the strained expression left his face, and Richard laughed. "Oh, *that!*" he cried, with the magnificence of youth. "Well, I believe she does care for your graceless 'son,' Alec. Unworthy, of course, but—"

The older man interrupted ruthlessly. "And if I don't give my consent even now?"

"I have told you; it will make no difference. We shall marry just the same." Richard's jaw was thrust forward, bulldog-fashion.

"In spite of—?"

"In spite of anything and everything!" the boy cried. "She is mine, I am hers. God! you make me say these things. We were man

and wife in sight of Heaven a year ago. We were to be married then, and I fell ill. Suppose I had died? I tell you, I'm going to marry Folly Fontaine to-morrow."

Alec Hollister's silence breathed the horror he experienced at the boy's words. He couldn't look at Dick, couldn't trust his voice. Once Richard stumbled over some obstacle in the road, and Alec darted back—if the boy had caught at him to save himself, Hollister knew he should have struck him down.

Without sign or agreement, when they had gone scarcely a mile, the two of them turned and retraced their steps in the direction of Tranby.

"One thing more," said Richard, with fine, boyish effect. "I believe in Folly—I believe in her future. She isn't going to remain a chorus girl. She has real dramatic instinct, and if she could get the right kind of part she'd make Broadway sit up and take notice. She's an actress—!"

"I think she is."

"Eh?" Richard's mouth and eyes were wide.

"I think you are right—she is a born actress," repeated Hollister quietly.

"Alec!" The boy seemed overjoyed. "You mean it?"

"I mean it so much that I'm writing a play for her now," the author announced. "I shall finish it at once. It is hers; take it and

do with it as you like. Or, rather, I suppose you'll scarcely find a producer willing to finance an unknown star," he added lamely. "Perhaps—"

"Perhaps . . . *you* will? Alec, you've forgiven us! Folly's won you over! I must run ahead and tell her."

"Wait! Wait!" Hollister's voice was sharp and shrill. "I promise nothing. I said nothing about forgiveness. The play is hers, of course—nothing can alter that. I wrote it for her, and no matter who it is she chooses to marry, the play belongs to Folly Fontaine. I had certain plans for her. I didn't tell her, just let her go her way, live her life, study—" He seemed to be talking to himself. "I meant to give her the script this summer, with all vacation time to talk over the part with her, and then in the autumn—" He broke off abruptly and seized the young man by the arm. "Boy, you're sure?" he demanded.

"Sure? Why, Alec—"

"Never mind. You care? You care more than heaven or hell, life or death? You . . . love her, Richard?"

Dick nodded vigorously.

"So much that I'll give you up, Alec, rather than Folly."

"I see. Well— And she cares too? She wants to marry you?"

Richard's voice was bland and significant.

"Can you doubt it?" he whispered. "Can you doubt it, now I've told you *everything*?"

#### XIV

FOLLY had gone to her room, taken off her hat and coat, and was back in the library in time to witness the return of Alec and Richard. As the two men came toward the house, she left the window, and stood in the library door. Hollister walked a little ahead of the younger man, and though he must have seen Folly there, he neither paused nor spoke, but continued straight along across the hall and up the stairs to his own apartment. And Folly, who was still aglow with the memory of his words an hour since, was too dumfounded to move. Had Alec swept her into his arms then and there and kissed her before Richard and the world, she would have been less surprised than she was by this strange behavior. Hurt, perplexed, she was dropping back, when Richard came along and, gently taking her by the arm, led her into the room and closed the door.

"He has been explaining his plans for the future to me," declared the boy, hunching a shoulder ceilingward to indicate Hollister. "It is a play he is writing, and not a book at all. The book comes next, and he expects to go to the other side of the globe to write it, I believe. Whoever it was put ugly thoughts in your head about his present



composition, Folly, is the greatest scoundrel unchanged. Alec is too fond of you to put you between bookcovers. He spoke most enthusiastically of you! Said he believed in your future as an actress, and the play he is writing was for you—for you! What do you think of that?"

Folly's face was half-turned from view.

"I don't want his play," she muttered sullenly.

"But old Alec is most interested in your future—and mine," persisted the boy. "He said—he said he'd like to see . . . everything settled before he started off on his trip around the world. And that isn't the only thing he said either, Folly."

"I don't want to hear it." She presented an uncompromising back to him.

"He's known so many disappointments!" sighed Richard.

Folly turned fiercely upon him.

"Has it been all rose color for the rest of the world? Answer me that?" she cried.

Shrewdly Richard steered into other channels.

"I like to think it was you who saved my life, Folly. Yes!"—as she attempted to interpose—"it *was* you that nursed me and cared for me at old Hibberd's! But for you I'd be six feet under the daisies now, I guess. Alec knows this—he's a sentimental old chap. Folly, can't

you guess what it is he—he wants to see before he goes?"

"Richard, I'm sorry!" Her hand went out. She *was* sorry, for both of them.

"Alec's word has always been law with me," muttered the boy. "Folly, I've always loved you!"

"You scarcely know me, Richard," she answered him.

And then, because she knew him better than he did her and because she had had her dreams besides his sick couch once, she colored furiously. Until Barker became Richard, she had fancied herself in love with Barker. It was the man's reappearance on the scene that had shown her the folly of her secret love.

Upstairs in his room, looking out across the green hills, fresh in the morning dew and sunshine, Alec Hollister was facing pretty much the same discovery. Now he knew that Richard's mother was little more than a sentimentalized dream.

Folly, head down, went blindly towards the door where Richard, anticipating her move, was waiting for her. He tried to take her hands in his own.

"You hate me!" he cried, playing on her sympathies.

"No, Richard. I'm fond of you, and it was the happiest moment of my life so far when I saw you well and strong and yourself again. Don't think harsh things of me. Only . . . I must be alone for a little while."

She had missed the early train, but there was another at nine something she could catch, and Folly, donning hat and jacket again, crept down the broad stairs at Tranby for the second time that morning. This time she made good her escape, caught the train at the station without mishap, and less than an hour later found herself on the familiar soil of Times Square. What she was going to do, where she was going, remained as unsolved as the riddle of the sphinx. Crowds bewildered her; old memories frightened. After a moment of indecision she walked into a Broadway hotel and asked for a room.

Folly felt neither safe nor happy here, but at least it was a refuge until such time as she could decide upon a definite plan. She had a few hundred dollars saved out of her salary, and this money would keep her out of the street for a time, but work was needed for heartsease as well as for bread and butter.

The next morning Folly awoke in the same world, with the same problems staring her in the face. Towards noon she felt the need of sunshine and fresh air and, dressing herself carefully and wearing a veil, she left the hotel and ventured out on Broadway. The street was a colorful mass of humanity. Even at this hour electric lights twinkled from the facades of theaters and restaurants. Surface cars moved at snail-like pace through solid flanks of people. Misery and

jest rubbed shoulders, and too often the jests concealed misery.

Five days slipped away, pretty much as the first, except that her fears lessened, and her determination to seek her fortune elsewhere weakened with every hour she remained in New York. Why, the island metropolis was the very finest, safest hiding place on the globe! A person could live a more secluded life right here in Manhattan than out in Sahara. Joe Martinez might be in Frisco or purgatory; Folly had glimpsed neither him nor any of the familiar faces from Little Romany in five days on Broadway. As for the inmates of Tranby, well, she wouldn't let herself think too much about them. Alec was sailing for the other side of the world and, as for Richard—Richard was a boy who must learn the meaning of "no."

Had Folly known better the workings of Master Richard's mind she wouldn't have dismissed him so lightly, as a mere youth. For he was far from being the innocuous boy she believed him to be. Probably the pretty mother who had made a tool of Alec Hollister, first as a lad in order to effect a marriage with the man she wanted, and later on her deathbed as a savior for her son, was directly responsible for Richard's disregard of truth and honor. Whatever the cause, he left no stone unturned when he had set his heart upon a certain object. Just at present this object was Folly Fontaine—Folly and the play

written for her by Alexander Hollister. Richard knew the financial worth of his guardian's name.

When Richard first learned that Folly had taken French leave of them at Tranby, he successfully concealed his anger and disappointment and accounted to Alec for her absence in his own inimitable way.

"She had gone up to town for a few days. There is so much she has to attend to before our marriage. Clothes—you know the ladies, Alec. Folly will stop at a quiet hotel and when she is ready I will join her and then—the parson."

Alec wanted to ask why Folly had gone away without seeing him, without stopping to say good-by, but the words stuck in his throat. After all, why should she stop to bid him farewell?

"When you see her again, please say it is quite all right so far as I'm concerned," he told Richard. "I—I didn't know before—that was it, of course. I suppose the words 'show girl' frightened me. My fault—I should have stopped to meet the lady before expressing myself. I'll do everything in my power, please say, to make amends for what happened a year ago."

"I'm sure you will, Alec!" cried Richard, gripping his hand.

The next day he announced that a message from Folly urged him immediately to New York.

Those ancients who painted Time

as a grim and hooded figure, ready with scythe and crossbones, possessed a strange notion of humor, for time, as all the world knows, is twin brother to Fate, and he is the merriest comedian of them all. Upon his arrival in town, Richard registered at the very hotel under whose roof Folly had been a guest since her first day in New York. And the elevators—more farce-comedy!—did the rest. Dick walked out of one car at the very moment Folly was in the act of entering another. Instead, at his urging, she retired with him to the dining room.

He didn't lose sight of her again. Neither did a scarred, dusky fellow lose sight of Master Richard. The Latin had watched and waited and prayed these many days. Here was his reward.

## XV

FOLLY had reached that frame of mind where nothing much matters. She had been talked to—steadily—for three days by Richard. She had heard of Alec's wishes, or his hope for forgiveness, of his plans for their future; she had heard, too, of Richard's love for her, and remained cold and unresponsive. She was impatient, as one is with love undesired; it was so simple to forget that at one time Richard outranked all other men of her acquaintance just as at present one man stood head and shoulders above Richard. When this other

man's ghost would not down, she grew desperate and called upon her pride . . . only to discover there was precious little of it to stifle such a great affection. And through it all Richard talked and talked and talked. . . . Someone told her once that drowning was easiest when a person refrained from struggling. In the end Folly knew that Richard would marry her; so why not surrender gracefully?

"Yes, yes, yes!" she fairly hurled at his head, when he started away on his familiar discourse for the hundredth time. "I know all about what Alec desires, what he will give us, where he is going, when, why. I know every thought and heart-beat of Alec's. For heaven's sake, forget such a person exists! I don't love you, Richard—I've told you that over and over; but if you are determined to marry me, if you want to marry me under those conditions, well and good. I'm beaten! I'm so tired I could go away and sleep for a million years. I'm so sick of this eternal harangue I could do without companionship throughout eternity. Marry me if you will, take the play, and do as you please with it! Only, let me alone—let me alone!"

This was on Monday night. The next afternoon Folly learned that Joe Martinez had discovered her whereabouts and was following her whenever she appeared on the street. Richard had withdrawn from the same building that housed his fiancée and taken up quarters in a

hotel across the street, but there was a maid installed as jailer and Folly was too spent to plan escape, anyway. When Martinez appeared, she knew that flight was hopeless, and besides she felt safer with Richard than with the musician.

One afternoon, unaccompanied, Folly sauntered forth from the hotel, but she hadn't gone fifty yards before she sensed the musician on her heels. Stopping suddenly, she turned and faced him with challenging glance, if quaking heart.

"What do you want, Joe? Why will you insist upon following me every time I venture on the street?" she asked.

He seemed nonplused by her words no less than her action; he scowled at her and refused to answer, muttering to himself.

"Very well, since you won't answer, since it is evident you don't come in the guise of a friend, I must ask the police to assist me in getting rid of your unwelcome attentions," Folly declared.

A short, ugly laugh was his answer.

"The devil you say! What are you trying to put over, eh, with your big-time words? Who's learned you fancy language, eh? That damn' girl-face toff—! Well, kid, I'll have to give you credit, and you was always out of your element with the roughnecks at Little Roman's."

Her voice rose a note; face to face with danger, she was singularly unafraid.

"I will not be followed on the street, Joe—"

"You're afraid I'll tell him, eh?"

"Tell whom? About what?" she challenged.

"Once you promise to marry me, Folly."

"Never—never in my life!" she denied stoutly.

"I believe you was a good girl." He shook a long, thin, cigarette-stained finger in her face. "I believe it and I want to marry you. Now—now look at you!"

"Look at yourself. You've sunk to the gutter—"

"Because of you—because of you, Folly! I can't eat, I can't sleep, I can't work! All the time I think of you and search and wait. Now I find *him*—"

"But if you don't want to marry me, if you think I'm no longer a good girl, why shouldn't I marry someone else?"

"Ah, that fancy man! . . . I dare you! I dare you, Folly Fontaine! You belong to me!"

His manner became threatening, his voice loud. Passers-by turned and looked at them, a smartly gowned young woman and a scarred, gesticulating Latin, there on Broadway, almost at blows.

Folly swung round, face towards her hotel.

"If you follow me a step. I shall turn you over to the policeman at the corner," she said through her

teeth, and either her manner or her words had the desired effect, for Martinez held his ground, without moving an inch, so long as she was in sight.

Once in her room, Folly discovered she was on the verge of collapse. All the fight was gone and she was trembling and afraid. Sinking down on the nearest chair, she began to cry like a little child, and the maid Anna, finding her in this condition, lost no time in communicating with Richard, across the street.

" . . . Indeed, I don't know what's happened, sir, but she's all to pieces, crying and taking on. I thought you'd want to know," said Anna across the wire.

Richard answered he would be over to see Miss Fontaine at once.

## XVI

It had been a warm day, with a thunderstorm threatening, and along Broadway life moved sluggishly, as it is apt to do in late spring and early summer. Under the metal roof and confined within the narrow quarters of a great hotel, Richard had been restless and worried since daybreak. He wasn't to meet Folly until seven o'clock, when they were to dine together for the last time before the morrow, which had been set for their wedding. He was glad of the interruption of Anna's telephone message, and lost no time in getting

his hat and stick and hurrying away.

At Forty-fourth Street he brushed against a muttering, trembling piece of humanity, a man emaciated and swarthy, with his face disfigured by a dark and ugly scar. Richard swore, and the wreck, coming suddenly to life, turned and followed the young aristocrat with eyes that were like pinpoints of fire.

All unsuspecting, Richard walked on. As he placed his foot upon the great stone steps of Folly's hotel, something sinister crept up behind him. A hand shot out; there was a flash of steel; and the immaculately groomed gentleman went down like a cardboard house.

Immediately a crowd gathered.

"Somebody . . . shot me, I think," Dick gasped. The effort of talking brought a flow of blood to his lips. "Not—there," he muttered, as a move was made to carry him into the hotel. "Not in there, I say. Take me . . . home."

Several hours later Richard became aware of time and place and people again in the white iron bed of a hospital room. It was the loss of blood rather than the wound itself which had caused him to faint, but he didn't know this, and the lightness of mind and the heaviness of body led him to believe he was dying. He turned painfully on his pillow and glimpsed a wren-like little nurse at his bedside.

"I want to see somebody—got to

see somebody—at once," he whispered fretfully.

The nurse called the interne, and he himself telephoned to Tranby, urging Hollister to come with all possible speed to the hospital.

Alec drove up to town in his motor car and the trip was made in less than an hour, so that by nine o'clock he was at the boy's bed, shocked, grieved, asking himself as so many have asked before him the why and wherefore of life and love and death. It seemed a terrible thing that Dick, so young, with so much ahead of him, should be lying here like this.

"What a cowardly thing to do—to strike a man from behind!" he cried, with blazing eyes. "Richard, who could have done it?"

"I don't know. It doesn't matter much; he made a good job of it." Tears of self-pity rose to the boy's eyes and rolled down his white cheeks.

"And Folly—where is she?" asked Hollister, after a moment.

Richard spoke. "You might send for her, too—she's at the Hotel Splendid. Yes, send for Folly, but . . . she'll have to come quickly!"

He was quite prepared to die, it seemed. Someone was directed to telephone for Miss Fontaine, and at a sign from Dick Alec drew nearer to the head on the pillow.

"It was all a lie!"

"What?"

"It was all a lie," repeated the

boy, while tears flowed unchecked. "About Folly, you know. There was nothing between us at old lady Hibberd's madhouse. She—Folly—was just kind to me. When I was ill that time—and before—she might have been my sister!"

Hatred black and naked rose in Alec Hollister's breast. Probably it was reflected in his face, for Richard said wearily:

"I knew how it was with you—I saw, when I came back to Tranby and found Folly there. I had lost out—with you, I mean. I was no longer the young lord, heir to the manor—that stuff. O-oh. I'm not complaining—now. You'd a perfect right. God knows you've been the whitest, squarest—! If I had been your own son—! And I took advantage of it—yes, I've 'worked' you almost from the day I came to live with you—a mere kid. Often I've wondered deep down inside of me if you really liked me, the real me, I mean! . . . Don't answer! Why should you like me? How have I repaid your kindness, and generosity? I made a big mistake when I ran off and stayed away a year, for when I got back . . . there was Folly."

Alec heard him with bowed head.

"It would have made no difference," he said presently in a choked voice.

"You say that because you probably didn't know, then." Dick laughed faintly. "But I saw it at once. Long before I could reason

things out, I used to notice the way you looked at her. It was always supposed you would never marry—your heart was in the grave and that nonsense. When a wonderful girl like Folly came along you pretty soon discovered that love isn't something to be written about only. I saw myself in the discard. You, with a wife and family—where'd I be? I couldn't reasonably expect to inherit Tranby and your fortune in case you married, could I? So . . . I put the jinx on it. I lied about Folly."

"Richard, Richard, be careful!" warned Hollister, beside himself.

"You can't do anything to me now," the boy muttered. "I'm done for already. I don't want to die—I can't die!—until I straighten things out for you and her. There's little I can do in return for your goodness—"

His voice failed. He began to weep silently. When he opened his eyes again and speech was possible once more, there was a shadow flung across the foot of his bed, the shadow of a frightened girl.

"Oh, Dick, Dick! I'm sorry!" she cried, with clayey-white face and beseeching hands.

"What?" Then he recognized her. "I'm glad you've come, Folly. Somebody stuck me with a knife—did you hear? I don't know why. Maybe he had a hunch that I wasn't on the level with you and Alec. I swear I don't know why! Folly, I told Alec that you were the girl I

wanted to marry a year ago. It isn't true, of course. Nor any of the rest I said to him, either. It was all my greed, my ingratitude. I said what I did because I knew it was the only thing that would make him surrender you to me without a fight to the finish. And I knew if it came to choosing between us, I'd lose out. You love him! I know it, and so I told him—I told you, Alec, *that!*"

"Don't! Never mind, Richard. Get well first," pleaded Folly.

"That listens good, only—"

He shook his head, and for a second or two the dark, feverish eyes were closed. Then he began again, as if he had to get the load off his mind, had to make a clean confession of it all before it was too late.

"And about the play," he whispered, beckoning them closer. "When I learned Alec had faith in your ability as a great actress, Folly, I—I saw millions in it—in you and the play, you know. I just had to have them—both of them. Lies, more lies, but I was desperate. Alec never cared for me in his heart as much as he did in his mind, and with you—with Folly on the scene—What could I do? I couldn't drive a truck or peddle matches! Folly and the play—"

In spite of herself, the words came, escaped, were flung at him.

"Dick, how could you?" cried the girl.

"Never mind." A ghostlike smile

accompanied the nod of his head. "It'll all come right now. Alec knows. And the very best fellow in the wide world, Folly. I know—though you wouldn't think it. . . . I'm tired! . . . To strike a man from behind, that's a cowardly thing to do—Alec says so himself. I'm tired. I guess I'll try to sleep. . . ."

## XVII

WHEN she saw Alec coming down the terrace with the letters and the cablegram, Folly put aside her fancy work and waited for her husband, empty-handed and smiling. As he bent over her chair to whisper complimentary nonsense in her ear, she had never looked so handsome in her life before. Alec told her that. He liked her in white, with her hair done simply, and the bit of scarlet silk lending a thread of color to the picture.

"Only—don't stop sewing," he begged. "Do something. Your hands are so pretty that I like to watch them among the colored silks. Like tiny white mice among the flowers in the corn-field. It—it seems so much prettier than—"

"Than what?" Folly demanded, when he broke off abruptly and turned to his letters with gently twitching mouth.

"Than a—spear, I was going to say," he returned calmly, refraining from looking at her.

She pretended to take him seriously.



"Thank you, I have carried pretty much everything that a real honest-to-goodness chorus-lady ever carried, Mr. Hollister—including a spear, yes. But . . . I too like this best," she added, with a new shyness, turning to her embroidery.

"Darling!" Alec's glance was on her cheek and she could feel the warmth and kindness of it there. "You really mean it?"

"Really and truly."

"Then you don't regret the play—one little bit?"

"Never! Never for a minute, Alec."

He couldn't doubt the sincerity of her words and eyes, and, satisfied, he sat down beside her to read the mail. The cablegram was the most important—in appearance, at least—and so it was opened first.

Play went over big. Miss Hildreth magnificent in star rôle. Sure of record run, with London engagement offered. Shall make production there myself. Letter following.

RICHARD.

"That's splendid! I'm so glad!" cried Folly, looking up from her work. "Of course I never doubted that your play would prove a huge success, but it is kind of nice to know the facts. And London! Richard ought to make a lot of money, and I hope he does."

"Righto!" echoed Hollister. "The play is his, to have and to hold. So long as I have you—"

Folly shook her head and sighed.

"You're not at all a shrewd business man, Alec," she teased. "I'm perfectly satisfied that all the time Master Dick preferred your play to—to me. Why, directly he got out of hospital, though we were about to start on our honeymoon, he—he began to put weight on most alarmingly. Now, a love-sick, Tennysonian youth doesn't do that. He pines away and—and so forth and so on. You made a bad bargain, my dear."

"Not I!" Alec's glance was as full of mischief as a schoolboy. "You see, I can write another play."

"And can't you find another wife, poor man?"

"Heavens, my own is quite enough!"

They laughed as loudly as they dared, with the terrace and gardens full of smart, well bred people. At their feet lapped a turquoise, southern sea, and beyond the oleanders and ilex life beckoned with all it holds for the world's fortunates. A little silence followed directly upon their mirth, but it was a peaceful silence.

"You're happy?" Alec asked, watching her with a lazy, satisfied smile.

"Supremely!"

"When we get back to America. Richard will be in London with the play. You won't have to face him again for years, I guess, unless you care to."

Folly dropped her embroidery

and gazed earnestly into his eyes.

"I shan't mind meeting Dick again—after a little. The last thing in the world I'd have you do on my account is to neglect the boy or think unkindly of him. What he has done is in the long ago, like Joe Martinez and Little Roman and Broadway. I think harshly of none of them, Alec, and feel real pity for Joe, for, after all, I am the only girl he ever 'honored' with a proposal of marriage." She smiled briefly, faintly, with a smile that suggested pity. "Often I think it was better that he should go out by

his own hand rather than fall into the clutches of the law. Poor Joe!"

"Don't be sad," Hollister begged, hating the little frown which came between her honest eyes at her last words.

In a twinkling she stood in motley, ready with cap and bells.

"But, dear, I can't very well stand on my head, or wiggle my ears, before all these sensitive people!" she protested.

And straightway Alec knew that all was well; Folly was herself once more.



## Love's Tempo

By Randolph Pruett

It thundered on the sea  
And lightened terribly,  
It quaked beneath the earth,  
When my Love came to birth.

There was a certain thunder and a quaking  
Accompanied that novel undertaking.

The sea is quieter  
Since I am tired of her.  
I weary of her touch:  
The earth quakes not so much.

# A Matter of Taste

By Berton Braley

**T**HOUGH handsome is as handsome does  
And beauty's only froth and fuzz,  
The maids that I prefer to buzz  
In town or city,  
Are very easy on the eyes;  
Perhaps the homely girls are wise  
But though it's such I ought to prize,  
I like 'em pretty.

The "violet by a mossy stone"  
May have a glamour all her own,  
But I prefer the rose full blown  
Whose mind is freighted  
With worldly wisdom, who has wit  
To wear glad rags that smoothly fit—  
In fact, I like the Janes a bit  
Sophisticated.

Nix on the ingenues who pout,  
I'll take for mine the "darned good scout"  
Who clearly knows her way about  
This earthly bubble;  
Who's gay and blithe and full of pep,  
But none the less is wholly hep  
And knows the way to watch her step,  
Avoiding trouble.

In short, the sort of girl you can  
Talk frankly to, as man to man,  
And yet who does not wholly ban  
The thought of kisses.  
A merry type of miss indeed  
Who likes to dance and smoke and feed,  
Yet who makes, for all her speed,  
A dandy Mrs.

# WHY IS A WIFE

left, after the honeymoon has waned, to stare into the mirror, looking for the first faint lines that mark the passing of youth? Does the mere fact that she is a man's wife make up to a woman for an empty life and a husband who takes her for granted? . . . Those on the inside looking out, and those on the outside looking in, on that great tragedy-farce spectacle called Marriage, will want to know what happened to *Elsa* when she turned her back on the sleepy island and indifferent Jim, in Bob Dexter's colorful novelette of a South Seas matrimonial tangle:

## Island Wives

in

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A whiff of the spicy variety of the rest of this issue: "The Importance of Legs," a chorus-girl comedy by C. S. Montanye; "Aurora's Children," a little domestic drama of pearls and love; "The Blue Eyes of Wang Hai," a story written by Jay Gelzer, who knows the Chinese Quarter of Melbourne well, and sets forth the meeting of the tradition-bound, poetical East and the wide-awake tawdriness of the backwash of the Australian seaport. Then:

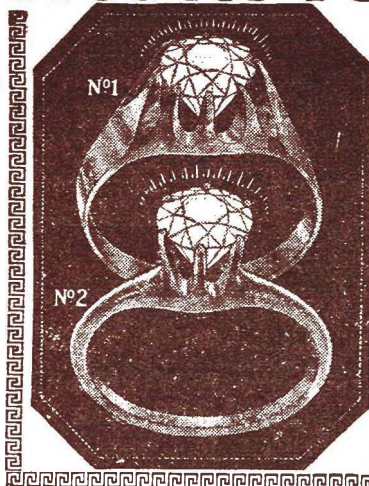
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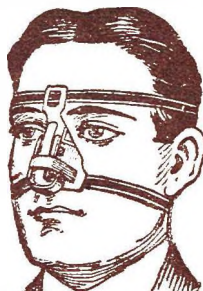
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Family influence was all that saved the prisoner from the death sentence; and then . . . when the accused boy was freed from the grip of the law, he faced the bitterer tribunal of a family pride that could be as relentless as the hari-kiri demand of other days, when a man wiped out his own dishonor with his own blood on a sword blade.

*Less dramatic, but just as absorbing is The Unknown Goddess, by Horation Winslow, which one of our editorial readers described as "The best story I've found in a year—by Jove!" In this issue, too, Harry Irving Shumway will amuse you with "Bold, Bad Monte," Jay Gelzer charm you with the wistful appeal of "The Love Lady," and John Peter Toohey take you back-stage, into the confidence of a star in "Second Balcony Seats."*

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"Four months ago my scalp was bare; now it is covered with a nice growth of hair and it is growing nicely."—W. C. Colman, Red River Co., La.

"One sample box and one full box of Koskott have grown hair on my head where I was perfectly bald."—A. W. Bowser, Butler Co., Pa.

"I was bald and never could find anything to bring the hair back until I used Koskott."—Esther Arnett, Wallace Co., Ky.



MRS. JENNIE DAVIS, who reports full growth over completely bald head in a few weeks. She used Koskott exclusively.

## BOX FREE TO YOU

We offer to send you a testing box of Koskott FREE, postpaid. It is probably different from anything you ever used on your scalp before. It is inexpensive because concentrated. We know that Koskott has surprised and delighted many who were losing or had lost their hair and feared they must remain bald throughout life.

What Koskott has done for others' hair, why not for yours?

If you have entire or partial baldness, alopecia areata (bald spots), barbers' itch, dandruff, dry scalp, brittle hair, falling hair, if you get a lot of hair on your comb whenever you use it, itching scalp, or other hair or scalp trouble, try Koskott.

## GROW HAIR!

You need only ask for a free box of Koskott—a postcard will do. It will come to you promptly, with full directions, and you can soon decide what it will do for you.

Koskott Laboratory,

KA-257, Station F,

New York City