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

MARRIAGE ON PROBATION

By Louise Winter
Author of "Hearts Aflame"

"NO," said Madelaine, looking up at Mrs. Lorrimer, frankly; "my mother is not dead, she is living in Chicago."

Something in the child's tone prompted Mrs. Lorrimer to go on, although she prided herself as a rule on her freedom from vulgar curiosity. "Don't your mother and father live together?"

Madelaine shook her head, covered with short golden curls. "Oh, no, mother and father are divorced and she's got a new husband; that's why I'm with daddy this summer." She had overheard so much that she stated these appalling facts calmly; then she saw pity in the kind face close to her own, and suddenly she broke down. "I wish mother hadn't married Mr. Hopkins, and I don't see any fun in having two fathers. It makes me feel queer, and I like my own daddy best!" she sobbed.

Mrs. Lorrimer gathered the child in her arms, and soothed her with tender words, though she could offer little by way of comfort.

In speaking of the matter afterward to her husband, she said: "The child is only twelve, and she feels the tragedy in her life. Poor little thing, she's heard the servants talk; her nurse seems to be a gossipy creature, and neither mother nor father seems to have considered her in their desire to be free of each other. She's a quiet little thing and I thought she'd be a nice playmate for Flossie, but I don't know if it's wise to encourage an intimacy under the circumstances."

Lorrimer was a broad-minded man. "Would you visit the sins of the fathers on an innocent child?"

"I hope not. But the fact remains she is tainted, and I wonder if she is innocent. You know how carefully I've tried to bring Flossie up!"

"My dear, I think it almost your duty to be kind to this child, you can influence her so much this summer, and who knows what effect your teaching may have on her after life. The father seems a weak-kneed sort of creature, and the mother is probably selfish, so it's up to you to put her on the right road. She can't harm Flossie, you can watch over them both." So matters were decided, and an outside influence soon became the strongest factor in Madelaine Pierce's life.

Weak-kneed was not an apt description of Ralph Pierce. He was a dreamer, one who had always shirked the real issues of life, and who preferred to drift rather than to set his face against the tide. He had inherited a good-paying business from his father, and so he was in a position to marry early in life, but his choice was not a wise one. Minna Pierce was caught by the dazzle of a comfortable home, small luxuries and the glory of the prefix Mrs. before her name. She was twenty, the youngest of the family and the first one to marry, so she never hesitated, never asked herself if she really loved Ralph Pierce, nor if she would be content to spend the rest of her life at his side. Madelaine was born a year after marriage, and was the only child. Considering that she had done her duty, Minna from that time on devoted herself to getting as much pleasure out of existence as she could. Husband and wife soon drifted apart; they had no tastes in common, and neither understood the art of home making. He was content with his books, his pipe and his weekly whist club, and she had her own set of friends to whom he was a stranger. Madelaine had a nursery governess, and she saw more of her father than she did of her mother, for Minna never possessed the maternal instinct. When Mark Hopkins came into her life, and

urged her to divorce her present husband and marry him, Minna after a few weeks of indecision, consented to do as he asked. He was a different type of man, he was large in frame, with a bluff manner, and a peculiar faculty for getting what he wanted with apparently little effort. He fell in love with Minna at first sight, and the fact that she was married to another man did not deter him from making love to her. The only question that arose was over Madelaine. Some feminine trait made her insist upon keeping the child, and though in the beginning Hopkins combatted her desire, he finally gave in when he saw she was obstinately determined upon this point. But he gave in with a reservation; Madelaine was to spend her summers with her father, and he counted upon his tact in showing Minna how much more comfortable they would be without the child to finally induce her to relinquish her claim.

The idea of a divorce startled Pierce, but he was not the man to protest when Minna declared her intention of leaving him, and he had long ceased to trouble over the knowledge that he had lost her love. As Hopkins had foreseen, the only difficulty raised was Madelaine's future. He could not give up his child, but he was reasonable enough to admit Minna's claim to a half interest in the little life they were both responsible for.

Minna became Mrs. Hopkins in June, and Madelaine was present at the ceremony that gave her two fathers. In obedience to her mother's command, she raised her little face for a paternal kiss, but as the mustached lips brushed her cheek, a fierce dislike toward the man who might be father but who never could be daddy, was born in her heart.

Pierce met her at the station, and she flung herself into his arms, sobbing out her grief on his breast. But he stilled her reproaches.

"I don't think you ought to talk like this, darling; she's your mother, you know," he said, in a troubled voice. Minna's prompt re-marriage had made him wince, but it did not seem quite honorable to openly side against her, even with their child.

Madelaine raised her head, and studied her father's face with questioning eyes; then, for she was wise beyond her years, she silenced her lips. Daddy looked worried, she must not add to his pain. After all, grown up people were different from children; perhaps mother and daddy were both right, and she would get accustomed to the queer situation in time. And after that one outburst Pierce never heard her mention her mother's name.

He took rooms for them at a nearby resort, and, though the trip to town every day tired him, he was surprised to find how little physical discomfort mattered when at the end of the day he could look forward to a few hours with his daughter. He made no explanation to anyone at the hotel. He had engaged rooms for himself, child and nurse, and as he was a diffident man his acquaintance with his fellow guests was of the slightest. Sunday mornings he played golf, always alone, but the afternoons he devoted to Madelaine.

Flossie Lorrimer was the only other child at the hotel of her age and they met at the beach. Flossie had no nurse, as her mother had her own ideas in regard to bringing up her child, but after Mrs. Lorrimer's talk with her husband she volunteered to include Madelaine in her supervision, and Nurse was only too glad of the extra hours to herself. In the beginning Mrs. Lorrimer feared Madelaine might talk too freely of her family affairs to Flossie, but she soon saw that she need not worry as the other child was learning to keep her troubles to herself. On the whole it was a happy summer, for she had daddy and Mrs. Lorrimer and Flossie, and there were only times when she remembered Mr. Hopkins' entrance into her life. Mrs. Lorrimer talked to her about her mother, and after a while loyalty came to her aid and she forgot to judge.

In fall, however, Pierce put her and Nurse on the train for Chicago, and that night she cried herself to sleep. But in the morning there was the excitement of arriving in a strange city, the curiosity about a new home, her mother's effusive welcome, and the delight of an exquisitely furnished room all to herself. Hitherto she had roomed with Nurse,

but Hopkins was a rich man, and in the beginning he indulged Minna in every caprice. The house was on the Lake Shore Drive, and Madelaine's suite overlooked a garden. In New York the Pierces had lived in an apartment, and the freedom of a whole house was fascinating to the child, but she soon found out that she was not expected to roam about at will, but was supposed to keep to her own rooms. The Hopkinses entertained a great deal, and always dined out when they were not having company, so Madelaine took her dinners in her sitting-room. She also breakfasted there, as Minna never arose until ten, and Hopkins refused to share a tête-à-tête meal with the child he disliked; but when her mother lunched at home she was permitted to descend to the dining-room, where the solemn-faced butler inspired her with awe and made her nearly always spill something as she tried to help herself from the dishes he passed. She was sent to school, and she found that Mark Hopkins' stepdaughter was treated with respect by the teachers, and consideration by the girls, who were mostly snobs. She was invited to parties, and at Christmas time she gave a party herself which was attended by over a hundred children, all beautifully dressed, beautifully mannered, and who seemed to be enjoying the elaborate preparations made to entertain them, much more than their small hostess, who was conscious of a longing for daddy and Flossie Lorrimer. In spring Madelaine had typhoid fever, and Mark Hopkins was brutal about it. He had planned to spend the summer abroad, but though two trained nurses were in charge of the patient on the top floor it was impossible for Minna to put the ocean between herself and her child as long as there was any question of danger. It was an unusually warm summer, and Hopkins, who was a stout man, suffered from the heat; Minna also looked wan, and the fear that she might lose her looks and, in consequence, the favor of her new husband, made her fretful. They took short trips for the week-end, and during one of them Pierce visited his daughter. She was convalescent, and her small face lighted with joy as daddy came into the room. It was an hour of sacredness between the two; Madelaine never complained, but she kept repeating: "Isn't it too bad I had to be sick in summer, daddy, when I might have been with you!" And Pierce knew that in spite of the luxury with which she was surrounded his supremacy in her heart was unquestioned, and he went away greatly comforted. As a compensation, Madelaine was allowed to spend the Christmas holidays with her father. He was living in bachelor apartments now, but he made arrangements to board her and Nurse near by, and they spent their time happily together. She was fourteen now, taller than Minna and almost as tall as daddy, a pretty girl with blue gray eyes, brown hair in which a trace of gold still lingered, a clear skin and finely cut lips. The following spring Hopkins began his attack. He wanted Madelaine turned over entirely to her father; it was ridiculous for Minna to saddle herself with that great girl! She did not look a day over twenty-five, but if she kept Madelaine beside her people would begin to realize she was no longer a young woman. He kept it up continually, finding fault with everything the girl did, appealing to the weakness of his wife's nature, and hinting that it might come to her choice between the two, so that in the end, terrified at the prospect with which he threatened her, Minna consented, and, though no formal agreement was entered into, Madelaine knew that when she left the big house on the Lake Shore Drive she would never return to it.

"I shall keep house for you, daddy, and we shall be so happy together," she said, as Pierce met her at the station.

"Yes, until you marry and have a home of your own."

"I never intend to marry," she said, firmly.

He smiled back at her. "All girls say that, I believe."

"Well then I'll say I never intend to marry until I'm sure of him and of myself."

"Marriage is never a certainty; it's always a risk."

"Mine won't be."

"How will you avoid that?"

"I shall serve a novitiate. Why even a nun isn't forced to take her final vows at once, her marriage to the church isn't consummated until she's given it a fair trial."

Pierce was dumb with astonishment. Where had the girl absorbed such views! "But, my dear child, marriage with a man is quite different!" he finally said. But he couldn't go on; he couldn't tell her why it was different.

She saw his perplexity, but she only smiled back at him reassuringly. "Mine won't be," she said.

And suddenly Pierce was troubled. The arrangement he had looked forward to with such pleasure developed an unforeseen danger. Suppose he were unable to cope with a girl; suppose at this critical time she needed a woman's guidance? His heart hardened as he remembered that her mother had also failed her, that she had been eager to turn over her claim to him. He had no sisters, no female cousins, where could be find a woman who would know what to do at this juncture! He never thought of Mrs. Lorrimer, and it would never have occurred to him to appeal to a stranger, so after vowing he would do his best for her, he put aside worries over the future, and devoted himself to making the present attractive. He soon forgot the remarkable statement that had fallen from Madelaine's lips, but she did not forget, and the day came when she gave voice to it again openly.

II

The years passed without incident until the summer Madelaine was twenty. Each year she and her father had returned to Blythedale-by-the-Sea, but the last two seasons they had deserted the hotel for one of the numerous bungalows which had sprung up in the neighborhood, where they kept house in a simple fashion. Ralph Pierce's income had not increased, and as living was much higher the girl often found her resources taxed to make both ends meet. But she never complained; she was with daddy, and, though she saw her mother from time to time as the Hopkinses passed through New York on their way to and from Europe, she never regretted that she was barred from sharing in her stepfather's wealth. Minna brought her extravagant presents from abroad, thereby appeasing her conscience, but while Madelaine accepted her mother's gifts they failed to touch her heart.

They opened the bungalow the middle of June.

"They say we're going to have a good season, every place is rented, and the hotel is booked full for July."

"I hope we have some nice neighbors, it was so unpleasant last year with all those children," Pierce said dubiously, as he recalled the antics of the five small children who had occupied the cottage adjoining the previous season.

Madelaine laughed. "They're not coming back, daddy dear; Mason tells me our neighbors are to be two bachelors, though they might easily be as objectionable as the little Kutners."

Pierce looked alarmed. "Bachelors! I shall have to put a fence around my girl, or one of these days I'll be losing her!"

"One of these days is a long time off. Really, daddy, I've never envied a married woman yet. I should like to have a baby, but I don't want the husband who goes with it. You are the only really, truly good man I know; you've set my standard pretty high."

Pierce allowed himself to be persuaded that there was no immediate danger, and even after the bachelors took possession of the bungalow next door his suspicion was not aroused.

Madelaine was on her porch when they drove up in a low, rakish looking car. The driver jumped out and ran around to the other side to help his companion, fitting him with crutches under either arm, and the girl felt a pang of pity that such a splendid specimen of young manhood should be lame. A man servant got out of the tonneau and began collecting hand luggage. Then the three passed into the house.

The next day being Sunday they met at the beach. Blythedale now boasted of a casino, with tennis courts and a danc-

ing pavilion, and all the cottagers and most of the hotel guests were members, so that they were brought in contact. Madelaine after taking her dip in the ocean went up to the pavilion to join her father, and found him talking to their lame neighbor. After the introduction, Madelaine sat down quickly to prevent his embarrassment.

"The result of a motor accident," said Carr, looking down at his helpless right leg; "but I'll be all right soon; the only nuisance is that I shall be so hopelessly out of it this summer, I shall have to look on while Brandon flirts with all the pretty girls; my only consolation is that our places are so close together that I can hear you laughing and talking on your porch, and you look so kind-hearted that I'm sure you're going to throw me a word occasionally."

"I'll do more than that, I'll invite you to come up on my porch whenever you feel like it," she answered. She liked the frank way his eyes met hers. He was pale, but that was evidently the effect of his accident, for his shoulders were broad and his hands were muscular.

Carr told himself he was darned lucky to have such a pretty neighbor, and it would be his fault if Brandon drew all the peaches.

Just as Madelaine and her father were leaving, Brandon came up. He stared with pleased surprise at Carr's new-found friends, then he winked knowingly.

Madelaine looked up into Burtis Brandon's eyes with the same direct gaze she had bent upon all the masculine world till now, but she found something that made the blood rise steadily in her cheeks and her lids droop in spite of herself. Brandon thought her quite the prettiest girl he had ever seen, and he secretly exulted that his open admiration was making her blush. She hurried her father away, not sure whether this new feeling which swept over her was fright or pleasure. It made her long to get away by herself, to hide in her own room, to close her eyes and summon up a vision of a mocking face which seemed to say, "No matter where you go, I shall pursue you!"

"Very nice young men; I know of Mr. Carr's uncle; good substantial people; too bad about his accident; I think, my dear, they will be a great improvement as neighbors over the Kutners." But Madelaine was not listening; she was saying to herself: "I shall see him every day for three months, every day, and then he will pass out of my life, and I'll have only daddy!"

When Robert Carr was convalescing, he began to make plans for the summer. "This puts me out of things, no swimming, no tennis, no dancing; I'll have to hunt up some quiet hole where nobody knows me and rusticate."

Brandon, who was his closest friend and had escaped by a miracle from the slightest injury in the smashup, was deeply sympathetic. "I'll go with you. I think I'd rather enjoy a different kind of a summer, it would be good for my pocket as well as my constitution. We'll take a bungalow not too far from town; we'll take Flynn with us and live the simple life."

Carr protested. "There's no need for you to bury yourself because I'm half dead!"

"Every reason in the world. We've chummed together so long I'd be lost without you. Besides the mater is going to Europe with Elsie, and I'd have to shift for myself, so here's where I consult the agents with ready-to-live-in huts to rent, and we'll pick out the one that sounds best."

Carr gave in and they interviewed agents, read glowing descriptions of houses to rent, and finally decided upon the bungalow at Blythedale-by-the-Sea.

"It must be an impossible place with such a name, but we'll be among people we've never seen before, and we'll hope never to see again," said Brandon, after they had reached a decision. But he little knew what was in store for him at Blythedale. Even at first sight he thought Madelaine the prettiest girl he had ever seen, and he was thirty and had been all over the civilized world. When she spoke her voice thrilled him oddly, and the color rising in her cheeks under his prolonged scrutiny affected him in a way quite new. He admitted he was awfully taken with her, and he was

mighty glad chance had thrown her in his path. The first month he made love, as he had to every pretty girl he had ever met. The second month he made love seriously, as he had only done once before, and the third month found him making love as a man only does to the one woman in the world for him. But she kept him at bay. His early love making scarcely stirred her pulses, she had seen so much of summer flirtations; the second phase troubled her slightly. There was a look in his eyes, a meaning in the touch of his hand which she could not ignore, and which she did not quite understand. Carr also fell in love with her, and she was an angel to him, spending many long afternoons on the neighboring porch, but Carr's love-making never frightened her. There was no fierce, possessive note in that to startle her maiden shyness. Both men belonged to a different class socially. They were the sons of rich men; they were accustomed to luxury; they lived the lives of their set. They had adjoining bachelor apartments, just off Fifth avenue; one evening they were entertained by the mothers of débutantes, the next they were hosts at parties for stage beauties, and they enjoyed themselves at both functions. Carr told more of their lives than Brandon did. The older man obliterated everything but the personal note from his rare tête-à-têtes with Madelaine. She saw that he was anxious to bridge the gulf between them, but the mere fact that there was a gulf put her on her guard. There was one day when she realized that had she remained under her stepfather's roof there would have been no social inequality, that the daughter of Mrs. Mark Hopkins could have gone any place, but she quickly banished that thought. She was daddy's daughter, she had cast in her lot with him, and she would never allow herself to regret it. She had practically brought herself up, no one had supervised her reading; she had chosen her own companions, and she had learned to think for herself on the many questions that are in the book of life which is sealed to most girls. And she knew the danger that lurked in Brandon's love-making from the beginning, and in her feeble way she tried to guard against it. And after one night when he tried to kiss her coming home from a dance at the casino she avoided being alone with him as much as she could. When he saw that she was not coquetting, he attempted to belittle his act.

"A girl as pretty as you are must get used to a man's losing his head," he said; "after all, what's the harm in a kiss, all it leaves is a memory with no stain attached."

Madelaine had regained her composure. "I don't look at it in the same way; a kiss should only be given in love."

"But I love you; haven't I been trying to tell you that for ages!" Words committed him to nothing, and if she were romantic enough to insist upon a period of preliminary deception he was willing to play that game as well as the other.

"We haven't known each other for ages. To be exact it's five weeks, and you can't be sure of your feelings in that time."

"I was sure the first day I laid my eyes on you. You've got the prettiest hair, the prettiest skin, the prettiest mouth, and the dandiest figure I've ever seen! When a fellow feels like that about a girl he's hard hit."

Madelaine hastened her steps as they turned the corner bringing them in sight of her home. "Why can't you be nice and friendly, Mr. Brandon?" she asked.

"Can't, never could. I'm either crazy about a girl or she doesn't exist for me; such a thing as friendship isn't possible between a man like me and a girl like you." He spoke pretty plainly, and Madelaine understood, though at that time he never dreamed of the depth of her knowledge.

"Then I'm afraid after to-night I must pass into the realm of non-existence for you, for I surely don't want you to go crazy over me."

Brandon laughed. "I rather fancy that is a matter over which you will have no control." And he left her, not at all discouraged. She wasn't going to fall into his arms at his first assault, she was going to be difficult, and he relished the prospect of a fight. To do him justice he had no ulterior motive, he merely wanted

a flirtation which would be absorbing enough to keep him amused all summer. And at the end he would leave her as he had found her, robbed only of some unimportant kisses. But he reckoned without his heart. Madelaine noticed that he had said he was losing his head, which was quite a different thing from losing his heart, and his words wounded her cruelly. Love was a thing which was usually treated too lightly, and she knew what came of that. She supposed her mother had thought she loved her father, and then she thought she had loved Mark Hopkins, but neither feeling had endured. She had left her first husband, and the only reason she clung to her second choice was the fact that his wealth gave her certain material advantages which made life a little more bearable. She knew that Mark had tired of her as she had of him, but as long as she did not interfere with his personal freedom, and he confined himself to a set which did not bother about marriage, he would not dethrone her from her empty seat of honor. But her thread of tenure was slight, and she knew it and she suffered. On several occasions she had spoken much too openly to Madelaine, revealing a condition which froze the girl's mind with horror, and made her more than thankful she had not remained to be a constant witness to her mother's degradation at the hands of the man for whom she had given up so much.

She tried not to make her avoidance of Brandon noticeable, but Carr had keen eyes, and one day he spoke.

"What's wrong between you and Burt; he's terribly sore, and you don't act any too chipper yourself. Had a tiff?"

Madelaine had been spending the afternoon on the neighboring porch, but was preparing to leave now that it was nearing train time.

"No tiff, only Mr. Brandon has rather a casual manner, and I don't believe I like it."

"What do you mean by a casual manner?" Carr was interested. He had tried to get something out of his friend, but had not been successful. Brandon never would talk when he met with defeat.

"He does things because he thinks he's expected to do them, without giving their real significance any thought." She was frowning; it was difficult to explain without being too definite.

"Don't misunderstand Burt."

"I'm trying not to. You see I live alone with my father, and I'm my own chaperon; I decide on right and wrong for myself. Daddy isn't conventional, you must know that by this time; neither am I, or I wouldn't be here so much, but there are certain things not wrong in themselves which I don't do."

"That he's asked you to do?" Carr had turned white, and his thin fingers were clenched over the arm of his wicker lounging chair.

"I've no doubt there are girls at the hotel who have mothers to come home to who'd be glad to go riding at night."

Carr breathed a sigh of relief. He couldn't tell just what he had feared. "Is that such a dreadful request? Why I've done that myself!" he said.

"There, I can't explain because it would bring us to things not usually discussed. And so until Mr. Brandon gets over thinking I'm the only girl at Blythedale I don't care to see much of him." Then she realized her speech sounded conceited, and she added hastily: "Don't misunderstand me in turn; I don't for one moment imagine it's anything stronger than a passing attraction, complicated by the fact that we're living next door to each other. You brought up the subject, you saw that there was something wrong, so I said what I did. I'm quite willing to be friends with Mr. Brandon as I am with you, but I don't wish to accept anything from him, motor rides or anything else." She wondered if she had made matters worse instead of better, and she could not tell from Carr's face, which was graver than usual.

"I think you're a very unusual girl, and I'm awfully glad you're friends with me. Burt has been spoiled by women all his life; his mother adores him, his sister thinks there's no one like him; he's a pretty fine fellow and most girls would be only too glad to have him for a summer beau. I think he meant to be kind when he asked you to go riding, and as he's in town all day he likes a spin at

night. I know Brandon, Miss Pierce, and I think you'd be as safe with him as you would be with your father." It was up to him to defend his friend, and he did it in the conventional manner. But in his heart he was wondering just how far Brandon had attempted to go.

Madelaine recalled the struggle she had had to avoid being kissed against her will, and she smiled scornfully. Then she rose to go. "I'm glad you have such a good opinion of your friend; I wonder if you really believe that, or if you said it because it was the thing to do!"

"Have I also got a casual manner?"

Madelaine shook her head. "I have no fault to find with your manner—so far."

Carr repeated some of the above to Brandon.

"It's none of your business, but I'll confess that I tried to kiss her. We were coming home from the dance, it was a dark night, I had hold of her arm to help her over the bad spots in the road, and I yielded to a perfectly natural temptation. I'm not sorry and I'll do it again the next chance I get. Girls are all alike, Bob, they squeal at the first kiss, and welcome the second." He fully believed what he said, as experience so far had justified this belief.

"I think you're wrong about this girl; somehow, Burt, she's different." Carr spoke thoughtfully.

"Prettier than the majority, and consequently harder to land; diffident perhaps, not different." Brandon knew so much about girls. He had pursued "The Colonel's Lady and Judy O'Grady" with about the same tactics.

"Let her alone, Burt; she's honest; I could stake my life on it; I know the brand of flirtatious skirts as well as you do!"

"Bob, that's one thing I can't do, let her alone. I'm mad about her, and I'll get her if I have to come to her terms."

"You mean you'd marry her!"

"If she's what you think she is, I don't see any other way." But in his heart he did not agree with his friend. He thought if he chose his time well he was bound to win on his terms. And he wasn't ready for marriage.

III

Madelaine found it impossible to keep on avoiding Brandon, and as he was willing to play a waiting game he humbled himself to ask her forgiveness, taking all the blame on his own broad shoulders. He refrained from any show of more than friendly interest, and for nearly two weeks he kept up his attitude of the man who had been taught a lesson. Then one rainy Sunday he overstepped the bounds. Carr had gone to bed with a headache, and after one solid hour of Canfield he dashed across the lawn to the Pierce bungalow.

Madelaine was in the sitting-room reading. It was nine o'clock, and her father had gone to his room; he often retired early nowadays, for his health was failing rapidly. She looked up as Brandon entered, after a knock at the door.

"I'm so sick of my own society that it will be an act of kindness if you let me sit and talk to you for an hour," he began, smiling frankly; "Bob's gone to bed, I played solitaire till the cards yawned in my face, and then I made up my mind that I'd come over and bore you for a while."

It was the first time they had been alone since the night he had transgressed, but she felt that perhaps now he might be trusted. "It's been a miserable day, hasn't it?"

"A rainy Sunday in the country is the most dismal thing I know of, unless you're at a house party, and you forget by common consent that it is Sunday." He drew his chair a little closer, and leaned forward to pick up the book lying in her lap. "I say, this is scarcely the sort of literature I'd expect you to be reading. Some book, isn't it?" He turned the pages carelessly, his eyes lighting on an occasional passage that quickened his pulse.

"You've read it?"

"I should say I had; first week it came out." His tone indicated what he thought. "It's strong meat for babes."

"I think you read it with your eyes, Mr. Brandon, not with your heart. It's a tragic story, and I'm afraid most of it is true."

"I suppose it's true enough, but we can't help those things; it's life, you know."

"I suppose people used that same argument when they discussed the negro slave question, and yet one can help those things. Thinking men and women must find a remedy, and progress will make the next generation view this wrong as we view the horrid fact of slavery."

"You don't understand; how could you, you're a girl!"

"You're mistaken; I do understand, perhaps because I am a girl."

He was puzzled. The book in his eyes was written to appease a hunger for vicious literature. It treated of a condition which men might deplore, but which had existed since the beginning. He never noticed the sermon between the lines, the author's earnest purpose to bring a state of affairs home to the great majority, so that a remedy for the evil might be discovered; he read it because it was what he called "rotten." Men in his set laughed when they mentioned it, and good women read it on the sly. He had a moment of compunction. "I think if I were you I wouldn't finish; it leaves a horrid taste in your mouth, and in spite of your assurance I don't believe you know what you're talking about."

She reached out for the book, and replaced it on the table. "My life has been different from that of most girls, of your sister, for instance, who has probably been kept from the knowledge that there is any evil in the world. I have known unhappiness since I was a little girl, and I made up my mind I would read and try to find out why most women were unhappy, and so far I think it is because they believe they must take their views from some man."

"Isn't that as it should be?"

"It might have worked in the days before women discovered that they could reason things out for themselves."

"Do you think they can?"

"I do."

"You have your own views then on love and marriage?"

"Of course."

Something prompted him to draw her out. "Tell them to me."

"I think there is only one logical reason for marriage, and that is love. I think children should be born of love, and I think husband and wife should love to the end."

"But that isn't possible. You can't keep on loving a person simply because a priest has mumbled certain words over you!"

"Love can be nourished by care, and killed by neglect. No one has the right to marry until he or she is sure."

"But how can you be sure? You may have the best intentions in the world, and when you make your vows you may mean them, but you can't put tangible fetters on an intangible feeling; you must realize that."

"You can be honest, you can be truthful, you can be loving if you cultivate these things, but of course first of all you must start right."

"Naturally, and how do you propose to do that?"

"By testing the quality of your affection."

This was leading into curious byways, and his eyes sparkled. "By a long engagement, or a trial marriage?"

"By a combination of an engagement which is more than an engagement and by a marriage which is less than a marriage."

"It sounds involved; are you quite sure you know what you mean yourself? Divorce takes the sting out of most weddings to-day."

"You are not fair. I am quite in earnest, Mr. Brandon, so if you don't wish to discuss this seriously we'll change to some other topic."

"It's a great pity you lost your mother; she would have told you there were some subjects it's not wise to discuss with a man, seriously." He wondered the next moment why he said it, yet the absurdity of her remarks struck him forcibly. She had lived too much alone with that queer old father of hers to know what the world was really like, and it was only justice on his part to sound a note of warning. He was not prepared, however, to see the tears rise and linger on her thick lashes.

"Mr. Brandon, I lost my mother

through divorce; she is married again, and I see her occasionally; that is why this question appeals to me so strongly," she said, her voice bitter with memories.

"You poor child! I'm awfully sorry I said what I did, and yet it's true." Now he had a new view of her. Her early life had been probably stained by a domestic tragedy. Though he joked about divorce, he had inherited rigid ideas on the subject; he was too dominantly male to have any compassion on the woman who revolted, and, while he could countenance an underhand violation of the contract, he had no tolerance for the man or woman who set it lawfully aside. He immediately formed an opinion of Madelaine's mother, and unconsciously it at first reacted upon the girl herself.

"It only means that I can't discuss it with you."

"Better with me than with anyone else." He was quick to perceive what might happen should she make it an ordinary topic of conversation. "I'm really fond of you."

"I know how little that means." She smiled. "You are trying to make the best of a dull summer; there is no society here to compensate you for Narragansett—Mr. Carr told me you usually go there—and you're killing time by flirting with me. I don't mind if you only realize that I know you're flirting, and that your going or your coming makes no real difference to me. I like Mr. Carr quite as much as I do you, and I derive just as much pleasure from talking to him."

"If you had studied out what would hurt me most, you couldn't have happened on anything better. See here, you maddening little thing, this has gone beyond a jest with me. I told you I was crazy about you and I meant it; it's been a feeling that sprung up suddenly; I didn't want to down it in the beginning and now I can't! It makes me wild to hear you say you like Bob as much as you do me; you don't! You're sorry for the poor old chap, that's why you spend hours with him as unconcernedly as if he were a girl! But with me it's different; you're conscious that I'm a man every moment; that I'm always fighting the impulse to seize you in my arms, to kiss you even against your will, until you lie quiet against my breast and acknowledge I'm your master!"

Madelaine pushed back her chair. She was afraid; he looked as if he might stop fighting any moment and yield to this impulse, and secretly she knew that if he held her long enough she would lie quiet in his arms and acknowledge him her master. But she denied it even to herself. "You mustn't talk like that to me; I won't allow it," she said, but her voice shook in spite of her efforts to control it.

"How will you stop me?" He saw she was perturbed, and he thought victory was not far off.

"I can deny you the house, and I can ask you to go now." She rose and stood facing him, one hand gripping the back of her chair.

"Do you ask me to go?" He was playing with her.

She had pride, and she summoned it to her aid. "Yes."

"I don't believe you mean it; I think you want me to stay, to put my threat into execution." The next moment she was in his arms, crushed to his breast; he could feel her heart beat irregularly as she fought to escape. He did nothing but hold her; he did not even touch his lips to her hair; he waited until her force was spent and she gave up the unequal struggle. Then he released her suddenly, his face pale, his eyes dark with excitement.

"Now come to me of your own accord," he commanded, in a tone that was scarcely above a whisper.

She, too, was pale, and her hair was loosened. She put up her hands to straighten it; then quite against her will she took a step forward, uncertainly, like a sleep-walker. He watched her coming; she was his now to do with as he pleased, and the triumph of the hour was more than sweet. But when she was quite close to him, she lifted her hand and pointed to the door. "Go!" she said, and in her eyes there was no trace of her momentary weakness.

He wasn't a man to ordinarily repent of a burst of passion, but just now he did feel a sense of shame. He tried to hold

up his head and found it strangely weighted, and then he did something that astonished himself. "Let me say one word; I am heartily ashamed of myself but I love you; will you marry me, Madelaine?" Nothing had been further from his mind than such a proposal, yet it came out simply and naturally.

"You are salving your conscience, and I am glad it hurts, but you don't love me, Mr. Brandon, not as I understand love, and so there's no use in prolonging this interview." She was mistress of herself, and her dignity was impressive.

He had not expected to have his offer dismissed as if it were not worthy of consideration, and her calm air of superiority irritated him. "If I go, I shall not return; you don't seem to realize I am quite in earnest!"

"For the time being you are, but how long would that mood of yours last were I foolish enough to accept your proposal?"

He bit his underlip savagely. "You think I would change?"

"Not change. You spoke on impulse; you had no intention of asking me to be your wife when you came to-night."

"I never am deliberate, and love does come suddenly."

"I'd rather not discuss love with you; your act was dictated by quite another feeling."

"What do you know about that?"

"Enough to distinguish between the two. Please go; I am very tired."

"You heard me say if I went in anger I would not return?"

"Yes, I heard you."

He took a few steps toward the door, then he paused abruptly, and turned to her with one of his radiant smiles. "But you knew I did not mean it. Why, little girl, I couldn't let you go. I'm going to behave myself, and prove to you that my feeling may have begun with passion, but it's working its way up to the love that lasts. Good night."

After he had gone, Madelaine sat down to think it all over. She was troubled when she realized how near she had been to a surrender; how the physical charm of the man had drawn her in spite of her ignorance of his true character. He had been trifling with her up till the last, and she fully believed that had she accepted him to-night he would have found a way of wiggling out of an engagement in the morning. He had spoken in hot blood, but when he cooled down he would congratulate himself upon his escape, for even were he anxious to assume the responsibilities of the wedded state he was not the kind to go out of his class to choose a wife. All these things hurt, but she was brave enough to go over the facts calmly, and to weigh each consideration with fair judgment.

But she was mistaken after all. Brandon was the man to leave no stone unturned to get the thing he really wanted, and he never considered any price too high to pay for indulgence. Marriage had lain in a deep recess of his mind, something he would turn to when lighter loves palled, and at the present there seemed no possibility of that, but he spoke truly when he said that no matter what the source of his feeling for Madelaine it had grown to be the most dominant desire of his life, and the more she held off the more he wanted her. He knew it would require delicate manipulation to overcome the effects of last night's mistake, and after some thought he concluded to confide in Carr and to make him an ambassador in his suit.

"You can't be in earnest; why you've only known the girl two months and marriage in your family means a lifetime." Carr was incredulous.

"I shouldn't have asked your help if I were not sure of myself. I admit in the beginning I thought it would be merely a summer affair like the rest, but it isn't; it's love, and if I have to marry it's come sooner than I expected, but I always knew I'd be bowled over some time, and perhaps it's just as well it happens now."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Persuade her I mean business; talk to the old man, and tell him what a fine son-in-law I'd make. Put it on strong; say I'm grieving to death over her hardness of heart, but why need I tell you anything, you know how to deal with girls!"

"What will your mother say?"

"Bless you, my children, I hope; and,

if not, it's my marriage, the happiness of my whole future."

"You may be right, but your mother's awfully keen on class."

"Have you ever seen a girl with prettier manners?"

"No, but she's been brought up differently from—Elsie, for instance."

"I'm not narrow enough to prescribe one rule of education for all girls. Elsie is an heiress; she has a fortune of her own which my aunt left her far in excess of anything I inherited from the old gentleman; she will probably marry an Englishman; she has a bad attack of Anglophobia, and all her education has been along lines to fit her for a place in the British aristocracy, but I'm a Yankee clean through, and any American girl is eligible to bear my name and share my position."

In the end Carr consented, thinking his mission an easy one to accomplish, for he did not see how a girl in her sober senses could turn Burt Brandon down. For a few days he was unable to open negotiations for the reason that Madelaine refused to see him either on his porch or on her own. She excused herself; she was busy; she was not feeling well; she was just going out. Flynn was the medium through whom she transmitted her replies.

"She's a deep one, she is; I wonder if after all she's playing a game," he remarked as Brandon came home, and for the third time he had to admit no progress.

"I've stopped thinking about her motives; my mind is so full of her it has room for nothing else. I can't shut out her face; I can't exclude her voice; why I never knew a man could go dippy over a girl in this fashion." He showed traces of his unrest, and there was trouble in the depths of his eyes.

"You sure have got it bad." Carr attempted a lightness he was far from feeling.

All the next day he kept thinking about his friend, and in the afternoon, having made sure that Madelaine had not gone out, he limped across the lawn, and mounted the steps laboriously.

Madelaine heard him; the tapping of his crutch was an unmistakable sound, so she was prepared when the maid announced: "Mr. Carr." She got up, and went out to meet him.

He was standing, leaning painfully on his crutch, and she was obliged to push forward the most comfortable chair, and put a cushion at his back. He was one of those boyish-looking, fair-haired men women are always mothering, and when he was ill there was no more gainsaying him than one would an ailing baby.

He came at once to the point. "Why have you neglected me?" he asked. "Even if you have had another tiff with Burt I shouldn't be made to suffer!"

"Have you suffered?" She tried to smile at him, but the effort was not a success. She was nearer tears than smiles.

"Of course. You see, you've spoiled me; you've accustomed me to a visit every day, and then without warning everything comes to a stop. And, after all, don't you think you're a bit hard on Burt, too? A man can't do more than ask a girl to marry him. It's usually considered the highest compliment he can pay her, and to my certain knowledge you're the first girl he's ever honored in this way."

Madelaine had opened her lips once to interrupt, then had thought it wiser to let him have his say. "Mr. Brandon asked me to marry him, and I refused; surely he's man enough to know that ends the matter. He doesn't really love me; I know it, and I don't care for him," she said, calmly.

"You believe that a small affection can be nurtured into a full-grown love if it's rightly trained. Now you do like Burt, so why won't you give him a chance to turn that liking into love?"

"Has he asked you to intercede for him?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, we'll have this thing out once for all. I do like him better than I imagined I ever would like anybody except daddy, but marriage isn't a thing to be entered into lightly. Did he tell you that I had a theory about testing the enduring quality of love before taking promises upon my lips that my mind was not sure I could fulfil?"

"Yes, something in the nature of a trial marriage? But that was only a theory, not something you wanted to put into practice!"

"Mr. Carr, my childhood was saddened by a divorce between my parents; my mother has re-married, and still she is not happy; now when I marry I must be sure, and the only way to be sure is to give it a trial. I want to live in the same house with my fiancé, to see him at all hours, to learn his little ways, to know him as I never would if I only saw him from time to time as conventionally engaged people do. I want to see him not only when he is on his good behavior, but when things go wrong; to see if I am sufficiently attractive to keep him interested all the time; I don't want him to put up with me for a certain number of hours, and then go from me to his club where he is entertained, or to a different set where he is amused; I must share his pleasures, his aims, his big interests; I must be all to him he is to me, not merely his housekeeper, the mother of his children, his wife—but his mate."

Carr was too astonished to do more than gasp out. "You want to try living with him before you marry him?"

"I want to try living under the same roof with him."

"You must be crazy! No decent man could accept such a proposition! Suppose after you gave it a trial you found out you couldn't get along together?"

"Wouldn't it be better before than after we had taken our vows?"

"But your reputation?"

"I am thinking of my happiness and his."

"Do you wish me to repeat this to Burt? I know him too well to doubt for one moment what his answer will be; he couldn't accept you on those terms."

"I did not believe he would; that is why I am so certain he does not love me; he couldn't stand the test."

"And how long would this arrangement have to last?"

"Six months at least; it would hardly be fair to both to judge in less time."

"And you think you and Burt could live together under the same roof, be nearly everything to each other, and yet not marry; you wouldn't be human if you could stand the strain."

"Of course my father would be with us; even if I married him regularly, I couldn't give up daddy."

"Then you would have a refuge, and Burt none."

"I don't understand."

Carr struggled to his feet. "The kindest thing I can think of to say is that I don't believe you do."

IV

Brandon took the remarkable proposition quite as Carr thought he would. He had never heard of such a thing; she couldn't be in her right mind to suggest it; her father was an old fool, but even he would forbid it; it was immoral even to think about it? So he stormed; then he calmed down. After all if a man were a cad he could see that the proposal had its advantages. In six months one could be quite sure whether he wanted to legalize such a union or not, and think of the delightful companionship in the interim. But Brandon was no cad, and he couldn't put the girl he loved in an equivocal position. Carr was right, and he thrust temptation from him indignantly, but the harm had been done, and the hardest thing to get rid of is an evil suggestion. You can't argue with it; you can't fight with it; it eludes an honest encounter, and it makes itself heard above the voice of conscience.

He sent over to know if Madelaine would see him, and she returned a favorable answer. Like his ambassador, he saw no object in beating around the bush.

"I had to talk to you; Carr must have misunderstood; I'm willing to submit to a six months' engagement; in fact, I realize we should know more of each other before we marry; that was what you meant, wasn't it?"

She shook her head. "Not quite. Mr. Carr thinks I'm crazy; perhaps I am on this subject. Happiness can't rest on an uncertain foundation."

"But have you thought, dear, what it would mean if one or the other of us repented?"

"It would mean a temporary grief, but much better than a lifetime of regret."

"Don't you suppose most couples could get along if they made up their minds to bear with each other?"

"How much better to have love that makes forbearance unnecessary."

"But I thought love taught us forbearance?"

"In little things. When two natures are fundamentally opposed, there is no middle ground upon which to rear the structure of a home."

"Do you think our natures are fundamentally opposed?"

"I don't know; that is what we must discover. We think differently on many subjects, but whether it is a surface difference or whether it goes deeper only a trial can prove."

"Does your father know what you propose to do?"

"Not yet. Daddy isn't very well, and I don't want to worry him with something that may never happen."

"You realize that I couldn't consent?"

"That you probably won't."

"And it is consideration for you which holds me back?"

"Consideration of a society which holds up its hands in horror at any new departure."

"But your own friends; how could you justify such an arrangement to them?"

"I have few friends, and I shouldn't try to justify it. I realize quite as well as you do that it sounds dreadfully shocking, and to save your pride I'd be willing to make concessions. No one need know outside of daddy and Mr. Carr, just what we are doing. The world, of whose opinion you seem to stand so much in awe, could think you were boarding with us, for I must manage my own house; then when our time of probation came to an end if we were both satisfied you could announce you had fallen in love and were going to marry me. If, on the other hand, we found out in time we were not suited to each other, we could terminate the compact immediately, and there would be no lasting harm done either to my reputation or to yours."

Brandon wavered. "Of course as you put it, it doesn't sound so bad, but I wish you'd marry me at once; I'm so sure of the lasting quality of my love that I'm willing to assume all responsibility."

"But you can't! I have to take my share. Don't you think if it were harder to get married there would be less divorce? If people were made to see how solemn an obligation it was, how seriously it should be entered upon, there would be less risk of tiring of each other. The family should be a unit to all practical purposes, and as husband and wife grow older their minds should be attuned in one key. Their children should be brought up in an atmosphere of harmony, not strife, and they should learn the sanctity of the relation between their parents, so that in turn marriage should be a holy thing to them also. It isn't the custom for us to bring our children up to regard this thing as the highest duty we have to perform. Men marry only too often because they can't get a certain woman without the wedding ring; girls because they want a home, the independence of the married state, or on account of a feeling they designate as love without any knowledge of what nature is trying to tell them. You think I speak very frankly, and that perhaps I know too much for a girl, but if we all knew more there would be less horrible mistakes for us to expiate later in life. Don't you see what I mean? I want to be sure nature is telling me you are my mate, the one man destined from the beginning to be the complement of myself, and not the first man who has happened to touch my heart when I was in a responsive mood. For in that case I would realize that I had given up to a makeshift, and I had forfeited my right to experience the deepest, holiest feeling that stirs a woman's heart. Had we known each other from childhood, had we seen each other develop from boy to man, from girl to woman, this period of probation might not be necessary, although they say you cannot know a person till you live in the same house with him, but as it is the slight acquaintance we have with each other only tells you that you feel a sort of love for me, and me that no other man has ever dominated my thoughts to a like

extent. But whether this tiny love plant can be made to flower or not is still too doubtful. It would need care and watching and even then it might shrivel up and die through no fault of ours, but merely because it was too feeble to take a real hold on life."

"You have pretty theories, and I have no quarrel with them as theories, but when you try to introduce them into factors of our modern existence I'm afraid you'll find they won't work. I do think you know more than you need to know to make you happy, but I realize the conditions that governed your childhood, and the fact that you've had no woman at home to think for you has developed your habit of thinking too seriously for yourself. I agree with you that marriage should not be entered into lightly, and that there is one man and one woman who are perfect mates, but perfection is rare, and I believe it would bore the majority. You come as near to my ideal as any woman I could imagine, and I'm willing to share my chance of future happiness with you. We'll spend as much time together for the next six months as we can, but it will be a conventional engagement, and I guarantee to point out all my failings in case you seem likely to overlook any. Be sensible, there's a dear girl, and let me speak to your father. He shall always have a home with us, and I'll do my best to make him comfortable. Now are you satisfied?" He was smiling; he could not take her seriously.

But Madelaine's whole heart was in this matter. "No; I appreciate your offer to be nice to daddy, but you must take me on my terms or not at all."

He flared up suddenly. He was the man, and it was his place to dictate, not hers. "Very well than, I guess it's to be not at all; the other alternative is too ridiculous!"

"As you wish."

He seized his hat and went out angrily, and she watched him go, and wondered what she would do if he did not come back.

He was resourceful, and he determined to ignore the issue at stake and proceed in his love-making in the conventional fashion. Madelaine accepted the change of front, and said nothing, receiving his visits as if the past had been wiped out between them.

Her father, who had taken a liking to both men, began to notice Brandon's attentions.

"He seems a fine, manly young chap; do you like him, daughter?" he asked.

"Yes, daddy."

Pierce sighed. "I can't expect to keep you forever. Some day a man like this will take you away from me, and I shan't mind if he only makes you happy."

"Daddy, do you remember years ago I told you I had a way to prove whether love was love or something else?" She came close to his chair, and laid her hand on his thin shoulder.

Pierce did remember, and his timid soul recoiled at the thought of her bold proposition. "But, my darling child, surely you did not mean it!"

"So much so that I've told Mr. Brandon I won't marry him unless he consents to the test."

"He's asked you to marry him?"

"Yes, daddy."

"Then don't trifle, child. It's a splendid chance for you; he belongs to an excellent family; he's rich; he can give you luxuries, and he can't help loving you. Don't frighten him off by advocating such revolutionary ideas; it's scarcely modest for a young girl to question love."

Madelaine saw that she had her father to convince as well as her lover, but she went about her task patiently. Like most timid natures, Ralph Pierce was obstinate, and nothing she could say would alter his convictions. He was terrified at the knowledge of life she displayed; how could she have learned these things from reading and observation! He had never bothered his head about enlightening her ignorance; the world expected good women to be half blind, and instinct was the only teacher an innocent girl could have. How often instinct betrayed innocent girls made no difference, and he listened to Madelaine's calm recital of what progress was doing for women with fear in his heart. If Brandon heard her talk like this, he would never marry her, and such a marriage would relieve her father of all worries

for her future. He knew his days were numbered, and he had dreaded dying and leaving his beloved child alone. He had saved a little money, enough to take care of her if she exercised strict economy, and he had wondered if when he was taken away she would be forced to go back to her mother for protection. He had never heard of girls in her position standing alone; either they lived with their parents or they married, and Madelaine had never seemed to care for young men. Now, however, when this brilliant chance was laid at her feet, she was endangering it by the most alarming theory that he had ever imagined could lodge in a young girl's brain. He must combat it, so he set to work skilfully, but he made no more progress with her than she did with him, and the season was drawing to a close, and Brandon would soon be going away. Back in New York he would forget her, unless he were definitely bound, and it was her father's duty to see that so desirable a suitor should not escape. Brandon gave him the opportunity he sought, and it did not take the two men long to come to an understanding.

"You agree with me, Mr. Pierce, the thing is absurd, and we must bring her round to our way of thinking," said the younger man, as soon as he was assured of his future father-in-law's views.

"Give her time; she must see how foolish it is. She is a good girl, Mr. Brandon; she has been a good daughter and she will make a good wife. She has told you about her mother; we make mistakes when we are young; she was also good, but we weren't suited to each other; I was always a quiet, home-loving man, and Minna was pretty and she liked amusements. I've tried to make Madelaine see that our divorce was only an unfortunate happening; that there was no grave fault on either side."

Then suddenly a revelation of what Madelaine was trying to do came to Brandon. She wanted to avoid such an "unfortunate happening" as had blighted her parents' lives. She had been told there was no grave fault on either side, and that it was merely because the marriage was not founded on real love that it had ended in the divorce court. And she had resolved that she would not risk an end to her romance. Could he blame her? He began to contemplate the thing from her point of view, and the more he did that the stronger her arguments appeared, until he held out more for form's sake than for real conviction that his way was right.

Carr watched the progress of the conflict with interest. He had smothered his own budding love for the girl whom his friend had chosen, for he realized that from the first he had had no chance in the race. Now he listened to the doubts Brandon expressed at home, though he kept them to himself when he went next door.

"She has right on her side; her early experience has made her wish to proceed warily, and after all who could talk if her father was with us. His presence would do away with gossip; we could live in a neighborhood where we were not known, and I'd keep on my rooms at the Berwind, and have my mail sent there. Besides it would only be for six months." He was trying to convince himself it wasn't as bad as it had seemed in the beginning.

Carr filled his pipe leisurely. "Anything you have to keep hidden is something you are ashamed of, and that can't be right. Of course you're both free, white and twenty-one—by the way, is Miss Pierce twenty-one?"

"I don't know, but I should imagine she is."

"In that case, no one has a legal right to interfere, but morally I am bound to point out the dangers you appear to have passed over. What would your mother say? You could never convince her that when the six months were up you were not forced to marry. Now don't get wrathy; I am looking at it from a worldly standpoint. Then there's Elsie; would you ask her to visit you? Would you introduce your friends? You've always been a social animal; are you going to shut yourself up with Miss Pierce and her father, or are you keeping on the rooms at the Berwind so that you can get a whiff of your own world occasionally? Then you realize, of course, what it will

mean to see a girl at breakfast every morning, at dinner every night, to share a common sitting-room, to spend your evenings together, and to always keep your self-control?" Carr stated the case brutally, and Brandon winced.

"I know it will mean vigilance, and I haven't been accustomed to holding myself in check, but the reward at the end will be worth it, Bob."

"Yes, if you both decide there is to be a reward."

"She loves me or she wouldn't be willing to propose such a thing; it will be hard on her, too; she hates deceit, and she will have to conceal the real meaning of my presence in the house. As for my feeling, it's love; I never felt like this for any other girl, and I never will; it's growing stronger all the time; it's the deepest, sweetest thing that has ever come into my life. I'd be willing to bring my mother to our home, to let her see for herself how things are, but Elsie, of course, is a child; she wouldn't understand, and yet I look forward to Madelaine's influence in Elsie's life as something that will make a true woman out of my little sister."

"My dear Burt, knowledge is all very well for the working girl, but in our set we chaperon our sisters."

"And yet so curiously is our country constituted that often when a girl's supposedly rich father dies she is cast into the ranks of the working class. My views on the woman question are undergoing some change."

"So I perceive; you'll be a suffragette next."

"They've got one platform I approve of."

"Liberty of action for women as well as men?"

"No, you scoffer, something fine and high, the endowment of motherhood. That's looking out for the future of our race."

"It will give too many loafers a chance to throw the care of their offspring on the state."

"Every plan of betterment has some drawbacks."

"So you realize that, do you?"

"Perfectly, but I'm beginning to believe that in Madelaine's scheme the good results will outweigh the drawbacks."

But Carr groaned. "It can't be done, my friend, it can't be done."

Nevertheless it was done; much as the girl had outlined it with certain necessary qualifications to which she yielded gracefully. After all the main thing was that she had gained Brandon's consent to the test. Pierce was easier to manage, and he never knew it was his own words that influenced the young man; the graphic picture he had drawn of the rock on which his own matrimonial bark had split that made Brandon feel perhaps after all Madelaine knew what she was about when she made her suggestion.

V

They went house hunting together on the upper west side of town.

Brandon had insisted upon a house. "Within doors you shall be mistress and spend your father's money, but I shall supply the home that shelters us. That is only fair, and three people in a flat is one too many. I'm accustomed to plenty of room; that's why I've had bachelor apartments ever since I left college, and I've fussy little ways of spreading my belongings out over a lot of space. I've given in to you in the essential matter; surely in trifles you will give in to me; beside we'll live in a house after we're really married, so you might as well learn to manage one now."

There was wisdom in what he said, and she made no further objections. It was vain to consult her father; he was so helpless in a matter which required decisive action, and he seemed to have lost the power to express an opinion of his own.

After a week's search they found what they wanted, a modern American basement house on West End avenue in a quiet neighborhood, and then they began to furnish it. Madelaine brought their own things from their modest apartment in Gramercy square for the rooms on the second floor which were to be hers and her father's, and they contrasted curiously with the rich things which Brandon supplied. He left his rooms at

the Berwind intact, and if Madelaine wondered she refrained from comment.

In October the double household took possession, and the experiment which sounded so well was earnestly begun.

Madelaine unpacked Brandon's things which were sent up by messenger in the morning, and she spent the greater part of the day trying to make everything homelike for him. Two maids comprised her household staff, and the cook especially gave promise of excellence.

Her father came home early, and wandered about his big room nervously. "It doesn't seem like home," he said, plaintively; "and how shabby our furniture looks, yet it was plenty good enough for the old apartment."

"Daddy, you're not sorry we came, are you? Remember you're always going to live with Burt and me, and as he's a rich man you've got to get accustomed to big rooms and nice things. And you always did like them; it's only because we haven't as much money as we had that we've economized. So please smile for my sake. I'm a little bit nervous myself, and I don't want to cry, for I'm really happy, indeed I am."

"There, there, I'm an old man, darling, and it's hard to change at my age; all I want in this world is to see you happy, then when my time comes I'll be ready to go."

"Daddy!" She flung her arms about him, her heart sick with terror as she noted how his clothes hung on his thin frame. "Don't you feel well; is there anything wrong; shall I send for a doctor?"

"Why what ails you, child? You are nervous; I'm quite well, but I must expect to die some day."

She was reassured. "You don't know how you frightened me. We've been together so long that I couldn't live without you now."

"I'm hoping Brandon will mean all that to you in time."

"He'll mean a great deal, but he'll never take your place, daddy; we've gone through too much together." A sob rose in her throat, but she choked it down. "How do I look? This is one of the dresses mother brought me last spring; it was too gorgeous for Blythedale, but it seems just right here." She stood off for inspection, and his old eyes brightened as they rested admiringly on his beloved child. The handsome satin gown meant nothing to him; he only saw the sweet face rising above it, and that was always worthy of admiration.

"I guess Brandon knows more about clothes than I do; you always look well to me, daughter." Then he added quickly, fearing she might think he was jealous of her mother's gift: "I'm glad you've got the chance to wear some of the pretty things Minna gives you, and you're right, they did need a richer setting than the old apartment."

Madelaine was vaguely soothed by his words, and she left him to see how dinner was progressing, with a lighter heart. She was nervous. She and her father were used to the simplest meals, but the first time she dined with Brandon she learned that he was very particular about what he ate, how his food was prepared and how served.

"I like clear soups, green vegetables, my meats well cooked, always a salad, cheese and coffee; you can suit yourself about sweets. I never eat pie," he had said when she had consulted him about a possible menu.

Soup, meat, vegetables, a salad every night, with a dessert thrown in; she wondered if her father's income would cover all that, then she set to work to do her best.

The entrance was on the ground floor, and Madelaine coming out of the kitchen in the rear heard the front door bell, and saw Brandon's face through the lace square in the door. Her first impulse was toward flight. She was suddenly afraid, he looked so big and masculine as he stood there; then she conquered her fears, and opened the door to him herself.

"You darling!" She was in his arms, and he had stilled her protest with a long kiss. "You don't know how good it felt to be coming home to you."

She blushed as he released her. "Burt, oh, you mustn't!"

"It's the only way I can make myself believe it's true; sight may deceive me, touch can't," he said, and the scandal-

ized maid, watching from the kitchen door, shook her head and went in to talk it over with cook.

Brandon inspected the table. "Looks fine, sweetheart!" Then he changed the position of the forks. "Salad forks on the inside, dear, next to the plate."

A vivid red stained her cheeks. "I know," she hastened to reassure him on that point. "Funny I overlooked it."

"You darling, did you think I meant to criticise? I'm not such a bear. Kiss me just once more, then I'll go up and dress. Dinner at seven or seven thirty?"

Madelaine gave a start. They had not discussed that, and she had ordered it at her usual hour, half past six. Now she saw she had made a mistake. "Seven, I think." And as she spoke she was wondering if the roast would spoil if it were held back half an hour.

Her father left his room and came downstairs as the clock chimed the half hour. Madelaine was alone in the drawing-room; the blinds were drawn and the room was flooded with a soft light from yellow shaded bulbs. The heavy gilt furniture was upholstered in a rich silk tapestry; the baby grand piano had a wonderful piece of Chinese embroidery thrown across its lid; there were pots of graceful ferns standing about in handsome jardinières, and tall vases of yellow chrysanthemums gave an added note to the color scheme. And in the midst of this unwonted luxury the girl seemed perfectly at home. It recalled the days when she lived with the Hopkinses, though her stepfather's house had been more extravagantly furnished; Pierce had never seen her in that other home save the one time when she had been ill, and her rooms had been stripped as bare as a hospital ward so that he wondered a little she was not oppressed by all this splendor. She came forward to meet him.

"Is dinner late, daughter?" he asked, patting her hand which she had slipped under his arm.

"No, daddy, I thought we'd dine at seven after this," she said; "you don't mind, do you?"

"You are the little housekeeper; the domestic reins are in your hands." But he quite understood that the later hour was chosen to suit Brandon's convenience.

Brandon came down in his dinner clothes a few minutes after seven. He greeted Pierce warmly, pulled out Madelaine's chair, took his place at her side, and launched into the tale of a humorous incident which had occurred at the office. Occasionally he remembered to include Pierce in the conversation, but on the whole he forgot it was not a tête-à-tête with Madelaine. He praised the meal until the coffee was served, then he put down his cup untouched.

"Isn't it strong enough?" she said, leaning forward to question him.

"I'll send up some special kind that I'm used to; I'm a crank about coffee, and I'll get a percolator and make it at table, then you shall pronounce judgment on my cooking." He tried to take the sting out of his criticism, and Madelaine, after a moment's effort, met his gaze frankly.

They sat in the drawing-room after dinner and talked. Pierce read the evening papers until ten o'clock, then he said good night, and the two were alone.

"How do you feel? strange, or as if the whole thing was a dream and you were bound to wake up?" Brandon drew her down beside him on the sofa and slipped his arm caressingly about her waist, bending his head a moment to lean his cheek against hers.

"I feel quite content. Of course the first days will be difficult; we shall have to make allowances, but I know you'll tell me when you don't like things, and I shan't hesitate to find fault when you displease me, and so in time we shall learn to adapt our ways to each other and strengthen our love." She spoke quite simply. It was only the first few days, the settling process that troubled her; she looked beyond to a period of calm content when their love should deepen. And Brandon stifled his own misgivings, and began to feel that the experiment could only end in satisfaction all around.

At eleven she started to rise, but he looked at her reproachfully.

"Sweetheart, you don't mean to say you're going to leave me at this hour! I

never go to bed before twelve, and how shall I amuse myself until then?"

She smiled at him indulgently. "Silly boy, can't you read; do you have to be amused all the time? Dear, I'm tired; it's past my usual bedtime, and I've been so busy to-day, putting things to rights, that I'm worn out. I'll never be up in time to pour your coffee at breakfast if you don't let me go now."

"Just five minutes; put your head on my shoulder, and close your eyes, and pretend you're asleep. No, you won't even pretend—there, I'm a brute to keep you for my selfish pleasure; say good night to me, or wait, we'll go up together and say good night at the door of your room. Shall I switch off the lights, and do you wish me to lock up?" He was contrite now, for he saw that she was growing white from fatigue.

"Ellen has fastened the door, but you need not go upstairs; why don't you read here?"

"My dear girl, I couldn't! My rooms look much more cozy; some evening I shall expect you to visit me; my sitting-room has couches and comfortable chairs much more inviting than these!"

"This is a very beautiful room," she said, rebuking him gently.

"Indeed it is, but it's our formal room, and you know what an informal chap I am." He waited till she had her foot on the lowest step, then he switched off the lights and they went up together, his arm laid lightly over her shoulders. At the door of her room he paused. "My own girl, don't make this test last too long; it almost seems as if we were married, and I love you so." Then he kissed her.

Madelaine tiptoed through the dressing-room that stretched between her room and her father's to see if he were asleep.

Pierce heard her. "Daughter, should I have put on my Tuxedo to-night?" And his voice was full of anxiety. He had been lying there in the dark, wondering if he were going to be able to meet the requirements of this grand new house.

Madelaine laughed softly. "Of course not; you're to do just as you please. If Burt dresses for dinner, that's his affair, but that need not influence us. Good night, daddy."

But though she was very tired she was not able to get to sleep herself for a long while; she lay thinking over the great change that had come into her life, and how events were shaping themselves as long ago she had imagined they would. She was almost sure of the depth of her feeling for Brandon; he was a man among men, and she looked up to him and adored him, and she wondered if she would be able to satisfy the various needs of his complex nature. She was essentially a home body, like her father, but she saw that Brandon would demand a social side as well, and that a continued diet of quiet evenings at home would make him restless. She wondered if he knew that, when he kept on his bachelor apartment, and that if she failed to amuse him, he would go there for relaxation? She tried to dismiss that thought as disloyal, but it would crop up, and she saw herself striving always to keep his interest centered on her. Even to-night he had spoken of asking Carr to dinner soon, and suggesting that she invite one of her girl friends to round out the table. She had not told him that she did not expect to see much of her girl friends now, and that the only women who would come to the house without questioning would be one or two of her working women acquaintances, a newspaper reporter, a social settlement worker, and a teacher of physical culture. These three were broad-minded enough to understand her motives; it was from them she had learned of the darker side of life, but none of the three was under thirty, and they all thought more of their brains than they did of their personal attractions. Carr wouldn't like them; they'd bore him, and even Brandon would scoff at their advanced ideas, no matter how hard he tried to be courteous. The only possibility was Flo Lorrimer, whom she still saw from time to time, though she was more fond of Mrs. Lorrimer than of Flo, who had grown up into a fluffy creature with some pretensions to beauty. She had only one idea in her small blond head and that was to marry money. Mr. Lorrimer was dead, and

his widow strained every nerve to make her limited income meet her daughter's demands. Madelaine had not thought of the Lorrimers at first; the mother might understand but she might not sanction, and it was doubtful if she would be willing to let her idolized child come under the influence of such a radical movement, but if the case were put up to Flo, and the girl knew that she was going to meet a nephew of Rollins Carr at an informal dinner the bait might be strong enough to make her demolish her mother's objections. So if Brandon really invited Carr she would risk a snubbing and call.

The next morning, in spite of her bad night, she was dressed and downstairs at eight o'clock. Ellen was laying the breakfast table, and her curt greeting had a note of insolence in it that the girl was quick to notice, though for the present she determined to let it pass. She had apportioned certain details of the housework to her own share, and while waiting for the two men to come down she went into the drawing-room, opened the windows, and started dusting.

Brandon was late. Her father had finished his second cup of coffee, and had pushed back his chair and was reading the morning *Times* when the younger man appeared. Ellen was in the pantry, and as Brandon passed behind Madelaine's chair he stooped suddenly and catching her face between his hands kissed her.

"I slept like a top, in fact, too well, and I'm late, but fortunately the subway is almost at the door, and it brings Wall street quite near. I forgot to tell you, Madelaine, that I like my eggs turned over, and my bacon very crisp. Don't send them back; that is just a tip for future reference. No, I don't care for cereals; they are too fattening, and my favorite morning appetizer is grape fruit." After having delivered himself of the above remarks, he proceeded to a leisurely consumption of the meal spread before him. In spite of his acknowledgment that he was late, he lingered at table, glancing from time to time at the *Herald* headlines, and discussing the news of the world with Madelaine. Pierce had already left the house when the other two finally rose. Madelaine went to the door with Brandon.

"Do you want to go to the theatre tonight? They say the new show at the Astor is great!"

It was on her lips to beg for a little longer time at home; then she recalled her qualms of the previous evening, and she assented with a show of pleasure she was far from feeling.

She went upstairs slowly, passing her father's room, where everything was neat and orderly, and entered the two rooms on the third floor which comprised Brandon's suite, but on the threshold she paused in astonishment. It did not seem possible that in so short a time chaos could have come out of the order in which she had left everything the previous afternoon. It looked as if every chair had been moved; the long table in the sitting-room was littered with papers; cigarette stumps and ashes were carelessly deposited without regard to the fact that she had provided two ash trays for them; one shade was up, the other down, and the curtains had been pushed back to admit more air. Towels lay in a heap on the floor of the bathroom, and in the bedroom beyond was a similar disorder. Brandon's dinner clothes lay over the back of a chair; his shoes were in different corners where he had kicked them off. A mass of neckties heaped on the top of his dressing table showed that he had not taken the one that lay nearest to his hand. Madelaine sighed; then she smiled. This was something she had not bargained for, but she remembered that he was accustomed to the presence of a man servant, and her heart glowed at the thought of being able to do these intimate things for him, for she was the type of woman who glories in service to the man she loves.

For a week he said nothing further about inviting Carr to dine, but every other night he took her some place, occasionally just for a motor ride, and a stop at Claremont for refreshment on their way home. He was always kind, considerate of her, treating her as if she were the only woman in existence for him, and her alarms were hushed. Sure-

ly she had done right, and everything was working out for the best. Then suddenly a new opposing force developed. Madelaine had written to her mother, giving her new address, but stating nothing of her lover, and Mrs. Hopkins came to New York, full of curiosity and determined to probe into the affair. She telegraphed Madelaine to meet her at the Plaza at five and to remain for dinner. The girl showed her father the telegram.

"Of course I can't stay, but I must meet her, and I'll telephone Burt to stop for me on his way home."

Pierce, who had not gone downtown because of a slight cold, studied the yellow slip of paper with anxious eyes. "I wonder what brought her on; she isn't due until December," he said.

"I'm afraid, daddy, it's me. Of course she has no right to interfere as long as you are satisfied, but she will." For Madelaine understood her mother.

Over the telephone Brandon listened to her explanation. "Of course I'll stop for you." He had an intense desire to see for himself what manner of woman Madelaine's mother was. "But, dearest, you've never told me your mother's name."

The girl laughed. "Haven't I? How queer; why she's Mrs. Mark Hopkins."

"Of Chicago?"

"Yes."

And as Brandon hung up the receiver he whistled. Mark Hopkins was one of the biggest powers in the Western financial world.

VI

Minna Hopkins at forty-two was as young as wealth and art could make her. Her maid was a skilful masseuse, in addition to her other abilities, and her mistress dressed, did her great credit. There wasn't a thread of white in her light brown hair nor a visible line in her smooth face; there was just a tinge of color in her cheeks, and her lace negligée showed a throat guiltless of wrinkles and free from a disfiguring double chin. As Madelaine was announced, her mother rushed forward to meet her, and welcomed her effusively. Then she dismissed the maid, for she wanted an intimate chat.

"Now tell me everything," she commanded, making Madelaine sit on the sofa beside her, and prisoning the girl's fingers between her own.

Madelaine had realized what the interview would mean, and she had determined upon a full confession, so she launched into it without hesitation. Minna interrupted the tale frequently. In her anger, she got up and paced the room. Finally she began to attack Pierce.

"He's crazy; he was always half-witted, and now he's gone clean out of his mind! Do you imagine for one moment this man will really marry you after you've practically lived with him for six months?" She was livid with rage, and her voice shook with passion.

"My dear mother, you can't judge of Burt without seeing him; he is coming for me at six. Now while I refuse to admit of your right to interfere in my life —you forfeited all claims when you relinquished me to daddy, who is the best, the kindest, the most faithful man in the world—I shall let you speak once to Burt to reassure you."

"A mother can't forfeit her rights, and as long as I live I shall keep up my surveillance over you. This man shall see he has some one else to deal with beside a romantic girl and a visionary man!"

"So you think my plan romantic?"

"Don't force me to tell you what I really think of it. How did you ever dare to propose it?"

"Simply because I was not willing to run the risk of repeating your unfortunate experience. Had you stopped to consider, you would never have married daddy. You don't know what I suffered, even when I was a little child; you never thought I overheard you reproaching him for spoiling your life. The partitions in a New York flat are so thin that one can't help overhearing, and I was your child and it did not seem wrong for me to listen. Then, I was often at home when Mr. Hopkins called, and you never suspected how humiliated I felt. It hurts me to talk about it even now, but I must; it's right that you should know I criti-

cised you as a child. Nurse used to talk with cook of the divorce that was coming; I didn't know what a divorce meant, so I asked, and she told me I was a very lucky little girl to be getting a new father who could give me everything, and she for her part knew on which side her bread was buttered. That phrase stuck to me, even when I was most unhappy; I wondered how any one could ever be in doubt on which side your bread was buttered. I can't imagine anything more horrible for a sensitive child than the torture I went through after you married Mr. Hopkins. It was like cutting me in two; the winters I spent with you half of me always stayed behind with daddy, and the summers I was with him were overshadowed by the thought that they would soon end, and I would have to return to Chicago. Mr. Hopkins never liked me; I was in the way; I felt it, and I knew intuitively that he wanted to get rid of me and you knew it, and it worried you. Children that are brought into the tragic side of life too young learn to think for themselves at an early age, but most people suppose because they are silent they are blind. You were always good to me; you gave me all the material things that are supposed to make little girls happy, but you couldn't take me to your heart because there was a secret wrong separating us all the time. Daddy may be a dreamer, but I wouldn't exchange him for all the successful men in the world, and I'm proud of being his daughter, not of being Mark Hopkins' stepdaughter. I'm not blaming you, mother; how can any one of us be the judge of another's motives, but being your child and daddy's I must guard against making your mistake."

Minna Hopkins had listened, too much astounded to interrupt. It was as if her toy Pom had turned suddenly upon her. Madelaine had always been such a docile child, a precociously silent child, that she had never dreamed criticism lurked behind that calm, low brow, and to hear herself taken to task in this fashion quite deprived her of speech for the moment. She had old-fashioned ideas on the subject of children; whatever their parents did their children must accept as the law. She overlooked the fact that she had often judged her own parents, and called their ideas foolish; she only remembered that Madelaine was delving back into that past she had long ago buried out of sight, and was hauling it up to confront her. The situation had been hard in the beginning; she was willing to admit that, and she had always regretted Mark's attitude toward the girl. It seemed a pity she could not stay on in the luxurious Chicago house; that she must spend certain months of the year with Pierce in an atmosphere of genteel poverty, but she had never dreamed that Madelaine's happy days were the ones she spent with her daddy! She had hoped in time to overcome Hopkins' prejudice, and she had once won his consent to a trip abroad with her daughter, when important business detained him in the West, but to her surprise the girl had refused, saying that Pierce needed her. Minna had put the refusal down to pique, and had gone away, her maternal feathers ruffled, but she had quickly gotten over her feeling of annoyance, and had made reparation by purchasing some French frocks for the girl, without any reference either to Madelaine's needs or taste. She suddenly began to defend her actions to herself; she could think up plenty of excuses for her conduct; she had been so young when she married she had not realized what it meant to tie herself to a man with whom she was not in sympathy, and common sense showed her it was foolish to cling to a mistake when there was such an easy way to redeem it. It was hard on the child, but other women who had children divorced their husbands and married again, and usually their daughters accepted the situation and made the best of it. She had never heard of one instance where a daughter dared to set herself up to judge her mother! She quite forgot that if it had occurred she would not have been likely to hear of it, for it wasn't a thing a woman was apt to tell, even to a most intimate friend.

Brandon was announced just as they were in the midst of an argument. Madelaine got up suddenly and crossed to the window where she stood looking down

on the traffic flowing into Central Park, while her mother went into her bedroom to freshen her appearance.

He came in correctly attired for the afternoon, cutaway coat, high hat and yellow gloves. "I sent your mother some flowers; I thought you would wish me to," he said.

Madelaine still bore the traces of the scene she had gone through in her eyes. "How nice of you." Then she leaned against his shoulder a moment, seeking mute comfort. What if her mother were right—she knew so much more of the world—and the slight tie that held them together snapped suddenly. She had nothing tangible to show except the sapphire ring on the third finger of her left hand, but it wasn't the ring that was the outward symbol of a spiritual relation.

He felt that she was trembling, and he divined that she must have had her bad quarter of an hour, so he touched her hair with his lips lightly. "Is Mrs. Hopkins very formidable?" he said, having visions of a big, blond woman, painted and overdressed.

Then Minna came in, small and slight, and looking like her daughter's elder sister. She held out her hand, her eyes appraising Brandon to a nicety, her mind busy with forebodings. Oh, no, he wasn't at all the type of a man who stood for an irregular situation, and then married the girl. It was up to her to straighten out the matter at once. Her voice had a staccato note that had once been birdlike and now was only sharp. They sat down and began with conventionalities while tea was served.

Madelaine was the least nervous of the three, and so she was the first to speak of the matter that touched them so closely. "I've explained to mother, but she can't see any wisdom in our arrangement, nor its serious purpose. She fears you may look upon it as a diversion, and in a little while you'll tire and pack up and leave. I don't ask you to justify yourself to her; we understand each other, and daddy is satisfied, but you don't mind admitting, do you, that we are formally engaged, and we do expect to marry?"

Brandon flushed. He saw the whole matter from Mrs. Hopkins' worldly point of view. "I know how it strikes outsiders; I know I shall have difficulty in persuading my own mother that I am doing an honorable thing when she returns next month, but I stand ready at any time to do my part when Madelaine says she is satisfied that I have stood the test."

"No man could put the girl he really loved in a compromising situation, and that's what you've done, Mr. Brandon. Madelaine's father never has seen further than his own nose, but, thank goodness, she has another parent to look out for her interests. I shall take you at your word, and expect you to marry my daughter before I leave for Chicago on Saturday." Minna called his bluff.

"I thought I said distinctly whenever Madelaine was ready." Brandon's eyes flashed hostility.

"And I stipulated for six months," said the girl.

"In six months you won't have a shred of character left!"

"You are insulting me, mother."

"Mr. Brandon, if you re a decent man you'll acknowledge I am right. Do you want the world to point a finger of scorn at your wife? as it surely will when it knows of your present irregular housekeeping arrangements."

"I can protect my wife, Mrs. Hopkins."

"But she isn't your wife yet. I take back my permission to let Madelaine stay with her father; I give you three days to think it over, and if you do not agree to marry by that time I shall insist upon Madelaine's accompanying me to Chicago. It's not an empty threat; I shall expose this immoral arrangement, and appeal to law if necessary."

"My dear mother, I was twenty-one in August, and I am legally of age. I could live an immoral life if I chose, but I prefer to try out my chance of happiness so that neither Burt nor I will ever be in danger of the immoral divorce courts!"

"Madelaine!" It was Brandon who spoke. "Come, dear, let's go; there is nothing to be gained by arguing. Let your mother think it over; it won't sound so dreadful in the morning." He carried her away unprotesting, for she was

shaken to her soul by the violence of her emotion.

In the West End avenue house Pierce sat and waited for them. It was long past seven when they drove up in a taxicab. Brandon had insisted upon going through the Park and up the Drive to give the girl the opportunity to regain her self-control before she faced her father.

"He isn't well, poor old chap, and it'll upset him to see you so done up," he said. And they had driven on in silence, her hand in his, speaking little, just comforted by each other's nearness, until finally he was willing to give the order to turn.

She forced a smile as she greeted her father. "We had quite a time; mother couldn't see things in the right light. I'm sorry we're so late; I fear dinner will be hopeless; of course I haven't any appetite, but I presume you and Burt are starving." She spoke in a hurried, unnatural voice, and both men knew the scene had cost her more than she was willing to admit.

Mrs. Hopkins remained in town three days. She kept up a fire of invective alternated with cajolery, which almost wore down Madelaine's defenses. She visited the West End avenue house, admired its appointments, and again reiterated her belief that the girl was crazy to trifle with such an opportunity for establishing herself in life. In spite of Brandon's manly assertion, she judged him after the manner of men she had met since her marriage to Mark Hopkins, and she had no doubts but that his love, strong enough to-day to surmount the obstacles of class and wealth, would not endure unselfishly to the end of the test. And she really could not blame him, man's nature being what it was. Madelaine, of course, was confident, because in her ignorance of real conditions she thought she had the same passionless affection to deal with in him that she had in herself, but she was in for a rude shattering of that illusion in the near future, unless, of course, Brandon were a very different man from any she had so far encountered. And nothing she saw of him in three interviews caused her to change her first opinion. She did not spare her daughter the sum of her reflections, though she veiled her hints in delicate language. Curiously she preferred to rouse a morbid curiosity in preference to speaking frankly and telling the girl the exact nature of the peril that threatened her. Madelaine brushed aside her hints with quiet assurance, saying she knew quite well her experiment had an element of danger, but she was taking the risk with her eyes open. And, coaxing, the offer of a magnificent trousseau, the promise of a rich mother's intervention to smooth the way in a new social sphere, these things moved her as little as threats and presentiments of trouble to come.

"If we can't hold out six months, then our love is too physical to endure the strain of a long marriage, and I'd rather find it out when we can both draw back honorably, than when it is too late," she said, stubbornly.

And Mrs. Hopkins was finally forced to own herself beaten. She took her departure in tears, heaping a storm of reproaches on her former husband's head for his share in their child's ruinous folly.

After her mother had gone, Madelaine drew a long breath. Now the little household would be left in peace to work out its salvation along the lines of her choosing, but peace was still a long way off. She quickly perceived that Brandon was not at ease, but it was several days before she got the truth out of him.

"I'm thinking of my mother," he said; "she is coming home soon, and she will have to be told. It looked in the beginning as if we could keep this experiment to ourselves, and only let the world in on the after result; your father and Carr were the only confidants we planned to have, but now your mother knows and by this time Mark Hopkins; Flynn knows something because he's staying on at the Berwind, and I had to tell my lawyer on account of making a change in my will; and my mother will have to know as soon as she arrives, and all these people disapprove, and we are bound to feel the weight of that and it will make us self-conscious."

They were in Brandon's sitting-room,

which they had promptly decided upon using when they were at home, for, as he said, the parlor was much too formal. Pierce had his own special corner under a low-hanging reading lamp, but as he retired early the two lovers always had an hour of confidence together.

Madelaine, in the depths of a huge leather chair, listened to Brandon's remarks with a sudden sinking at her heart. It was coming; he was going to tell her he was tired; the arrangement was not satisfactory, and it had lasted little over a month. He would put it he was acting out of consideration for her so that he would spare her pride; he would insist upon continuing the engagement, conventionally, but that, too, would probably fail of fruition. She made an effort, however, to be brave, as women always do. "It will only make us work the harder to prove we are right. It's never the majority which stands for progress; always the tiny minority," she said.

"I wish I honestly felt called upon to play the rôle of pioneer. I acceded to your wish against my better judgment, and now——" he broke off suddenly.

"And now you want to discontinue? Oh, Burt, it's been such a little trial; how can you be sure it won't work?"

Her gray blue eyes were raised appealingly to his face, her pretty mouth quivered, and he forgot his own misgivings in the fierce desire to quiet hers.

"It isn't that, sweetheart. I love you just as much, more, in fact, for I'm learning how sweet you are in the home, and that's where every man pictures his future wife, but I do think your experiment has lasted long enough, and I wish you'd consent to a marriage in a month or so. However, I said I'd stick it out the allotted time and I will keep my word, but I want you to realize that many unkind things will be said about me for giving in to you."

She was encouraged by his words. "Can't you stand that?"

"If it is your wish, yes." His face was grave; he was quite sure she did not realize all people could say, and he was slightly surprised that he had not been able to gain a mastery over her mind in the six weeks they had lived under the same roof. She was still thinking for herself; deciding for herself; not submitting to his authority as he had fancied she would.

She said no more, content with her half victory. She knew they were under disapproval, but secretly she rather gloried in it, not knowing how differently it affected him.

VII

"Carr was asking to-day if he couldn't call, so I invited him for dinner to-morrow, with the proviso that if it didn't meet with your approval you'd say so," Brandon said one evening.

They were in the sitting-room and Madelaine was making coffee in the percolator. She did not turn as she answered. "Why, of course, it's agreeable to me; I like Mr. Carr, and so does daddy."

"So that's settled; Bob having passed your inspection and Mr. Pierce's, he is to be allowed a glimpse into Paradise. But in order that he shall not feel his isolation too keenly, don't you think you could scare up a girl for the occasion. Any girl so long as she's pretty; Bob can do the talking."

Madelaine had been waiting for this. She carried her father's cup to him while she did some rapid thinking. "There is just one girl I might ask, a Miss Lorrimer; she's very pretty, looks like a French doll, and she can chatter in a very amusing way. Daddy, do you think Mrs. Lorrimer would let Flo come?"

Pierce stirred uncomfortably. He refused to meet his daughter's eyes as he took the cup from her hand. "I don't know, my dear, you might try."

"Lorrimer, Lorrimer, where do they live?" Brandon asked.

"I'm sure you don't know them; they're very nice people, but especially since Mr. Lorrimer died they haven't had much money. Mrs. Lorrimer was very good to me the first summer we were at Blythedale; I've never forgotten it, and I've always kept up a more or less desultory acquaintance."

"Well, then, do ask Miss Lorrimer, and we might go down to the Winter Garden

afterward and see the great French beauty. That is, unless you prefer to stay here and turn on the Victor. Has Miss Lorrimer any parlor tricks?"

"I don't know just what you mean. She's a beautiful dancer; she skates very well; she sings ragtime, and I believe she's very popular."

"All that sounds as if it would lead to Bob's undoing, so I'll give him fair warning of what he is to expect."

"That is if she will come."

Brandon rose to replace his empty coffee cup. "You think her mother may object?" He dropped his bantering tone, and became grave.

Madelaine tried to carry it off lightly. "How can I tell till I ask her? But I know Mrs. Lorrimer likes me."

"Little girl, don't put yourself in an awkward position by risking a refusal. We four will go to the show after dinner —now don't say no, Mr. Pierce, for I've got to have some one to talk to as Carr is bound to monopolize Madelaine."

Pierce spoke suddenly. "I think you're right, Brandon; it would be very awkward if Mrs. Lorrimer refused."

But Madelaine was not daunted by opposition. "Let me try; in that way I shall prove her friendship for me. We can't be friends with those we don't trust."

"It isn't a question of that, my dear; few women can afford to disregard the conventionalities where their daughters are concerned."

"Daddy, are you siding against me!" Her voice was sharp with pain. It was too hard. Brandon's secret hostility, and now her father's expressed doubts.

"Madelaine, dearest!" Brandon crossed to her side, and laid his hand on her shoulder. "It isn't a question of siding with you or against you. Your father and I have sacrificed our own opinions because your whole heart seemed set on this matter, but we can't help knowing how the world at large looks at a thing like this."

"Doesn't the world ever give one credit for good intentions?"

"So seldom that it isn't worth talking about."

"Then you only gave in to please me; not because I had convinced you that this test was necessary to prove our fitness for a real union?"

"I was convinced of that fitness long ago, but if you wanted to prove it out I was willing to try."

"Daddy knows how long this thing has lain in my heart. You remember, don't you, daddy, the night I arrived from Chicago to live with you always; I said then that even a nun was allowed a year or two of probation before she took the final vows, and she was a bride of the church, not of a mortal man, and I would serve a novitiate to love before I took my final vows. I was fourteen then, and you thought I didn't know what I was saying. You were right, I didn't, but the conviction that a period of probation was needful grew the more I read, the more I studied. The lives of women became books to me, and I searched to find out why there was so much unhappiness in a relation that was meant to be the culmination of the most sacred joy. And I concluded because marriage was entered into lightly, and women were not taught how to be wives. They were supposed to be changed by the miracle of love into entirely different creatures; to know all by instinct; to be given sight in a day, and wisdom was supposed to be acquired with the wedding ring. And you know how untrue that is, daddy; so do you, Burt! Love can do much, and without love we women are nothing, but the difference between the sexes is a fundamental difference, and it often takes years of living together to consummate a true union between husband and wife, and only too frequently one or the other tires and decides that the end isn't worth striving for, and then they begin to pull in opposite directions, and love departs from their hearts and peace from the household. Can't you see that I'm working to train myself to be Burt's wife, so that our period of probation will come before marriage, not after?" There was no mistaking her earnestness, and Brandon suddenly felt that a veil had been torn from his eyes, and he saw the spirit that dwelt in the fair young body.

He raised her hand to his lips reverently. "Now, my dearest, your convic-

tion is becoming mine also. I shall never make another protest," he said. And at the time he believed himself capable of keeping that promise.

She rewarded him with a look of such adoration that his pulses quickened, and he wished they were alone so that he might take her in his arms and thank her fittingly for her great gift. But Pierce sat there, huddled in the depths of his arm chair, quite unheeding of emotion stirring the air, and so Brandon had to content himself by caressing her softly with his eyes.

After ordering an elaborate dinner, Madelaine went to call on the Lorrimers. Both mother and daughter were at home, and they greeted her cordially.

"Have you come into money that you're living uptown?" Flo had noted the new address on Madelaine's card, and the smart tailored gown in which the visitor was arrayed.

"No, but I'm engaged." She glanced from the girl sitting curled up on the couch amidst a heap of pillows to Mrs. Lorrimer, a faded, tired-looking woman, who showed the strain of trying to make both ends meet.

Flo jumped up and kissed her friend in congratulation that was tinged a little with envy. Madelaine had never seemed to care for men, and she was evidently landing a matrimonial prize, while she, who had kept a sharp lookout for a well-to-do husband, had seen the only possibilities she would consider snatched up by other girls. And she was twenty-two, and blonds of her type faded early.

Mrs. Lorrimer was less effusive, but more sincere in her expressions of pleasure.

"Now tell us all about him, who he is, where you met him, when you're going to be married, and everything!" Flo settled herself back to enjoy the next hour. Perhaps through Madelaine she might meet some desirable men.

Madelaine told the beginning of her story simply, but as she went on she addressed herself more to the mother, who had been kind to her when she was a child, than to the daughter, who had been her playmate.

Mrs. Lorrimer was greatly troubled. She was sincerely fond of the girl; she realized that Madelaine had an unusual nature, and she sympathized with her stand, knowing what she did of her early life, but she wished that Madelaine had not come to them now. She foresaw that some sort of a favor was to be asked; she hated to refuse, and yet she dared not appear to countenance the unconventional step on her own daughter's account. She was searching for words in which to clothe her refusal gently, when Flo broke into the conversation.

"I think it's perfectly splendid of you, and you're right to try, that is if you are sure Mr. Brandon will stand the test. I'd love to meet him; he must be a man quite out of the ordinary!"

"Thanks, dear. I wanted you to understand the situation clearly before I asked you to dine with us to-night. Mr. Brandon's most intimate friend, Robert Carr, a nephew of Rollins Carr—you've probably heard of him—is coming, and I wanted another girl. I am including you, Mrs. Lorrimer; my father would be so pleased to see you, and if you think you would enjoy that sort of thing Mr. Brandon suggested our going to the Winter Garden. It's a sort of vaudeville show, so we don't have to be there at any particular time." She had not intended asking Mrs. Lorrimer, but she suddenly saw she could do no less, and she waited a moment for the inevitable refusal which she saw trembling on the older woman's lips.

But again before the mother had time to speak the daughter took the words out of her mouth. "You darling, I'd love it! And you're an angel to include mother, she has so little pleasure nowadays, and it would do her good to get out and see something of the world. Of course we'll come. A nephew of Rollins Carr; have you met him?"

"The uncle, no; the nephew, yes, and he's charming."

But by this time Mrs. Lorrimer had found speech. "Flo, dear, you mustn't act so impulsively. I appreciate Madelaine's invitation; it's very sweet of you, but I don't see how we can accept," she said, gently but firmly, with an assumption of her old authoritative manner

which both girls knew so well, and which had been laid aside of late years.

Flo sat up, ready to begin the combat. She did pretty much as she pleased nowadays, for a wilful spirit underlay her childish air. "Mumsie, don't be a fussy old dear. Madelaine and I both know what you mean, but I'm not likely to follow suit for two very good reasons; first because the minute an attractive rich man proposes to me I'm going to say, 'produce the minister,' before he changes his mind; this is the first great and good reason, and the second is very like it. I think Madelaine has queer ideas, and, while I admire her for living up to her convictions, they're not mine and never will be. I know marriage is a risk, but I'm willing to take my chance; the sooner, the better!" She delivered herself of this astounding speech in such an infantile manner that it was robbed of all but its absurdity.

But Mrs. Lorrimer knew, if Madelaine didn't, that Flo had made up her mind to meet and conquer the nephew of Rollins Carr. Nevertheless, she ventured on protest. "Florence, I don't like to hear you speak like that even in jest, and while I know Madelaine's motives are fine and high they are irregular, and I cannot bring myself to approve of them by going to her house. I shall always be glad to see you here, dear, and if you ever need a woman friend you can come to me sure of my sympathy, and I shall not fail you. Now we will say no more about the dinner; I know you understand my position."

Then Madelaine remembered that it was Mr. Lorrimer who had been tolerant, not his wife, and since his death his widow had relapsed into a narrow groove. "I don't blame you; I suppose if I were a mother I should feel the same way, and yet I'm hoping that by the time I have a grown daughter life will be easier for women."

"Bother the coming generation; our concern is with the present. Now, mumsie, I want to go, and I don't have so much pleasure that you can afford to deprive me of a chance like this!" Flo was plaintive now, preparatory to being wheedling. She had shrewdly fathomed the depths of her mother's heart, and she had various tactics to fit different occasions.

"Flo, dear, if it's against your mother's principles, don't urge her." Madelaine was hurt, and yet she had tried to school herself to bear refusal.

"It isn't as if you were living with a man dishonorably. You are going to marry him, so I don't see that any principle is involved. It looks to me as if it were just a question of silly prejudice. Who knows but what it may become a custom one of these days."

"Florence!" Her mother's tone was filled with alarm.

"Oh, don't look shocked; you know I'm only joking! I'm as deeply conventional as you are, but I like Madelaine, and I'm going to her party, and you are, too, because it's such a long time since you've had any little spree." The girl was now coaxing, and for the next ten minutes she opposed her own desires to her mother's feeble objections, and in time won out. She was prettily docile in her triumph.

"Now don't say you've nothing to wear; your black crêpe de chine looks very well at night, and I'll press it for you this afternoon. It's lucky I've only worn my blue chiffon twice, because it's the most becoming dress I have."

Madelaine took her leave shortly after. She had gained her point; both Mrs. Lorrimer and Flo were coming, though the terms on which they came were rather humiliating. It was eager curiosity to meet Rollins Carr's nephew on the part of the girl, and a desire to give her daughter pleasure at any cost to herself on the mother's side. Yet the main thing was that they were coming, and that she would have a pretty girl to present to Brandon's friend.

She called him up on the telephone and imparted her news.

"There will be six of us at dinner, and the Winter Garden proposition was acclaimed with cries of delight," she said; "Mrs. Lorrimer is coming also."

"I'm glad, sweetheart, from the bottom of my heart I'm glad, and I'll turn in my order now for good seats."

Brandon came home early, and in-

spected the flower-laden table in the dining-room with critical eyes, and pronounced everything good. She ran over the menu for him, and he nodded his head approvingly at each item.

"No wine, not even one glass apiece?" That was the only household question on which he openly differed from her. She had never tasted a cocktail, and after one definite refusal he had not suggested it a second time, but he saw no harm in an occasional glass of champagne, though Madelaine steadily declined to have the case of wine in the cellar opened.

Now she hesitated, and he saw that she was wavering.

"Bob will think it funny, and I'm sure Miss Lorrimer is not a teetotaler," he said.

"Neither am I, only father never takes anything, and champagne seems like such an expensive drink. But if you wish to have it to-night I don't mind. I can taste it so that it will not look odd."

He put his arm about her, and drew her to his side. "Dear, if you'd rather not you've only to say so. This is your domain, and I shall never oppose my wishes to yours."

"I want to please you in everything. I suppose Ellen knows how to serve it?"

"Ask her while I get a bottle up and put it on the ice. It's to be one bottle."

"Isn't that enough for five people?"

He smiled down at her anxious little face. "I've seen times when it wasn't, but I guess it will do to-night." He had progressed another step in demolishing a few of her provincialisms, and he was content.

Carr was quite frank in his approval of everything. He was still lame, although he had discarded his crutches for a cane, and he was very handsome in evening dress. He held his hostess' hand a moment longer than convention decreed was proper, as he repeated how glad he was to see her, and then he turned with a little gasp of pleased astonishment to Flo, who indeed did look like a French doll in a quaint baby blue chiffon frock, rosebuds in her golden hair, and a most guileless expression in her big blue eyes. As he afterward said, he always did fall for the baby stare.

It was a very merry quartette of young people who sat down to dinner, and if Mrs. Lorrimer had been beset with qualms up till the hour she set foot in Madelaine's house they were promptly dispelled by the chivalrous courtesy with which both of the young men treated the young mistress of the house. Nothing could have been finer than Brandon's air of mingled respect and devotion, and Carr showed an eager deference that was beautiful to see, if a little difficult to understand. She did not know, of course, that it was to Carr Madelaine had first unfolded her scheme, that he had fought it strenuously, declaring right along that it could not work, and now he wanted to make up by his manner for his lack of faith. She was perfectly splendid; he couldn't tell her so in words, but he did in every look, in every tone of his voice.

Flo was not the girl to permit any other woman to overshadow her. She was an amusing conversationalist, and she soon took the reins between her childish little fingers, and led along the path of easy banter. Madelaine abdicated in her friend's favor, and she was so quiet that Brandon wondered if she were displeased at being supplanted, but her grave eyes had a glint of amused interest, as if in her subdued way she was enjoying herself immensely.

The evening was voted a success by the younger people, although Pierce and Mrs. Lorrimer found the show vulgar, and both were heartily glad when it came to an end. It led, however, to more evenings spent together without the older couple's presence.

"Being engaged relieves you from the necessity of a chaperon, and, in fact, makes it possible for us all to do without," said Flo, when the next party was suggested, and the two men promptly agreed with her. Madelaine was not averse to including the others at dinner or the theatre, especially when she grasped at the real depth of the friendship between Brandon and Carr. She tried to call the latter Bob as he requested.

"Do you think Bob really likes Flo? She is so pretty, and such good company, and they seem to get on so well together," she said, voicing a hope which had lately been born in her breast that perhaps another happiness might come from her experiment.

Brandon lit his cigarette, and threw the match on the floor. "You never can tell with Bob; he has such an expansive heart, but Miss Lorrimer is decidedly an attractive girl, and he could do much worse."

She took up cudgels for her friend. "And not very much better."

But Brandon wasn't listening. He had some news he had to break to her, and he was waiting for a favorable opportunity. It wouldn't come through a discussion of Carr's probable matrimonial intentions. "Dearest, I had a cable today from my mother; she sailed this morning," he said, finally deciding upon the abrupt announcement.

"How glad you will be to see her!"

"And you?"

"I think the question is, Burt, what will she say to me; will she accept me as her daughter or not?"

"She has always been the best mother in the world, and I feel certain that if she blames any one it will be me not you."

"Some one else to convince, and all I've done so far is reconcile. Outside of you I haven't made one convert to my idea."

"But even to reconcile people is something, and if you bring mother to a passive acceptance of the peculiar facts of our engagement I shall be proud of you."

"You think she'll be more difficult than my mother?"

Brandon had a mental vision of the stately, gray-haired woman whom he idolized, and he could imagine her quite as difficult, though in an entirely different way, as Mrs. Mark Hopkins. "She won't be easier."

Madelaine rubbed her brown head against his shoulder in the gentle little way he liked. "Say you love me, Burt; say it twenty times, and then I'll be equal to my task of winning over even your mother!"

VIII

Mrs. Brandon was born a Rhinelander; her mother had been a Miss Schuyler, and her grandmother, a famous Dutch beauty, Elizabeth Van Huysdel. She had inherited some of this grandmother's beauty, and all of her aristocratic, rather narrow prejudices. There were certain things a lady could do, but the things she could not do were just as clearly outlined, and among the latter was a step aside from the ordered conventions. She had been left a widow in her early thirties, but she had never thought of a second marriage; she had loved her husband with a single-hearted devotion, and she now gave up her time to her children. She had had a large family, but only two lived through infancy, Burtis, the eldest, and Elsie, the youngest, and there was twelve years difference in their ages. She was very proud of her son, and she speculated in secret about the woman he should some day marry; she hoped he would pick out a girl who had inherited traditions and not one of those modern girls who seemed bent on throwing conventionality to the four winds of heaven. But she knew, of course, that he would please himself in his marriage, and all she could do was to suggest indirectly the kind of daughter-in-law whom she desired to see as her son's bride.

Her daughter was easier to manage. Elsie had been strictly brought up in the European fashion, and at eighteen she was outwardly as modest and demure as a Continental maiden. They had spent the summer in Holland with distant relatives, and Mrs. Brandon persuaded one of the numerous Van Huysdel cousins to entrust her daughter about Elsie's age to her for a winter in New York. She had taken a great liking to Katrina, and she was conscious of a hope that Burtis, seeing the lovely Hollander in his mother's house, might come to feel that she was in her rightful place. She was a year older than Elsie, and the younger girl adored her extravagantly. Mrs. Brandon, thinking her son might take fright if he were advised beforehand of the addition to the family, said nothing about her guest; she planned to take him by surprise, knowing the full value of

an assault on a bachelor's empty heart. He, in turn, had a surprise for her; it tinged his first greeting, and made him impervious to his cousin's charm. He mentally phrased her as quaint; a good companion for Elsie, but beyond that he did not waste a thought on her, for his whole heart was absorbed in his love for Madelaine.

The day before his mother and sister landed, he had driven Madelaine up to the house in East Sixty-second street, which had been put in readiness to receive its inmates. As the car stopped, he jumped out, then turned to assist his betrothed, but she did not move.

She was troubled. "Burt, this is your mother's house; I can't enter until she asks me to. It would be taking advantage of her if I went through it in her absence," she said.

"Why, Madelaine, my mother's house must be open to my future wife." He was hurt at her reluctance.

"Nevertheless I must wait until she says so. I had no idea you would want me to go in; you said you had to stop for a moment to see if it were in order. Go in, dear; perhaps we are wrong in thinking we have another struggle before us, and your mother will be willing to accept me as I am."

He said no more, but turned and went up the brown stone steps not quite understanding her attitude, and laying it to a foolish pride.

But when he saw Katrina Van Huysdel he knew he would have a hard time in making his mother accept Madelaine as she was. And he was not wrong. The steamer docked late in the afternoon, and Brandon drove uptown with the family. He sat next to Elsie, and opposite to Katrina, and her full face was even prettier than her profile. She had soft brown eyes and brown hair, very white skin and very red cheeks. Her figure was a bit stolid when you contrasted it with the angular lines that were the prevailing mode, but she would make a lovely matron, and a health-giving mother.

"You will stay and dine with us, Burt, of course. I presume you still have your rooms at the Berwind," Mrs. Brandon said.

"And is Flynn still with you?" put in Elsie.

"Yes, to all questions; I ordered dinner for eight. I thought it would give you time to rest. I'm going to leave you now, but I'll be back early." He had told Madelaine he would probably dine with the family, but he had not let her know definitely that he would not be home.

"We're so tired that we won't dress to-night, so we'll excuse informal attire in you."

"It won't take me long to change, and there is something I must attend to before seven."

Mrs. Brandon said no more, but she had a presentiment that her son had some unpleasant communication to make.

And after dinner, when she gave the signal to the two girls to rise and leave him to finish his glass of cognac and a cigarette, he stopped her.

"I won't smoke at present; I want to speak to you alone; may we go into the library?" he said.

"Certainly, my son."

Elsie pouted. "You might leave horrid business matters till to-morrow; it's been ages since we've seen you, Burt, and you've no idea what a comfort it is just to look at you!"

"Now, Elsie, what does that flattery mean?" and he smiled down at her teasingly; "you'll have plenty of opportunities to feast your eyes on my manly beauty, but the business I have to discuss to-night won't keep, so run along like a good little girl."

Mrs. Brandon was almost as tall as her son, and he lacked but one inch to measure six feet; her beautifully dressed gray head topped his shoulder, and her hazel eyes under their level brows were just under his. He resembled her strongly; more in feature than in manner, for she was a serious woman, and he had inherited some of his brilliant father's humor. But now his grave face was singularly like hers, and each knew that the other was preparing silently for a conflict.

"What is this business that will not keep till to-morrow, my son?" she asked, seating herself near the open fireplace

where the pine logs crackled with tiny, fierce flames.

He drew up his chair close to hers, and launched at once into his story. During the telling of it she never interrupted him, but the shadow deepened in her eyes, and her mouth grew stern. It was not a pleasant tale for a proud mother to listen to, and while her heart yearned toward her boy she could find no excuse for the girl who had put him in such a position.

"Well, mother?" he said, as he finished, waiting for some comment.

"It is not well, my son. It is a most astounding piece of news. I fear you have been deceived in this woman's nature; the fact that the suggestion came first from her proves that she must be wanting in feminine delicacy. Now let me speak," and she went on, giving her reasons for believing Madelaine a designing creature; ignoring the frequent attempts her son made to correct such an impression. In vain he spoke of her goodness to her father, her modest conduct, her pure outlook on life; Mrs. Brandon brushed all these things aside with a smile for his credulity. She refused in positive terms to receive Madelaine, giving as her reason that she had Elsie and Katrina to consider.

"When you do marry her then it will be time enough to talk about what I owe to my son's wife, but at present I can only pray that you may escape from the fatal consequences of such an infatuation."

"Mother, one interview would make you realize that you are mistaken. If you won't let me bring her here, or you won't see her in her home, will you consent to a meeting at the Berwind?"

"You keep up your rooms then?"

"Yes."

"So you see you do realize that you are not willing to cut yourself off entirely from your old life. No, Burtis, I must take your word for it that she is a respectable girl, otherwise you would not ask me to meet her, but afterward, when you come to your senses, you will agree that I acted wisely in refusing to sanction your folly. Now we will say no more, and kindly refrain from mentioning the person's name to Elsie. Girls cannot keep secrets, and you do not wish it to leak out, do you; if the newspapers got hold of the story how many of your friends would believe that it was anything else but a vulgar intrigue."

Brandon was white, and he kept his anger down with difficulty. But he could not quarrel with his mother. She must be given time to accustom herself to the situation, and perhaps an exercise of patience would finally bring her around.

"I see no reason for concealing the fact of my engagement from Elsie; it will explain why I am not able to devote as much time to her as formerly."

"You cannot explain without going into details which are not proper for her ears. Must I forbid it?"

He shook his head. "No, you have only to express a wish; I shall say nothing for the present, but should I deem that circumstances demanded the full truth I shall not hesitate to set Madelaine right in her eyes."

"How different my homecoming is to what I imagined it would be; discord the very first evening." And Mrs. Brandon sighed. She was bitterly disappointed. Her son was entangled in the meshes of an adventuress, and that he believed her good was only a further proof that she was subtle as well as dangerous. But young men always tired of these irregular affairs, and she determined to work secretly to hasten his day of disillusionment. She would use her attacks of neuritis to summon him to her side, and force him to act as escort to Elsie and Katrina. She was usually opposed to underhand methods, but in this case she must fight with the weapons nearest to her hand, and she did not underestimate the strength of a rival who was entrenched in a mock substitute for a home.

Brandon took his leave hurriedly at eleven. Madelaine would be waiting for him to learn the result of his embassy in her favor, and he wanted to get the worst over quickly.

It only needed one look into his face to tell her the truth. "She won't accept me," she said, and her lips quivered.

"Not now. I've done my best, sweetheart; we must leave the result to the

future; she may come around, she is a very just women, even if she is steeped in old Dutch traditions."

But Madelaine had little hope of that. She foresaw that now she had a formidable enemy arrayed in the path against her, and one who had rights on her side. The situation was complicated by her father's health. One morning he was unable to rise, and Madelaine summoned Brandon in alarm.

"Do you suppose it's a stroke?" she demanded, her face livid with fear. That anything should happen to daddy was beyond her calculations. He had always been a delicate man, but how many times the frail creatures outlived their sturdier brothers.

Brandon bent over the helpless form, in which only the eyes seemed alive. "I don't know; call up McCracken, give him my name, and ask him to come at once."

The girl flew to the telephone, while the man did what he could to rub warmth into the cold limbs.

The great surgeon confirmed the girl's fears. "Is this the first?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then he may pull out of it. Sometimes years elapse between the first and second. Now I'm going to send you a good nurse, and I'll look in again to-night."

Madelaine protested that she could do everything necessary; daddy would hate a stranger fussing over him, but both McCracken and Brandon insisted upon trained help, and so she gave in.

But she haunted the sick room, and Miss Smith, who was a kindly soul, permitted her to minister in little ways to the sick man, and while for several days he could not thank her with his lips his eyes told her how precious the service of her hands was to him.

The household naturally was disturbed by Pierce's illness. When he was well he had been an insignificant factor in Brandon's life, but his illness magnified his importance out of all proportion. It was impossible for Madelaine to dine out or go to the theatre while daddy lay in a stupor. He might come out at any time and call for her, and she must remain within reach. Brandon quite understood, but it was hard on him. He found himself lowering his voice as soon as he entered the house, and their meals together were gloomy affairs, for Madelaine was too grief-stricken to eat. When she saw that he was growing restless after the first week, she made an effort to throw off her sadness when he was at home. Pierce was improving; his power of speech was returning, although his voice was thick and his words often undistinguishable, and Brandon began to think it was time that Madelaine devoted some consideration to him.

At his first suggestion that they spend an evening at the theatre, however, the girl shrank as if to avoid a blow.

"Oh, I couldn't, Burt, it would seem so heartless, and yet I realize you can't be expected to mope as I do. Why not call up Bob and go with him," she suggested.

"I don't want to leave you alone," he answered, truthfully. "You need a change as much as I do."

"It seems so soon. When he's up I shall feel better about leaving him. Do go with Bob; I'd be glad to know you were enjoying yourself, and you can tell me all about the play to-morrow; it will give us something new to talk about."

Until noon Brandon decided he would not accept her suggestion, but as it neared closing time on the Exchange he began to dread the thought of another dreary evening. So he rang Carr up.

"Bob is having a party, and he asked me to join, and as it will be a pretty late affair you go to bed early and get a good night's sleep." He brought her roses, and a box of chocolates as a solace for his absence, and she thanked him prettily for both.

Pierce slept all evening, and Madelaine went to bed at ten, but she could not sleep. She lay awake in the darkness, listening for Brandon's step, and it was three o'clock before she heard him come in. It was a very late party, and she wondered a little how they had amused themselves up till that hour.

Brandon had a headache the next morning. He took a glass of orange

juice and a cup of black coffee, but he ate no breakfast. Madelaine refrained from questioning him, and he vouchsafed no details beyond the information that after the show at Hammerstein's they had gone to Jack's and had whooped it up some. But it didn't pay; it made you feel so rotten the next day.

And for several succeeding nights he sat home quietly, and taught her pinochle. He had only paid two brief visits to his mother's house, in the late afternoon when he was sure of finding her out, but one day she called him up and asked him to come at five as she had something to say.

When he put in an appearance promptly at that hour, she offered to declare a truce. She could not pursue her plan if he kept on avoiding them all. She begged him not to let this affair deaden him to the duties he owed to her and to Elsie; the girl was beginning to grieve over her brother's neglect, and would he not come to them occasionally as he had been in the habit of doing, dine with them once a week, and take the girls to the theatre? She suffered so with her arm that she was unable to act as chaperon, and while Cousin Emily was willing to take the girls to dances along with her own daughter she disapproved of the theatre, and yet there were some plays that Katrina ought to see. Brandon felt the justice of his mother's demands, and he consented to one evening a week. She exulted over the first victory, and trusted to stratagem to gaining more.

He explained the case to Madelaine, but at the first hint of Katrina her jealousy was aroused.

"What is she like?"

"A Dutch doll, with round eyes and red cheeks." Then he gave a start at the thought which would intrude. "Sweetheart, you're not worrying over little Katrina?"

She blushed. "Even if she's a Dutch doll, she's made of flesh and blood, not wood, and you're going to spend one evening a week with her."

"Madelaine, you come first, before my mother and before Elsie; if you don't wish me to give them one evening a week, you have only to say so; your happiness, your peace of mind are worth more to me even than the duty I owe them."

"Oh, Burt, I'm ashamed; I do trust you, but the possessive quality of a woman's love makes her jealous of any other woman's influence. Go, dear; perhaps some day soon I shall know and be fond of both Elsie and Katrina."

"The sooner that day comes the better pleased I'll be. Time's half up, little girl."

"I know it. What night are you giving them?"

"To-morrow."

"Then I think I'll ask Mrs. Lorrimer and Flo to dine with me."

"Do, and tell them how sorry I am not to be at home. Do you want to ask Carr also?"

"Would you care if I did?"

"Very decidedly. I don't want even my best friend coming here when I'm away."

Madelaine was not sure whether he meant it or not. "Is that reasonable?" she asked.

"No," he replied; "but it shows the nature of the beast."

So while Brandon sat at dinner in his mother's house Madelaine entertained the Lorrimers.

"You haven't met his people then." Flo was frankly curious, and she asked a direct question.

"No."

"My dear child, don't you think you've tested the experiment long enough? It doesn't seem wise to prolong the situation, and the longer you put off the end the more difficulties you raise up for yourself." Mrs. Lorrimer wished with all her heart that the girl would give in now while there was yet time to retrieve her position.

But Madelaine only smiled back at her faintly. "Dear Mrs. Lorrimer, it seems to me that the real test has just begun," she said.

IX

There certainly was a charm about Katrina. She might look like a Dutch doll, but the wooden appearance was only skin deep. With Mrs. Brandon, she was as

demure as a little nun, but she had not been a week in New York when she permitted Elsie a peep beneath her surface gravity. The first night she came downstairs dressed for a dance to which Cousin Emily, who was also born a Rhinelander, was going to take them, her scarf hid the cut of her gown, but when she slipped it off in the dressing-room Elsie's eyes opened uneasily.

"What's the matter; is anything wrong?" she asked.

"It's your dress; it's cut like a dowager's." Elsie was young enough to be quite frank.

Katrina laughed. "It has always seemed silly to me to wait until your throat is shrivelled and your neck and arms are like sides of beef before you display them properly."

"But doesn't your mother object?"

"Goose! I had a private arrangement with Madame Z. as soon as I knew I was coming to America! She put a false neck in all my evening frocks, which I pulled out as soon as I unpacked my trunks. You don't think it's too low, do you? If so, perhaps I'd better keep my scarf, only I really thought I looked nice."

"All the same you'd better keep on the scarf, and put those false necks back tomorrow; you don't want people to think you're fast, do you?"

"What does it matter so long as I'm not?"

In the ballroom Katrina was a great success. Her scarf had a trick of slipping down over her shoulders, leaving their marble whiteness exposed for a moment, and there was no denying their beauty. Then, although she was tall and well built, she was light on her feet, and her European training made her able at once to adapt her step to her partner's.

She had a habit of burning pastiles in her bathroom which Elsie criticised, until one day she discovered the reason therefor in the stub of a cigarette. When she taxed her cousin with smoking, Katrina shrugged her shoulders and laughed.

"But, yes, why not? I always intend to smoke openly when I'm married, and it would be such a bore being ill on my wedding trip."

Brandon did not look forward with any great degree of pleasure to his first evening at the theatre. Katrina had taken Elsie's advice and had replaced the false necks in her evening frocks, and their modest cut was not nearly so becoming to the girl's statuesque proportions. To-night she wore black, and it brought out the dazzling fairness of her skin; her dark hair was beautifully dressed and her cheeks were redder than usual, probably due to excitement, Brandon concluded, and a twinge of conscience made him resolve to hide his repugnance to the duty allotted to him, and give the girl as pleasant an evening as he could. He attempted to draw her out at table, but she seemed diffident, and he mentally characterized her as heavy, but once in the cab a change came over her, and she amazed him by her rapid flow of witty comment.

She had decided that this very good-looking cousin was probably bored at the prospect of taking out two bread and butter misses, but she would soon show him she could be as entertaining as the women of the world whose society he undoubtedly preferred. And she succeeded, although not quite in the way she intended. Brandon was wondering how he had ever thought her dull, and then he wondered if he liked it, this demure manner at home, this worldly air abroad. But on the whole the evening passed off so much better than he had dared to hope that he told himself he was foolish to complain. Perhaps this was the effect of the Continental training; it made girls afraid to be natural, and taught them always to hold their opinions in subservience to those of their elders. Then he contrasted her with Madelaine, and his sweetheart's open frankness seemed all the more admirable. Madelaine never pretended to be what she was not, and if she had a wider outlook on life it had never taught her deceit.

He spoke of Katrina to Carr. "I think mother brought her over with the idea of making a match, but had I not met Madelaine she wouldn't have appealed to me; still I'm pledged to one

evening a week, so do you want to come along next time? She's pretty and amusing, so don't be fooled by her wooden manner at first."

Carr never refused the chance to meet a pretty girl, so he accepted with alacrity, and the second week it was a party of four who witnessed "Bunty Pulls the String."

"How stupid men are not to know that no matter how much they struggle some Bunty is always pulling the string, and they are only marionettes after all," said Katrina as she left the theatre hanging on to Brandon's arm.

Her head was on a level with his nose, and he caught a whiff of a familiar odor. "Can it be possible," he said to himself, "that my little Dutch cousin smokes?" but aloud he answered. "If a girl is as sweet and as womanly as Bunty, she's quite welcome to pull my string."

Katrina was shrewd. "I think you've found your Bunty, haven't you, Cousin Burt?"

He looked at her a moment, then he swept hesitation aside. "Yes, I have, but at present it's a secret from Elsie."

"Aunt Elizabeth knows?"

"Of course." And his manner told all that he tried to conceal.

"Is she—is she an actress?" Katrina sparkled at the thought.

"My dear cousin, she is not. My betrothed is everything that a girl should be, and we are to be married very soon. There are complications, and so for the present I'm going to ask you not to betray your knowledge to Elsie; but your question seemed to require an honest answer; that's why I told you."

Katrina nodded. She did not promise to respect his confidence; she fully intended to talk it over with Elsie as soon as they reached home, but there was no use in letting him know that. Beside, she wouldn't tell in so many words; she'd go about it diplomatically. Of course, that eliminated Cousin Burt as a matrimonial possibility, so as they sat down to supper she turned to Carr, and launched the full battery of her smiles and sallies upon him. And he responded quickly to the attack.

The girls stopped in Mrs. Brandon's room to say good night; then they went on to their rooms. Elsie unfastened Katrina's frock, yawning prodigiously as she did so.

"Have you ever been to your brother's rooms?" asked the older girl, as she slipped into a kimono, and lighted her final cigarette.

Elsie, brushing her hair, turned at the question. "Yes, he gave me a tea party just before we sailed last May."

"Has he many photographs of women?"

"Not many; mother's and mine, and a few of the girls he was in love with when he was a very young man."

"And how about the girl he's in love with to-day?"

"What girl?"

"Goose!" It was Katrina's favorite exclamation. "Don't you know the signs?"

"Of what?"

"Of a serious love affair. I could have told you the first night we arrived your charming brother's head was full of some woman."

"You mean you think Burt is in love with some woman! But if that were true we'd know it."

"What do you think is worrying Aunt Elizabeth; why do we see so little of him; why when you call him up at his rooms does his man never seem to know when he'll be in? Elsie, there's a mystery, and a mystery in real life is so much more interesting than in a book."

Elsie was literal. "You think mother knows, and she isn't pleased. Perhaps it's some divorced woman!"

"Perhaps. If he would only invite us to tea we could find out."

"It wouldn't be honorable to pry. He'll tell us in good time."

"Yes, if it's an affair he can tell."

"Katrina Van Huysdel, if you say another word about Burt you can leave my room! He's the best man in the whole world, and he couldn't fall in love with a girl he couldn't talk about!"

Katrina laughed. "Boo! Now that your virtuous indignation has evaporated listen to me. He is entangled in some affair, and it's your duty to get him out. First of all, we've got to discover who

she is, and then we may have to appeal to her to give him up, for your sake and Aunt Elizabeth's. Don't you see that it's breaking her heart?" Katrina had a vivid imagination, and now she allowed it full play. She had noticed that Mrs. Brandon was worried, but she knew that she would have to enlarge upon her aunt's trouble to make Elsie see the affair as she saw it.

"But that would make Burt angry!"

"Of course it may not be necessary to go that far, but we must find out who she is. You tell your brother that I've never been to a bachelor's apartment, and it would be such a treat to have us there for tea; and soon because I shall die of curiosity if we don't get to work at once. Oh, Elsie, think how proud we shall be if we rescue him, and prove to the world the influence that we good women exert!"

It sounded very fine, and Elsie was also fired with missionary zeal, but in the morning she had less relish for her part. She much preferred to ask Burt directly if he was in love; he would surely be very angry if he knew she was manœuvring for an invitation to his rooms to discover something he had decided to keep secret. But Katrina gave her no chance to draw back, and after a little delay Elsie succeeded in getting him at the office and making her suggestion.

He gave permission grudgingly, wondering all the time what the little Dutch devil was up to. She was evidently back of Elsie, though it was doubtful if his sister knew she was being made use of.

"To-day suits me as well as any other time. I'll 'phone Flynn to dust the china cups and lay in a supply of tea cakes, but at this hour I can't provide a real party. Mother will come of course," he said.

"She's not so well to-day; we were going to the Heddens' but she doesn't feel up to it; that's why we have a free afternoon."

"Well, then, get some older woman to chaperon you; you two girls can't come to the Berwind alone." He spoke sharply. He had never asked Madelaine to come to the Berwind; he had not liked to suggest a chaperon to her, and, on the other hand, he could not contemplate having her come without one.

The Brandons had one cousin who had been married the previous spring. Katrina suggested asking her; she was Cousin Emily's eldest daughter, stupidly in love with her husband, as the Dutch girl phrased it.

Mrs. Brandon, not knowing the invitation had been of the girls seeking, was delighted to think Brandon wished his cousin to see his rooms, and she made no objection to Emmie Rhinelander as a chaperon.

Brandon had no portrait of Madelaine at the Berwind. The rooms were no longer his home, and they meant nothing to him; he kept them on because he had a lease and much of his mail was directed there. It also figured as his address in the social directory; he owed that to Madelaine, but he had no feeling of sentiment about the comfortable quarters; he was too well housed on West End avenue.

So Katrina's first attempt fell flat. She made a leisurely tour of the three rooms. "How neat everything is," she said, "I always imagined bachelors were untidy; your valet must be an old maid."

Flynn, entering with the tea things, scowled at hearing himself so characterized, and Brandon laughed uneasily. The girl had sharp eyes. Suppose she opened a closet door, and found it empty. He wished he had taken the precaution of turning the keys.

"No book left where you put it down last night; no tobacco in your jar; why even your cigarette box is empty. Don't you really live here, Cousin Burt?" An awful suspicion dawned in her mind. These rooms had a ghostly air, as if they had not been tenanted for some time.

Brandon said "Damn!" under his breath. "Flynn, have you forgotten to fill my cigarette box again; you know the penalty for that."

Flynn said "Yes, sir," in his usual way, and fortunately Katrina was curious enough to ask what the penalty was.

"I never smoke cigars; Flynn doesn't care for cigarettes; every time he forgets to fill my box I empty his in the

fireplace, and as he sees them burn it refreshes his memory wonderfully."

Katrina laughed. "Never mind, Flynn, I'll beg you off this time, for I don't really believe it's your fault."

"Your brother uses his rooms as a blind," she said to Elsie, after they left Emmie Rhinelander at her door; "there wasn't one invitation card stuck in his mirror, nor a letter in the rack on his desk, and Flynn is in the secret. Don't ask me how I know, but I do know; he betrayed himself in a dozen ways."

"Katrina, I'm going to tell mother what you say; if there is anything wrong she ought to know."

"If you do, you'll spoil everything, and you'll add to her unhappiness; I don't believe she knows how bad it is."

"Burt isn't the kind of man to do what you think!"

"He isn't any different from other men. They all do it when they get the chance, and the worst of it is they stick up for the woman. Of course, it may be that he's married to someone he's ashamed of. Some of the nicest men do that; they get roped in by some unscrupulous woman, and before they know their lives are ruined." Katrina was well up in modern literature, but her reading had taught her a different lesson from the one which Madelaine had learned.

The last possibility overwhelmed Elsie. "Married, oh, Katrina, you make it worse all the time!" she cried. "If that's true, then we can do nothing!"

"No, but we're not sure. I wonder if we could bribe Flynn?"

Elsie shook her head. "He's been with Burt ever since he left home."

"Well, we'll have to think up some other plan. There's no use trying to worm it out of Mr. Carr; men are always loyal to each other, but I'll see what I can do indirectly."

Carr, however, proved himself a blank as far as extracting any information went, and the girl dared not go beyond a hint. She might be told roughly that it was none of her business, and she dared not risk alarming him to the extent of forcing a warning to Brandon. There was undoubtedly something wrong, Aunt Elizabeth's eyes were full of sadness, and when Cousin Burt dined with them he was always mutely pleading for something that was denied.

If she could only probe the mystery! Elsie was no help to her; she had only succeeded in awakening the younger girl's suspicions without hitting upon any way to clear them up.

The clue fell into her hands by chance. One night after dinner his mother asked Brandon if he had received a letter from his uncle in regard to some property they held jointly.

"He sent it to the Berwind instead of to the office, and he called me up this afternoon to inquire if we had come to a decision. It required an immediate answer, and he advises us to sell."

"I brought the letter with me," he said; "it's in my coat pocket; I'll get it."

The letter was sent to the Berwind; it had probably been remailed; that accounted for the delay. Katrina made up her mind to see the envelope.

Brandon came back with a letter in his hand: he extracted the inner sheet and handed it to his mother. At that moment Katrina knocked over a silver vase holding some orchids, and the water poured down the front of her gown. Brandon sprang to her assistance, wiping her dress with his handkerchief. She laughed as she begged pardon for her awkwardness, but her eyes never left the envelope which he had dropped on coming to her aid, and while he was still on his knees, trying to repair the damage to her frock, she motioned Elsie to pick it up and lay it on the table.

For a moment Elsie hesitated, then impelled by her cousin's stronger will she stooped and the address 1412 West End avenue burned itself into her brain.

Brandon apparently did not notice. When he straightened up and saw the envelope lying face downward on the table, he fancied he had tossed it there himself, and he crumpled it nervously between his fingers.

"You're sure that's the right number?" Katrina asked, the first moment the conspirators were alone.

"Yes, but what good is that going to do us?" Elsie was miserable. Success seemed a poor thing, gained in such a manner.

"We're going to find out why Burt Brandon has his letters re-directed to 1412 West End avenue."

"And then?"

"And then, goose, we're going to see the woman!"

X

It was several days before the girls found a fitting opportunity to inspect the enemy's lair, as Katrina phrased it. She tried to make light of their discovery, fearing that it might prey upon Elsie's mind to the point where she would indulge in confession to her mother if not to Brandon himself.

One morning, when they had been to a private view of a notable collection of paintings with Cousin Emily, they announced their intention of walking home, and parted at the corner with their chaperon. After going three blocks along the avenue, Katrina hailed a hansom, and gave the address "1410 West End avenue." "He will stop next door, and while we decide we have made a mistake we can get a good look at the house," she said, in explanation of her order. Elsie acquiesced; she was too unhappy these days to do anything more than follow her daring leader's suggestions. Her conscience pricked her, and there were times when she could scarcely repress the desire to throw herself into her mother's arms, and beg to have the mystery cleared up. But she saw the anxiety in her mother's eyes, and she hesitated, not wishing to add to her burden.

"I wonder what kind of a street West End avenue is?" she said, by way of making conversation as they crossed Sixth avenue.

"I don't know, but it's probably all right."

They drove along Broadway till they reached Seventy-second street, and then again they turned westward, swinging into the quietest residence street in New York, where the elegance of the houses made them open their eyes in astonishment. They had certainly not expected to find their prey lodged like this.

The hansom drew up before a large apartment house and the cabman waited for them to alight. Both girls leaned forward and took in the light brick dwelling next door, the handsome lace curtains at the window, and then as if to reward them the door opened and a young girl came out. Elsie pulled Katrina back, while her face grew uncomfortably warm, but her cousin shook off the restraining touch on her arm, and stared hard at the slight, gray-clad figure, who looked up to stare at them in turn. She was very small and blond, for it was Flo Lorrimer, and she had run in for a moment to inquire about Mr. Pierce, and had found Madelaine greatly worried over her father's condition.

Katrina sank back with a sigh of satisfaction as Flo advanced. "Drive on, we have made a mistake; I think you can take us to Fifth avenue and Fifty-ninth street," she said, through the hole in the roof of the cab. "Oh, Elsie, what luck; to think that we saw her! Isn't it funny how splendid-looking men like your brother always fall in love with a baby-faced blond, and it's so hard to tell whether that type is made up or not."

Elsie did not answer. The girl looked very young, and was quietly dressed; perhaps after all there was no dreadful mystery.

Katrina went on making plans, but when she suggested an interview with the blond girl Elsie put her foot down. That was going too far, and even Katrina was not as anxious to bring matters to a climax as she pretended. After the mystery was solved, the excitement was over, and the chase was really the most interesting part of the hunt.

One evening, however, Brandon, who had noticed Elsie's fits of abstraction, and the sorrowful expression that settled over her face when she thought herself free from observation, took her aside. "What are you worrying about, Elsie?" he asked. They were in the library together, and he drew her down upon his knee, encircling her with his arm so that she could not get away from him.

"Nothing," she said, and then she sighed.

"Can't you confide in me?" He was gently insistent. Could it be an incipient love affair, and she feared her mother's disapproval?

"What's the matter with mother, Burt? She acts as if she had something on her mind; she isn't happy; it isn't only her neuritis; that was quite as troublesome in Europe, and you don't act naturally either. I'm not a child, and if business has gone wrong I ought to be told." She was fencing for time.

"It isn't business. It's true, sister mine, you're no longer a child, and you should be told, but I gave mother my word I wouldn't speak. However, I may say that it is something concerning my happiness, and it will all come right soon. Will you be content with that?"

"I suppose I must be. Shall I know by Christmas?"

"That's only a week off. I fear not, and yet—with all my heart I wish I could tell you now; you would side with me, and we should all be so happy."

"I know it has to do with someone you love, and I suppose mother doesn't approve, but still if she's your choice she must be all right."

"It isn't fair to guess, but, little sister, she is all right, and I love her. Now you know the essentials are you satisfied?"

Elsie threw both arms about his neck and hugged him delightedly. "I'm more," she whispered; "I'm content." But she did not explain the feminine distinction between the two states.

Christmas came upon a shadowed household in West End avenue. After rallying, Pierce had had a relapse, and neither the doctor nor Miss Smith, who was still in attendance, deemed it right to keep Madelaine in ignorance of the seriousness of her father's condition.

"He may last months, and he may sink very rapidly, so you must be prepared," said McCracken.

Madelaine struggled to keep back the tears. "Thank you for being honest with me. It is always best to know."

She repeated the surgeon's verdict to Brandon when he came in, and it prevented the request for a little celebration which had hovered on his lips. He couldn't blame Madelaine, but it was hard on him. For five weeks now the pall of approaching death had hung over them, and, while, of course, he felt sorry for her, he couldn't be expected to mourn over a man whose insignificance made him a negligible quantity in most people's lives.

Brandon spent the greater part of the holidays with his family. Christmas day fell on Monday, so there were practically three days to celebrate. Cousin Emily gave a dance on Saturday; Emmie Rhinelander a dinner Sunday night, and Mrs. Brandon a small dance on Monday, and Madelaine urged Brandon to accept all three invitations, but it hurt when he yielded to her urging.

He sent home quantities of flowers, pots of poinsettias and dwarf trees laden with red berries, to give the house a holiday aspect, but Madelaine's spirit was too heavy to respond to the outward show.

He lounged about the house Monday morning, going in and out of the sick room, but in the afternoon he announced he had telephoned for the car and he was going to take her for a spin.

"It's a gorgeous day, and surely Miss Smith can be trusted for a couple of hours. Really, Madelaine, you owe me something." The dismal atmosphere within doors got on his nerves and made him irritable. Daughterly devotion was beautiful, but she did owe her lover some thought, and the sick man was not in a condition to notice her absence for a couple of hours.

She yielded without a word, and when the chauffeur drove the car up to the door she came downstairs wearing the fur coat which was one of Brandon's gifts and a hood to match. She had lost her pretty color, and her skin had a grayish tinge, but that soon disappeared as the stinging wind brought the blood to her cheeks. She sat beside Brandon, who always drove, while the chauffeur, taken along in case of a tire accident, lolled in lonely splendor in the tonneau.

"Cold, sweetheart?" he asked, glancing

down at her as she snuggled under the fur rug.

"No indeed! I'm so glad you made me come; I needed a fresh air tonic. I suppose I have been selfish in my grief, but Burt, dear, daddy has been 'all my relations' for so long that the knowledge he is going to be taken from me is more than I can bear. I see your point, and I shall try to put away my sorrow while you are home, only if I do get low spirited have patience with me. You have been so kind; keep it up just a little longer, and some day I will make up to you for what you are going through now."

"Madelaine, don't you realize that your father is very tired; that he has probably suffered in silence for years, and that the end will come as a release to him? It's easy enough to talk, and to tell you to perk up, but I suppose the truth is you can't. This may not be the time to intrude a personal consideration, but have you looked beyond and decided how we are to go on afterward? I shall abide by your decision, but I think you ought to take some account of the future."

"You mean it will make a difference after daddy goes?"

"Won't it?"

"You are right. I hadn't thought of that." Then she gave a little sob. "I haven't thought of anything but that he's dying!"

"Sweetheart!" Brandon's hand sought hers, and held it close for a moment, trying by pressure to tell her that he loved her and he understood, and this silent sympathy comforted her greatly.

They dined together. She slipped into one of her pretty evening frocks, and made an effort to appear cheerful. Without consulting her, he had ordered a bottle of wine opened. She noticed the champagne glasses on the table as he pulled out her chair, but she made no comment. Perhaps he knew what she needed, and she found to her surprise that the wine affected her mood, and made her part less difficult to play. Brandon had promised to be at his mother's early, so he left at nine, and Madelaine went to the door with him. He was very good-looking in his new evening clothes, white silk waistcoat, white gloves, his overcoat with its sealskin collar, and his silk hat, and she felt a pang of jealousy that he would spend the evening surrounded by dainty girls in his own set, and her claims for the time being would be obliterated.

"Have a good time, but spare a thought to me occasionally," she said, taking his face between her soft hands, and kissing him full upon the lips.

It was unusual for her to volunteer a caress, and he was secretly delighted. It proved that she was not as placid as her ordinary conduct seemed to imply. He went off in a contented frame of mind, wishing with all his heart things had been different, and that they had been going to his mother's house together.

Elsie was in a fever of excitement. It was her first appearance as hostess, and she ran from room to room, inspecting everything as if she were personally responsible. Mrs. Brandon followed her with indulgent eyes, and when Brandon arrived the three stood together for a moment under the chandelier in the drawing-room, which was entwined with greens. He held his mother's hand in his, while his other arm drew Elsie close to his side. "Looks as if we were ready for some party," he said; "and I hope it's going to be the jolliest party you ever attended."

Elsie squeezed his arm affectionately, then she had a daring impulse. "You never invited a single friend of yours, Burt," she said.

"What about Bob?" But he knew she did not refer to Carr.

"I consider Bob a friend of the family. But we should have been glad to welcome any particular friend of yours, shouldn't we, mother?"

Mrs. Brandon gave a start. "What do you mean, Elsie?"

But the girl had already repented. "Oh, I know Burt has so many friends of his own age that I thought it would have been nice if he had asked one or two of them."

"Thank you for the thought, little sister, but I don't believe your invitation list could have been improved upon, and

if I feel at all like a benevolent old uncle I promise to conceal my age and my infirmities from my partners. Are you going to spare me a dance?"

She felt sure that he understood what she had meant by her offer. "As many as you wish."

"Thanks, but I won't be greedy, and I have no desire to have one of your college beaus inveigle me into a dark corner, and hold me prisoner for monopolizing the belle of the evening." He came to her assistance with his easy banter, and he was rewarded by seeing her face break into smiles.

Katrina did not appear until the first guests began to arrive. Without saying a word to Elsie, she had taken the false neck out of one of her gowns, replacing it with a band of pink tulle, so that while Aunt Elizabeth could not criticise her own attractiveness was enhanced a hundredfold. Brandon drew in his breath as he caught sight of her. She certainly was a "stunner," and he felt sorry for Elsie; she was bound to be overshadowed by this handsome foreign cousin. He went up and claimed her for the first dance, and as his arm encircled her waist, and her perfumed hair was close to his nostrils, thoughts of Madelaine were not so insistent. Katrina showed only too plainly that she was in the mood for a flirtation, and Brandon, who had repressed his own feelings for some time, suddenly gave way to the holiday spirit that reigned, and resigned himself to a very pleasant evening. He danced with Katrina time and again, until even Mrs. Brandon noticed it and began to wonder if her inmost dreams were in the way of being realized. Katrina's lovely flushed face sparkled with happiness. Her pride was roused. Brandon was certainly the most charming man present, she decided, and no matter if he did have a love affair on the outside she was going at attach him to her chariot wheels for this night at least. They were among the last to leave the ballroom as the supper dance came to an end. Perhaps it was accident, perhaps design, but when they paused they were directly under the great chandelier from the centre of which hung a bunch of mistletoe.

"What pretty white berries; they look like dewdrops," she said, innocently.

He did not stop to consider whether her innocence was real or assumed. "By Jove, mistletoe!" Then he laughed, and with a laugh on his lips he kissed her.

Mrs. Brandon, who had come back from the dining-room a moment to see why some of the guests lingered, saw the kiss.

Katrina drew back, her cheeks crimson. "I thought mistletoe was an English custom," she said.

"We Americans are an adaptable race, and we appropriate all the foreign customs that are pleasant. You surely don't find fault with this one, do you?" For she had not moved; she still stood under the chandelier, and her attitude was provocative. There was nothing to do but repeat his first offence, and it really did not seem as if she objected.

She was the first to catch sight of Mrs. Brandon. "Aunt Elizabeth, what will she think?"

He turned. "Hullo, mother! I've been kissing Katrina under the mistletoe; mighty glad you placed it so conveniently," he said, in a tone which he thought was careless.

Mrs. Brandon smiled. "Katrina is pretty enough to make me glad there is only one bunch. Aren't you two coming to supper?"

Later in the evening mother and son stood together for a moment watching the dancers.

"Katrina is really beautiful, and not a bit spoiled; she is as deferential to me as if I were her mother," said Mrs. Brandon, with an undercurrent of meaning in her tone.

"There is another girl, mother mine, sitting to-night by her dying father's bedside, who in my eyes is much more beautiful than Cousin Katrina, and who would show you just as much respect. It is her wish that I am here, and if I appear to be enjoying myself it's a blind; I'm not; I would much prefer to be sharing her vigil."

Mrs. Brandon was startled by the deep earnestness in his voice, and her mater-

nal plans fell suddenly to pieces. Then she gave utterance to the thought that had been troubling him of late. "And will you continue living there after her father dies?"

"I don't know, mother. I have given Madelaine my word; it is up to her to release me."

"Release you?" she asked, quickly.

"I mean it is for her to decide whether there will be an immediate marriage or not. Don't make a mistake; my choice is made for all time."

"And her father is really dying?"

"Yes, McCracken says it may be weeks or it may be a question of days."

"She has had McCracken. Do you think that wise?"

"He is our family physician, mother."

Mrs. Brandon sighed. She wondered if it would be wise after all to give in; to receive the girl who was undoubtedly to become her daughter-in-law in the near future. Then a curious desire to hold off as long as possible, so that she might give Providence a chance to interfere, made her refrain from speaking the words which her son so evidently desired. Once the girl had been received under her roof, his family was committed to approval, but as long as his mother withheld her sanction his family was not bound in any way. And there was always the chance of an untoward happening.

Carr had watched his friend with puzzled eyes. For a man who accepted the peculiar relation of the West End avenue house, Brandon was carrying on pretty recklessly with the handsome cousin who looked as if she would resent any trifling, and Carr, who was honestly fond of Madelaine, worried a little. Of course Brandon couldn't force his people to accept her, but he could comport himself as an engaged man, and not flirt deliberately with the prettiest girl in the room!

He ventured on a word as the two left the house together. "That cousin of yours is some girl. I wonder, Burt, what would have happened had you met her last year instead of Madelaine."

Brandon stopped to light a cigarette before replying. "The usual thing; a very desperate flirtation which would have burned itself out in a short time. She's much more in your line than mine, Bob."

"She evidently doesn't think so."

"Faint heart, you know."

"That's all rot. A girl has a hundred ways in which to let a man know whether his attentions are welcome, and your Cousin Katrina hasn't displayed one of them to me. On the other hand, she showed very plainly that there was only one man in the room for her to-night, but unfortunately he isn't free."

"What the devil do you mean?"

"I want to open your eyes. I know you'll do the square thing by Madelaine, but for God's sake take care or you'll be doing it only because it is the square thing, and not because your whole heart is involved."

"See here, Bob, when I want advice I'll ask for it."

"Yes, and then I won't give it. It's only the unsolicited article that is ever worth anything."

Brandon laughed. "Come along, old sorehead. I promise in future to keep hands off and not spoil sport. You're right, she is some girl, and as I've no brother to keep her in the family the next best thing is my 'old college chum.'"

"You mean that?"

"I sure do."

"Then here's another unsolicited bit of the unwelcome article, make Madelaine marry you before the old man dies."

"As that coincides exactly with my own desires, I agree to do my best."

XI

In spite of his good intentions, Katrina made up her mind that she would not be ignored, and without being rude or keeping away from the house altogether Brandon found it impossible to avoid tête-à-têtes, which were charged with subtle meaning, though she cloaked her manner with a comradeship that might have deceived a less acute observer.

There was another tea party in his rooms. This time he had more warning, and he got out a lot of "truck" which had

been packed away, and he also borrowed some odds and ends from Carr.

"You're to be here when they arrive and to stay to the finish," he said to his friend, and Carr assented.

"How's Pierce to-day?"

"No change; wonderful what vitality he has; seems to hang on through sheer grit, though McCracken gave us warning weeks ago."

"And Madelaine?"

"Does her best to bear up, though the strain is telling on her. I'd like to get her away when it's all over."

"Have you broached the important topic?"

"Not yet, but I'm making plans as if it were settled to my satisfaction. I've reserved staterooms on every outgoing Mediterranean steamer around February first. Find out, will you, if I have to get her consent for the license."

"All right. You know you can count on me to see you through."

Brandon nodded, he was arranging books and magazines on the centre table, with a view to forestalling any criticism.

But Katrina when she saw only smiled with amusement. Had anything been needful to confirm her suspicions, the different appearance of the apartment would have done that.

Again Emmie Rhinelander was the chaperon; this time her Willy accompanied her, and the two withdrew to a lounge in the corner to talk over the happenings of the day, for they had not seen each other since breakfast.

"Cigarette box full this time?" Katrina said, maliciously.

Brandon opened it. "Have one?" he asked, remembering that he had thought once or twice he had detected an odor of cigarettes about his cousin.

"Are they very strong?" And to his surprise she reached out for one.

"Yes, too strong for girls. Do you really smoke, Katrina?"

"I learned at boarding school, and all my married friends smoke; they say it helps you to concentrate."

He frowned. "It isn't a nice habit for girls. I hope you won't persuade Elsie to try."

She stood close to him, her shoulder brushing his coat sleeve. "Do you really object? If so I'll give it up, but I thought older men liked it."

There was no mistaking the inference. She would give it up to please him, but he must make the demand.

"I have no right to impose my wishes upon you, but you are wrong; older men hate to see a cigarette between nice girls' lips. At least, that has been my experience."

"Strange all the fascinatingly feminine things are relegated to the women who are not nice."

That was not a subject he cared to pursue with her. "Since when has smoking been a fascinatingly feminine pursuit?"

"Since women took it up," she said, audaciously.

Brandon gave a short laugh, then he moved to include Elsie and Carr in the conversation, and in spite of Katrina's cleverness she could not manage to draw him aside again. Instead Carr dogged her footsteps with a persistence which at first annoyed and then amused her as she saw through his ruse. "He's afraid, and he's calling on his friend to protect him; stupid, stupid Cousin Burt!" she thought, but she gave no sign, and she accepted Carr's attentions graciously.

Carr called him up on the telephone the next morning. "It only takes a day to get the license; I'm sending you the blanks to fill out so there'll be no delay."

"Good; I'll try to speak to Madelaine to-night."

But no opportunity came as Pierce had a sudden sinking spell, and Madelaine hurried through her dinner in order to get back to the sick room. Brandon followed her after he had had his coffee, and sat for an hour conversing in low tones with her hand in his.

Miss Smith met him in the hall the next afternoon as he came in. "Mr. Pierce is asking for you; he wants to see you alone; he has something to tell you; try to understand him; I know it's difficult as his speech is so mixed, but do your best."

"I certainly will. Where's Miss Pierce?"

"Asleep. I gave her something; she's

worn out, and she will need all her strength soon."

"You mean?"

"He can't last much longer."

Brandon went into the sick man's room. Pierce was lying back on his pillows, his face gray white, his eyes closed, but as he heard footsteps he opened them, a faint smile playing about his lips.

As he looked down upon the shrunken figure, Brandon suddenly knew what was coming, and he determined to set the old man's mind at rest. "You want to speak to me about Madelaine, don't you; you'd go easier if you knew she was my wife, wouldn't you? I thought of that, and I have the license for our marriage in my pocket. I'm sure four months have tested the depth of our love for each other, and while if things had been different I would have gone on to the end, I think now it is our duty to bring her round to our way of thinking. My mother will receive her as soon as we are married, and my little sister will be very good to her. Isn't that what you wish, Mr. Pierce?"

The dying man's face brightened. His words came fast, but they were so jumbled that there was little coherence about them. Only one thing was clear; he did want to see Madelaine married before he died. And Brandon assured him that this wish would be gratified. He was still sitting beside the bed, talking of future plans when Madelaine appeared in the doorway. Her eyes were heavy, for her sleep had been that of exhaustion, and she wore a loose, white house gown. Her hair was ruffled and she looked small and childlike.

Brandon rose and went to meet her. "Madelaine, my dear, I want you to listen to me for a few moments. Your father is anxious about you; he wants to leave you in my care, legally, when he goes away. I should never have asked you to reconsider for my sake, but I ask it for his. You do want to make the end easier, and he being a man knows that the only certain thing about this life is its uncertainty. You have been wrapped up in your grief, and I have not wished to disturb you, but one day, you remember, I begged you to take the future into account. Are you willing to trust yourself to me now; to give me a legal as well as a moral right to take care of you?" He had taken both of her hands in his, and he stood before her, speaking in a clear voice which was perfectly audible to the man lying on the bed.

"You ask it of me for daddy's sake?" The suddenness of it disarmed her. Since his request nearly a month ago, she had tried to take account of the future; to wonder if it would be possible to go on living under the same roof after her father was gone, and she had found it impossible to decide.

The gentle old man had been her refuge, and she knew now what Carr had meant when he spoke of Pierce in that fashion. From the beginning, she had had daddy to turn to, and when slumbering passion stirred in her lover's eyes, and his kisses had fired her own blood she had known she was quite safe, because of daddy's presence in the house. But when he was gone if their hearts spoke too fervently, what would happen? She was innocent but not ignorant, and she had learned much of the mysterious workings of human emotions. She had said six months, and only four of the six had passed, but was it not enough; had she not proved that he loved her deeply, tenderly? He had been patient through the long trial of daddy's illness, and it was only in agreement with her spoken wish that he went abroad for an evening's diversion at his mother's house or with Carr. Carr had been to call and she had asked him a question about the Dutch cousin which she could not ask of Brandon, and Carr had answered that she was a great beauty and fascinating and deep; and he had looked worried as he said it. From Brandon she learned Katrina was to remain in New York all winter, so that the temptation was a permanent one. She was sure of him now, but in love as well as in life it was often the uncertain thing which was certain, and it still needed constant care to bring their flower of love to perfection. She could give it this care best if she were his wife, for it would surely receive a setback if she adhered to

a continuance of her plan after daddy went away. All these thoughts raced through her brain, and when in answer to her foolish little question he stooped and kissed her forehead her doubts suddenly melted in thin air.

"You consent to an immediate marriage, dearest?" He wanted her to openly acknowledge her trust in him.

She looked towards the bed. "It would make you happy, daddy?" she asked. Then she broke from Brandon's grasp, and knelt beside her father, slipping her soft arm about his neck. "It seems cruel to talk of a wedding when you are so ill!"

Pierce made a great effort to speak. "It would make me happy, very happy, to see you and Burt married." And each word was distinctly uttered. No one knew what the effort cost him, but as he finished he closed his eyes and sighed gently.

Brandon summoned Miss Smith, then he went downstairs to telephone. He called up Carr first, and gave explicit directions. "You know what to do; get an Episcopal clergyman if possible, and let me know if you can be here by six. Tell Thorley to send up plenty of pink roses immediately. Now I've got to ring off, so don't ask any more questions; I leave everything to you, and for heaven's sake don't bungle!" He waited a moment then he rang up his mother's house. "I shall bring my wife to you to-night, mother; you will be at home and you will receive us, because after this I cannot come where she is not welcome."

The pause was barely perceptible before Mrs. Brandon answered: "I shall be glad to receive your wife, my son. Shall I tell Elsie?"

"Mother, you're an angel, and you've made me so happy! Of course tell Elsie; now I want the whole world to know!"

He called up Mrs. Lorrimer last of all. Fortunately she was at home. "Madelaine and I are to be married at once. Mr. Pierce is dying, you understand, and she is giving in to please him. I think she needs a woman with her; will you come? You have always been fond of her, and it will be somewhat of an ordeal; I think she would prefer to have you alone. How soon can I send a cab for you? In half an hour—good! Believe me, I shall never forget your kindness to my dear girl."

Madelaine was still on her knees by her father's bed when he went upstairs again. He touched her lightly on the shoulder. "Madelaine, dear, Mrs. Lorrimer will be here shortly; I thought you might like to have her with you," he said.

The girl rose, and stared at him with uncomprehending eyes. He knew she had been praying, and his heart was filled with reverent tenderness.

"My mother wishes us to come to her afterward. I did not ask her to be present; I thought you would prefer it to be as quiet as possible." Then seeing she was still dull to the importance of the impending event he went on. "Don't you think you might change into a frock; this"—and he fingered a fold of her blanket robe—"isn't exactly a thing to be married in. Why, Madelaine, my girl, what is it!" For she burst into deep, convulsive sobs. He led her quickly from the room, so that she should not disturb her father, and once out of earshot he soothed her with all the tenderness at his command. "What is it; are you regretting that you have consented; do you fear I want to turn it into an occasion of merrymaking? You must know that nothing will be changed between us, except form, and that I will not intrude my claim while your heart aches for him. It is only to safeguard you, and to insure his peace. I have asked Mrs. Lorrimer and Bob because it is necessary to have witnesses, but I don't want the memory of the most solemn act of our lives to be only full of sadness, so won't you change, and put on a pretty white frock, so that I can hold the picture of my bride always so attired in my mind? Then when your father is asleep we'll steal away for an hour and let my mother have a glimpse of her new daughter. Am I asking too much? There, that's better; why you are actually smiling! For a moment I think you feared I was an ogre bridegroom, and I was going to eat you up as soon as you committed yourself to my care."

From the shelter of his breast she man-

aged to look up at him, and to force a faint smile. "You are good, and I trust you, heart and soul. We were getting on so nicely, weren't we, and my test wasn't a ridiculous theory; we would have won out only circumstances were too much for us."

"And when we attempt anything out of the ordinary, sweetheart, they always are," he said.

THE VOICE IN THE WIND

By Danco Orsini

A STORM raged through the city, and though early in the afternoon, the heavy curtains drawn tightly across the windows of a luxurious room to deaden the sound of the wind and shut from view its lashing of the sleet placed it in shadow, save for the flames from copper-filled logs burning in a low, wide grate. They shot quivering shafts of high-light over the velvet draping the walls, gleamed in a great mirror and along its frame of gilded garlands, and in the crystal pendants of the chandelier, reflecting their iridescent sparks. And they shone boldly on the woman looking into but not heeding their changing colors who sat in a high-armed chair before the grate, her feet on a plump embroidered cushion; one elbow, resting on her knee, supported her arm, and her cheek lay in the soft palm of her hand.

As a violent gust of wind sent the sleet pelting against the windows she started in fear lest the intruder would enter and demand her thoughts, which were in accord with the storm, straightened her bent shoulders as though to ease the pressure of a weight, and sank forward again in dismay at her futile effort. Long ago she had placed the weight there, thinking to carry it lightly amid the sumptuous ease and excitement in the never-ending race for the pleasure she had desired. Now she demanded from her soul the strength to go forth into the storm and be free from its burden of hated and dreaded demands. The soul, so long ignored, gave but faint response.

How could she provide for herself, unskilled as she was in the performance of any task but that of using her cold brilliant charm to hold at a distance, yet still allure the master whose possession she was as were also the beautiful things surrounding her? Why had he given her nothing but the costly means to enhance her body, and make of her a useless creature save to delight his senses? He had procured a superb jewel. It was his pleasure to keep it in the fitting case he provided.

The wind tore fiercely at the windows as if, tired of her dallying, it desired to enter and snatch her by force from the warm, scented room; the woman shuddered and drew back in the shelter of the wide arms of the chair. The wind rushed shrieking down the street, and in the stillness that followed she heard a knock at her door. Motionless, except for one foot tapping the cushion nervously, she let the knock repeat itself twice before she called sharply: "Come in!"

The door opened, and a girlish voice with a strange accent said softly yet clearly: "Pardon, Madame, I wish not to disturb. I come with the linen."

With a breath of relief the woman leaned forward. A vivid little figure, in worn garments that bore the mark of former elegance, stood in the doorway. A queer pointed cap was pulled elfishly over her dark hair, sparkling with drops of melting sleet; and a pair of golden-brown eyes, holding courage and a mystery, met the woman's brightly.

Her fine straight brows arched in interrogation. Who was this strange child, and what did she mean by the "linen"? Shivering, she drew a lace shawl over her shoulders, and said impatiently:

"Please close the door and bring it here," as a vague remembrance of having left an order somewhere for hand-woven linen entered her mind.

With swift, lithe grace the girl crossed the room, not heeding its gorgeousness, and laid the bundle she carried on a tabouret near the woman's chair, then pulled off her cap and shook it at the flames. They hissed and snapped, and she smiled at her thought: "It is like Madame. She is not please'!"

Noting her rough little hands, blue with the cold, the woman inquired querulously: "Why did you come out in this storm?" and pushed the cushion from beneath her feet, motioning the girl to sit there.

The gold in her eyes glinted; she shook the linen from its wrappings, and laid it across the woman's knees and said quietly: "It is finish'."

The woman felt its satiny texture and looked wearily at its beautifully embroidered design, and said: "I was in no hurry for it; you should have waited for a pleasant day." Where had she ordered it? To what use was it to be put? What did it matter——

The low reply: "I am in need, Madame," brought a keener interest to bear on her mind. She glanced sharply from beneath the full white lids of her eyes at the girl, the sharp outline of whose face showed clearly against the firelight, her eyes bright and misty, and said with some warmth: "Let me give you a glass of sherry—or a sandwich."

With a slight, imperious shrug of her shoulders the girl answered: "I thank you, Madame; I want nothing." She had accepted the cushion and sat bent toward the fire, apparently absorbed in the dancing flames and their gorgeous colors. The heat had dried the moisture from her hair and it stood out from her face and head in a bright glow, the soft coil at the back of her neck still damp and dark. Her hands hung limply over her knees and her fingers moved unconsciously to the motion of the flames.

The weary expression of the woman's face changed to one of alertness as she watched her. Here was someone who had come out of the storm and knew the pinch of its cold; who needed the pittance her work would bring, possibly to assuage her hunger; and who had at some time known the ease and grace of life. What was the mystery hidden in her strange, long eyes? What had brought the firmness to her soft young lips, and given the imperious poise to her small fine head? What was her life like now? Was she often cold and hungry? The desire to have these questions answered grew strong and slowly formed itself into the words: "Why do you need the money?"

"For my son." The girl's answer came as though its subject dominated her thoughts.

"*For your son!* Your *son!*" the woman repeated in bewilderment. "Why, you are but a child yourself!"

The girl straightened her shoulders proudly and said: "I very soon am twenty. My little son is not two years."

"Tell me about him."

"Madame have no children?"

"No." A light as baleful as that of an occasional steely-blue flame, curling sinuously among the logs, lighted for an instant her cold eyes.

The girl shook her head. "Then Madame would not comp'ren'," she said softly.

"Yes, I would comprehend." And leaning toward her the woman spoke with rapid intensity. "I want to know about him; about you, and how you live. You have not always worked with your hands. Tell me, what brought you to it? Was it hard to find work—tell me! Does it bring any compensation but discomfort—are you often cold and hungry? Tell me, is it possible to *live* and have nothing that is soft or beautiful, and to have no pleasure? Tell me! It means much to me!"

The girl turned and watched the woman with wide eyes as she made her vehement appeal, and as she finished she fell on her knees before her and threw out her arms. The woman, leaning back in her chair with her hand held tightly over her eyes, did not see the girl's gesture of comprehension and compassion, so she slipped back to her former position before the fire and said simply:

"You ask many questions, Madame. I know not why I have the wish to answer —may be it is your need. May be it is the room so soft and warm that brings me to remember. It is not much to tell. I was a dancer and I please'. I love the luxur'ous and the beautiful things I have to wear. To be admire', to ride from the theatre to my *appartement* in my carriage —it is excit'ment! Ah, I love it!" The warmth of her words brought a faint color to her cheeks, and her full, short upper lip curved softly back from her even white teeth. For a time the room was still save for the crackling of the logs and the sharp beat of the sleet against the windows.

The woman remained hidden in her chair, and when the girl pushed back the recollections of her gay, careless days and continued to answer her questions she spoke as to an empty room. "I know what I do is bad—I am young so I do not feel it—not then. By and by, when I know what is to happen to me, I feel it. I am afraid. I do not tell. I dance the same at the theatre, and go after to the big shining place and walk proud as the people they turn to look at the Prince and me! I preten' I am very gay and make them laugh—his friends; they like me and my fun.

"When I can no more dance at the theatre I have to tell. It is *terrible!* But he do not throw me away like some do. He take care, and bring me to the country, and put me in a little house all my own, and a good woman to look after me. I am very happy. I sew, and sew, and make little clothes, and I look beyond the door and see the tall grass bend in the wind and the trees shake the leaves, so they dance as I do when a little child. Now my heart dance with them, not my feet, as they do then."

Suddenly her face grew white and small, and her words came very slow and with a tragic tenderness, "My—little—son! Ah, it may all have been dif'rent, but—he is so little—and *he have a crooked back!* The Prince he want everything to be strong and fine and gay like his self. He have no patience with the *miserables.* He say I am not to keep the little fellow; I am to send him away and come back to him. But who would love him—so little and so crooked? And how will I amuse and be gay?"

The woman interrupted her tersely. "Did you love that man, the Prince?"

The girl looked into the fire, seeking the answer in its brilliant flames, and did not reply at once. Finally she shrugged her shoulders and said slowly: "I love' the luxur'ous. Now I love my little son!" Then continued her narrative rapidly and with many varying expressions in her voice and in the quick gestures of her hands:

"I say nothing, and I think about it. I preten' it take a long time for me to be strong. I beg to keep my baby till I shall be. The Prince he say to me: 'I go to hunt the wild beast in the forest of my own country; you may keep the little fellow till I come back. Then you have to send him away and come to me. How can I live without you to love and make me laugh?' This I do not comp'ren', for he have the wish to take from *me* what is my life!

"One day I feel very strong, and I have it all in my mind what I shall do. I tell my woman: 'I find the place for my baby. I go to join the Prince.' Ah, I tell many lies before I finish. But they are for the good, and do not make me feel shame. I pack a little trunk; I take my baby on my arm; I go to the city; I get my money from the bank—it is *mine* —mine I make with the dancing. The Prince he tell me to put it there and say: 'You have not the need for it. You have mine now. Some day it is good for you to find it there.' Now it is good for me so I take it, and come away to this country, where he will *never* find me and take my little son away from me!

"It is no use to tell about that voy'ge. It is not pleasant. I have not the experience with babies. Often he is so white and still I am frighten'. I think we love each other so much is why he live. When I arrive to this city I am distract'. I know not what I shall do. But everyone is kind and direct me to a hotel they tell me it is very quiet. I find it very expensive! Very soon my money it look not enough; my little son look not so well, and I am sad and *isolé,* with no

one to tell me what I shall do. One day I take him and sit in the *salon* of the hotel. A woman, very big and not so young, but beautiful and good, she come and talk to me, and look at my baby and say: 'It is no use for him to be crooked! You must take him to the doctor I tell you about. He will straighten him and make him strong!' Is not that *wonderment!* Ah, she is an angel and comp'ren' everything!

"The next day we go. I cannot hold him I am so full of the excit'ment! And she carry him like she know how. We go to a big white building, and see many women with babies who sit in a big room. We do not stay there. We go on the elevator to the top, and into a little room—so white and clean! We do not wait long till the doctor come. He is not so tall like my big friend, but he have the face and the voice to make him fill the room! When he see my friend he take her two hands, and his eyes look very bright and please'. She tell him about my baby. He take him from her and grow very serious, and say nothing till he look him all over, so gentle the little fellow do not cry *once.* And me so afraid he is to be hurt! Then he smile at me, very kind, and say: 'We will make him all right, but you have to leave him in the *hospetel* with me for a little time.' Ah, that is not easy to do! How will I know what they shall do to him?

"The doctor he ask many questions of me, but I do not tell everything. They must not know I am the dancer, and my little son have no father but the Prince—no! And they must not know I have so very little money. For, is not my little son a prince also? He can not have the charity! I will make that money.

"We go from the *hospetel* and my good friend she know I feel like I must cry. She take me to a little garden and we have tea and somethings to eat. I do not eat them, but that is no matter—I have not to make explanations to my friend once. I feel so disturbe' I tell her I have so little money I must make some. I am not to stay in the expensive hotel, and I am not to have my son a charity. She is intereste', and say: 'That is well,' and ask me: 'What is it you can do?' I do not tell about the dancing. I tell about the linen I learn to make on the loom, when I am a little child and live with my *Grandmère,* and of the embroiders. She look please' and say: 'I can help!'

"When I arrive to my room I listen for my baby, and my arms they are *vide.* But I do not cry, and feel not so sad. Is not he to be straightened? And we not punish' for my badness? Now he will grow to be the big fine man with the fair hair and the blue eye. And the Prince, if he see, will be proud!

"My friend she find a loom for me, and a little room like I can have, light and very little to pay—I can have no thing soft and beautiful. My friend she know every one who like my work, also she arrange for me to see my little son every day. Ah, it is not for me to have so much! Now I am start' and happy a terrible thing must happen to me. My good friend, who I love and who is all I have, take a cold in her chest and in two days she is dead and I am desolate!" Tears filled her eyes, and with an effort to control them she cried lightly: "See! Madame! the fire; it is gone! I also am finish'!"

Springing to her feet, she stood before the woman, straight and slim as a boy, her cap held in her hand, and said shyly: "It is not for I need the money so bad I come here. It is to feel am I content'. It is so," she explained whimsically. "All the day I work in my room. There is no thing to divert. My thought it is for my little son, and the day I am a little child and live with my *Grandmère* and the trees teach me the dance behind her back! My mind it is also of the things I will do to make the money so there be plenty for everything he want as he grow up. One day I have the big room and the many looms and girls to work for me, and the little *appartement,* soft and warm, for my son and me!

"Then I think how do I feel I shall be satisfy' alway' to work all day, and to have no thing that is luxur'ous, and no excit'ment? Shall I not grow discontent'? So it come to my mind, when I embroider on the linen, when it is finish' I will not take it to the shop; I will bring

it myself to Madame, and look on all her beautiful things and feel if I have the *contentement!*

"*Chute!* Madame! I come here; I walk on the soft carpet; I do not feel it! I know there is sparkles everywhere; I do not see them! I smell the perfume of the rose; it makes me think of my baby with his soft, sweet body. And I see Madame"—she leaned toward the woman pityingly—"in the soft chair of the velvet, so lon'ly and discontent', with all that is luxur'ous about her, and I say I wish to go quick to my room where there is no thing beautiful but it is happy! Madame is not offen'? She will excuse?"

The woman's hand fell from her forehead, leaving a bold mark across the white skin above her eyes. Not heeding the girl's plea she arose quickly from her chair, hurried across the room and pulled a cloak from a closet, threw it over her shoulders and exclaimed: "I am going with you! I want to see your *room!*"

"Madame!" the girl cried in confusion, "my room it is cold and hard to you! And the storm—it is *furious!*"

"I want to feel the cold and the storm. Come, we will ride"—a faint smile touched her lips—"in a carriage!"

As the door of the elevator slid open the woman unconsciously stepped back to allow the girl to pass in first; and as unconsciously, when they reached the curb of the sidewalk, the girl, with a dainty hauteur, gave the direction to the chauffeur and entered the limousine first. She pulled the fur robe close about her and nestled back against the cushions with the pleased satisfaction of a child. The woman sat straight and stiff, staring ahead into the storm and thinking of her sumptuous apartment with its warmth and color; of her horses and her motor car; of her days free to follow her own inclinations; of the cool, fine linen and silk of her soft bed; of her scented bath, and of her intuitive maid with her deft, smooth hands and pleasing service; and with intolerance of the man to whom she must pay the price of these expensive necessities. They were driven silently through the storm and its fury to an out-of-the-way street.

Up endless flights of stairs to the top of an old building the girl swiftly led the way to her room, threw open the door and cried: "It is here, my room and the happiness! Enter, Madame!"

"Happiness!" The woman gasped, and sat down suddenly on the hard bench before the loom, reposeful and dignified, waiting for the touch of the hand that gave it activity. Her cloak slipped from her shoulders and she shivered, not sensing the cause, and peered appealingly about her—and found nothing to strengthen her half-formed resolve or to invite "happiness." One must have much within herself to be happy in a cold, bare room. Its scrupulous cleanliness and order seemed to add a crispness to the cold and bring sharply into view the meagreness of what she saw: A narrow couch, a chair, a rough chest of drawers, a stand on which were a white enamel-ware basin and a water-carrier, a table holding a pile of neatly folded work and a basket filled with thread and silk of various colors, great hanks of linen thread hanging from hooks in the wall near the loom, a tiny stove which looked inadequate to stay the progress of the frost creeping over the high north window nearly filling one end of the room. In a niche in the wall, having at some time served as a closet, two wax tapers burned steadily before a figure of the Madonna on a narrow shelf covered with a beautifully embroidered cloth; above hung the crucifix. The woman's eyes, that could never melt to tears, grew black and soft as she turned them from the little shrine to the girl leaning against the loom. "You pray?"

"Ah, Madame, alway'! At first, when I lose my good friend, and I have not the work to do, and I am not use' to the cold, and I have not what I desire to eat, I pray alway' for the work. Now I pray my little son will not have the shame for his mother! Do not you pray, Madame?"

"No," the woman replied bitterly. "I have never been cold nor hungry." She looked at her hands, strong and fine, but unused to any toil. Of what assistance would they be to her in a struggle for a slight subsistence? She rose from the

bench and gathered her cloak about her.

The girl's eyes shone and in their depths was compassion. "Ah, Madame, it is not so bad. When the hands are busy and the mind at peace the body do not feel the cold—not so much. Madame is too beautiful, too intelligent to——"

The woman broke her sentence harshly. "Madame is the vilest of the earth's creatures; she is a coward!" and walked quickly to the door, turned and said: "I have forgotten the money; I will send it to you. Perhaps—I may—I have not decided—will you come to me in a few days? I think I have a cloak to be embroidered." Without waiting for a reply she hurried down the stairs.

The girl stood looking at the closed door, still seeing the woman's face and its tragedy, and murmured softly: "It is a pity she have no little child and no loom!"

Down on the street the wind still drove the sleet before it, an angry thick gray veil, torn and rebellious. It caught at the woman's skirt and swirled it above her feet and tugged insistently at her cloak. She looked at her silk-covered ankles and thin slippers impatiently, hesitated, and reluctantly entered the limousine. When she stepped from it to the sidewalk in front of the great stone building holding her apartment, the capricious wind took hold of her and pushed her violently into the vestibule. Stunned and breathless she sought her door and threw it open, her face still showing the torment of indecision.

Its warmth embraced her, and the fresh fragrance of roses came to her distinct from the perfume of sandalwood, of which some of the furnishing of the room consisted. The fire had been replenished and its light and the glow from a lamp of curious Eastern design shed a soft radiance through the room and a luster over the deep violet tone of its draperies. The high-armed chair awaited her pleasure before the tabouret from which the linen had been removed. In its place was a silver tray bearing a glittering tea service, and from the kettle the steam puffed jubilantly.

Her eyes turned from it quickly and her glance fell on the table holding the lamp. The jeweled eyes of the serpents forming its design revealed significantly a freshly opened box of cigars and a decanter of liquor and glasses as well as the evening papers, late books and magazines which had for a few weeks occupied it solely. The trace of tenderness the woman's face had possessed during the afternoon vanished, and her soul ceased to be tormented.

Through half-drawn curtains she saw her trim maid moving busily about her dressing-room arranging the accessories for her toilet, and called sharply, "Elise!"

The maid started, dropped an armful of chiffon over a chair and hurried into the room exclaiming apologetically: "Why, Miss Pauline! I did not hear you come in!" She quickly slipped the cloak from her mistress' shoulders, wondering curiously what pressing need had taken her into the storm in her negligée and slippers, and with a solicitude that invited a confidence said: "It is a very bad storm to be out in, Miss Pauline. Come to the fire, I have your tea ready for you—or shall I bring you some brandy?"

"If I feel the need of anything I will get it for myself. Remove the tray; I shall not want tea, and put that chair somewhere—anywhere—away from the fire!"

The maid hastened to remove the cheerful cause for irritation, and as she bent to lift the tray saw the telegram placed there a short time before and carried it to her mistress, who still stood by the door, her eyes narrowed, and her lips compressed into a thin, scarlet line across her white face. She took the telegram from the maid without question, opened it, read its message, walked to the fire and threw it to the flames—deliberately. "Mr. Castelli has returned, as I see you have divined"—nodding slightly toward the table. "I shall dine with him to-night. When you have finished here, come to my room."

Her maid found her seated before her mirror searching her fair unhappy face, and kneeling to remove her damp slippers said: "Take care! Miss Pauline; search the face and find the devil!"

The woman laughed harshly. "No need to search, Elsie; he has always been at my shoulder!" Then she inquired briskly. "Is my bath ready?" She looked at the black chiffon falling over the chair and demanded: "Where is the gown Chârièse sent yesterday? I do not wish to wear black to-night."

"But, Miss Pauline," the maid demurred, "that gold net is very fragile; you may ruin it in the storm. You have only worn the black once."

"Well, I don't want to wear it again—you may have it. Bring my sapphires—the cut ones. I want my most beautiful and costly jewels to-night."

The maid's face beamed her delight at the sudden and extravagant gift, and her thanks would have been profuse had they not been interrupted by her mistress' many quick demands for her services.

Seated again before her mirror, her body refreshed, her mind dull, she watched listlessly her maid's deft fingers fluff the fair bright hair about her face and secure it with a sapphire fillet, and took no interest in the gown, smilingly brought and fastened about her tall supple figure, or in the beauty its grace revealed.

Indifference toward her toilet was not the woman's habit, and her strange mood affected and perplexed her maid. The tears sprang to her eyes as she clasped the gems about her neck and arms and said, awe mingling with her admiration: "You are very beautiful to-night, Miss Pauline. Is it an important dinner?"

"No. You may leave the room as it is and go now; I wish to be alone. Leave word at the office for Mr. Castelli that I shall not be ready for an hour and I am not to be disturbed— Oh, Elise!" she called, as her maid started toward the door. "I had forgotten. Bring me my purse."

She sat down before a small inlaid desk, wrote something on a card and emptied the generous contents of the purse the maid handed her into an envelope, slipped in the card, sealed and addressed the envelope and handed it to her saying: "Send this by messenger at once." Then. "No. Take it yourself. You may have a taxicab and, if you do not like to go alone, ask someone to go with you—it is early, and it is not far—but go at once. Good-by, Elise."

"*Good-by,* Miss Pauline?" She lingered a moment, then left the room with a timidity new to her, scenting calamity.

Left to herself the woman sat quietly at her desk, destroyed a few papers (for her desk held little of an intimate character), made out a few checks, stamped and addressed them and arranged them in a neat pile. Leaving her desk open she stood up, stretched her arms above her head with her hands tightly clenched, and said in a loud, clear voice: " 'Marble hearts whose gold bought souls shall ever be the ministers of misery, destruction and death!' *God help my soul!"*

Her arms fell to her sides; she looked slowly around her room and passed quickly from it into her drawing-room, and crossed to a bookcase. Searching impetuously among its treasures she found the book she desired, sat down on a low stool before the table holding the lamp, and turned its leaves eagerly. She had not been long occupied with the contents of a page pertaining to some Eastern lore that would further a recently formed intent, when she grew conscious of being watched, and looked up quickly to meet the jewel-eyes of the serpents gazing at her familiarly.

The room became suddenly stifling. Her book dropped to the floor, and she trembled as she poured a glass of liquor from the decanter, set it down without tasting it, arose, and threw open a window. The curtain bellied out like a sail and the cold damp air rushed in. She leaned far out and let the wind sweep against her face with all its vivifying strength. It caught the ends of a scarf thrown across her shoulders and held it taut; and as it were in answer to a voice she cried out: "I am coming, I am coming!"

Pausing only to wrap herself in the thick soft cloak the maid had left conveniently thrown over a chair, she passed swiftly from the room, and out into the storm. Around the corner of the street a line of public cabs were standing near the sidewalk, and she stepped into one of

them and bade the chauffeur drive quickly.

In her eagerness to enter again the little room she sped up the many flights of stairs which had a short time ago seemed steep and dreary. As she reached the top the door flew open and with a glad cry the girl sprang toward her. "Ah, Madame, it is you! I am so please'! I feel you will come to me—I know!" Radiant and excited she drew her into the room and hovered about her, exclaiming: "See! Is it not warm for you? Your letter, it tell me many things. But I know—you are too strong with life to have the wish to die—it is not to be. I open my window and send my prayer out on to the wind and I feel you will come."

She pushed a chair near the glowing stove and began to unfasten the woman's cloak, murmuring caressingly: "Ah, to think I have so beautiful a thing in my little room!"

"My little friend," the woman's voice broke, then went on steadily as she gently took the girl's hands in her own and looked down into her shining eyes. "My little friend, I have come to live with you, and you are not to do these things for me—to wait on me. My hands are strong, and not incapable and they are to serve you and me, and help me to be of use in the world. To-morrow we will look for the 'little *appartement,* soft and warm'! When does your little son come home?"

"Ah, Madame, so much that is good happen to me. He is to come, may be, this end of this week, and he is to be straight alway! I find the letter when I come to my room, and, when I read, with my joy I have the fear, for I have not so much to make him comfort'. Then came to me your letter, fill' with so much money that I need, and again I have the happiness, and the fear—for you, Madame. Now *you* come to me, and everything is happiness! Is it not too much?" She caught her lip between her teeth and her eyes glistened with tears that did not fall.

The woman turned from her abruptly, then again sought her eyes and said humbly: "Do you think I will ever be good enough to share your little son with you?"

The girl's face quivered and grew wistfully serious. "I think," she said, "it is like this: When we are good and the temptation for badness come to us too strong, the good it is not remembered. So if we have make the mistake, and after, we have the wish and the effort to be good—the badness—it is vanish' as—it—has—never—been. I cannot make it an explanation! To me, you are most beautiful and good and I have the love for you in my heart. It is my wish for my little son to feel it also."

And the two women found themselves clasped in each other's arms. A long embrace of tenderness and trust and understanding.

Into the early hours of the morning they sat by the little stove making the plans they were to work out together.

THE SILENT PARTNER

By Nalbro Bartley

A ROAR outside caused Maxwell to stop dictating to the stenographer. A crowd of rowdies passing *The Bulletin* newspaper office were cheering a poster of Donald Steele, candidate for governor.

Maxwell gazed out the window to smile at the mob. "It looks like a clean sweep, Miss Burgoyne," he found time to add as he continued with the letter.

Five minutes later Bobby Crandall burst into the office. "Max, come inside, I want to see you alone."

Maxwell looked up in surprise. It was unlike Crandall to come rushing in before the office force.

"All right," he told him briefly. "What's wrong—the Haviland county chairman hasn't backed water——"

"Backed hell!" Crandall took off his

hat and jammed it viciously on the table. Maxwell promptly closed the door.

"What's up?"

"I knew it'd come," said Crandall bitterly. "Trust petticoats to kick up the final dust. I told Steele to bury the skeletons. He laughed."

An imperative knock sounded. Maxwell opened the door to admit the burly form of Fighting Jim Roland, Steele's backer. Maxwell was his secretary; Crandall his younger cousin.

"Well," said Fighting Jim slowly, nodding "hullo." "I certainly do not like the way things are going. Seems to me——"

"Out with it. I'm dead with work and speeches to get ready and press stuff and crank letters. If it's anything vital about Don's success, put it on the table."

Crandall burst out impulsively. "Vital? It means Don's failure. It means that the inevitable woman in the case has turned up. She made a head for the associated press table last night after the rally; jumped for Yaeger and would have told the whole story if Jim hadn't side-tracked her. The press are wise. They're watching like a cat with a baby rat. They'll wait until the scandal breaks and then they'll wipe Don nicely with the mud, set him on an outside window sill to harden and crumble while they elect Hardy governor!"

Fighting Jim, who had backed many campaigns, smiled at the boy's excitement. "The kid has sized it. Don's got a bigger fight on than he counted for. When a woman steps into the ring, there's no umpire needed."

"Then there was stuff to be raked up?" Maxwell's brown eyes had a far-away look. "I was afraid of it."

"What did she do?" asked Crandall, staring reproachfully at a lithograph poster of Don Steele.

Outside came a din of horns. A group of youngsters were electioneering in behalf of Steele.

"Rah, rah, rah for Honest Steele!
Always gives a good square deal——"

Hooting followed the mock parade. Fighting Jim scratched his head in perplexity.

"Of course this is not the time to judge Steele," he remarked; "it is the time to put a gag on Laura Hunt's mouth. What Steele did or did not do has nothing in common with election day. You know his grip on the people has been through his spotless record, unblemished past—that sort of thing. The public is more swayed by that than by what he has ever done in public life. We know it. Good God, we three are closest to him. The rest are leeches, hangers-on. They're waiting to change their coats for the season as soon as they know which party gets in. But we've got the old boy's interest at heart."

"The woman—what did she say—what does she know?"

"She went to the press table last night. Didn't try to make a scene or get behind to see Steele. She'd been up in the gallery during the rally. Went to Yaeger, you know the man, and said she had some side-lights on the prospective governor's life that wouldn't look well in print. Yaeger acted like a fish out of water. I stepped in and claimed the right as a newspaper proprietor to hear them first. Yaeger could have knifed me. But the woman was easily influenced; she has never tried a game like this before. She followed me outside and I took her to the nearest hotel parlor.

"She told me the whole story. Has the letters and God knows what to make Steele out a double-dyed villain. It wasn't decent, if it's as she tells it. But we can't stop for that now. The fight's on. One word of this in the press and it'd kill him—sure. What chance would my sheet have against all the others? Steele's on the southern circuit now; imagine the rural population if they should read Laura Hunt's story. Don would be as dead as any stiff in the morgue."

Fighting Jim mopped his face in despair. Maxwell turned white as he listened. Crandall grasped the front of the chair on which he straddled and held it desperately.

"How are you going to stop her?" he demanded.

"Don't know."

"Where is she?"

"Outside in a taxi. I've kept her quiet up to now by promising her the exclusive use of my sheet in which to tell her troubles. She's as bitter as a 'me-child, me-child' melodrama. She wants to queer Steele. Those were her very words."

"Can't be bought?" asked Maxwell.

Fighting Jim shook his head. "Don't need money, seems to be well off. Just came back from Europe in time to spoil the whole show."

"Of course Steele doesn't know. He left on the early train."

"Of course he doesn't know. And, what is more, he must never know. Even if it were all covered up and his hide was safe, he'd lose confidence in himself and imagine it was stamped all over him—like the mark of the beast. He's that stripe."

"What are you going to do with her?" reiterated the younger man.

"Ask something easy," said Fighting Jim. "A revengeful woman is worse than a Bengal tiger after a jungle famine. This one has a nasty twist to her tongue that would get the mob."

Maxwell answered a rap. A wordy epistle was handed in indorsing Donald Steele as candidate for governor. It was signed by the Union of Ministers.

"There," commented Crandall, "that is the stuff Don is banking on. Why, this little story would queer their whole vote. Hardy doesn't care; he's got the sporting class, the law-breaking set. He glories in his past. Don banks on it."

Maxwell bit his lips nervously. "We can't ask her to wait in the cold much longer. She may take it into her head to go to *The Ledger* and bleat the whole story."

"I wouldn't put money either way," said Fighting Jim peevishly. "If you had kept an angry woman quiet, addressed two luncheon clubs and taken anti-fat exercises, you'd have a little more idea what a strenuous life means. Buy her silence? I've offered her more for those fool letters than you'll earn in five years. I tell you it isn't money she wants, it's the exquisite joy of making Steele suffer."

"What does she think you are going to do?" asked Maxwell.

"Don't know. I told her it was only fair to wait until I had seen Steele's secretary, seeing that Steele was out of town."

"She must not be allowed to talk," interposed Crandall weakly.

"Then suppose you keep her still," advised Fighting Jim. "Believe me, this is not in my line. I can go down to the Tenderloin and make stump speeches, but I'm nothing when it comes to hushing the weeps. And there is one thing I want you to understand right now. I will *not* marry this woman in order to make Don governor. Absolutely not. If anyone has to be led to the slaughter, it will be you, Maxwell. You know that trick has been worked."

A feeble laugh followed. "What did he mean by writing her?" asked Crandall angrily. "This is a new side to Don."

"The oldest side in the world," answered Fighting Jim philosophically; "but damned inconvenient when you want the vote of the God-fearing people. Boys, here's an iron-clad rule. *Tell 'em anything you want, but don't write it.*"

"There is only one chance left," said Maxwell suddenly. "One chance of putting Don in the governor's chair. Get Mrs. Steele to help!"

Crandall sprang to his feet at the mention of her name. "Never," he declared stoutly. "Drag Joyce into it? It's to shield her as well as Don. You don't know Joyce."

"Yes, I do," answered Maxwell slowly, "that is why I want her help. We all know what Don claims she is to him—his Silent Partner."

They were still for a moment, each one thinking of the slender, gracious woman whose very presence lent such a charm. The woman to whom Don Steele showed only the best and truest of his nature; the woman to whom he owed his ambition, his success, his possibilities. To drag her into a distasteful political mess?

"Women were not cut out for things

like this," decided Fighting Jim. "If she was a militant suffragette she might match this other. But her type's the quiet, suffering sort that waits until she is alone before she cries. No, we don't want Mrs. Steele to know about it."

Maxwell shook his head. "She must know. She's our last hope. If she cannot come to the front, Don will never be governor. Then she'll know the reason for the crushing defeat."

"How could she help?" asked Crandall curiously.

"I don't know just what she would do," said Maxwell; "who could? But she'll face the situation without flinching. If anyone can put a seal on Laura Hunt's mouth, it is she."

"What's your plan?" asked Fighting Jim.

Outside the telephones were ringing incessantly. Men tramped in and out, boasting of winning bets. The evening traffic rumbled by. Maxwell was tired. The campaign had been a severe test of his friendship for Donald Steele. Sometimes he wondered whether this man possessed all the fineness he expressed so freely. Was it more to be recorded on the side of the Silent Partner's ledger?

"Tell Laura Hunt she can see Mrs. Steele first of all," he answered wearily. "That sort love creating scenes. She doesn't dream of being admitted to Mrs. Steele. That would be too good."

"And then?"

"Don't you see? You take her up there, or I'll take her up there, and Yaeger will know she is at Steele's house. If the Silent Partner succeeds, they haven't a ghost of a show. She has merely been a guest. And if the worst comes, we've all played our best."

"Fire away," said Fighting Jim briefly, "I can't match you."

Maxwell gave a sigh of relief as he reached for his hat and coat. "Stay here to take messages," he told Crandall.

"Let me stay, too," begged Fighting Jim pathetically; "I'm sick of being told over and over again what a low-browed brute Don is—and she uses musk perfume."

Maxwell smiled grimly. He thought of Steele, secure in his private car, a hundred miles away. He thought of the Silent Partner reading press clippings of the campaign's progress, writing speeches for women's clubs, praying for victory——

"All right, Jim," he said; "I'll fight single-handed."

He found the taxi thumping away outside. The woman in the fur coat raised her heavy eyebrows in studied surprise as he introduced himself.

"Miss Hunt, I've been sent out by Mr. James Roland. He is unavoidably detained." To the driver: "Drive to Mrs. Donald Steele's house—No. 657 Essex avenue." A man standing on the curb started. So did the woman inside the cab.

"Where are we going?" she demanded. "I want my rights; I've been kept from talking long enough. Your fat friend tried to make me——"

"You may talk all you please in a few moments," Maxwell told her courteously; "I am taking you to Mrs. Steele. She will hear your story."

"Her?"

"It's not a pleasant story to tell. But we thought it better she should know before the papers broke out with it."

The woman gave a satisfied click of her strong, white teeth. So she was going to have first chance at hurting his wife. "It's just as well I do see her," she commented. "I should have seen her before they married."

"It would have been better," Maxwell said gently.

The woman stared at him in surprise. All along the dusky streets groups of enthusiastic rooters for Steele were heard. Large posters of the candidate occupied prominent places. The woman felt a twinge of envy as she heard snatches of Steele's popularity. She, who had no share in any of it.

"He's no better than the rest," she said bitterly as they rounded a corner.

"Indeed?" Maxwell understood Fighting Jim's peevishness.

"I suppose she'll deny it," said the woman with a scornful inflection in her deep voice; "they usually do. But it's

true; every word I tell her is the truth. I knew him as no other woman ever can or——"

"We are here," interrupted Maxwell coldly, helping her to alight. The gray stone mansion loomed up majestically. She looked at it in awed silence. "So this is where—he lives," she murmured.

"Ask Mrs. Steele to come down at once," Maxwell told the butler. "You can tell her it is urgent." He walked up and down the hall restlessly. The woman took a seat in the drawing-room gazing at the surroundings. Looking in at her, Maxwell saw a certain loud beauty that must have labelled her as "stunning" some years ago. Hard lines were about her mouth and her eyes looked tired. Her coat was edged with ermine and the plumed hat bespoke the musical comedy actress. She wore flashy diamond earings and a wishbone of brilliants.

"What a half-tone she'd make for an extra," Maxwell thought, a stir of the old newspaper man awakened.

"It's a pretty neat hut, isn't it?" she called out. "I remember when he was glad to——"

A rustle of soft skirts interrupted her. Maxwell ran up to the landing to meet Joyce Steele. The woman peered after him. "Wants to tip her off"—she laughed—"well, let him."

Joyce Steele wore her simple, white housegown of the morning. Don had needed extra speeches for some club and she rushed with them up to fifteen minutes ago. Her copper-colored curls were slightly tossed and the blue eyes looked weary. She held out her hand cordially.

"Good news or bad? Have you come to tell me I am late with my copy—is that the word? Can't help it. I've worked straight ahead all day."

"It isn't very good news, Mrs. Steele. You know we would all spare you if we could——"

"Don isn't ill or injured He's worked so hard that I'm holding my breath for fear——"

"Everything points to victory as far as work goes. It's the unpleasant past looming up at the wrong minute. Mrs. Steele, you are a politician's wife; I am his secretary and best friend. We are both working for his good. Neither of us can afford to mince matters. A woman is downstairs, a woman with a bag of letters and nasty facts about your husband and my friend. Once published, they would kill his election. And she is determined to talk. We tried everything but telling you. She will not be satisfied. Mrs. Steele, Don calls you his Silent Partner—will you put aside your own feelings and help him win?"

The color had left her cheeks. As Maxwell paused she asked quickly, "Is she here—in my house?"

"She is willing to tell you her story. We hoped you might persuade her to be silent, argue with her—I really don't know what. Only we looked upon you as a court of last appeal; the election is in danger, you see."

"I understand," she answered, "but it isn't that. I know what defeat would mean to Don. Yet the humiliation of begging silence from——"

"We thought of that," said Maxwell gently. "Fighting Jim, Bobby and I. We didn't want to do this—but she must be silenced."

Joyce lifted her head proudly. "Very well," she said, "I will see her."

"Shall I wait?" Maxwell watched the quivering lips with pity.

"No; if I fail, I will let you know. Please leave the taxi outside for her to go away in. You must go back to headquarters. Here are the speeches, and don't forget the letter to the women's federated clubs. It is important—Don said."

After Maxwell had left her she stood for a moment with her hands pressed across her eyes. She had worked so hard for victory, she had so gloried in the fact of his clean record. And now—to cover up the stains that he might fool the people!

She entered her drawing-room slowly. The woman glanced at her with critical, inquisitive eyes.

Joyce stepped toward her, a quiet sense of authority and possession making the other shrink from her introduction. "Mr. Maxwell tells me you are

trying to prevent my husband's election as governor," she said slowly, "that you have ugly facts to disclose about his past. Would you mind telling them to me—in his absence?"

The woman sat rigidly in her chair. "My name is Laura Hunt," she said stolidly. "I just came back from Europe, where I've been performing. I knew Donald Steele when he was a law student, before he was admitted to the bar. He was too poor to marry then, so I lived as his common-law wife for five years, always earning my own way and sometimes his. He was going to marry me as soon as his practice was bigger. As soon as it was he was too proud. After he made a name he married you. I still heard from him at intervals. I have letters he wrote me, some of them dated as late as last year. There is no doubt as to the truth of my story. I don't think the people will want him for governor."

"Just what is your motive in using the story—the public good?"

Laura Hunt winced under the sarcasm. "It's to pay back a little of the sting and shame I suffered because of him," she said doggedly. "It's to let him know that a man can't always walk out of his downward path without leaving footprints that will be traced. Why should people not know the truth about him as well as they knew it about me? I suffered, and suffered, and no one cared. They called it retribution. And I wasn't twenty-two."

"Then the grudge is purely personal?" Still the Silent Partner was standing.

"If you call it that. I held my tongue until I knew I could hurt him. I hate him now. I used to tell him long ago that he was the sort that came to the front. And I made up my mind, after he left me to drift while he forged ahead, that I'd wait until he was in the public eye before I'd speak."

The butler handed in a telegram. It was from Steele, saying:

"DEAR: Send speeches to Tremont House. Everything booming.

"DON."

Joyce folded the yellow slip methodically and laid it on a table. "And what do you propose doing?" she asked.

"Give the story to the press; let the people know that the virtuous, upright, honorable Don Steele left a girl to starve some years ago; that he felt so guilty later that he sent her large sums of money as a recompense. I could have been buried in Potter's Field for all he cared—then."

"I don't suppose," said Joyce thoughtfully, "there is a single argument in the world to stop you."

"Not one," answered Laura Hunt firmly, "and I wanted to hurt you, too. I've read of you as the 'intellectual Mrs. Steele,' the 'eminent philanthropist'—I know your sort. You hold your skirts so high and blind your eyes to what's going on so that the other half is forced to stay down in the slums."

"Has it occurred to you," said the Silent Partner quietly, "that I am suffering now? That the fact of your existence, your—connection with my husband is a shock? Is it my fault? Have I ever consciously or unconsciously said or done or thought an unkind, unjust thing concerning you? Don't you think I need pity as well?"

"I haven't seen you shedding any tears; you're cold-blooded. I know your sort."

The color flamed into the Silent Partner's cheeks. "Don't be too certain," she said. "Miss Hunt, I'm not going to make a melodramatic appeal for your mercy. You are bent on your own plans. But you are wrong when you call me cold-blooded. I do not cry or faint or become hysterical, as some women do; I haven't that make-up. But I have put my whole heart into this election; I've worked harder than any man at headquarters. I believed in my husband. And at the eleventh hour you come forward to kill the truth I have reverenced ever since my wedding day. I'm not defending Donald Steele; he was wickedly wrong. I'm not blaming you—I might have done the same. But it's in the past; he's a different man than when you knew him. I'm different, you're different—have you thought of that? Have you

thought how people change and grow bigger? How their viewpoints change, their actions broaden? Hasn't my husband in his blunt, selfish, masculine fashion tried to make up for the neglect and cruelty of years ago? It was because he was a changed man that he wanted to make the past as honorable as he could—so he sent you money, the best any man can ever offer a woman he has wronged. That was why he sent you money, Miss Hunt; not because he was bribing your silence. Suppose when you were my husband's—common-law wife—suppose he had given you plenty, protected you from discomfort and censure? Are you quite sure you would have spoken to-day? Or would you have kept silence? Isn't this the feminine desire for revenge, a primitive jealousy of the convention we call marriage?"

"But he gave me no money—until he grew afraid of the past."

The Silent Partner shut her lips tightly. "I'm not excusing him," she said presently. "Of course he was wrong—so were you. But it's over, done with, dead. You don't want money, you don't want my husband. You just said you hate him. What is the satisfaction in killing the belief and faith in thousands of people? A few hours of sensational gloating over your own past weakness. What is the gain? What is the goal? Aren't you satisfied with the victory over me? Haven't I humbled myself enough to you? To beg silence—I, his wife?"

Laura Hunt stood up abruptly. She looked closely into the Silent Partner's quivering face. "Tell me, has he made you suffer, too?"

The other put up a protesting hand. "I have no bag of letters to publish," she said bitterly, "no extra sensationalism to give the press."

"You don't understand," said the woman thickly; "is he—the same?"

"The—same?"

"Is he as determined to trample over obstacles and people that might hamper him? Does he still have the refined, cutting, subtle cruelty that you can only writhe under? Does he silence you when you long to speak, when you blame yourself for your silence? Can he look at you and make you feel that the game is not worth the candle, that the dominant personality can crush your——"

"Stop!"

Laura Hunt was satisfied. "I haven't seen Don Steele in years," she said softly, "but I know now who made him candidate for governor."

The Silent Partner did not move. Laura Hunt laid the bag of letters on the table. "Do you want to read them?" she asked.

"Why should I? Can't you see the marked copies pouring in here?" she laughed shrilly. "I'll know what he wrote you—don't be afraid."

"Are you going to tell him?" asked the woman anxiously. "Will it make a difference between you?"

"He must never know I believe it," said the Silent Partner firmly, "and if they try to tell him I do, I shall lie. It is best to let him think he has kept his mistakes from me."

"It takes more women than a man's mother to make him a success," Laura Hunt murmured.

"Many more," said the Silent Partner wearily.

"Do you hate me?" persisted the woman, her cheeks flushing.

"Why should I? I have the better part. I am only sorry you had the bitter, thankless share of an unacknowledged mate."

"Why?" she asked fiercely.

"Because I am grateful to you—you served your time and purpose first. Donald Steele came to me a finer man because of his earlier experience. It is I who owe the debt. You must not think you have revenged yourself by telling me of the skeleton. You are wrong. You must tell the public if you wish hysterical condemnation, maudlin sympathy."

"There is one other thing," said Laura Hunt slowly. "When the scandal breaks and Don loses out, give him this—and ask him what he remembers."

The Silent Partner started. In the other's hand lay a soiled, white baby shoe, worn at one side and marked with tiny teeth. She grasped it eagerly.

"This—this, too—oh, Don, *Don!*"

"What are you crying for?" demanded the woman. "Ain't your children going to have the best the world can give; ain't they going to have name and——"

"You don't understand." The Silent Partner let her tears come unchecked. "There is no—child."

"I thought—I read——"

"Oh, you've had what I'd give a thousand governorships for," said the Silent Partner; "you've had the one thing that would make this a home. You've had what makes a wife truly precious in her husband's eyes. Tell your story to the press. You have the right, you have the right!"

The starved maternity tipped the scales. The fierce, primitive love of revenge, the stifled desire for recognition, were lost in the eternal sympathy of sex. The flush of victory was chilled; the little shoe had served its purpose.

"What does it all matter?" asked the Silent Partner slowly. "I have made my husband a public man; you have been the mother of his child."

Outside came the noise of home-going factory hands:

"Rah, rah, rah for Honest Steele——"

"You have the right," repeated the Silent Partner stolidly. "I do not ask you to keep silence——"

Impulsively Laura Hunt turned to the woman she suddenly saw in a new light. "It ain't square to you, it ain't square to me, to the best that's in me to let this lie live! It's all a fake, a fake story trumped up by Hardy! He's laid awake nights trying to get something that would queer your husband. I know Hardy—well. And they thought—I was—hard—enough to carry it through. I thought I was, too. I would have been if it hadn't been for the baby shoe. They made me take that along; that would be the fine finale, understand? Don't tremble so, little girl; I tell you it's all a lie—the letters are fakes, the whole thing is phoney—I'm the only bad thing in it—I'm hired. But I can't go through with it—not now—you have the best husband God ever put into this world, for all I know—only God gave him a pretty sharp enemy to fight with and that's Sam Hardy, opposition candidate. It's a fake, I tell you. I'm a fake, a paid liar—and you can look at your husband when he's elected to the governor's chair and say, 'I trust that man as I trusted him the day we were married.' A dry sob broke in her throat as she finished.

For one moment the wife believed, and she drew herself up proudly to order the other woman from her house, and then she hesitated. What was the truth?

"You mean you have lied to me all along? You never knew my husband—you never loved him—you never lived with him—and this"—she touched the baby shoe with the tip of her forefinger—"this, too, is a lie?"

Laura Hunt's head drooped. "Yes," she whispered, her heart beating rapidly, while her brain throbbed with the words: "You fool—you've lost your one chance to get even with him—you fool, to back down now!" But she paid no heed to the voice of common sense; she glowed at the thought that she had been given the chance to retract. The tall, slender woman opposite should have her belief in her husband again, after all—she, the woman cast aside—had had the better part.

Quietly she stole from the room, and the Silent Partner, wrapped in her own thoughts, did not seem to notice her departure, but when she heard the outer door close a shudder shook her slight frame.

The bag of papers lay on the table, they would never be used now, but the little shoe was gone.

And then all doubt vanished, and she knew the truth.

It was late when Steele came to his wife, flushed with victory. She greeted him with a faint imitation of her usual gracious smile.

"I've won," he said, proudly; "I've won, my Silent Partner!"

Tears were in her eyes as she smiled up at him—the smile for the governorship; the tears, symbols of her woman's shattered trust.

ONE WAY

PLAY IN ONE ACT

By Helen K. Roberts

CAST

EDWIN GRANT.....*Stockbroker*
CHRISTINA GRANT, *Wife of Edwin Grant*
MABEL BRANDER.....*Her friend*
POLICE OFFICERS
PORTER

SCENE:—*The dining-room of the* GRANTS' *apartment in Bayswater, London.*

TIME:—*The present.*

When the curtain rises MRS. GRANT *is talking to her friend. The table is daintily laid for dinner for one person. There is a chafing-dish and signs of food being kept hot for some one on the sideboard.*

The room shows feminine taste and is cozy and dainty. MRS. GRANT *herself is an extremely well-dressed, attractive and pretty woman, with a slight, graceful figure—rather unhappy looking, but it is evident that though she has made a mistake in her marriage, she is determined to put a brave face on the misfortune, and has not allowed herself to become slovenly in her personal appearance.*

CHRIS (*bitterly*): Mabel! It never does to let the outside world get an inkling of what is going on within. That's just it. It is pride that makes us women endure, and endure, and *endure!* We make a mistake in our marriage and are too proud to own it. After all, it is rather like a maze, isn't it? It looks easy enough to get out of, but it isn't. I'm afraid lately things have been too glaring with our concerns, and the outside world *is* getting a peep into what our life is. *Life!* Hardly an existence—for me!

MABEL (*is silent for a moment and can only think of the obvious phrases of sympathy*): My poor friend! How I wish I could help you! Why—why don't you leave your husband?

CHRIS: Leave him? Supposing I do? Have you thought of what a woman's life is, separated from her husband? There she is, bound, fettered, still a wife, yet not a wife. That is the curious part of it all. Here in England a woman is expected to submit to and suffer every imaginable cruelty without a murmur; but she must never under any circumstances leave her husband—unless she has grounds for divorcing him. I can't divorce Edwin, because he is careful to refrain from doing the one thing that would entitle me to a divorce in this country. He has never struck me. The whole thing is so outrageously one-sided! I am made to tolerate the vilest degradations, the most loathsome insults, the actual lashing of soul and spirit, but because my husband has never raised his hand to strike me, I am bound, powerless! Heavens! It's time we had the suffrage if only to change the marriage laws. Why, a cut across my face; a bruise on my body would be *nothing* compared with the torments I endure through his neglect, unfaithfulness, gambling, gibes, tyranny! But he is too clever for that. I am useful to him. He takes all my money—I still have some—and he needs that. His pleasures are expensive.

MABEL: Christina, you can't——

CHRIS: Hush! There he is.

(*They are both silent and sit watching the outer door, which can be seen from the divan when the drawing-room door is open. After some fumbling, accompanied by oaths,* EDWIN GRANT *enters. He is a strong, muscular man of thirty-eight or forty. He doesn't see the visitor, and stands in a violent temper, tugging at the key in the lock.*)

EDWIN: Hell! Damn that key! It's stuck again. Damn the blasted thing! (*He eventually pulls it out, bangs the door, with a snarl, turns and says an-*

grily): I want dinner. (*Directly he has said this his face changes when he sees* MABEL, *and wears the smile of the greatest good-nature. It is almost impossible to believe this kindly countenance capable of even a moment's temper, there is such a complete change of manner. Both* CHRISTINA *and* MABEL *rise.*)

CHRIS: Oh! Mrs. Brander is here. She is just going.

EDWIN (*smiling, with extended hand and great gush and palaver*): How do you do, my dear Mrs. Brander? Why, this is a pleasure! Delightful, delightful! Have you and Christina had a nice chat? Won't you sit down? Do. I want to hear all the news. We can't let you run away. Well, now, how do you like the new flat?

MABEL (*still standing*): Very much, thank you.

EDWIN: Let me see now, is it upstairs or down?

MABEL (*with meaning*): Neither. It is across the passage.

EDWIN: Oh! (*Slight pause, he then gushes again.*) But now you must stay and dine with us, if you will. . . . We really can't let you run away! I'm afraid we're without servants. But you won't mind that, will you, as you know us so well—Chris rather? (*With an extra beam.*) I want you to know me, too. We've been without servants for three days. I daresay Chris told you about her fur coat and valuable rings disappearing. Dreadful! So we got rid of the girls. Darling didn't want to, but I insisted. . . . We can't harbor thieves. Chris won't even give them in charge.

CHRIS: Do stay if you will, Mabel. We're all alone to-night. The new maids come to-morrow, I am glad to say. Mary has been round helping all day, but I let her go home at nine.

EDWIN: Yes, we're all alone to-night, but I'm sure dearie has something good she can give us. Haven't you, darling?

MABEL: Thank you, no. I dined two hours ago.

EDWIN: Two hours ago! Really! (*Taking out his watch.*) Why, yes, so it is! Ten o'clock! How time flies when one is working hard. Positive slavery at the office, Mrs. Brander. Slavery, I assure you—slavery!

MABEL (*ignoring him*): Good-by, Christina, dear. We must see much of each other now that we are neighbors. I shall keep a sharp eye on you now. (*With a glance at* EDWIN, *who laughs uncomfortably. She kisses* CHRISTINA *and bows to* EDWIN.) Good night, Mr. Grant.

(*She ignores* EDWIN'S *outstretched hand. He opens the door with right hand, and apparently doesn't acknowledge slight.*)

EDWIN (*with great fervor*): It is most unkind of you to run off like this—most unkind, isn't it, darling? Well, it was charming to see you, very, very charming. Good-by, dear Mrs. Brander. *Adieu*, rather *au revoir!*

(MABEL *exits. He shuts the door and turns round with the cruel, bad-tempered expression on his face he wore at his entrance.*)

EDWIN (*severely*): Understand me once for all. I will not have that woman coming here. I've said this to you before. I am saying it again. (*Shouts.*) Do you hear me? Answer! you mute fool!

CHRIS: I hear you. I am sorry. She is my oldest friend, my only friend. Now that they have come to live opposite it will be difficult to ignore her altogether. But, of course, if you—(*She pulls herself together and determines to be amiable and cheerful.*) Never mind, dear. She sha'n't come. Now I'll get your dinner. I daresay you are ravenous.

EDWIN (*interrupting*): She can't come here. That is final. Drop the subject—and drop her. Get my coat. Get my dinner. (*She fetches coat.*) And try and look as if you had a little life in you. You didn't wait, I observe. No!

(*She gives him his soup from the sideboard.*)

EDWIN: I think I have told you a hundred times that I can't eat canned soup.

CHRIS: Ed, you know quite well that it is not canned. But if you don't like it, you needn't eat it. There's some salmon—you like that, you know.

EDWIN: I know it is canned. Can't

you manage your domestic affairs better, so that we don't have to make shift in this way? You're pretty mum to-night. What has been upsetting you?

CHRIS (*taking his plate, still being cheerful*): Nothing—nothing. Now—you can eat salmon.

EDWIN: No, I don't want fish.

CHRIS: What will you have? Some cutlets and some asparagus?

EDWIN: Give me a cutlet. (*She does so.*) This meat isn't fresh. (*He puts down his knife and fork and pushes his plate away.*) What a meal! (*He snatches the flowers from the vase and throws them in the fireplace.*) I abominate pink flowers.

CHRIS (*still remaining good-tempered*): Shall I cook you something? Let me! You must eat. You see, I expected you at half past seven. Let me cook something.

EDWIN: No! (*He rises and goes to sideboard and pours out a whisky and soda, and takes up his position back to the fire and drinks it as she clears away.*) No! Good God! Christina, what a sight you look! You're not a Venus, poor dear, are you? I saw Mrs. Kenworthy to-day. Dear little Kitty! Now she is a smart woman!

CHRIS (*exasperated at last*): I can't think why you never married Kitty instead of——

EDWIN: A bag of bones! (*She winces.*) Well, I sometimes wonder the same thing, except that one must look at the practical advantages of marriage before one takes the plunge. She certainly has wit and charm! Gee! It takes a Kentucky woman to know how to love! You English women have no "go" or vitality. Of course, if Kitty had only had your mon—never mind—perhaps—Kitty knows how to keep a man amused; one wouldn't have got to the end of her so soon! And her friend Marion, too! What a ravishing creature! There she was, looking handsomer than ever! What a figure! What skin! Why can't you take a lesson from her and *dress* instead of just draping exhibition tablecloths round that sloppy body of yours? Really, you are such bad style, I hate to take you out. Oh, well, that's what comes of marrying—beneath you. (*He lights a cigarette and takes another whisky and soda.*)

CHRIS (*stung at the insolence and injustice of this last remark*): You—*you* dare to cast a slur on my family! (*Gently*) I seem altogether unlucky in pleasing you. I am sorry about your dinner. You know I was obliged to get rid of the servants when my fur coat disappeared. I won't give either of them in charge, because somehow I can not feel sure that they stole either that or my rings. That coat Dad gave me was worth a whole lot of money. I wish we could trace it! If only you would take the matter up, I know we could. But you're so curiously indifferent about my affairs. Even when it is a serious matter like the theft of a fur coat and valuable rings. I've done my best so that you should feel no discomfort nor inconvenience about the servants. I do wish I could please you, and that we could live happily together. We're drifting wider and wider apart. Things have been going from bad to worse with us. I have tried—so hard—to make you happy! I've given up all my friends to please you.

EDWIN: Nice freaks, too!

CHRIS: You've apparently no idea how you hurt me! My own people never even come near me now. What am I to do? What is wrong? A man and wife must bear with one another. I've done my best. Our life has become intolerable, and yet I've done my best. Indeed, I have! (*Her cheerfulness has departed completely. She is now miserable and hopeless.*)

EDWIN: Are you starting to snivel? For God's sake cut that out! You love to play the rôle of an ill-used martyr, don't you, like the heroine of a cheap novelette! I tell you, you're a damned fool! God! How you get on my nerves! This attitude of yours toward those thieving servants is one of your fool Lady Bountiful poses. You mawkish idiot! Shut the window (*she does so*), it's freezing in here. (*Pause.*) Have you heard from your father to-day?

CHRIS: No.

EDWIN: Isn't the letter due?

CHRIS: You know he advanced me this quarter's allowance some weeks ago, —that's what you're referring to. (*Going to him.*) Ed, you've not been gambling again?

EDWIN: Supposing I have? (*He turns away;* CHRISTINA *crosses and sits on stool R.*) Come now, don't be unreasonable. You're married to a man; you're not tied up to a jelly-bag, and a man has a man's temptations. . . . I've been unlucky. Will Carlton and I had a game just before we dined, and——

CHRIS: Oh, you've already dined?

EDWIN: Well?

CHRIS: All right, dear.

EDWIN: Listen to me. I'm in a hole, and you've got to help me out, Christina. You're to get me five hundred pounds by to-morrow midday.

CHRIS: I can't. I really can't. I haven't it!

EDWIN (*bullying her*): Well, you can get it, and, what's more, you shall get it. No humbugging me, d'you hear! Sit down and write to your father. Tell him you've been speculating foolishly, or tell him your lungs are bad and that you have to go abroad for an expensive treatment. Say you have heart trouble, say anything that will bring it immediately and make him wire the money. Get up! (*She rises mechanically and walks to desk and sits down.*)

CHRIS: Are you forgetting how often I've written for money and how, quarter after quarter, *you* have had every penny of my allowance? You complain of my clothes being dowdy; how can I help it? I have no money to spend on them. My father makes me a generous allowance, but it is yours now, not mine, and I don't begrudge it to you. I've placed it all at your disposal to help you in your difficulties. But this time I must refuse. I simply dare not write again.

EDWIN: You will write at once! Listen, Chris, I must have five hundred pounds, and you must get it for me. No (*with a sneer*), not from your father; ask Jim Hartley.

(*Pause.* CHRISTINA *turns in her chair and looks up at him.*)

CHRIS: Jim Hartley? What are you thinking of?

EDWIN: Your lover.

CHRIS (*perfectly quietly*): You lie!

EDWIN (*sneering*): You will write.

CHRIS: I shall not.

EDWIN: Damn you! You will.

CHRIS: I shall not. Jim Hartley is *not* my lover, and you know it. He is one of the rare men of this world able to give a great and fine friendship to a woman loyally and nobly. I know he loves me, but by daring to insinuate that he is my lover you insult us both. I've tried my best to do my duty by you—you have stoned my love to death. I see now, you never have cared. It was all a trick . . . you only wanted my money—my money! (*Rises.*) Ah! (*facing him, with horror, as an idea flashes through her brain.*) Edwin! Did *you* take my sealskin coat? Why, of course you did! And my rings! I see it in your face—you did—you did! (*She walks up and down the room in despair.*) Heavens! I'm married to a *thief!*

EDWIN (*his face dark with rage*): Don't make such a fuss! What if I did? You're my wife, aren't you? And I shall take whatever I damned well please. And what's more . . . you're to get that money, and stop trying a "pure soul" bluff on me. You evidently think I'm color blind to believe in innocence the shade of yours. Jim Hartley will do anything you ask. So ask. (*Raising his voice to a shout.*) Do what I tell you. (*He moves R. near sideboard.*)

CHRIS (*standing C. back of table*): I shall not. And now we've come to the end, you and I. My life with you is one long degradation from morning to night. You neglect me; you make a slave of me; you flaunt your mistresses in my face, and spend my money on them. Oh, yes! I know where the money goes—on women, and cards, until our name has become a by-word. And I have been hoping that by patience I could win you back, but when you couple my name with a man who respects me, and whom I respect, here is our end—yes—*our end.* The spirit you have tried to crush and trample on is surging up in me at this

last insult of yours. *I* have a life to live, too. Now—understand, I have borne all I intend to bear. I see you now for what you really are—a thief—a bully—and a coward. I despise you from the depths of my soul. This isn't marriage, it is bondage, and I *won't* be tied to a thing like you any longer. (*She sweeps everything off the table, shakes her hair down and rushes to the window, throws it open, pulls down curtains, leans out, shrieking violently.*) Help! Help! Murder! Help! (*Tears open her collar.*)

EDWIN (*too surprised at the turn things have taken to do anything, and he just sits still and gasps*): My God! What are you doing?

CHRIS: Seeking my release! Help! Will no one come? (*She goes through the antics of a woman brutally handled. He is too flabbergasted to move.*)

EDWIN: Have you gone out of your mind?

CHRIS (*screaming*): Help! Help! I'm being murdered! See the crowd collecting, yet nobody dares to stir. Help! Mercy! Why, you might be actually cutting my throat before any one would move to save me. Help! Help! Will no one come?

EDWIN: For God's sake, be quiet! (*Beginning to realize her tactics are dangerous to himself jumps up and goes to the door.*)

CHRIS: Help! Yes, there's some one coming at last! Help me! At last! at last!

EDWIN: Be quiet! Control yourself. (*He turns from the door, goes over to her, and for the first time touches her. He fiercely puts his hand over her mouth and catches her right arm just as the* POLICE OFFICER *enters, accompanied by the* PORTER *with another policeman.* MRS. BRANDER *follows.* EDWIN *releases his wife immediately, and she falls on to the divan.*) Policeman (*in the suavest tones he can produce under the circumstances*), my wife—my poor wife——

(MRS. BRANDER *crosses over to* CHRISTINA.)

P. OFF.: All right, we'll soon settle you, my man. (*Handcuffs him. To the* PORTER): Stand at the door and admit no one.

EDWIN (*indignant and excited*): Here, this is preposterous! You don't know what you're doing.

CHRIS (*moaning*): He tried to kill me.

EDWIN: That's a lie! She has gone out of her mind.

P. OFF.: We'll hear everything you have to say in the morning. (*To* CHRISTINA): Can I send anyone to you, Ma'am?

CHRIS (*sobbing and moaning still*): No, no, keep everyone away. I shall be all right alone.

EDWIN (*during these remarks and their subsequent conversation he interpolates the following, and the* POLICEMAN *makes notes in notebook*): I haven't touched the woman. It's a damned trick. Take these handcuffs off me. It's lies. It's a trick. She's crazy. This isn't fair play. It's an outrage. (*To* CHRISTINA): You liar! You shall pay for this!

MRS. B. (*getting water for* CHRISTINA): Drink this. Shall I send for a doctor?

CHRIS: Thank you. No. I'm bruised . . . that's all. (*Moans.*) Mabel, stay with me. Don't go, don't leave me, don't leave me!

(*She lies on the cushions moaning. Drinks a little water and hands back glass to* MRS. BRANDER, *who replaces it on the sideboard.*)

EDWIN (*quickly to* CHRISTINA, *while* MRS. BRANDER'S *back is turned*): Curse you, damn you, you fool! I'll wring your neck. I'll choke you for this. Don't you know that this means ruin for me?

MABEL: Do you feel any better, dear?

CHRIS: Yes, thank you, Mabel.

EDWIN (*trying to control himself, and realizing abuse is unwise*): This is all hysteria. She's—my poor darling is ill—she is——

P. OFF.: Silence! (*To* CHRISTINA): Madam, can I rely on your presence at the police court at ten to-morrow morning?

CHRIS: At ten? Yes, I will be there.

EDWIN (*talking through their remarks, desperate again*): It's false! You're all being fooled. I'm not a wife beater.

You liar! Take these things off me—take them off, I say. I swear to you it's a mistake. My God! Take them off!

P. OFF. (*to* MRS. BRANDER): And your name, Madam?

MRS. B.: Mrs. Brander—I live in the flat opposite—No. 6.

P. OFF.: Can I depend upon you, too, as a witness?

MRS. B.: Certainly—by all means.

P. OFF.: Good night. Thank you, Madam. (*To* CHRISTINA): I hope you will feel better. (*To* EDWIN, *who is still expostulating*): Come along!

(*Leads off* EDWIN, *who is shouting and struggling wildly, with the help of another* POLICEMAN *followed by the porter who shuts the door.*

CHRIS: Good night.

(*When they have gone, and their voices are no longer heard,* CHRISTINA *springs up, alive and excited.*)

CHRIS: Mabel! This means my freedom—at last, at last! Free! Free!

CURTAIN

THE HUNCHBACK OF THE CASENTINO

By Ida Warner MacLean

AT thirty-five, having made an enviable name by painting French peasant life, Carleton surprised his world by suddenly turning his face toward Italy. In Florence he looked about, and decided on setting up his easel in one of the quaint villages clustered on the many hills of the Casentino—that "loveliest vale of Tuscany."

Armed with maps and a fair knowledge of the language, he set out directly, but without haste, to find just the place he wanted; ranging leisurely, but—and this was Carleton's special characteristic—always keeping his objective well in view.

One day, pausing at the Convent of S. Eremo, he stood in one of the tiny gardens, conversing with a kindly faced monk, while the clear morning light shone full upon his strong-featured, thin-lipped face and tall, muscular figure. Unseen by him from out a tiny window in a nearby building, a pair of strange, yellow-gray eyes were staring at him, and followed his retreating form until a turn of the road shut it from their sight.

Throughout the length and breadth of the Casentino every hill is crowned by a small town or village—clusters of humble cottages grouped about its own more or less crumbling "castello," where in old days one's good neighbors might be kept under discreet surveillance. Passing many in review, Carleton suddenly decided on Borgo alla Collina as his resting place. Two days later his baggage had arrived, and he was "At home."

This abrupt ending of his wanderings meant the end of his quest. While tramping from one place to another, those cold, bright eyes had taken account of each face they rested upon. His objective was, as ever, well kept in view. Scenery for him meant only the necessary environment, the harmonious setting for the depicting of human life; but his taste was critical and difficult in selection of models. At Borgo alla Collina, while passing by the cottage of a certain *contadino,* he found the type, perfect in each detail, for which he sought.

A slight figure, half-child, yet with a hint of hovering womanhood in rounding angles, had paused in the open doorway, turning to glance over her shoulder in naïve curiosity at the stranger. The large, soft, dark eyes, the wavy, silken hair with blue high lights, creamy brown skin, with the blush of a rose beneath—the girl's coloring was perfect, but not more so than others the painter had seen daily. It was the subtle something in expression, the sensitive dilation of thin

nostrils, the arch sweetness and the hint of pathos about the lovely, coral-pink lips —all these and an underlying possibility for *feeling* which made Peppina what she was, raising her to what Carleton meant by "The Type."

"There she is!" he said to himself contentedly, and at once turned his attention to finding suitable lodgings.

When the painter had gone his way, a figure crouching on the step at the girl's feet stirred—a pair of strange, yellow-gray eyes stared after him.

"An American. I saw him at Camaldoli a week since."

"So? I do not like him, this American."

"Why?"

An expressive downward wave of the hand.

"Because—I do not know—a shiver crept over me when I met his eye."

Her companion rose, uncurling like some couchant animal, and stood upright, showing a strange, stunted figure. Broad-shouldered he was, with long arms, a distorted spine and cruelly twisted and deformed legs. In years he might have been possibly eighteen, but eons of pain looked out of the cavernous eyes, which were surprisingly light and clear and bright in contrast to the overhanging black brows. His face was haggard, with big features, framed in shaggy black hair. Standing, he was scarcely on a level with the girl's shoulder.

"Matteo."

"Si, *nina?*"

"To-morrow we'll go up to the great chestnuts on the edge of the wheat field, and you'll tell me tales of the old days, yes?"

"Maybe."

"But, *yes!* Matteo!"

"Yes, then."

The instant he had made his decision, Carleton set himself to a deliberate study of his environment—to absorb the atmosphere—to saturate himself with local color—to drive out of his consciousness all trace of previous existence. It was one of his theories that only so could one successfully portray the essense of the life encompassing him. When he placed a canvas before the public, those whose opinion was worth while did not say, "Ah, one of Carleton's French things!" but, "Carleton in Brittany, I see," or "in Provence," as it might be. So, to those who knew Dante's beloved vale, next winter would bring alluring recollections of the Casentino.

So he went down the single, winding street of the little village with clear eyes, passing on to the clearly registering brain the mellow grays and yellows, or dingy white of walls and buildings; the solemn dark of cypress spears against the luminous sky; the richer, warmer green of clustered chestnuts; far heights each crowned with time-gnawed fragments of the might and power of past ages. A gay little vagrant of a path beckoned him to leave the dusty state of the high road, and wander errantly through waving, silver-green wheat fields which later would turn to gold, all splashed with blood-red poppies and harboring timid, blue cornflowers.

Presently the little gypsy path he was following was joined by another running gayly down a steep slope and out over grassy meadows toward where the Arno flashed along on her way to escape from the circling hills. Carleton chose to wind upward to where a grove of chestnuts promised grateful shelter from the sun.

His leisurely advance made no sound which was not covered by the whispers of the grain, while the song of some hidden bird suddenly flung upon the air was almost startling. A clump of scrubby growth thrust itself across the way, and as he neared it Carleton became conscious of a voice—a clear, wonderfully sweet and resonant voice, evidently reading or reciting, so even and continuous was its flow. With no premonition that he was blindly following Fate's pointing finger, the painter skirted the screening trees and came upon a picture at which his arrogant spirit leaped, claiming:

"It is mine!"

Detached from the grove to which they belonged, two giant chestnuts had started life as twins, not six feet apart, and succeeding years had so intertwined the luxuriant growth of their towering

forms that eye could scarcely distinguish their separate entities save where the two rough-barked trunks marked their birth.

Facing one another, and each with back to one of the arboreal twins sat two figures. Peppina, one knee drawn up to support an elbow, held her eager face in the cup of a slender, brown hand, while with parted lips and quivering nostrils, with big, absorbed eyes flaring wide and staring, she listened to the dramatic flow of Matteo's words. And Matteo, his long arms wrapped about his dwarfed legs, sat hunched against the tree; his head, with its rough mane atoss, thrown back. But his pain-old face was transfigured by some inner radiance, the light of which streamed from his strange, bright eyes, glowing yellow in the shadow. He was in the midst of some old, barbaric tale of romance belonging to the days when each hill of the Casentino was crowned by the castle of its Prince, "and men were brave and maidens fair." Even as Carleton, halting to absorb each detail of the scene, listened subconsciously to the words of the story-teller, Matteo was saying:

"And the serf, my ancestor, who adored the Princess, set himself to watch the stranger; for he doubted him, and he saw with a hot heart that the Princess' eyes followed him."

It was on the inspired story-teller that Carleton's attention was riveted. The strong, bold features held a curious likeness, for the moment, to the eager rapture of Savanarola. The wild eyes, fixed on something unseen save by his spirit, took no note of actual surroundings. Matteo was no longer living on the hillside of To-day; he was back in the rude medievalism, watching through the eyes of a faithful servant the threatening circle of a hawk above a snow-white dove.

Carleton never "rushed his fences," and he went away, leaving the two on the edge of the grove ignorant of his espionage. But he had the great picture of his year clearly set in his inner vision.

The painter had taken up his lodging in the old castle, and the kindly, voluble landlady entered enthusiastically into the subject of possible models. There was Silvano Torri, if the Signor wanted a fine, handsome, young man, and one with the patience—he would sit or lean for hours without offering to move a finger. The Signor thanked her gratefully and, testing Silvano's powers of repose, found they had in no way been exaggerated. Several preliminary canvases glowed with local color before Carleton made any advances towards the two who he had decreed were to add a deeper note to his world's applause. He watched Peppina saunter away one morning, driving her father's little flock of goats to pasture, and later he followed, with his traps slung across his back.

When he came up with her she was lying against a hillock, with the sun falling in all its fervor on her upturned face and dreamy, half-closed eyes. Her gentle charges nibbled peacefully close by.

Carleton's sudden advent startled the girl. A flame flashed up over her cheek and brow, a look of panic appeared in her soft eyes; then, with a single lithe movement, she was on her feet and away; the flurried goats stormed after over a ridge, and the surprised artist was gazing at an empty hillside.

"My sketch was laid in with fugitive colors," he commented, grimly humorous, and quietly set out in pursuit.

He found the runaways just over the swelling shoulder of the hills, and reinforced. The goats were once more decorously cropping the short grass, and beside Peppina stood the ungainly form of the hunchback, listening to the tale of her late encounter. His light, bright eyes challenged the newcomer, while Peppina, too, stared at him with unfriendly glance. But the girl's expression wavered as Carleton, raising his cap, smiled the frank, meaningless smile which seemed to mean so much. In fairly good Italian he deprecated having frightened the Signorina as well as—a humorous side-glance touched the indifferent quadrupeds—her pretty goats, but he had obtained permission from the mother of the Signorina to ask that she would pose for him to make a little picture.

But, no! Peppina declined to sit still and be painted—hinting that her moth-

er's consent did not necessarily mean her own. The artist argued good-naturedly, and at length turned to Matteo, whose gaze had never left the stranger's face.

"Can't you persuade your sister?" he asked pleasantly.

The Hunchback answered curtly:

"She is not my sister, an' I will not try."

And that was the mistake Matteo made. The obvious disappointment on Carleton's handsome face at this rude rebuff caused one of the queer, illogical shiftings of sentiment feminine mind is subject to. Her first recoil rebounded toward sudden sympathy. She took a hasty step forward, casting a half-angry glance at Matteo's stern, repellent face as she said:

"But, yes, Signor, I have the mind changed; why not? Twenty centesimi to sit still in the sunshine for an hour? Think, Matteo, it will buy me a new ribbon for the *Festa!*"

And Matteo, silent save when the one inspiration moved him to winged words, held his peace. But he remained close by, crouched in his favorite position, where his watchful eyes saw each glance, his jealous ears caught each word that passed.

Carleton wasted no time, but set about his work with swift, sure strokes. Profiting by past experience when dealing with a model of moods, he expended little effort on accessories, but devoted his attention to the lovely, glowing face, so full of the latent possibilities of Southern passion.

Events justified his perspicacity.

Before the first hour was up Peppina, grown cold in her capricious fancy, felt restless, and finally, without warning, sprang to her feet.

"It is enough," she said curtly. "Come, Matteo." And picking up her switch, she stirred the goats to activity, heading them toward home.

"Wait," said Carleton quietly; "don't you want to see this?"

He held out his canvas. Her half-reluctant glance was swiftly changed to a stare of delight mingled with awe. Even Matteo drew in his breath with a sharp hiss. Looking through narrowed lids from one face to the other, the painter smiled inly. There would be no further trouble in coaxing Peppina to pose. Not but what she had her wilful days, when not all Carleton's persuasions, backed by her mother's scandalized scolding, could prevent her from following her beloved pastime of slipping away to some quiet nook with Matteo, where, chained by the Hunchback's fervid eloquence, she let hours pass by drinking in the marvelous old tales he had to tell. No one throughout all the Casentino could tell such tales as Matteo, to whom they had descended from father to son for all the generations which lay between the birth of a proud race in the now-crumbling castle on the hill of Borgo to the present. In those old days the Prince's most devoted follower had been one Matteo —Matteo of the Long Arm. These old romances, poured forth by a poet born, a minstrel belated, and broidered by an imagination enriched by all the passion of a deep, introspective nature, wherein suffering had fined down the barrier between the real world and the unreal, held entranced Peppina's whole being, half-wakened, as she was, to womanhood's first faint stirrings. Poor silver-tongued Matteo, rapt singer, never guessed the echoes he was waking to life in his little playmate's innocent heart, never dreamed that gradually the gallant knights of his romances grew to wear one certain face to Peppina's inner vision. His natural instinct against Carleton was never sufficiently subdued for him to trust the girl from under his own espionage, and the painter was accustomed to the silent figure of the Hunchback crouching close at hand wheresoever he might be at work when Peppina was acting as model. The American was not in the least disturbed by this guardianship; rather, he utilized the opportunities thus afforded to dispel the Hunchback's distrust, and thus pave the way to the sittings for the Great Picture.

The second month of his stay in the Casentino was almost worn away, and the painter, reviewing the sketches already glowing on the dingy walls of his studio, felt exultantly that at last the spirit of the old Tuscan vale had indeed

entered in and taken possession of his being, was ready to guide his hand. It was time to start on the work which should put his name on the tongues of men; should write it indelibly upon the scroll of Fame.

And that day Matteo disappeared.

Carleton was sufficiently annoyed at having to postpone what he wanted to begin at once, but when, in addition, Peppina freakishly avoided him at every turn, thus preventing the study he had planned of her as he had first seen her standing at her father's door, he set his jaw, while his thin lips curved in a smile which was without mirth. It was a bore to be obliged to go to the trouble of stratagem, but his work was not to be given pause because of the whims of a little fool of a peasant.

The next day he met Peppina on a sunny path running along the yellow wheat field. He stopped, putting his hand in his pocket.

"Will you give this money I owe him to Matteo when he returns, Peppina?" he asked gently. "And say to him I was sorry not to see him again."

Peppina's eyes opened wide, a sudden dismay drove the pretty color from her cheek.

"But—but Matteo will be back soon, *Signor*. He has but gone to the good monks at S. Eremo until he recovers once more from the sickness."

Carleton looked sympathetic.

"I'm sorry he is ill. Here, add this to the sum I owe him. And say good-by to him for me, will you, Peppina?"

He made as if to pass on, but a troubled Peppina barred the way.

"And the *Signor* will not wait until Matteo comes back? I—I thought—the *Signor* said he had the mind to paint yet more. The *Signor* spoke of the two big chestnuts with possibly Matteo and—and me——" Her stammering tongue failed, but the big, soft eyes implored.

Carleton smiled his most charming smile.

"But how can I be sure that when Matteo returns he will be ready to pose as I wish? And you—I have no time to waste, and a model who runs away when I need her is of little use, Peppina."

Peppina's dark eyes were bright with a mist of tears. *Il Signor* smiled so kindly, and yet he looked sorry, too. And it was she, Peppina, little pig that she was, who was disappointing him, and driving him to go away where he would find perhaps another model who would not treat him thus.

"*Signor,*" she faltered humbly, "I will run away no more if——"

An interruption came suddenly in the form of a third person, a swaggering figure which strolled up from below. Carleton briefly glanced at him, classing him at once as a type of tourist which makes the name Anathema wherever they chance to light. A bold-eyed youth, who grinned in a would-be knowing way as he looked from the painter to the pretty, pleading face of the girl. He passed on, and Carleton, not wasting time after Peppina's surrender, speedily allowed himself to agree to a new trial of the penitent's services.

Making an appointment for afternoon, the artist continued on his way toward Strada, and Peppina sped lightly along toward home, following the path taken shortly before by the red-faced pedestrian.

And then occurred an incident crude and banal, which, nevertheless, was the rivet in the chain of devotion which should bind the little peasant girl's heart of fire to Carleton forever.

A sudden shrill cry rang out on the air—a girl's cry—and, falling on the painter's ear, he turned and went striding swiftly back along the way he had come. He had a premonition as to the scene being enacted just out of sight, as he recalled the beefy-faced youth who passed when he was speaking with Peppina, so he was not surprised to find her struggling like an angry cat in the embrace of the stranger.

"What a little spitfire!" the latter was saying between gusts of laughter. "I'm going to have a kiss for each scratch, my dainty Dago, so hold up your pretty head."

He succeeded in putting one hand beneath the girl's chin and holding her

struggling form with the other arm. Reaching forward, his thick, grinning lips pressed—a muscular man's hand, which had been deftly inserted between them, and the victim of his gallantry. A second hand, closing on his collar, jerked him backward, and he next found his face being smartly slapped by the same palm he had a moment before so passionately saluted. Not long after he was going quickly down the hill, having curtailed his sight-seeing, and with his ears tingling from a few stinging words uttered by his chastiser.

Thereafter there was no stint in the willing obedience rendered by Peppina to Carleton's slightest wish. Without reserve the child-woman poured out all the warm treasure of her devotion on *Il Signor,* as she called him; her inflection turning it into a title.

Thoroughly at ease now, and her tongue unloosed by the tide of uncomprehended happiness swelling within, Peppina chattered gaily whenever the work permitted, and, half-listening, Carleton soon knew all the story of her simple little life; knew that of all her friends the Hunchback was the dearest. He it was who had taken care of her when, all too young, she had been turned from out her mother's arms by the swiftly following baby brother. She told him of Matteo's famous descent from the most trusted servant of the first Prince who had ever dwelt in the stronghold where Carleton had found shelter. How from generation to generation, through the servant's descendants, the traditions of that noble race had been handed down; wonderful old tales of romance and chivalry which Matteo could recite by the hour when he was so inclined.

"It is only for me he will always tell them," she added with innocent boasting. "But, then, Matteo loves me much, and I love him."

"And you think he will be persuaded to tell some of these wonder stories up in the chestnut grove so I may paint you and him the while?"

"But, yes, *Signor,* for me; I know it."

The wheat was yellow in the rolling fields, and all through it glowed daring scarlet poppies, challenging the eye with their flaunting loveliness, while more modest blue cornflowers nodded shyly from between the golden spears of grain, when Matteo returned from his exile. Grayer of face, with the tragedy of his late grim struggle written in new lines on his forehead, and looking from his wild, light eyes, he followed Peppina like a grotesque shadow one morning to where Carleton awaited her in an olive grove, where he was painting her against a delicious background of the cool, gray-green trees. To Carleton's surprise, the Hunchback, who always came and went like a voiceless shadow, spoke a few shy words of greeting in his curiously musical tone, and when the morning's work was ended silently insisted on carrying home the heavier portion of the artist's property. Late that evening, as Carleton sat idly smoking and dreaming beside a window in his temporary studio, there came an abrupt knock upon the door.

"*Avanti!*" The door opened, and over the threshold stepped the Hunchback, bearing a wide, flat basket heaped with fine oranges, still clustering on the branch amid their cool, green leaves.

With a lithe sweep of his long arms, he placed the offering at the painter's feet. "They are the finest to be gotten in the country, *Signor.* I brought them with me from the good Padre's garden at S. Eremo. Will the *Signor* deign to accept them?"

Carleton smiled his charming smile.

"Why, with many thanks, Matteo. But you surely are robbing yourself."

The Hunchback made a dignified gesture of dissent, then, lightly touching his breast with his finger tips, looked the other eye to eye and spoke with passionate force:

"Were the *Signor* to ask of me my heart's blood—it were nothing. Peppina has told me."

Carleton nodded kindly.

"I understand. That disgusting brute!"

Matteo's pale face was convulsed; his eyes gleamed mere points of white flame under his drawn, black brows; his mobile lips drew back from his clenched teeth;

his voice came in a curious, singing whisper:

"I went to Strada where the cur lodged—but he was gone. If he comes again, there are those who will let me know, and then—then—I, Matteo, will meet him."

The next moment he had slipped away.

"That won't be a merry meeting for the amateur Lothario," decided Carleton with a shrug. Then, while the memory was vivid, he lighted his big reflector lamp and set to work to reproduce the mask of hate which had confronted his eyes when Matteo spoke of that postponed meeting. This accomplished to his satisfaction, he ate a couple of Matteo's oranges, and went to bed in a contented frame of mind.

Matteo's passionate gratitude to the painter for his defence of Peppina embraced the opportunity to be of service, so there was no difficulty in gaining his consent to pose for the picture Carleton had set his mind upon. He showed a curious lack of self-consciousness, and it was Peppina who noted with warming heart how the pose chosen placed the Hunchback's worst physical deformity as little in evidence as possible, and caused attention to concentrate upon his inspired face. Day after day the three climbed the winding path to the twin chestnuts, and, once in position, Matteo threw himself into recital as never before, while the hours flew past. Peppina drank in draughts of her beloved romances, while Carleton's keen eyes and swift, sure fingers worked. That Matteo descended the hill daily feeling drained of half his life was something he kept locked in his own breast, and never did he falter in his task. The fire in his eyes glowed as brilliantly, the clear, singing resonance of his voice continued to pour forth its flow of vivid words, as evenly as when he began.

And at length—at length it was finished. Peppina and Matteo gazed at the great canvas with awe. Peppina's heart thrilled with pleasure at sight of the beauty *Il Signor's* magic brush had lent her face; but even her simple nature comprehended that what made the real greatness of this thing the painter had accomplished was, not the bloom and beauty of the listener, but the illumined face of the "Teller of Tales." It was her Matteo—the Matteo she loved, but it was more. Uplifted, fervent, mystical—world-old, God-young—through his delineation of the Hunchback's soul Carleton had touched greatness.

Matteo saw his own face only as a shadow—an adjunct. His gaze riveted itself upon Peppina's.

Not long after came a day when Matteo and Peppina watched *Il Signor* pass down the highway out of their lives.

"I'll be back in the early spring," he promised, "and you will both be here to help me with my work? I can't do without either one, you know. I have a greater picture planned for next year, and I shall need you both."

He smiled with the misleading warmth which promised so much and meant so little, shook hands, and left them standing at the crest of the hill where they might watch him grow smaller and smaller until he turned a distant corner—and the world was empty. Their wistful eyes turned to each other for comfort, and Matteo it was who found it first. The world could never be very sad for him so long as it held Peppina. His devotion to Carleton might be said to be but a reflection of Peppina's, called into being only by the artist's defence of her. But such was the man's strong personality—his will to overcome their first recoil—to compel their liking, that he had succeeded well. Many hours that in other days had been filled with medieval romances were during the months that followed devoted to silent listening on Matteo's part while Peppina lingered in words over the bygone summer. Their olden haunts held ever a shadowy third.

The winter was more than half over. But an unusual cold had descended upon the Casentino that year; a gripping cold for which the *contadini* were ill prepared. In spite of hermetically sealed windows, the cold crept in, and where it caught and wrestled with the old and

weak there was a new grave opened in the little cemetery on the hilltop.

But with the advent of March, no matter what the weather, Peppina made a daily pilgrimage down the winding highway to the point where she had waved farewell to *Il Signor,* and where she looked and longed to see him returning any day. For had he not said, "In the early spring I come"?

Ever beside her, a patient, misshapen shadow, muffled in his ragged brown cloak, was Matteo. His grave voice admonishing against her impatience, but yielding to her insistence that one could not tell—*Il Signor* might choose to come earlier this year; and they two whom he had called his friends, of course they must be ready to greet him, lest he think they had forgotten.

Mateeo shrewdly opined *Il Signor* would be unlikely to seek the Casentino while the sun either remained hidden for days, or else gleamed coldly from a "white sky"—but what mattered his opinion against Peppina's desire?

But one day when she slipped away to her lookout, searching the empty road where a cutting wind laughed away hope, the cold seem to search to her very heart; and that night, in the close, airless room shared by many sisters and brothers, Peppina shivered under the nondescript huddle of bedclothing.

Poor little Peppina!

When all suddenly the cold mountain winds ceased to blow, and earth laughed in radiant beauty under the ardent caresses of the sun, not all its warmth could drive out the deadly chill closing about little Peppina's heart. Daily Matteo came early and, wrapping his fading treasure in his tattered brown cloak, carried her to a rude seat he had made in the shelter of an oak, commanding the long, long road which her wistful eyes searched in vain.

Nightly the pathetic, hopeful voice would say:

"But to-morrow—he will perhaps come to-morrow, Matteo?"

And the Hunchback, crowding back the heartbreak from his own voice, would answer bravely:

"To-morrow, *nina,* he will of a surety come." Then she would cling to his strong hand and whisper:

"My good Matteo! I love thee, Matteo!"

May had not yet slipped away when one day Peppina did not go to her tryst —and Matteo, with burning eyes, knelt beside her still form, the far-receding echo of her last cry in his ears:

"Hark! Matteo, *Il Signor*—is coming!"

And just at sunset of the following day he came. Striding easily up the steep road, he reached the village with the creeping twilight which had long submerged the valley below. Just as he swung around the turn below a certain cottage, a solemn chanting rose on the quiet air, and he paused to watch a strange possession pass out through the humble, well-known doorway.

First, two by two, and pacing slow, white-robed choir boys, preceded by the crucifer bearing aloft the sacred cross; after these walked the village girls, their rosy faces showing subdued and tear-stained under thin white veils draping their dark heads; they were followed by the young women with veils of black lace. All held lighted candles, and their flickering flames cast curious, darting shadows along the way. Chanting in his sweet, worn voice, next passed the kindly priest, and behind him, with steady measured tread, a group of young men carrying a bier, over which was thrown a gayly embroidered pall. All the remainder of the village folk followed. A short distance away the sad little cortege entered the church, and the arrested spectator half unconsciously settled himself to wait for what would follow.

The simple service was short, and Carleton had not had time to weary when once more the procession appeared, stepping out into the deepening twilight, where in the west still smouldered the dull embers of a red sunset, and began their slow ascent up the winding road to the graveyard on the hilltop. Up and up they wound, a strange, impressive sight; the double lines of flickering candles fitfully lighting up the white robes of the choristers, the veiled figures, the gray,

uplifted head of the old priest, the solemn bier slow-swaying between its bearers.

The painter stood immovable until far up the height the last gleam had passed from sight, then his gaze swept slowly down over the deserted street. He wondered which of Peppina's family had lain beneath the gorgeous pall. Her face, instinct with the very joy of life, rose before him, and the truth never touched the outer edge of his mind.

Suddenly his quick eye caught the outline of a deeper shade in the shadow now close about the still-open cottage door. A dark form was huddled on the threshold, and all at once a white face glimmered palely through the dusk, lifted toward the darkling sky—two long arms were thrust passionately upward in woful appeal—the stillness was rent by awful sobbing—the hoarse, strangled sound of a grief past comfort or hope of healing.

Carleton started, peering through the gloom.

It was Matteo! Then, Carleton knew. Turning, he stole away.

Late that night, Matteo, wandering through the lonely, sleeping village, raised his haggard eyes, and was dully surprised to see a light burning in the rooms Carleton had occupied the previous year. Could it be that *Il Signor* had come then, and just—too late? Too late, for Peppina was no longer there to be made glad.

He turned and sped away, crashing through wood and field, heedless of place or time, until near dawn his spent frame could no more, and he sank down upon an open hillside and fell into deep sleep.

It was toward evening of the following day when Matteo, worn in body and numbed in mind, once more stole up the familiar village street. Once during a day of aimless wandering he had indeed caught sight of Carleton's figure at a distance, but he was not yet equal to meeting *Il Signor* face to face. He was seeking him now, however, sadly bent on bearing to him Peppina's broken message. Perhaps he felt in some way it might lessen his dragging load of grief to see the quick sympathy spring to *Il Signor's* eyes; to mark in his face some faint reflex of the sorrow which was like a burning band about his own brow.

Slowly, heavily, he mounted the echoing stair, meeting no one. Opening the door admitting into a small foyer, he pushed his way farther on into the studio, but found it empty. Carleton was not at home. Half-fearfully Matteo glanced about, lest from some forgotten sketch upon the wall the merry face he loved so well should stab his heart anew. But the wall was bare.

An easel was drawn up to an open window, a large window which commanded the upper part of the village and overlooked a certain cottage. Upon the rest stood a fair-sized canvas, and dropping his exhausted form upon a chair nearby he raised weary, indifferent eyes to its surface.

The next instant he sprang erect, had crossed the floor, and stood close behind the chair Carleton had evidently occupied.

With gray face and strange, strange eyes he studied the picture upon which the painter had spent most of the hours since he had arrived in Borgo alla Collina. Unfinished as to detail, it yet was pitilessly strong and faithful in the story it told.

A faded western sky, the dark bulk of trees and buildings lining a palely glimmering road, up which wound a solemn procession, lighted weirdly by flickering, flaring candle flames. In the foreground yawned the open door of an empty house, and on the threshold crouched a desolate figure with anguished face upturned, and wrung hands thrust appealingly to a darkened sky. Carleton had worked the whole night through, and until the brush refused longer to obey his stiffened muscles.

How long had he been gazing on the canvas before the full truth burst on Matteo's tortured brain? A moment—an hour—a year—— What matter? When the yellow flame of his eyes turned and looked over his shoulder in the way the painter should come, Matteo had sounded the full depths of the man's nature; knew him for what he was.

Slowly, with an awful deliberateness, made more awful by the madness in the

yellow-gray eyes, the gleam of white teeth behind back-curled lips, the Hunchback slipped from his blouse a slender, short-bladed knife, keen and cruel. In a moment only tangled shreds of canvas hung from the wooden stretcher. Then, soundlessly, still with that deadly lack of haste, he closed the windows, crouched silently behind the door, and waited.

On his way home Carleton paused a moment at the cottage to speak a few commonplaces of sympathy to Peppina's mother, who received him emotionally. Then he quickened his step, eager to get back and inspect his latest piece of work with fresh eyes; to satisfy himself that it really held all the promise he had earlier imagined. Whistling softly, he entered and closed the door behind him, vaguely wondering that it should be open, since it was not his intention to exhibit this last thing to eyes which would possibly fail to appreciate its merits.

Moving swiftly toward the window, his gaze sought his work; but before he could grasp the destruction before him something hurled itself forward from out the space behind, two sinewy, long arms were wrapped about him, and he was borne suddenly, resistlessly, to the stone floor. A low voice was whispering swift words into his ear—words that made his pulse beat slow and the cold sweat of sudden, sickening fear stand on his forehead.

"*Il Signor* will never more paint naked hearts that the world may applaud his skill!" That was what Matteo whispered, and the long fingers felt for his throat. He struggled madly, he strove to cry out; but the Hunchback was endowed in that hour with the strength of ten men, and presently strange lights began to flash across the painter's dulling brain; strange lights like to those he had watched once winding up and up a darkening hill—and even as those others had at last died out, so did these.

Carleton stirred—a quiver ran through his waking body—a moan struggled feebly through his swollen and discolored lips. Then pain that was keenest anguish brought back his senses with a rush.

He cried out, loudly, shrilly, like one in mortal terror and agony. Again and yet again, until at length some one heard, and people came hurrying and clustered about, exclaiming in horror, questioning, gesticulating. There was running of messengers and frantic summoning of skilled help. In the following days, all that the best of medical science could accomplish was devoted to bringing the painter back to health and strength of body—and he lived.

But no knowledge under the sun sufficed to restore his missing right hand, nor to give light to his darkened eyes.

"*Il Signor will never more paint naked hearts that the world may applaud his skill!*" had the Hunchback whispered.

WITHIN HIMSELF

By Maude Leonard Robinson

SENATOR LAPHAM glanced absently at the waiting pile of papers on his desk as he listened. His thin fingers held tightly the expensive cigar he was smoking. Its mate lay unlighted in the red hand of the man sitting opposite him, talking incoherently.

"It is hard, Schank," Lapham remarked sympathetically at a pause.

"Hard!" echoed his caller in a gutteral voice. He was a full-blooded man and he wiped his damp forehead with a big handkerchief. "To think what I've planned and intended for that boy and now to have him ruin it all! He can't understand—he's too young, too satisfied! But there was stuff in him, Henry, I'm telling you! If he had kept his head until he was a few years older, the world

was his! To ruin everything by marrying such a girl!"

The Senator nodded. He really was concerned for Schank, who was one of the big men from his home town and an old acquaintance. He knew how the brusque, often brutal man had expended all the sentiment in his nature on his boy, who only a few years back had been a bright, curly-haired youngster.

"He was in his sophomore year, wasn't he? And the girl?"

The other nodded gloomily. "Just a doll," he elaborated. "With yellow curls and a pert nose and she worked in a candy shop in the college town. Harry had money and she grabbed him. As for that any girl would like him—but why he should be such a fool—he has brains—and I was pounding ambitions into him—oh, it makes me sick when I think of a few years later when he's waked up and can judge women, maybe meets one of his own kind and sees what he's lost out of his life, feels how he's hampered!"

"It may not be so bad," Senator Lapham suggested quietly. "There is always divorce, you know."

The big man shrugged into his overcoat. His fat face hung in gray lines of trouble. "I don't know," he answered wearily. "That's as you may look at it. It makes me sick, I tell you, the whole thing!"

After he had gone Senator Lapham mechanically attacked the pile of papers. Schank and his trouble kept running through his mind. He tried to fancy Sanford and himself in a like situation, but his mind refused to visualize it. A little glow warmed through him as he reflected on his wisdom in attacking this very topic with his son before he had left for college three years ago; his wisdom, in fact, in always taking up the vital, dangerous subjects with Sanford, making them futile before they should have appeared, triumphing over them, arming Sanford with some of his own cold-blooded, clear-sighted wisdom. If Schank had possessed a similar shrewd foresightedness he might now have been spared. Lapham's eyes wandered to the handsome folding case on his desk that held the pictures of his wife and Sanford and the girl, and there was a fire of appreciation that leaped in them as he beheld again, as he had done fifty times a day, the lean, sharply cut features, the clear gaze and the intensity in the face of his son. It was a face that attracted and held by its promise of power. A sense of oneness of mind, of commonness of purpose with this replica of himself strengthened the natural bond of father and son. It was as though he beheld the essence of his own world-experience and consequent ripened judgment and delicate mental balance hovering about Sanford like a protecting aura. He leaned back in his chair with his eyes still on the picture and sighed faintly in a species of relief. When he lifted his gaze at the opening of the office door Sanford himself was before him.

He had never particularly noticed his chin before—it was strange how it suddenly shot through his consciousness that the line of Sanford's chin was a shade too brief and inclined a fraction to retreat from the aggressive angle that should belong to it. In a kind of surprised daze he saw nothing else as Sanford approached with his usual quick, nervous step, drawing off his gloves as he came, his hat crushed under one arm. He sat down and then slapped the gloves sharply on the desk as though to attract his father's attention. His gaze was direct, but chill laid hold of Senator Lapham's heart before there was any speech from the intruder.

"I ran down to Washington from the university," he began and then picking up the gloves crumpled them, staring at them malignly. "I wanted to tell you," he went on rapidly; "that six months ago I married Laura Slater, whose father drives a hack in the town and whose mother has social ambitions. I was crazy about Laura—she's pretty—and her mother helped it on. And now—well, they tell me that in the summer I—I'll be a father!"

Senator Lapham was not conscious of breathing nor feeling as he sat quite still, staring at the wretched face turned to his with its wretched eyes. He glanced off to the photograph and it seemed of another

person. Singularly enough when his heart again began to beat he felt first a bitter desire to laugh. He was seeing Schank, his big face grotesque in its grief as he nodded farewell from the door and himself sitting there comfortable and snug, politely, emptily sympathetic. It seemed very long ago. Since then there had been a crash and he could not find his footing nor adjust himself. He found himself talking odd, unpremeditated things that issued from stiff lips.

"Do you care about your—your wife?" he heard himself say. He waited for the answer in sheer agony and fear. Nothing else seemed vital.

A sort of groan burst from Sanford and he dropped his head in his hands as though his father had struck him. "I don't know!" he gasped. "God! I don't know! I guess I was crazy at the time! That's what hurts so, to think I could let go of myself like a fool, throw away everything for a wave of blind feeling, not to realize what I was doing! All I thought of then was that I wanted her, that I must have her! I liked her laugh and the way she looked, drew me! I didn't think what it meant!"

"You don't love her then," Senator Lapham said half to himself in a voice that held a hint of accusation. His son looked up at that unspoken hint.

"No, I don't love her!" he burst out gaspingly as though it were a relief to say it. "I've fought it as though it were something to be asahamed of but I've known all along of late that I don't love her! She—why, she's cheap! She's little of mind and grasping! There isn't a bit of real loveliness in her—why, I've had dreams of the one woman, the real woman who would be so much in my life—and now Laura—Laura is my wife to-day, to-morrow, always till the end!"

Sanford's voice rose to a falsetto of pain and rebellion and he ground his fist upon the desk. Senator Lapham got to his feet and paced the room, glancing at the bowed head which so singularly seemed to be that of a stranger. He was remembering the plaid skirts Sanford had worn when he first chased a hoop down the front walk. His hair had been yellow then and bobbed up and down. Somewhere within him there was an ache but he crushed it back for he felt that his mind must be unimpaired, unhampered, must act with swift sureness and clearness in this unhappy situation just explained to him which seemed so foreign to himself.

"Have you a picture?" he asked naturally. There was the whole story of the boy's disillusion in the manner in which he shook his head, then remembering drew out his watch and pried open the back which responded stiffly.

Senator Lapham taking it walked to the window and studied the face that gazed up at him boldly. It was all there, the commonness, the narrow selfishness, the limitation, the utter impossibility, all there though glossed over by the girl's crude prettiness, the allure of youth and sex. Her eyes challenged him, mocked and triumphed at him, jeered at his complacent trust in the armor with which he had equipped his son. A wave engulfed him which illumined mightily Schank's rough phrase that the situation in his own family "made him sick." Lapham understood it now. His face had changed subtly, aged in a way as he came back and sat down, studying his son, reading the new lines on his face. The boy plainly was suffering, had suffered mentally. It was as though he had been stricken by something malignant and a great and overpowering pity arose in his father's heart that was selfless.

"My dear boy!" he murmured brokenly. Never had Sanford Lapham heard that poignant note in his father's voice and it touched some hidden spring.

"Don't!" he cried fiercely. "Oh, don't! Don't you suppose I know what it means to you and the rest of 'em—beside myself? Can't you see if it was just I it wouldn't be so bad, but I know it's your hopes and ambitions for me I've smashed like a fool! I've tried to picture mother having Laura presented to her as her daughter—I've seen Grace's look of amazement—even if she is only fifteen—at the wife her brother had brought home! I've seen how she didn't fit in, never could fit in, I tell you! That's one of the things I didn't stop to think of!

And now this—this that is coming—is another of the things I forgot to consider!"

Senator Lapham stared at Sanford in a sort of awakened terror. The child he had forgotten in the stress of the main fact. Sanford's son and his grandson! And that girl would be its mother! He clasped his thin fingers so tightly the bones cracked and he was not conscious of it. He had had dreams of what Sanford's children should be and attain.

Sanford was making aimless marks with a forefinger on the mahogany desktop. "I have wondered of late," he went on hesitatingly, "if the easiest way out of it—after next summer was over of course—would not be to get a divorce. It would simplify things!"

In the stillness which followed Senator Lapham's brain played strange tricks with him. A great and cold fury swept over him, a sickness so acute that the one of the previous moment was crushed out, obliterated, and the fury was directed at the boy before him. It seemed that he could have borne anything but that weakness, the wicked weakness of shirking and of cowardice.

"I'm ashamed of you!" he thundered.

Sanford sat up and his pinched face flushed. "I've got all my life ahead of me!" he protested. "I should think you'd think of that! I should think you'd be glad I'm willing to spare the family any more than I can help, now that I see what I've done!"

"But you don't see!" Senator Lapham almost hissed, bringing his convulsed face down to a level with the boy's. "That's the awful trouble, you don't see! It isn't so much your having married her and spoiled your life as I had planned it—it's the fact that I begin to realize that if you hadn't married her, you never could have lived your life as I had planned it! It wasn't in you! I thought you had stuff in you that you didn't have! I'm almost beginning to see that it's a mercy you did marry her; that it's the only thing that can save you!"

"Save me?" stammered the boy. "From what?"

"From yourself!" his father ground out between his teeth, "from your damnably weak, selfish, cowardly self! It's given you a chance to grow to be a man by accepting your responsibilities, by shouldering them, by fighting the obstacles you've saddled yourself with! You've taken a wife—you keep her! If she doesn't please you that doesn't matter—you chose her, you married her! If you can't change her into what you wish her to be, that's for you to bear! She's your wife; you swore it before God and man! Maybe when the child comes decency will awake within you and you'll feel the call of duty. It'll be your child! You can't change that! Yours, now and forever! You can't get away from it! If it hasn't your hand to hang on to, as you hung to mine years ago; if it hasn't you to care for it and guide it and to try to start it along the road you think it ought to go—we have to do these things even though later on it is proved to us the road was not the right one as it has just been proved to me—how are you going to answer for your own soul? How are you going to be able to face your own self, to face honest men? Are —are you going to run under fire, you, my own flesh and blood?"

The boy raised a stricken face. "I didn't dream you'd take it this way," he whispered. "I—I didn't know! What must I do?"

"Go, get your wife!" Senator Lapham almost shouted forth. "And bring her home—here! I'll answer for your mother and for Grace! Get your wife —and bring her home!"

Senator Lapham stood erect, a tense and fiery figure with shaking finger pointed toward the door as Sanford struggled to his feet, shook his coat together and gathered up his hat and gloves. The younger man's shoulders were squared and his head was up. There was something new and different in his step as he obeyed. He even smiled back, a wan caricature of a smile, as he vanished, closing the door gently behind him.

For a moment his father stood in the same attitude, then he crumpled like an old man, and with his head on his outstretched arms let the wrenching sobs have their way.

THE SUM OF VANITY

By Jane Guthrie

THE Dilworth pearls had made social history for the family for three generations; and now, by the will of her great-aunt Rosanne, they had come to Amy Dilworth, a mere slip of a girl, hardly twenty years old; and Amy was going to marry Bruce Dunbar.

The pearls, however, were bitter-coated for Dunbar. They brought upon him congratulations which ranged anywhere from a slap on the back and a "bully for you, Bruce," to the delicately lifted eyebrows and smiles and innuendoes which intimated that Amy must be a second consideration with him and the pearls first. He was enough in love to feel that his affection for Amy was sincere, and sure enough of his aims and ambitions to know that he counted for something in life, that he more than balanced with his masculine ideals the Dilworth idols.

So he sold a valuable piece of river land which had been left him by his mother whom he had adored, and bought for his sweetheart a string of diamonds which he was sure she would not be ashamed to put beside the pearls in her jewel case. That her loveliness demanded a proper setting was a delusion which had been carefully instilled into Bruce's mind by Amy's mother and eagerly fostered by the girl herself; but before a great while he realized that the diamonds had established a precedent and that the pearls were often on duty. He wondered sometimes whether after all they did not count for more with Amy than he did.

She wore the diamonds at her wedding, but within a year Bruce found himself hating the Dilworth pearls with a degree of intensity which he had the grace to keep to himself, though he discouraged the wearing of them with obstinate persistence. He disliked to see the great string wound a number of times around the slender girlish neck and hanging down below the slim waist of his wife, and he disliked still more to hear Amy's worldly old mother lick her lips and, taking a deep breath, murmur sighingly, unctuously: "A priceless dowry for any girl!"

And it must be conceded that it was the pearls as an initial impulse which sent Dunbar into the closest study and practice of financial affairs, in an unexpressed desire to pile up a fortune as hard and cold as Amy's milk-white beads, with the result that in ten years he could smile at such a simple ambition. He had become the commanding figure in his community. It was Bruce Dunbar, who when oil was discovered in the neighborhood, planned and schemed with men older and far richer than himself to make a city out of the town where he was born, and won success for all of them by his executive ability, his enthusiasm, his far-sightedness.

At thirty-five he was not only a very wealthy man, but far in advance of his associates mentally. That he had a handsome home, a wife who entertained extravagantly, two children of whom he was extremely proud, was borne in on him, however not so much by any close contact with them as by the monetary demands of his establishment.

His real life was not in his home, though he had been ten years in finding it out—ten years finding out that there was an absolute divergence of thought and purpose between his wife and himself. His undertakings, his ambitions, his contact with the world had brought him up to the cosmopolitan standard, while his wife had remained stationary. She had fixed her ideals at twenty and had never moved mentally beyond that. Dunbar had at first endeavored to interest her in his affairs, to find some

ground for mutual pleasure, but he had never been able to discover that she had any interest beyond the restless, feverish desire of the moment to be amused. His associates, too, for the most part retained still their provincial standards, though they had varnished them over with what represented for them metropolitan manners, a varnish which creaked and cracked here and there at times and was a sorry thing to contemplate.

They had inaugurated a Country Club where they played golf and tennis, and flirted and talked; and because they did not understand the fine art of leisure, lacking tradition and ideals as a backing, they got into mischief and scandal and other unpolite things.

Dunbar, an enormously busy man, playing the game of life, not its silly imitation, the game of manners, took his relaxation mentally. He studied many things, least of all his neighbor's affairs, and he was often the last man in town to know what other people were gossipping about, and he was seldom at the Country Club. His partner, Jim Marvyn, however, a man who practised the art of leisure without any previous instruction in its unwritten code against license, was one of the staunchest upholders and most liberal patrons of the Wildwood Country Club.

He had come into Dunbar's employ as a clerk years before, and worked his way up through many gradations. He was keen and quick, and having by strict economy been able to make some successful investments had plunged into social life with enthusiasm. He understood as no one else the many complications of Dunbar's business interests, and laughingly said that he was willing to engage to do "the social stunt" for both of them; and when he asked a partnership in an undertaking about to be launched it was given him.

But Marvyn as a clerk and Marvyn as a partner, Dunbar realized, were two different men. For more than a year he had been anxious to terminate their business relations. In fact, he had decided to do so summarily when he returned unexpectedly one afternoon in May from an important conference extending over three weeks, and found his partner absent from the office.

"He's at the Country Club," he was informed. "He leaves here every afternoon at two to play golf. It's his health."

"It is—is it?" rejoined Dunbar grimly, instituting an official overhauling which made the ears of his clerks tingle. Then he went home, intending to take a bath, brush the dust of travel from his mind and—hunt up Jim Marvyn.

At home he was told that his wife, too, had gone to the country Club.

"She isn't sleeping well at night," the maid assured him. "She hasn't been home any afternoon since the Country Club opened the first of May."

Dunbar was glad of that in a way. He had long begged Amy to live more in the open air. She was a restless, haggard woman, self-indulgent to a degree, and needed constant excitement to keep her up to her social duties. Inquiry brought out also that the children were out with their nurses, so Bruce decided to stay at home for dinner with them, and then if Amy had not returned to go out to the Club and bring her home.

An hour or two later, he was standing at the entrance to the ballroom at the Wildwood Country Club, a man of distinction, a man to merit attention anywhere. Tall, with good shoulders, a rather haughtily held head, his face was the impassively cold face of the American man of affairs—an atmospheric impress, the inheritance from the red Indian, or perhaps a personal interpretation of the national passion for machines, the automaton designed to do the work of ten men.

He was watching his wife, dancing now with Marvyn, his brow dark and his gray eyes like blue steel. Amy was wearing a simple little muslin frock which was exceedingly becoming, and was looking better than he had seen her for a long time. She wore no jewels, he observed with satisfaction, and his under lip relaxed to a grim smile as he recalled his old feeling about the pearls, the fact that they had driven him to try to offset them in value by possessions that would lift his wife above them.

It was a pretty scene, tremendously

like a butterfly chase, he reflected, and the light, summery, rainbow-colored frocks of the women, the light and dark flannel suits of the men heightened the illusion. There were music and gay laughter, the hum and throb of voices and footsteps, for it was "Company Night" at the Wildwood Country Club.

The pretty, rustic, bungalow-like structure was filled with people—people playing bridge downstairs, dancing upstairs in the great wide room swung across the top of the house, flirting on the porches, while the motors standing in rows outside with their huge lamps pointed toward the building like gleaming eyes looked like mammoth insects drawn toward the light.

It was all so unreal, so feverish, so artificial to Dunbar, who had just come from the darkness outside. He looked again at his wife as she floated past him and nodded and waved her hand lightly at him. His eyes followed her. She was so slight, so delicate, so childish, that he seemed to be looking at her across a great gulf and yet a tenderness welled up in his heart for her; a sense of protection, the desire to shield her, and it enraged him to see her dancing with Marvyn. Marvyn was not the kind of man that his wife—— Again Amy swept past him but this time she did not see him. He began to think backward. They really had seen very little of each other of late; he determined that he would arrange it differently—they must be more together —more companionable.

The music stopped and the two of them whirled up gaily and stopped before him. He leaned down and took Amy's hand and kissed her tenderly, though he took no notice of the thick oily laugh bestowed upon him by Marvyn, and Marvyn turned and made his way toward the punch-bowl.

"How did you come out?" Dunbar asked, still holding Amy's hand possessively, tenderly in his own.

"In the limousine," she replied absently, her eyes following Marvyn as he walked across the room.

"Then we'll go home together that way. I came out in the surface car and walked up the hill just to get you to go back with me." He smiled with a sort of sweet gravity on her. "Make it as soon as possible, won't you?"

She turned her head, opened her eyes wide, and stared at her husband. "Certainly not," she replied with decision. "I am always the last person to leave here." She laughed a vain, pleased little tinkle. "I shall not make any difference to-night. You'll have to stay for me, if you want me to go home with you."

"You are here every day, are you not? Are you feeling better for the outdoor life?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Anything's better than staying at home. Every one comes out here, and there's something to see and do—I've taken to golf. I do pretty well, Jim Marvyn says, and I'm generally here for dinner, or else I stay for late tea and get home and to bed. Why not?"

"Do they manage at home without you? The children?" Dunbar's voice was low, strained.

Amy's laugh was as thin as a reed's note. "About as well as they do without you." There was a half-sneer in the accusation, but she dropped to an indifferent note as she added: "There are the servants. The women I hire for my children are perfectly competent."

"Well——" Dunbar waved that aside; he was willing to yield a point. "Make an exception in your evenings for me, won't you?" He spoke gently, smiling tenderly on her as he laid his hand over hers with an intimate little gesture of affection. "I want you for myself this evening. I have something to tell you, and—somehow"—he smiled again that grave, sweet smile—"other people see more of you than I do. I can't have that. Come," he urged, "give me this evening."

Mrs. Dunbar turned and looked coldly at him. "Impossible," she said decisively. "If you cannot stay as long as I wish, Jim Marvyn will take me home." She threw her head back, a certain resentment in her voice. "Jim Marvyn always thinks of my pleasure; he puts himself out for me, and—Jim Marvyn is quite as busy a man as my husband." She dropped into a chair just back of them; two scarlet points in her

cheeks marking an inherent physical weakness no less than an accustomed lack of control.

Dunbar's face stiffened, his eyes dilated. "Marvyn will not go home with you," he said in a cold voice of command; "or if he does it will be the last time."

Amy laughed that light, irritating tinkle of hers, then she flamed into words. Happily no one was near, and the music and dancing had begun again, yet her voice shrilled above the music.

"Why should I go home with you?" she cried. "What would I find? Coldness, absorption in your affairs, about which I care not a rap. Business in which I take not the slightest interest, and—reading in a dull library. It's gay and bright here. I'm going to stay." She rose and walked away from her astonished husband, and a few moments later she was dancing again with Marvyn.

Dunbar saw it. The dull, slow red crept up over his face. His hands clenched, he took a step forward, but there was a flame across his eyes. The pretty, soft-colored room blazed with light, bells were ringing in his head. He was blind—blind with rage. He was trembling all over. He stood stiffly like a man who had had a mortal blow—then presently the flame passed from his eyes. He found himself looking at Kate Hampton, a slender, exceedingly handsome woman about his own age, with a delicately refined face full of enthusiasm. She was talking to some people near at hand. Dunbar remembered that he had cared for her once, before he had fallen in love with Amy. Now this woman, not his wife, seemed to him to represent something of which he stood in desperate need, something sweet and gentle like his mother.

He walked over and stood beside her. She smiled up at him.

"You are not often here," she said.

"Not often," he answered gravely. "And you?"

"Oh—once in a while. I come to be gay, to see the people."

Bruce had been thinking quickly of her as he stood and looked down into her face. When she had been younger, her attempts to sing had been a joke among her friends, but she knew she had a voice and persisted in cultivating it. She found a teacher who understood how to develop it. Now Kate had a glorious, rich, moving contralto which was her city's pride. She walked downtown with her father every morning and had undertaken to develop a tract of land adjacent to the city, having come to consult Bruce about it once or twice. He found her a shrewd and clever woman, trained and cultivated in many ways, a woman who had thought and lived, not because she was obliged to but because she wanted to, and to make life worth while.

"I wish," Bruce began hesitatingly, "I wish you'd do me a favor." She whirled around quickly, glad, it might seem, to do so. "I've just gotten home from a hard trip, and I'm going back there now. Amy wants to stay here and my going leaves her alone. She ought to have some one to drive in with her in the limousine; will you let her take you with her?"

She looked at him a long moment. It was late in the day for Bruce to be anxious about protecting Amy, and he really ought to stay, or make Amy go home with him, but he did look tired, and it was rather nice of him to ask her.

"Yes—yes," she said. "I will."

Then Dunbar walked over to Marvyn standing again by the punch-bowl in an interval of dancing.

He wasted no time in accosting his partner. "The—ah, little matter of those securities of my sister's which were in my private drawer in the safe—" there was a soft, slow drawl in Dunbar's voice, withal a quality which no man would disregard. "I happened to look them up this afternoon. I found the envelope, but not the certificates. No one, as you know, has access to that part of the safe but you and myself, and my coming home ahead of time——" He was looking full at Marvyn.

"Oh, you'll come across them." There was bluff, good-natured assurance in Marvyn's voice and manner, though his face belied it. It had grown a sickly yellow, and his rather light blue eyes had a film over them. Marvyn at best

was not particularly good-looking, though he had a reckless, devil-may-care manner, and a quick tongue which covered his lack of social polish. But there was always a noticeable contrast between his dark complexion and hair and his light blue eyes, which affected some people unpleasantly. "You've probably mislaid them. You'll come across them again."

"I have not mislaid them." Dunbar's voice was sharply accented. "They were my sister's. Trust funds, you will recall. Put there to be used at my discretion, not yours, as you well know. Put where they were for safety. I was called home by a telegram from the bank concerning them. I suppose they were inclined to be cautious a little late in the day."

"Well——" Marvyn threw out his hands with a gesture which made plain that they were shaking like leaves in the wind. "You can't make a row here. I'll be at the office the first thing in the morning, and explain it all to you."

Bruce turned on his heel and walked out of the house, down through the night-scented lane toward the car line, a quarter of a mile away. The darkness flowed all about him like a garment of soothing peace and calm, and the perfume of May filled the air with its delicate, elusive, haunting fragrance. It reminded him of his youth. It was clean and sweet, not heated and feverish and artificial like the atmosphere he had just left; and how far away that youth seemed now, yet how much more real!

When he reached home, he went into the library and sat down there in the soft dark. He knew that he could not endure the light. And he wanted to face life—what it meant for him. The discovery of Marvyn's duplicity coupled with Amy's defense of him, her insolent attitude toward himself offered him a problem to solve He was realizing fully as he had only dimly done before, that he and his wife had drifted far apart. Who or what was responsible for it he did not question, the fact was there too plain to ignore.

It was after eleven o'clock when he heard a light footfall on the pathway outside by the drive. Amy must have gotten out at the gate to walk up while she sent the machine on with Kate Hampton and then farther to the garage; but Dunbar sat still. He had no desire to meet his wife now; his mind was in too chaotic a state to do justice either to himself or her, and something in her manner struck a note of apprehension which he did not attempt to conceal from himself. She came in softly, very stealthily, peering cautiously about the halls and the rooms, turning on no lights in any of them, and then she came into the library and sat down on the edge of a chair near the door, as if she were waiting for some one or something.

Sitting there, thinking uncertainly, Dunbar caught the sound of a stealthy footstep on the side porch, and as if she had been waiting and listening for just this thing, Amy left the room hastily, and softly, very softly and gently, so that he hardly heard it, she opened the side door and let some one in—a man. Together they turned out the light in the hall, and then they came into the library and held a whispered conversation, moving swiftly at once toward the bookcases set in an alcove.

Switching on a small electric bulb there, Amy touched a spring. The shallow shelves swung outward disclosing a safe built into the wall. It seemed hours to Dunbar before she succeeded in manipulating the safe door, hours that those two faces side by side, eager, avaricious, in the wan light, looked like hungry birds of prey.

When the door swung open there was a sound in Marvyn's throat, something between a gurgle and a sob; he caught his breath quickly while Amy reached in and drew out the case containing the diamond necklace which Bruce had given her when they were married. She took it out of its box and let the string ripple through her fingers, a gleaming, shining strand, as she looked up into Marvyn's face just above hers in the sickly light.

"You will redeem them almost at once, if you use them, will you not?" she whispered. "Just as soon as you can."

Marvyn caught her in his arms. "You know I will, darling"; but his voice was

unsteady, hoarse. "Don't you believe I will?" he asked as he turned her head backward and gazed into her eyes.

Suddenly, the room blazed with light and Dunbar in one stride was beside them. Marvyn's hold relaxed. Amy dropped into a chair with her hands over her eyes, leaving the diamonds in Marvyn's hand.

"I will take those!" Dunbar's words seemed to split the air like lightning, and his hand swept out to take the necklace from the nerveless grasp of the man standing before him, dazed, blinded by the swiftness of the attack. "You were wishing to repay your theft from me by robbing my private safe, and my wife was good enough to help you at it. Take the pearls, Mr. Marvyn. We'll divide unevenly, but we'll divide."

Marvyn began to stutter and back out of the room.

"The pearls," insisted Dunbar.

Amy jumped to her feet. "No—no!" she cried. "What would people say? Everyone knows the pearls. Oh, no-no!" She grasped her husband's arm frantically and looked into his pitiless face. Then she turned and snatched the bag of pearls from the open safe and poured the string into her hand to fling them with one fierce, protective gesture about her neck.

"He had to raise some money hurriedly," she explained sullenly, "and I was willing to help him. He's only doing what you've done a thousand times in a little different way."

"Of course—a man who would steal another man's wife, would not hesitate to steal a woman's jewels, or bonds, or certificates—trust money. You were willing, too, to give him what was yours in trust merely as long as you were my wife—my wedding present to you, a gift to you as my wife, a seal of the bond between us—you and me. Take the pearls, Mr. Marvyn," he said turning menacingly, meaningly, to him.

Marvyn's hands were clenched, he took a step forward, the features of his face thinned, sharpened until it looked carven out of stone.

"You self-righteous prig!" he burst forth. "For that d——d cynical smile of yours, I'd like to smash your face. Oh—I'll tell you once for all what's in my mind, then I'll take the pearls and your wife with them, if she'll have me. What do you know of a man like me? You who found a fortune to build on, a fortune some one else made and placed at hand for you? I was born on the mudflats and got my education on the streets. I had ambitions just as you had—only mine were bigger than yours.

"I wanted to forget first of all the sordid things I had opened my eyes upon, and I made my way honestly. You know that. Then I wanted social position, a drink at the sparkle, and I hadn't enough to do it on. I took your securities all right, to make a three days' plunge on a sure thing. As for your wife, I found her a poor little neglected thing, something that you never valued at her worth, and she's giving me now what she values because I care for her and she knows it. She gave you herself and you weren't man enough to keep her. You just took her for granted—poor little girl, but I'll take her now or any other time that she'll have me, and her pearls, too."

Amy flung herself between them, thrusting her arm into that of Marvyn. "I care for Jim, and I'm glad that Bruce knows it, but I'm not going to leave my home now or any other time. My children are here, and my husband has been living his own life for the last ten years. He can continue to do so, and—I'll live mine—just as I choose to also."

"Not as long as you bear my name." There was a depth of meaning in Dunbar's slow, even, pitiless tones. His piercing gaze enveloped both his wife and his partner. It tore to pieces the thin bravado of Marvyn's words. It seemed to put before the man the long years when they had stood together on a fair basis of give and take, man to man, —a man's way.

Amy knew the menace of that tone of her husband's and suddenly she began to weep wildly, hysterically. "I will not be thrust out of my home. I will not go with Jim Marvyn. I was only flirting with him!" She sank a limp, sobbing heap on the floor, the pearls falling about her with a delicate ringing sound, the

only one that broke the tense stillness of the room.

Dunbar stood looking down at her, his face hard and still, his eyes smouldering.

"Hush—hush!" he said sternly as he glanced at the milky white beads which lay about his wife's neck, and which she had gathered up in a great handful and held tight against her breast, as if defying any one to deprive her of them. They seemed endowed with an almost human malice, so long had he wrestled mightily with what they represented. He wondered if at last they were quits. Then he turned swiftly and faced Marvyn.

"You must take the pearls, Mr. Marvyn. I insist." His voice was thin, rasped, as if broken with the weight of his words. "And since you have wished to enrich yourself at my expense, I may not be adding to your comfort when I assure you that they have only a nominal value. I found that out when I had a clasp repaired a year after my marriage. I traced up the history of them then. They are and always have been imitations. Shams—shams!" He turned quickly as Amy jumped to her feet and with a bewildered cry caught his arm frantically. For one long minute they looked into each other's eyes, unheeding that other presence there in the room with them. Suddenly they both turned, a slight sound like the closing of a door roused each of them. But for themselves and the emotions they represented, the room was empty. They were alone.

Yet that sound, slight and stealthy as it had been, aroused Amy, she looked about her hurriedly now, then she threw back her head vindictively, laughed a slight scornful little laugh, as she still held the pearls protectively in her hands:

"What an unutterable lie!" she cried. "How could I ever stay with you now? How could I ever have lived with you at all? How could I ever have believed anything that you have said!"

She gave a hurried glance about her, leaned down and seized the diamond necklace which lay upon the table where Dunbar had thrown it a few moments before, grasped her wraps from the chair where she had tossed them, ran through the rooms and the hallway, and without one backward glance opened the outer door and fled out into the night.

Dunbar heard her quick, running footsteps upon the pathway, her subdued, yet shrill voice as she called to Marvyn to wait for her. For one moment, he stared about him drearily. The pearls had commanded their toll, and in his eyes there was a tragic reminiscence of their influence on his life. Then he walked over and impatiently switched off the light. He could think of nothing but a moth with jewel-painted wings fluttering in and out of the flame until it extinguished itself.

THE NAIL

By Mary J. Safford

ON this winter day, toward four o'clock, Farmer Jean stopped on the threshold of the house, glanced over the deserted moors surrounding it, and again asked Marie Lûron, his maid servant:

"Well, then, you really won't be afraid to stay alone in the place until to-night?"

Marie Luron, a black-eyed girl, with a resolute face, began to laugh.

"Of course not! I've stayed here alone many a time."

"But perhaps those other times were not like to-day."

Farmer Jean hesitated, then added in a lower tone:

"It seems that Ravageot, the day laborer whom you caught stealing my ham, has come back and is wandering about our quarters. He's a very bad fellow, a dangerous vagabond. The jail

would have rid us of him long ago, if other people had had courage like you, to complain of his thefts. But they were silent through fear. Perhaps it is his spite against you which is bringing him here?"

"Bah! I don't fear him more than a snap of my finger—your Ravageot. Young as I am, I've braved more terrible things. But caution does no harm. Now that I am warned, as I have plenty to do in the house, I'll lock myself in, and not open the door to any one until your return.

"That's right. Lock up everything. Good-by till I come back."

The farmer went off relieved. While he was still in sight, prudent though brave Marie Luron, her ears strained, her eyes watchful, went the rounds of the house, and seeing nothing suspicious locked the outside shutters, then returned, bolted the door, and lighted the candle. Then she quietly prepared the vegetables for the soup, hung the pot on the hook over the fire and, taking the candle, she went toward the cellar to finish bottling the wine, when the cat scratched at the door, mewing plaintively.

"Poor thing, she is hungry."

And without any other thought, setting her candle on the table, Marie Luron drew the bolt and opened the door.

Released by her tormentor, the cat leaped away in terror, and a man flung himself upon the maid-servant, threw her brutally on the floor and with his knee holding her down bound her firmly from her shoulders to her ankles, with her arms behind her back. Then with a stealthy step he shut the door, pushed the bolt, and looking at the poor girl lying helpless before him he rubbed his hands, smacked his tongue, and said with a fierce laugh:

"Now I'm ready for you. We have a little account to settle between us. Each one has his turn; you had the first hit by telling tales about me and getting me driven away from here—I'm going to take my revenge."

Even if, turning toward the light, the man had not put a certain braggadocio into showing, under his greasy cap, his sallow face, his eyes with the light pupils of a wild animal, his thin, withered lips, turned up in an evil grin, Marie Luron, at the first sound of that thick, jeering voice, would have recognized Ravageot.

"The farmer won't come back for three or four hours. The farm is lonely. The road is a long way off; the country is deserted. Even if you should scream, you wouldn't be heard. So I have plenty of time. I want to enjoy my revenge. I've been fasting twenty-four hours on the moors watching for this moment. Now that I have you, I'll play with you as a cat plays with a mouse. Talking of cats, it was a capital idea to catch your pussy, and pinch her ear to make her mew. In that way you opened the door at once very nicely."

Still jeering, he went to the bread-bin, took out the bread, cut off a slice, then opened the cupboard and found a quart pot half full of wine. He began to drink greedily, then no longer felt hungry and dropped the bread.

A little intoxicated, he walked into the middle of the room, raised his head, looked at a large nail fastened in a beam of the ceiling and began to laugh in a silent, frightful way.

"There's the very nail where the ham hung," he said at last in the same jeering tone. "It is solid—and it's a good thing that it is there, because it's going to be used again—used to hang you."

Watching the effect of his threat with a sly, furtive glance, Ravageot pronounced the words slowly to impress Marie more, and to enjoy longer and more cruelly her increasing fear. But the maid-servant, as if she were deaf and dumb, did not even shudder. Held motionless by the cords, impassive, pale, but without the slightest contraction of the nerves that might betray fear, she looked at the man with her black eyes, wide with intelligence and attention.

To break the constraint of the look and the silence Ravageot turned to the closet, broke the lock with the poker from the hearth, forced open the door with his knee, and let fall a number of five franc pieces. He stuffed them with both hands into the side pockets of his trousers.

"I make myself at home, you see," he

jeered again. "I'm not afraid of your telling any more tales, but you mustn't forget to tell this to Farmer Jean when he joins you down there in the cemetery."

Without ceasing to watch his slightest movement, Marie made no reply. With his pockets filled to bursting he returned to her.

"Now that I have my pockets and my stomach filled, I'll attend to you. I'm going to prepare for your hanging. Since I unhooked the ham that was on the nail, I'm going to put another in its place—a much bigger one; the farmer can't complain. Only I'll lift you up, set you on your feet, and lean you against the wall, so that you can see my little preparations better. It's certainly the least I can do to let you be present at the beginning of the play in the front box, since you will be the principal actor at the end of the melodrama."

And while chaffing in his cynical tone of a suburban ruffian, he dragged her along the tiled floor, then, still securely tied, stood her in an upright position, propped against the wall.

There was no shudder of repulsion when his big, spatulous fingers touched her. She seemed to feel nothing; all the life she possessed had taken refuge in her large watchful eyes.

Now the man, standing a few paces from her, drew out a short rope rolled around his waist under his red belt. And bent upon arousing the poor girl's fear before killing her, waiting for the groan or the shudder which would betray a weakness, he cynically explained.

"You see, I think of everything. This is a strong rope that will not break. Only it's a bit rough. It must be greased so that it can slip and tighten better. Do you know where there is any grease? Ah! you won't tell; you are obstinate! That's no use. I've plenty of time to look, and when we seek, we find—see, here's proof of it."

He took a lump of lard from a plate on the window-sill, and began to grease the rope its whole length.

Marie did not stir, but without taking her eyes from him watched every movement with eager curiosity.

Although sure that his victim could not escape, sure of quietly accomplishing his evil work, the scoundrel felt a certain constraint, an incomprehensible fear of this tall, pale girl who, motionless, silent, mistress of herself, watched him with so much coolness.

What was she thinking? What was she pondering? Wasn't she aware of her danger? Yes, her pallor proved that. But what did she expect that she showed so little fear? What could she hope? An interference? No, indeed! Marie Luron was too sensible, too practical to rely upon an impossible aid, to suppose that, locked up for several hours with a man who hated her—a man like Ravageot—she would have the slightest chance to escape death. Then, knowing that she was lost, why did she not sob, beseech, utter shrieks of terror, like any other woman?

It was a mystery Ravageot could not explain, and which disturbed him more and more.

So he resolved to hasten matters, put an end to the uneasiness caused by the girl's pale, incomprehensible face, which insensible alike to brutal threats and cruel sarcasm gave no clue to her thoughts.

The rope being greased from end to end, Ravageot took a three-legged wooden stool, for the nail in the beam was high. Mounted on the stool he fastened the rope to the nail firmly, and pulled it with all his strength. The nail did not move. Satisfied he took the end of the rope which dangled at his waist, and carefully made the slip knot.

Then Ravageot assured himself that the noose moved easily.

Wishing absolutely to have the sigh of anguish without which his revenge seemed incomplete, he again questioned the girl so firmly bound and propped against the wall.

"You see, it slips freely. . . . *couic!* You'll cut three or four capers and at last stick out your tongue!"

Then with a suddenness wholly unexpected on the eve of death, Marie Luron, jeering in her turn, burst into a laugh:

"Fool! You don't know anything about your trade of murderer. With

so short a rope your slip knot will not be large enough—my wrist will go through it, but my head—never! Do you want to bet that it won't go over my ears?"

After this long silence Ravageot, suddenly hearing this voice, and hearing it so distinct, so clear, so full of indifference and even contempt for his sinister task, was startled. Slightly confused, he lost a little of his cynical confidence and his fierce clearsightedness.

"The knot is big enough," he replied. "Your head isn't so large. There—look! My head goes through all right! I tell you it will do very well, very well indeed."

To prove that he was right, with both arms raised to keep the noose open and even enlarge it around his neck, he stood upon the stool on tiptoe, thrust his head through the rope, and making a last attempt to produce a shiver of horror stuck out his tongue.

"Here's the ugly face you are going to make."

Marie Luron was waiting for this moment. Still fascinating him with her large, wide-open, black eyes so that he might not foresee her act, unable to stir arms or limbs, she straightened herself as well as she could, and from her full height, with all her strength, all her heavy weight of a bandaged mass, she let herself fall against the legs of the stool which upset, and rolled away to the hearth.

Ravageot standing on tiptoe, with his head still bent forward for his lugubrious grimace, lost his balance.

Feeling nothing under his feet he instinctively dropped the rope to thrust his arms forward. This was enough to let the well-greased noose suddenly tighten and grip him around the throat.

Lying on her back almost under him, the girl saw him beat the air with his arms for a second, as if he wanted to slip his hand again between the noose and his neck or grasp the rope above his head with the other hand. But the double movement abruptly stopped; the arms fell back inert; the legs, desperately seeking support, kicked about, groping in space; then a tremor shook the body, a shudder ran up the spine, returned from the nape of the neck to the heels and stopped, ending in a contraction of the great toes.

The rope held Ravageot and, well greased, was strangling him with all the weight of his flesh and bones, all the weight of his pockets stuffed with money. The wretch's face grew crimson, then purple. His staring eyes became injected with blood beneath their half-closed, swollen lids, the swollen tongue hung from between the lips.

Marie Luron shut her eyes that she might not see by the smoky light of the candle the body of the hanged man swaying above her head in the draught of air between the door and the fireplace.

The farmer returned late at night. He was not surprised to see no light between the shutters. But the bolted door resisting him roused alarm, and tearing a shutter from its hinges he broke a window to enter. The girl was still lying bound on the floor, under the feet of the body thrusting out its tongue at her.

The farmer unbound Marie Luron. Being told of what had happened, he immediately emptied Ravageot's pockets, counted and again piled the coins in order. It was only after this that he thought of informing the police.

The next morning, when the legal proceedings were over, the rope cut and the dead man taken away, the farmer turned toward his maid-servant, and for the first time asked:

"Well, Marie Luron, though you have come off so well, you must have had a terrible time."

"Oh! not so very terrible, sir," replied Marie philosophically. "I was not so very much frightened while the rascal lived; it was when I saw him dead that the hours seemed long to me. But what was I to do? When I entered your service as maid-of-all-work, I thought that on a lonely farm like this one must turn one's hand to everything, and perform police duty and legal duties oneself. They were no worse done for that."

The farmer made no reply, considering these words sensible and natural. "The ham I brought from the market is left on the bread-bin. Hang it up."

"On what nail?"

"The same nail in the beam—as well on that as any other; it's strong."

"Shall I use the end of rope that is left?" she asked without surprise.

"Yes. The ham will be only the better; the worms won't get into it, since a rope used to hang a man is said to bring good luck!"

And both, either because the jest seemed droll, or from pleasure at seeing everything put in order and the ham take the place of the dead man, burst into a hearty laugh of pleasure and relief.

THE EYE THAT IS SINGLE

By Charles Saxby

"POOR LOUIS," sighed Mrs. Bagley. "I don't believe he really did it—but—what on earth will he do now?"

"Compromise, I suppose," said her husband, in that faintly superior tone we keep for other people's troubles. "He told me they offered to meet him half way. He'll be a fool if he doesn't."

"He'll be a fool if he does," said Carter, from the other side of the fire. "That is, if what he says is right."

The decision of his tone, cutting across the rather desultory after-dinner atmosphere, roused us all to attention, but the reply was obviously Bagley's affair.

"Oh—right," he murmured negligently; "of course, as a matter of sentiment—clear conscience and all that sort of thing."

"That is not what I meant," returned Carter quietly. "My point is victory and vindication, the whole thing."

Bagley shook his head. "Not a chance in the world, not against those people."

"Are you sure?" asked Carter. "Now look here. If what Louis says is *right*—is the truth—then that is all there is to the affair. It can't be two ways at once, can it?"

"No-o," agreed Bagley, with all the reluctance for the abstract of a man who prides himself upon his practicality. "But they will say——"

"What has what *they* say to do with the truth—unless it *is* the truth?" Carter interrupted.

"Well—it can make it mighty uncomfortable for the person they are saying it about," objected Bagley shrewdly.

"Oh, I'll grant you that," laughed Carter; "and I'll grant you that unless the truth of an affair be known and recognized any good upstanding lie about it will do as well. But my point is this, that if a fellow who knows that truth—any truth of any affair—sits down on it and refuses to budge he will eventually win out because—don't you see—he is backed by all the authority of that truth, which is the only real authority in the matter."

There was a little murmur of dissent at Carter's words; we each felt we had had unpleasant experiences enough to prove their fallacy, but Mrs. Bagley, who had been watching Carter narrowly through half-closed lids, hushed us.

"There is something back of all this," she said quizzically. "Mr. Carter is not usually so uncompromisingly logical. What is it—another mysterious heroine?"

We smiled at that for Carter is always meeting marvelous people in out-of-the-way parts of the earth, and then coming home to tell us about them.

"No, it is a hero this time," he said. "There were three heroines."

"Oh, poor things!" exclaimed Mrs. Bagley with a quick breath of sympathy. "I must hear that. Draw in, everybody"—then, as the stir subsided she turned imperiously to Carter. "Go on, begin with the hero and please—please make him attractive."

"Oh—so it is just one of Carter's yarns," began her husband in grumbling enlightenment.

"But it proves my point," retorted Carter.

He leaned back, his eyes growing blank with introspection as he sought out the threads of his narrative, and began.

"It all happened in the Canary Islands —do you know them, that Union Station of the Eastern Atlantic, ruled by Spain, owned in Liverpool and with the only decent climate to be found within five days of England. I was projected there last winter by the psychological effect of a colored folder, you know the sort of thing, four-color print of a white city against a blue sky, with a border of roses and palms; it hit me on a January day of London fog and rain and in less than a week I was in Las Palmas. The folder was correct, I found; it was all there, blazing white city against a blazing blue sky, also the roses and palms, plus an English hotel that might have been lifted, guests and all, from the sea front at Brighton.

"But that was all there was and in less than a week I was bored. My interest is people, and the winter colony was composed mainly of that deadly English upper-middle class; well-dressed, healthy mediocrities, eminently respectable even in their vices.

"It was my fourth evening and I was sitting on the hotel terrace, vainly trying to extract one spark of entertainment from the commonplace babble about me, when I saw a young man coming out of the smoking room. The instant I saw him I was keenly aware of him; he chained my whole attention, in fact it seemed as if my own glance of curiosity had been the starter of that little hush of surprise that fell upon the terrace at his appearance. Why the mere entry of another man should have such an effect upon me I could not imagine, in fact I resented it a little. That he was remarkably good looking was not enough to explain it, though he was certainly that; a tall, white, yellow-haired sort of chap, evidently English, but devoid of that tendency to the clumsy that spoils so many of their men, moving with a lazy grace that only comes from a highly trained body.

"The first thing I noticed was his chin, it might have been cut from a block of white marble; then I met his eyes for an instant and forgot everything else in the puzzle of them. They were full of a strange inner light, infinitely still but of that dangerous kind of stillness—the stillness of poise, not of inertia. It was as though they were looking at something else, looking through everything about them at something that my vision could not reach. There was a touch of the genuine devotee about those eyes, too, but to what the devotion could be I could not imagine; the fellow was no saint, I would have taken my oath on that; he couldn't be, not with those looks. So strong was the effect he had upon me that I was relieved to note that nearly everybody else seemed to share it. The atmosphere had suddenly grown thick, like the clammy chill that follows upon the sunset, and I was surprised to note that the general feeling was one of antagonism. Not so much to the fellow himself, perhaps, as that half-frightened British antagonism to any one who in any way creates anything resembling a 'situation' and in some way I did not understand the young stranger's entrance had created a 'situation.' He himself seemed entirely unconscious of it as he sauntered my way looking for a chair, so unconscious that I almost felt as if I ought to warn him. Beside the subjective ambush all about him there were some young cubs near me who had been drinking pretty heavily; they had their heads together and I caught muttered growls of 'Infernal cheek, coming among gentlemen—ought to be kicked out.' As the young fellow passed, one of them sprang up and said something to him; what it was I could not hear though that end of the terrace had grown suddenly silent and all eyes were fixed upon the two. Whatever the words had been it was evident that there could be but one reply, at least from a fellow with that chin. It was splendidly done, not an atom of power wasted, just enough to send the cub crashing back against his chair and the sound of his fall electrified everybody into action. I'll say this for the English, they may be afraid of situations but when the situation arrives they handle it perfectly. There

was a swift, silent rush of men, a murmur of 'Steady on—serves him right, shouldn't have spoken—no row *here*, you know"; all the inborn British instinct of decorum and fair play in instant action.

"The cub was picked up, his companions forced back and it was all over, as far as the danger of a disturbance went, but the situation still remained and, by a mere trick of location, I was caught up in it. With the rest I had sprung to my feet when the blow was struck and as the little group of pacifiers fell back and turned to face the young fellow I found myself standing almost at his side and obviously being counted in with him by the others. I could have changed it all in a moment; all I had to do was to take a step, but somehow—mainly I believe because those other men had bored me so—I remained obstinately where I was.

"The boy had not moved since the blow was struck, just stood there looking down at the disheveled figure they were propping in the chair. Then he spoke: 'If he—or any one else—wants me you know where to find me.' He drew his handkerchief from his cuff, deliberately wiped his knuckles and turned toward the steps. As he went his eyes met mine for an instant and I was surprised to note in them the flicker of a half-shy, half-humorous appeal. It was gone in a flash but it decided me; I saw how very young and how much alone he was, and I turned and followed him.

"It was just impulse and I regretted it a moment later as I went down the steps. Above me was the terrace, glowing with light and buzzing with talk—about us. Down there it was dark and shadowy and the boy, just a glimmer of white face and shirt front, stood waiting for me. I had plainly followed him and it was up to me to speak so I plunged right in with 'If I can be of any assistance——'

"He lit a cigarette before he answered, holding the light so that it illumined my face; it was incredibly impudent but he wanted to see what I looked like—the only wonder was that he bothered with the excuse of the cigarette, but probably he really wanted to smoke. 'Thanks,' he said at last. 'That is awfully decent of you, but I think I can look after myself. By the way—do you know who I am?' I did not and I told him so, a trifle curtly; he threw away the match and from out of the darkness of its extinction came his answer. 'I am Lawrence Brooke.'

"It hit me between the eyes. I had heard that name a score of times since landing and the inevitable corollary to any mention of it was: 'Kicked off the Gold Coast for cheating at cards.' And this white and gold stripling, with the eyes of a devotee and the trained punch of a pugilist, was the man of whom they were talking.

"It all came back to me with a rush, half-heard sentences, broken bits of information piecing themselves together in my brain.

"'Lawrence Brooke—son of Colonel Brooke—you know, Brooke of Bontuku—dead now—came an awful smash.'

"Colonel Brooke, it seemed, had achieved notoriety and finally disgrace and recall through one of those mysterious, impossible African happenings that they always spoke of as 'the Bontuku affair.' Finally he had died of it, heart-broken by the injustice, for such it had proved to be, though it was fifteen years before the truth of the Bontuku affair had become known, and then only through the untiring efforts of his widow.

"To Mrs. Brooke this clearing of her dead husband's name had been a consecration; the boy had been brought up on it as a sacred tradition and when he was of age he had been given, as a tardy recompense for the injustice done his father, a Government appointment on the Gold Coast. I could picture it all in those few moments after he spoke. The incident on the terrace had given me an insight and the darkness and his proximity quickened my brain to a flash of clairvoyance. I could see him starting out, with all the enthusiasm of his youth and a bran-new tropical outfit, to prepare to take up the work his father had died for. But he had never done it; it almost seemed as if Africa, that most revengeful of continents, not content with killing the father, had reached out to

smite the son before ever he touched her shores.

"There was a full passenger list that voyage, a hundred young fellows going out, a score of well-known names. Play had run high and within ten days of leaving England young Brooke had lost his first six months' salary, and the Brookes were well known to be poor. Then one night there had been a scene in the smoking-room, a circle of stern, suddenly sobered men, a white-faced boy protesting his innocence and a well-known African explorer and exploiter, Sir Bertram Coates by name, accusing him of increasing his bets after the cards were declared. I couldn't believe it somehow; anything else, anything red-blooded, I could have believed of him, but not the sneaking meanness of stealing from his friends, but I was silent so long that he misinterpreted it.

"'I beg your pardon,' he said stiffly. 'I misunderstood. When you stood by me up there I thought perhaps you knew and didn't believe.' I shook my head at him stupidly. 'No, I didn't know.' I began, then caught at his arm as he turned away. 'Oh, wait. Of course I didn't disbelieve it—how could I when I didn't know? But I'm damned if I believe it now.'

"He turned and looked at me. 'I didn't do it, you know,' he said simply, as simply as if he were announcing that it was night, that the moon was shining or any other incontrovertible, cosmic fact. His eyes were again full of that inner light that had so puzzled me but I understood it now, he was looking at the truth of the matter, that was what he was seeing and it was all that he was seeing.

"'Couldn't you explain it?' I asked. 'Oh—not to me—you don't have to; but to—well—those others?' and I nodded up at the terrace.

"'You don't understand,' he said, as if patiently humoring a child. 'I didn't do it—how can I explain what I never did?'

"His logic was unshakable and there was no moving him from it; the thing had never happened and that was all there was to it. As for his present situation it was merely a passing annoyance that he must put up with while waiting for his vindication; he never doubted but that it would come, that vindication; it was bound to for how could they condemn him for what he had never done? The mere fact that they were doing so as hard as they could seemed to make no impression on him; his faith was unshakable for it was one and the same as the facts in the case.

"The affair on the steamer had been cabled home from Sierra Leone and on reaching the Gold Coast Brooke had found his appointment cancelled. No chance was given him to prove his innocence or to even put in a defense; there was against him the word of Sir Bertram Coates, that combination of Cæsar, Nimrod and Livingston, with Stock Exchange affiliations on the side. Sir Bertram was head of the Chartered Ahanta Company, a power in Parliament, *persona grata* with all the great missionary societies and purveyor of dividends to the British public, dividends that he was popularly supposed to earn by the simple means of dispensing sweetness and light to the heathen, who grew cocoa for him out of sheer gratitude.

"Thus cast adrift Brooke had transshipped to a homeward boat and come back to Las Palmas, where he obtained a position with the African Shipping Company. He was living in a cheap Spanish hotel down at La Luz, the port, and had come to the 'Victoria' that evening for a decent dinner—the rest I knew, they had kicked him out as unfit for human society.

"Some of this I knew already, some of it he told me as we talked there amidst the shadows of the garden, unconsciously lowering our voices to cut under the higher-keyed chatter from the terrace. Not that he was asking for sympathy; I never saw anyone who needed it less; there was a certain mental, almost spiritual, cleanliness about him that forbade the sprouting of the blue-mould of self-pity. It did not even occur to him to be grateful for my believing in him; why should it when my doing so only proved my own intelligence? But he was friendly and unfeignedly glad of some society of his own kind, so we parted with my

promising to go down and dine with him the next evening and at the time appointed I jolted down to La Luz on the steam-dummy and I went, partly at least, because there were some things I wanted to see for myself.

"There was a Spanish girl, the daughter of the woman who kept the *Fonda de Sevilla,* where Brooke lived and there were—well, rumors—about him and her, but there was no truth in it, I saw that at once. We dined in the *patio,* all brick pavement, green-painted tables, flickering lamps and one big date palm, and this girl, Mariquita, waited on us. She was a pretty little thing with a pale Madonna face and enormous, hungry eyes; not at all the Carmen type one might expect from a *Fonda de Sevilla.*

"That she loved Brooke was as plain as that he had never even noticed her; she lived and breathed in him, and to him she was merely the servant. It was all rather pitiful; she would stand about gazing at him, flushing and paling when she took his plate and he—left a tip for her on the table.

"She took it, too, picking up the money in a white-lipped ecstasy of pain; since pain was all she was ever to have from him she would at least have as much of that as she could. Her love for him was of that kind that women will sometimes cherish like a knife in their bosoms, holding out the handle to their idol that he may plunge it the more deeply and turn it in the wound; doubtless she credited him with an hundred high and noble reasons for what, on his part, was half self-absorbtion and half that fastidiousness that serves men in place of virtue.

"He was hardly the type that would engage in incidental *amours* with serving maids and just then his whole vision was fixed on something else, something far more vital to himself. To him at that time his whole surroundings were of the nature of a rather unpleasant dream; as he expressed it to me he felt that he was not really there, he could not be when the entire situation was the direct outcome of something that he had never done.

"What view Brooke's people at home were taking of his situation I did not ask him. It was surprising the number of things one did not ask that boy; anything he chose you to know he told you voluntarily and anything beyond that one would have had to blast out of him with dynamite.

"As far as his people went he offered no information but I was not surprised when one day a couple of ladies dropped quietly off an outward bound cape liner and installed themselves at the 'Victoria.'

"The elder, a stout, middle-aged woman, very plainly dressed but with 'an air,' announced herself as Mrs. Brooke; the other was a Miss Vereker, who was said to be a sort of sixteenth cousin, but everybody knew at once that she was really engaged to the boy. She was a tall, upstanding sort of girl, not exactly pretty but with fine eyes, good skin and a lot of brown hair.

"The hotel, feeling that it was really necessary to 'draw the line' at the mother and fiancée of a detected card-sharper, proceeded to do so with a viciousness of virtue that one suspected was all the more enjoyable to them because, in cutting two women of obviously higher social standing than themselves, they were also flattering their own innate snobbishness. Then somebody discovered that, before her marriage, Mrs. Brooke had been 'a Portdown,' which seemed to be something quite tremendous. In fact, it seemed that one simply could not draw the line at a Portdown, no matter what their offspring might do, and the hotel suffered a change of front, but Mrs. Brooke was as unconscious of their offered eyes as she had been of their averted ones.

"Me, she accepted with a gracious little word of thanks for my kindness to her son, but I could see that I really did not matter. She mentally tagged and shelved me for use in case of an emergency but it was plain to me that she was after higher game than myself, though at that time I could not imagine who it could be.

"Though they spoke to no one in the hotel the two ladies, in some occult manner, evidently heard the rumors and before they had been two days in the is-

land they drove down to La Luz. I was there, lunching with Brooke in the *patio* when they arrived and I saw at once that they had come to size up the situation.

"Brooke was entirely unsuspecting; he had very few emotional antennae about him, beside, as he would have said, with one of his cool, vivid stares, there was no situation for them to size up. Mariquita knew, however, and she also knew instantly what the relations were between Brooke and Miss Vereker.

"She hoisted the battle flag and tried to brazen it out in an impudent hand-on-hip way, with eyelids half lowered over insolent eyes. From the way she hovered over Brooke, shot glances at him, touched his shoulder, one would have said she was trying to make them believe that the rumors were true, but she could not keep it up. Miss Vereker's unwavering, amused gaze was too much for her and she suddenly wilted and threw up the game with a silent, quivering appeal for mercy. Then Miss Vereker's manner changed subtly, it became softly gracious like that of a victor picking up a wounded antagonist; the two girls took a long stare at each other over Brooke's unsuspecting head and Mariquita went away.

"Except for the Mariquita affair, of which they could hardly have known before reaching the island, I could not quite see what the two ladies were doing in Las Palmas. Then a few days later, with mountains of baggage, a retinue of secretaries and servants and a flourish of trumpets, the great Sir Bertram Coates himself landed from a northbound West Coaster.

"I saw him when he arrived, a bull-necked, thick-legged man, with the rubber mouth of the inveterate public speaker. I put him down as an egotist, a born opportunist and something of a brute; as for the missionary connection I could not quite see what he was doing in that galley, except for a certain rather tiresome, family-man sort of physical morality that he was always thrusting in one's face—there was a Lady Coates and eight children somewhere down in Surrey.

"With Mrs. Brooke and Sir Bertram both under its roof the hotel literally foamed at the mouth with curiosity, everybody wondering 'how they would take it.' For myself I was not so much surprised; I remembered the way Mrs. Brooke had ticketed me for use 'in case' and I doubted if the meeting were as accidental as it seemed. Behind it I thought I caught a glimpse of that mysteriously powerful Portdown influence and I was pretty sure it was a meeting of hostile powers for the purposes of a conference.

"At all events there was a letter from Sir Bertram that evening and a Brooke family council to consider it; I learned that next day when I went down to see the boy in response to a note from him begging me to come. He was in the *patio* as usual, with Mariquita hovering in the background like a pallid flag of distress. His breakfast was untouched, he plainly had not slept and as soon as I saw him I knew that something had happened, something that had shaken even his tremendous faith.

"He showed me Sir Bertram's letter, a characteristic epistle of the 'weak-minded young man, sudden temptation' order. He regarded Brooke, it went on, as 'perhaps sufficiently punished.' He did not wish to 'utterly wreck a life that, under proper guidance, might yet be useful to the world in a minor capacity,' and ended up by offering him a clerkship with one of his companies in South America where 'by attention to duty and God-fearing conduct he might, in time, live down the worst consequences of his rash and indefensible act.'

"I tossed the letter back with a laugh; Brooke wearing out the pride of his youth and his splendid young body in 'a minor capacity' in South America—the thing was ridiculous.

"'I need not ask what you answered.' I began, then stopped as he raised his head and gazed at me with a pair of miserable eyes from which the light had gone. 'I haven't answered yet,' he said. I could not understand it, but the thing was evidently more serious than I had supposed. For an instant, as I looked at his face, all ravaged by a white night,

I almost doubted, then I remembered him as he had been that first evening and my faith came back.

"'You see,' he began slowly. 'My mother — she thinks it might be wiser——'

"I saw it then. Poor Mrs. Brooke, she had loved two men in her life and for both she had had to fight; she was getting old and she feared. She had seen her husband go down to his death under something of the same sort and for her son she would snatch half a loaf rather than see him starve for lack of the world's recognition. And to have his mother fail him at this moment had shaken even the boy's actual knowledge; as for Miss Vereker she had not spoken at all, but had left everything to Mrs. Brooke.

"'For God's sake,' he cried, reaching across the table and grabbing my hands. 'I didn't do it—did I? It almost makes me doubt myself. Man—by anything you call holy—tell me I didn't do it!' I knew he had not, actually knew it, and a thousand words crowded to my lips in such a rush that I could not get any of them out. All I could articulately think of was something from the Bible, something about a Rock and the gates of hell not prevailing against it, but I could not say it somehow, partly because I could not quite remember it and partly because of that silly shame that overtakes one when inclined to quote Holy Writ in a serious way. I could only stammer while he hung on to my hands searching my very soul for a word, just one word to carry him across the dark waters that had so suddenly risen about him. Then he flung away my hands and buried his face in his arms. He was so young and so tragic; it is only youth that dares to be as tragic as it feels and I sat there, aching to help but helpless myself, when all at once Miss Vereker was at his side. She had foreseen the hour of his real need and had come alone, defying conventions with the same serene courage with which she now defied my prying eyes. She stooped and kissed him, magnificently careless of my presence; then, with a little nod of dismissal for me, she gathered his head in her arms and pillowed it on her breast. She was the real thing, that girl, there was that in her atmosphere that was like the sweep of a warm, sweet wind, full of the eternally virgin tang of the ocean, yet to the boy she could be wife and mother in one.

"I got away somehow, nearly stumbling over a crumpled heap behind the palm that proved to be Mariquita. She was crying and I would have avoided her—I felt there had been emotion enough for before lunch—but she sprang up and grabbed at me as I passed.

"'Was it true that Don Lorenzo was in great trouble?' 'Yes, it was,' I snapped back. 'And was it true that it was that Señor Sir Coates that was the cause of it?' 'Yes, damn him.' 'And—was it true that Don Lorenzo was to marry the Doña Elena?' 'Turn your head and look,' I said brutally, but she would not, she just quivered and looked down, twisting the fringe of her shawl.

"Then it came, pouring out as if she were afraid that if she stopped she might not go on again. There was a man, it seemed, and I remembered having seen him hanging about the *Fonda*, a raffish Spanish '*Scorp*' from Mellilla, sailor, smuggler, Jack-of-all-trades, knowing all the unholy ways of the Coast from Tangier to Cameroons.

"He had once been personal servant to Sir Bertram on one of his expeditions, the only person of white blood who had been with him most of that time, and he knew things—slave dealings, torturings, executions—all the secrets of African exploration that every one in Africa knows all about, that no one ever speaks of and that the good people at home never so much as suspect.

"Also he had proof—stolen, of course—an actual diary of Sir Bertram's, with everything set down in chapter and verse, one of those incredible indiscretions of which even the wisest will sometimes be guilty; and the man would sell—for a price.

"Price—Good Heavens! I would give five hundred—a thousand pesos; but Mariquita shook her head, he did not want money, it seemed. No, she would not tell me the price, but I must send

the Doña Elena to her at once—at once, and she actually stamped her foot at me, ordering me about like an empress in a brief flash of exaltation. Ye gods, how it changed things! It was blackmail, of course, and of the blackest kind, that we were bent upon, but we did not care; there was a weapon in sight and we scrambled for it. Through it all I caught a glimpse of the infinite humor of Providence and I also learned this, that when the truth of an affair finally determines to be known it is not in the least concerned as to the ethics of the means it uses.

"It was like the change of scenes in a play, emotion all done and every thing action. I spent the rest of the day in Canariote rattletraps flying between La Luz and the hotel at Miss Vereker's behest. First I must fetch Mrs. Brooke, then I must take Lawrence away and keep him away; then I must come back and pack his things—no, he must not come back with me, nor must he see Mariquita.

"It was the latter that gave me an inkling as to the price of that diary; they never told me and the boy never even suspected, but I heard Mrs. Brooke say, with a touch of that aristocratic brutality she sometimes betrayed, that 'Mariquita really had no cause for complaint; they had made the man marry her and it was as good a match as a girl of that kind had any right to expect.'

"I wondered then had Brooke been more susceptible would Mariquita have deliberately furnished him at such a cost to herself with that which would have meant the end of her own power over him? I also wondered if, had he not been so absorbed by the white light of his own vision, he might not have been different? Mariquita had a pale charm all her own, and the mere fact of loving a girl in England would not have protected him, for masculine constancy has nothing whatever to do with conduct.

"They got it, the diary, and that was all we really, any of us, cared about; it was as Mariquita had said, commonplaces of African exploration, but enough to damn Sir Bertram forever with his following at home and shake all his enterprises to their foundations. The Brookes requested an interview with him for that evening and I was allowed to be present—mainly because they saw they could not keep me out. I can see Sir Bertram now as he bustled importantly in, an over-sexed, egotistic brute, but with something real in his tremendous vitality. I could have respected him had it not been for his vulgar 'holier-than-thouness,' yet, as far as Brooke went, he really thought he was right.

"He came all prepared to meet an imploring mother and a sulky, penitent youth, to play the righteous judge with a bit of the heavy father thrown in—and he was confronted with that fatal diary, which he had either forgotten or imagined to be safely rotting in some jungle back of the Niger.

"He tried to bluster his way through, to beat them down with purple-faced noise, but what could he do against that blazing white youth and those two implacable women; the mother, bred to her finger-tips, prepared to tear and claw; the girl, all ice and fire, ready to commit the seven deadly sins if necessary; a trio of aristocratic blackmailers transmuting a soiled weapon into the sword of the spirit. Sir Bertram caved in and it was the falling of the walls of Jericho, the whole imposing façade crashed down, laying bare the panic-stricken, mental rabbit-warren behind it, with a flag of surrender fluttering above. They talked terms at that, bickering to and fro in a way that would have been sordid had it not been such actual life and death to all concerned. Finally he agreed to write the letters they demanded, one of the 'Further evidence, gross mistake, withdraw all charges and humbly apologize' type, to be published in the papers; the other, more specific, to be sent to the authorities at home.

"He wrote and signed them, all of us holding our breath meanwhile, then he gave them to Brooke and held out his hand for the diary and—what do you suppose that amazing youth proposed. He actually meant to make that diary public after all and he justified himself on the grounds that he was innocent of Sir Bertram's charges, while Sir Ber-

tram was guilty of the things in the diary. Oh—his logic was unshakable, as usual, and he stood there like a young avenging angel, gone a little wrong through excess of zeal.

"Did you ever see a near-great man trapped, with ruin inevitable staring him in the face? Pray that you may not, it is not a pretty sight; the things that surged up from the under world of Sir Bertram's consciousness were amazing and the very vitality of the man only made them the more grim.

"Brooke was adamant and the women were no use in this, for, after all, they had only been bargaining and this was something beyond; it was a man's task and I took a hand. Finally I got Brooke to see that to crush Sir Bertram would be unstatesmanlike, would mean financially crippling a whole colony, while Sir Bertram, still powerful but under Brooke's thumb, would be a tremendous asset at his command for furthering his dead father's ideas for the good of West Africa. The statesman plea caught his ear; born administrator that he was and reared in the tradition of ruling, he could understand using doubtful means for the purposes of empire. He threw the book contemptuously on the table; Sir Bertram flung himself upon it with a growl, like a starving dog upon a piece of meat and—it was suddenly all over, everything done, everything said, and we were just standing about looking at each other and wondering how to finish it up gracefully.

"It was Mrs. Brooke who put us out of our misery by an instantaneous return to drawing-room courtesies that brought us up standing in the harness of good manners. It might have been a dinner party, she was so cool and suave.

"So good of Sir Bertram to come, so glad he was convinced at last of his sad mistake—doubtless he was busy—we must not trespass on his time—good evening, Sir Bertram.

"He took up his cue with an 'Ah—um—good evening, Mrs. Brooke—Miss Vereker—er—ah——' a grisly attempt at a bow to Brooke, a dive for the door and Sir Bertram bolted.

"It was my time for exit then and I was getting off the scene as best I could when Mrs. Brooke laid her hand on my arm, murmuring something about fresh air and the terrace. Glancing back as I opened the door for her I saw her motive. Brooke was walking toward Miss Vereker, a step at a time, as if half dazed, and the girl stood there, her head up, her eyes fixed on his, not smiling, not speaking, just waiting.

"Their faith had been justified; it was their hour, and we left them to it."

* * * * *

Carter stopped and, as the tension lapsed with a little sigh and stir, Bagley seized his opportunity.

"But—look here—I don't see——" he began.

"What is the matter? Didn't he win out?" demanded Carter.

"Ye-es. But it was the women who really did it," Bagley protested.

"What matter how it came as long as it did come?" cried Carter impatiently. "Beside," he finished with an air of conclusive triumph. "Beside—they did it because it was the truth."

Mrs. Bagley laughed softly as she gazed into the fire. "My dear man," she said slowly. "They would have done it anyhow—for him."

EVERYTHING BUT THE COOK STOVE

By Forrest Halsey

"FLORENCE, I am afraid there is something seriously wrong with your aunt. I hear her groaning and sighing yet she does not answer when I knock on her door. Hadn't you better go to her?"

"Oh, no." Florence settled her head deeper in the cushions of the lounge. "She is probably having an attack of melancholia. I did hope she would not have one while we were here, but Auntie is so selfish. Just let her alone and send

tea and toast and pepsin to her room three times a day and a little digitalis, if you have any in the house, Irving. Have you?"

"Yes, or rather in the stables. Brown Ben has a bad heart and I have been trying it on him."

"That is lovely. But I would cut the dose for Auntie."

"Does she often have these attacks?"

"Ever since I have known her. I knew one was coming when I saw the way she would devour that fried chicken last night. Your cook is wonderful, Irving. Where did you get her?"

"She came with the place; was born on it, in fact."

"How charming and so Southern. I think you are perfectly right to have all negro servants. So many Northerners who buy historic Southern houses spoil the whole thing by importing white servants. And then yours are so perfectly trained. My maid, the one who waited on me last night, could not have done better if she had been French."

"All the servants except the cook are college graduates. They are all highly educated and highly intelligent. Your maid reads Herbert Spencer in her leisure moments."

A faint but deep groan came from somewhere.

Irving started. "Florence," he cried, "are you sure your aunt does not need medical attention?"

"Perfectly." Florence yawned.

"But, Florence, how long does this last?"

"Only three or four days. Don't be alarmed, Irving. Poor Auntie is perfectly harmless and perfectly proper. She never groans except when she knows that everybody is awake. And, of course, she would not think of cutting her throat or doing anything like that. Give yourself no uneasiness, Irving, just have tea and toast and pepsin sent to her and she will come around all right and ask for a boiled egg. When she asks for a boiled egg it means her heart is at rest. Really she is better upstairs with melancholia than down here objecting to the conversation as she did last night. You know, Irving, that a chaperon serves every purpose as long as she is somewhere and alive. I never would have brought her if there was any chance of her dying. Of course, I could not take a risk like that with my reputation. Give me a cigarette."

Irving moved the cigarette box a few inches so that the white, slender fingers could reach them. Then he lit a match. Then he lit the cigarette. Florence consented to the labor of puffing the cigarette. For such a beautiful woman that was labor enough. Florence was beautiful. No doubt of that fact. The soft yet strong loveliness of her face was framed in hair as exquisite. A medley of all that the masculine mind thinks delightful was she as she lay on the lounge, her red moist lips, which looked as if Nature had painted them with the best rouge, parted and sending smoke rings into the air. Her great hazel eyes gazed up the long hall with its cracking fire in the high colonial fireplace out through the open door to the lawns sparkling with frost and ridged with low mounds which long ago had been entrenchments. Far away beyond the bright curve of the river the little red tower of an old church showed. Silk and lace and farthingales had fared once upon a time of a Sunday to that church; cavalry horses had been stabled in it and kicked the fount where historic names had been given to children destined to make more history for their state; wounded men had crawled into its shelter to die in agony; but now, deserted in the wilderness, its chief purpose was to point Irving's next remark.

"We will be married there, Florence."

"Charming," said Florence; "but how will you ever get the guests over these roads?"

"The way we got here, by break."

"How deliciously old timey."

"Yes, and we will have a regular old Southern wedding. I can import negro singers."

"Don't your servants sing?"

"Heavens no! They are too educated. The butler is writing an opera with Wagnerian motifs."

"Education has solved the negro problem," said Florence; "when we women

get the vote. Mercy! I never heard Auntie sound like that before!" She raised herself and listened intently.

A weird, crooning wail drew out and shook through the house.

"She should never have taken that third helping to fried chicken," said Florence.

Irving elevated his sleek head much as a dog does who hears a familiar sound.

"I don't think that is your aunt. I heard it yesterday. I think it is the cook singing old negro melodies."

"How perfectly in keeping," said Florence, settling back. "Irving, when we have the vote we will attend to this negro problem, we women, as we will attend to all other problems that the ages of man government have not found a solution for."

Through the hall door came a long path from the sun which had just emerged from behind a snowy bank of clouds high in the Southern azure.

The light touched Florence as if with a flame. She might have been Helen for whom Troy town was burning.

"Now the housekeeping part of the government should belong to women," said Florence; "they are so much more economical than men." She crossed her feet, encased in hand-embroidered silk stockings from Paris at twenty-five dollars a pair. "And then think of the tragedy of the idle woman—nothing to do—all our energies wasted because men refuse us our proper right to exercise our energy for the good of the state." She cuddled down luxuriously into the cushions and lit another cigarette.

"Florence, I adore you. You are so lovely."

She allowed him to fondle one of her hands. The touch of her skin was cool and sweet. Little tingles ran up his arms.

"Oh, what have I done to deserve this woman," he thought. The prickles grew stronger—became a mellow glow—"what a wife for any man!"

"What is the government but a great house to keep? And what are women but housekeepers," continued Florence. "And isn't it ridiculous—nay criminal—that women should be debarred from the management of homes, for what is the government but a great collection of homes? In short by denying us the vote you deny us the chance to set matters right by our experience of ages."

"Florence, give me a kiss."

"Not until you agree with me."

"I do. . . . I do. . . ."

"And you will subscribe to the cause?"

"I will."

"And work for it heart and soul?"

"Yes . . . yes."

"Then"—but you know what the "then" was as well as I do.

They were interrupted by the same crooning song, now risen and grown heavier.

Florence drew back from her fiancé's embrace and smoothed her hair.

"Stop, Irving, remember the servants. Oh, how quaintly pretty that negro melody sounds. Couldn't you get her to come and sing it in here?"

"She is getting luncheon now."

"I am glad of it. I am desperately hungry. And are we going to have an old-fashioned Southern Christmas dinner to-morrow?"

"Yes, Mammy Lize cooks nothing else. Just think, darling, she never had a stove in her kitchen until I installed one."

"How absurd and how delighted she must be to have that wonderful range. Oh, think of her poor race how much they have suffered! Contrast those educated, efficient negroes of yours with those we saw from the train window coming down. Education and the ballot is the solution of all our troubles. Hand me the pad, I must make a note of that for my speech." She took the pad—"'education and the ballot is.'"

Stillness, save for the scratching of the pencil and the negro melody, now grown to have a long menacing note. The dogs basking before the logs began to raise their heads and cock their ears.

"Listen," said Florence, "woman has been emancipated from the kitchen range by modern inventions. No longer is it necessary for her to cook and weave as her mothers did. She has thus had empty hours thrust upon her which cry out to be filled by larger activities. She has risen from her prone position as a household drudge."

"Florence, darling, a household drudge who was prone could not do her work."

Florence frowned.

"Now don't be so stupid, Irving. As long as anything sounds all right it is perfectly good enough for a speech."

"Righto—say, my dear?"

"What."

"Do you want to drive over with me to meet Charlie and Dora?"

Florence put down the pad.

"You don't mean to say that you have asked Dora Furness?"

"Certainly, she is one of my oldest friends."

Florence sat up.

"Irving Pennymint, do you mean to say——"

"Why, darling, that is all over long ago. We were engaged, to be sure, but we discovered our tastes did not suit. She is so quiet and I am not. But we are the best of friends."

"Well, I must say!"

"And I thought she and Charlie would get on so well."

"You thought——" Florence had no words for such imbecility; "why don't you know that Charlie never opens his mouth. That was why I broke my engagement to him."

"But you asked me to ask him."

"That was simply because we are the best of friends. But Dora; Irving, are you insane?"

"No, dearest, simply trying to do my best for poor, quiet Dora. I hoped Charlie would like her. You know I had to have somebody."

"Well Dora is nobody. But don't blame me if they are both bored to death and hate you for it." She sank back with the soothing reflection that shortly, after a certain ceremony, she would be the one to say who should come to that house. "Now," resuming the pencil, "listen. 'Education and the ballot is the solution of all problems which confront the world.'."

"Beg pardon, Mr. Pennymint." The Wagnerian motif butler stood before them, immaculate, educated, finished, the problem of his race solved in the very way he wore his livery and side-whiskers. "Could I have a moment's speech with you?" He spoke with trained enunciation and pronunciation in every word.

"Certainly, Elber."

"I mean alone, sir. The matter while slightly trivial is of the highest importance."

In some surprise Irving arose and went to the door.

The negro melody grew stronger and fiercer.

"Well, Elber?"

"Mr. Pennymint"—through the succeeding speech ran motifs of regret, tolerance, superiority and dignity—"it is in regard to the chef that I take the liberty of calling to your attention some matters pertaining to the culinary regions. The chef is a regrettable specimen of the benighted, but now almost past, condition of our race. I have tried, in fact I may say that all of us have tried, but our efforts having failed I must ask of you to have a personal interview with her and request her to cook the luncheon."

"What the deuce is the matter?"

"The matter, Mr. Pennymint, lies, if I may be permitted to speak figuratively, in the condition of midnight ignorance of the relic of a past condition who presides over the culinary regions. That's her now."

The negro croon, loud and menacing, filled the hall. One of the dogs began to whine. The Wagnerian butler cast an eye at the hound and continued.

"You see, Mr. Pennymint, since the new range burned her, and more especially and specifically speaking since some of us—I may without being accused of overstatement, or exaggeration, say all of us, have in consideration of her condition, tried to make plain to her certain changes which have fortunately occurred, or I may say happened in the status of our race—since we have tried to do that and since the stove burned her, she has become, may I term it unmanageable? and has yielded to some of the absurd superstitions of our race—I should say former superstitions—and is now engaged in putting the voodoo on the whole lot of us, therefore may I request you to go and stop it."

He paused. The croon shook through the hall; there was a jungle note in it

which had come from the time when the naked bodies twisted to the bellow of the drums in the black depths of the forests. And the goat without the horns was dragged screaming up to the knives.

Irving felt a creep go down his spine under his immaculate English semi-lounge suit.

"What the devil?" he said.

"Of course," continued the Wagnerian butler; "it is absurd and we all of us in the servants' hall laugh at the matter. She has placed the curse on each of us much to our amusement, but still we thought if you spoke to her she would consent to relinquish her ridiculous incantations, cook luncheon, and stop sticking pins into chickens' hearts. Of course, I laugh personally at her threats but——"

He gave a loud yell, slipped on the polished floor and fell on his face. A log in the fireplace had exploded and one of the embers had flown right into the shiny eye that education should have changed but had not. One of the dogs promptly fell upon him and bit him. Whereat he screamed again. A second dog rose up and also sampled his cultivated form. Once more he yelled.

Irving dashed into the struggle, and with kicks and cuffs drove off the dogs.

For a moment the Wagnerian butler lay prone and motionless except for the rolling of his eyes.

"Has anything happened, Irving?" asked Florence in tones of alarm.

I firmly believe that if a woman heard the earth rocking and splitting at the Day of Judgment she would ask the man nearest her if anything had happened.

Something was the matter, at any rate with the Wagnerian butler. He sprang to his feet. He grabbed the poker. He yelled. "Damn dat nigger! She's wished the hydrophoby onto me," and he sped for the kitchen.

Irving sped for the kitchen.

Florence sped for the kitchen.

The dogs sped for the kitchen.

In fact, the big decorous hall was full of speeding.

"You nigger!" shouted the Wagnerian one, dashing open the last door. "You nigger!"

Then he paused.

Irving paused.

Florence paused.

Also the dogs.

The kitchen was vast, as became a kitchen which must provide for the whole congregation of Pohick Church of a Sunday, should the congregation feel like dining at Pohick Hall. In the middle of the brick fireplace stood a modern range. In the middle of the kitchen stood an ancient negro woman waving a knife. The knife was new and sharp. The woman old and fat. At her feet lay the entrails of some chickens. In the door leading to the outer offices stood three negro maids, each of their heads crowned by an educated cap, each of their waists covered with an educated apron. All of their eyes rolling in a most uneducated manner.

"Umm!" chanted Mammy Lize, "umm—fire burn em—water drown em—dogs chaw em."

The butler cowered.

"May dey bones shake an' dey teeth rattle—may de husk drap offen dey heels. May dey cuss be on em in de mornin' an' at noon, an' at night—may dey——"

"Cook," cried Irving, authoritatively.

"Clar outen my kitchen, you white man. You ain' quality an' I done 'sociates with nur one dat ain' quality. Yes, Lord Jesus, clean shurts ain' quality, an' clean faces ain' quality, an' money ain' quality, nothin' ain' quality 'cepin' quality. Ummm," humming and rocking herself. "Clar outen' my kitchen, white man—clar outen it—on dese niggers I'm gwine to put de *blight!*"

"'Fore de Lord dey ain' no such t'ing," quavered a highly-educated voice from among the highly-educated caps.

"Ummmm—ummmn—wait an' see, you cornfiel' nigger gal—on you specially is cumin' de curse of de snake! Umnnn—Umnnn—all dat 'Anti Kink' yo' got on yo' har' ain' gwin' to stop hit frum kinkin' up tight in de flames of de snake—Bosom ob de Lam'—bosom ob de Lam', har' me. Black Prophet, har' me—ummmn—umnnn."

She rocked brandishing the knife, the glitter of its blade matching the glitter of her eyes.

"Irving, take that knife away from that woman," demanded Florence.

The slender, immaculate Irving teetered on his toes. One of his delicate and highly-manicured hands clutched feebly.

The great, savage black woman let her eyes rest on him for a moment.

Irving stood perfectly still.

"Irving!" cried Florence.

"Ummmn—umnnn—de dead gwine tun in de graves—I har em—I har em—dey is coming—yes dead—yes dead—dey is niggers waitin'—dey is niggers waitin'—I hars yuh—I hars yuh."

"Fo' de Lord, mister, stop her!"

"Irving," cried Florence; "take that knife away from her."

"I—I think she—she is perfectly harmless, darling."

"Oh, I wish we had a man here to stop this," cried the suffragette.

"Ain' nothin' gwin' stop dis—ain' nothin'—Yankees done rage an' tare in dis house an' dey was bad. Morgagers bin in dis house an' dey was worse. But dese low down, cornfiel, chalky-level, sole of dey foots meck a hole in de groun' niggers, dey is de worstest pisen of dem all and on dem I calls de *blight*."

Still humming she crouched, the knife glittering in her upraised hand.

"Dat's fo' dat gal Hortense," she pierced the heart of a chicken before her. "Dat's fo' dat wench Marie Antonette. Dat's fo' dat cornfiel gal Gwendolin. Dat's fo' dat nigger Jenettah—an' dis—dis de worstest, de poisonest, de horryfinest, de scorifienest of all—dis is fo' dat blue gummed, pick heeled, free nigger, Elbert Agustus Franklyn, who tucken an' spoke disrespectus of me an' de res' of de quality. On him I axes a special, bone-eating, heart-chawin' *blight*."

She stood up straight, raised her rigid arms and screamed.

"Soul ob de snake. Heart ob de black, dark—give a sign—give a sign!"

With a loud explosion a stove lid flew into the middle of the floor. Clouds of smoke poured from the range, enveloping her figure.

Loud yells and screams and the scampering of educated feet followed.

Florence screamed.

The dogs howled and fled.

"It's done come," shrilled the frantic voice amid the clouds of smoke. "Hit's done cum—de blight—de *blight!*"

A second stove lid followed the first and took her somewhere in her ample back.

"*Gawdamighty*," she cried in startled tones, "de blight done hit me, too. Le'me git outer here—Lord spar' de chosen of yo bosom!"

Her feet scampered through the smoke and were gone.

"Why don't you do something, Irving?" cried Florence.

There was a loud explosion from the stove.

Both of them did something.

They fled.

In the hall Irving wiped his heated face.

"She has been using kerosene to light that fire," he cried in a shaking voice; "that savage does not know how to handle a stove." He gasped and seized the whiskey from the table, poured and drank a large drink. His color came back. "Heavens!" he said. "That was a page from the dark. "Heh! you! where are you going—stop!"

These cries were caused by the station break which passed the hall door laden with the educated specimens of their race all clutching suit cases.

The break flew by at a gallop.

At a gallop Irving sped for the veranda.

At a gallop Florence followed him.

At a similar gait the dogs followed both.

All arrived on the veranda in time to see the break fly around a clump of trees on the drive and disappear as fast as horses could be flogged by the frightened coachman.

Down by the river Mammy Lize could be discerned, running with a large bundle tied in a patchwork quilt.

Irving looked at Florence. Florence looked at Irving.

The truth burst upon them.

They were, for the first time since the cradle, servantless, forty miles from any town.

They sank into chairs and remained silent.

Finally Florence spoke.

"You can telephone for more," she said.

"There is no telephone," said Irving.

"Oh," said Florence.

"Of course you can cook," said Irving.

"Ye—es," said Florence.

"Then everything will be all right," said Irving.

A soft groan floated down from the chamber above.

"I suppose the stove can be fixed," said Florence. "You can do that, I suppose?"

"Er—y—es," said Irving.

"Then we shall get along beautifully," said Florence.

Again the gentle groan sounded.

There was a pause.

"I am frightfully hungry," said Irving.

"I don't feel the least bit hungry," said Florence. "But if you want me to cook, go and fix the stove."

"I somehow don't feel like eating just now," said Irving. "I—I think I ought to feed the dogs."

"A very good idea," said Florence icily.

They sat in silence for some time. Hunger began to gnaw them.

Still neither spoke.

"It's so funny, darling," said Irving; "just like being married, isn't it?"

"Very much," said Florence, sourly.

Silence.

"If you had sprung on that woman and taken her knife away, we should now be eating," said Florence.

"My adored, how could I strike a woman?"

"Fiddlesticks."

Silence—gnawing of hunger.

"I thought you were going to feed the dogs. They must be ravenous," said Florence.

Irving rose and in the midst of a wiggling mass of tails opened a cupboard and brought forth a package of dog-biscuit.

"See now how grateful they are," said Irving to the accompaniment of crunching canine teeth.

"So would I be if anybody fed me," said Florence. "What are you doing?"

"Just seeing if dog biscuit is really palatable."

"Give me one. I have always wondered myself."

Crunching of canine and human molars.

"It is not," said Florence.

"No, my love," said Irving.

"Do you suppose there is anything cold in the house?" said Florence suddenly.

"Why, there must be. Cooks generally have cold things about, don't they?"

"I am sure I do not know. It has not been my custom to spend my time in winning the confidence of cooks. But you might see."

He rose, hope in his eyes.

"I will."

"So will I," cried Florence, springing up.

But there was nothing cold in the ice-box, that is, nothing cold that had been hot, with the exception of some boiled potatoes.

Mammy Lize did not support three families to let anything like "broken victuals" get by her.

Florence looked at the potatoes. "Do people eat these?" she asked.

"I think so," said the other child of wealth.

Florence gingerly took a bit of the icy, soggy mass.

"I don't think they eat them this way," said Florence with dreadful calmness.

"Suppose you cook them then?" said Irving tartly. His stomach was beginning to prevail over his heart.

"How do you suppose I can cook until you fix the stove?" retorted the lady.

"I should think a simple matter like preparing a luncheon would be child's play for a woman who only needs the ballot to settle everything that the ages have left unsettled."

"Indeed? Well you gave a typical example of the way men have handled the questions of ages in the way you did not handle the cook," retorted Florence, glaring with the ferocity of hunger over the dish of cold potatoes she was holding.

"Do you think I was afraid of her?" cried Irving.

"I am not supposed to think. I am a woman," returned Florence.

"You are an untrained woman if you come to that."

"Irving Pennymint!"

"Florence Vasselearl. Well, I will say you have a temper."

"Please refrain from insulting me in your own house."

"I was not insulting you."

"You were."

"What did I say?"

"I don't care what you did or did not say. Is it possible for me to get any food in *your* house?"

"You have food in your hand if you can cook it, and there is more in the ice-box."

"Kindly explain how I can cook anything without a stove to cook it on. If that is not just like a man."

"Of all the unreasonable women."

"I don't care whether I am reasonable or not"—banging down the cold potatoes—"I cannot live on dog biscuit and since I am your guest——"

"You are showing a most unreasonable amount of temper about a mere matter of food," cried the hungry man.

"I am simply pointing out to you how remiss you are in your arrangements. When a man entertains—if you call this entertaining——"

"I don't. I see nothing entertaining in the whole matter."

"Well, if you are pleased to affront me. I shall leave you with your cold potatoes and your raw chicken and raw meat and your raw fish and only inform you that I am glad I discovered what you are before it is too late. I beg to leave this also."

A diamond ring was laid beside the potatoes.

"Florence, this is absurd and childish. Keep your ring."

"I would if it were anything to eat. Excuse me, Mr. Pennymint."

Florence left him.

Irving tried a cold potato.

"Of all the unreasonable helpless women," he cried, spitting violently. "Well, I will let her alone. She will have to apologize to me before I go near her."

"Irving," called an excited voice; *"come quick! The house is on fire!"*

Irving obeyed.

The kitchen floor before the stove, which had vomited a spray of red hot coals, was merrily ablaze.

"Fire . . . fire . . ." screamed Florence.

"Fire . . . *fire,"* screamed Irving.

The floor blazed merrily. Little tongues of flame began to lick the dresser.

"Telephone to the fire department," screamed Florence.

"Woman, there isn't any," yelled Irving.

"Bow—wow—wow," howled the frantic dogs.

"Why do you live in such an idiotic place!" cried Florence. "Oh! oh! oh! why isn't there a man here to do something?"

"Go ahead—go ahead—insult me while my house is burning."

"You ought never to be trusted with a house—fire—*fire."*

Florence wrung her hands.

"Throw all you can out of the windows while I run to town," cried Irving.

Suddenly they stood petrified.

Between them ran the small figure of a little old woman in a slik kimono who seized a broom and beat the fire away from the dresser, then holding up her skirts she sprang over the heap of coals and reached the sink; there she filled a dishpan with water and poured it on the coals. In three pourings the fire was out.

The little old lady stood holding her skirts high while around her feet eddied the smoke from the scorched boards; she resembled a little old sybil out on the burnt bracken.

"Idiot," she addressed her niece.

"Imbecile," she addressed Irving.

"Typical examples of modern methods," she addressed them both.

She paused. They said nothing.

"Don't do it again," said the little old lady and vanished as if the father of fires had summoned her.

There was a pause.

"Florence"—Irving regarded the red hot stove—"I wonder if that is warm enough to cook on."

"Get the potatoes and the chicken and the fish and the meat and I will see," said Florence, pinning up the skirts of her Irish lace morning gown.

Irving obeyed.

"She is a dear girl after all," thought Irving as he returned to find her placing the dishpan on the stove. She looked adorable as she did so.

"Thanks," Florence took the chicken and placed it in the dishpan. "I am so hungry, Irving, dear, I could eat almost anything. Get me a dish for the potatoes."

"You look so domestic, love," he took a china dish and handed it to her.

"It's sport, isn't it," Florence smiled as she dropped the potatoes into the pie dish. "I shall often cook for you when we are married."

"Won't it be jolly?" Irving placed his arm about her. "My dear, clever little girl. . . . Oh! my God!"

With a loud bang the china dish broke into fragments and the potatoes rolled over the red hot iron of the stove top.

Heavy smoke and the smell of scorched flesh rose from the chicken.

"Damn it," said Florence, "why did I ever come to a place where everything behaves in such an insane manner?"

"I am certain," cried Irving, his eyes blazing with tortured hunger, "that I cannot conceive of your coming to a place where you would be more useless. Do you call that cooking luncheon?"

"When I engaged myself to you it was not as a cook, Irving Pennymint."

"That is easily perceived," cried Irving through the smoke of the scorching chicken.

"However, Mr. Pennymint, it is fortunate that I have found out your true character before it is too late. Our engagement is now definitely and forever broken. I shall take Auntie and return to civilization."

"Our engagement is broken if you wish it to be. I personally recognize your right to terminate it and shall say not a word beyond the fact that you can't take Auntie and return to civilization because the horses have gone and there is twenty miles of the worst road in Virginia between you and the station."

Florence gave a laugh, one of those laughs packed and dropping over with meaning.

"May I inquire," said Irving, "what it is that amuses you, Miss Vasselearl?"

"You may inquire, Mr. Pennymint."

She gave another laugh.

"Then what is it may I ask, Miss Vasselearl?"

"You may ask, Mr. Pennymint."

"I said you might inquire, sir, and you might ask, but I shall not tell you why I laughed; I only mean to add that for a man like Charlie twenty miles will be a mere nothing. He is coming this evening."

"Then you will go home with him?"

"May I remind you that what I mean to do is no longer any of your affairs?"

"Certainly. Now if you will excuse me I will go and eat dog biscuit."

"We heard voices and we came out," said a new voice.

They turned to behold a young man and a demure young woman standing in the doorway.

"What is the matter with your house, Irving?" demanded the young man. "We met all your servants getting out of your break at the station. I took the liberty of driving Dora and myself up in it. What is the matter?"

"The deuce," cried Irving; "how did you get here so early?"

"Took a train before the one you told me. I know Southern roads."

"Are you getting luncheon," cried Dora. "Oh, let me help; it will be such a lark."

"Can *you* cook?" cried Irving.

"Certainly."

"Then for God's sake *cook*."

"Charlie, will you come on the veranda with me. I have something to say to you," said Florence.

"Dora, just tell me what you need and I will get it," said Irving.

Dora could cook.

The fried chicken was brown, delicious and fragrant, melting crisply in the mouth, the golden batter giving exquisite touches to the palate as the sweet, tender meat went down. Her biscuits were a symphony, her curry a melody of lamb,

spices, apples, raisins, gravy fit for the heavenly ones and rice like separate grains of snow. Her coffee was rich, creamy and golden.

Full fed, happy and at peace Irving watched Florence as she left the table with Charlie for a walk. He noticed that her napkin had dropped to the floor. He noticed that Dora picked it up. He noticed that Florence had forgotten to offer to help wash the dishes. He noticed that Dora's arms were dimpled and round as they splashed the soapy water.

"Do you know," said Dora as a few minutes later she emerged from the scullery. "I found this in the ice-box. Whose is it?"

She held up a diamond ring.

"Yours," said Irving, turning from the window where he had just seen Florence enter the woods with Charlie's arm about her.

"What do you mean?" said Dora.

"I will explain later," said Irving.

THE MAN WHO DIDN'T SEE

By Tom Gallon

"I WONDER if you'll have the courage?"

Calloway asked the question, with a half ironical laugh on his lips, of the photograph he held close before him; and it was with something of a disdainful shrug of the shoulders that he put the photograph back on the mantelpiece, and stood looking at it. She was certainly very beautiful, this woman whose eyes seemed to laugh out of the picture a little mockingly at him; and she was wholly desirable. Calloway wondered how the experiment that had been planned to begin that night would work out.

"I'm never sure of myself," he muttered, as though still speaking to the portrait. "How am I to know that I shan't get tired of you, or you get tired of me; how am I to know that we can go on indefinitely? The beginning is all right—or all wrong, as the case may be; I wonder what the ending will be? But I suppose, if we come to that, life is all at the hazard of the spinning of a coin—isn't it?"

He looked at his watch, to compare it with the little silver clock on the mantelshelf, and frowned a little impatiently; he looked at the photograph again and shook his head at it, as though blaming the woman for her unpunctuality. And just as he did that the bell rang.

It rang hesitatingly, as though the hand that touched it had half decided not to touch it at all. Calloway went quickly out into the hall and opened the outer door; the woman standing there smiled at him a little doubtfully, and then, as he held out his hand without speaking, allowed him to draw her into the flat. He closed the outer door, and signed to her to enter the room he had left. She hesitated a moment on the threshold, and looked back at him.

"Is it all right?" she whispered.

"Of course it's all right," he answered. "I'm quite alone; I've even given my man Jarman a holiday."

He put his arm about her, and drew her into the room; then, after looking at her whimsically for a moment or two, drew her into his arms and kissed her. She seated herself in a deep armchair, still retaining her hold of his hand; she wound her fingers round his, and drew him down beside her, so that he seated himself on the broad arm of the chair. It took her quite a long time to speak, and when she did she kept her eyes, not on his face, but on the fingers she was holding.

"Steve—I'm half afraid."

"That's not very surprising—is it?" he retorted. "I suppose any woman that runs away with a man doesn't do it quite in the spirit in which she would pay an afternoon call. But, my dear girl, you've got nothing to be afraid of; I'm going to

look after you—and I'm going to be very good to you. You love me—don't you?"

For answer she bent her head, and kissed the hand she held; then looked up at him with a smile that was half tearful. "Yes—I know you'll be good to me—and I haven't had the best of lives so far. I've deserved something better—something I've hungered for and hoped for. Instead of that I've had neglect and misunderstanding—oh—what's the good of talking about it?"

"No good at all," said Calloway. "All that part of your life is done with. Jack never understood you—and I flatter myself I do. Take your hat and cloak off, and make yourself comfortable. We don't need to start yet a bit; the car won't be here for nearly an hour. We shall travel all night; but you won't mind that, will you?"

"It'll be lovely," she murmured. "Don't tell me anything more; I want to forget that I've got to trouble about anything ever again. I'm going to leave everything to you for just as long as I live—or until you get tired of me, and throw me over."

"I wouldn't talk like that if I were you," said the man seriously. "I want you to feel as though you were beginning life afresh—and I want you to forget that there has ever been any other life."

She shook her head. "It will take a long time for me to do that," she said slowly. "You see, Steve—I'm leaving quite a lot behind."

"Oh, you mean—the child?"

She stopped him with a passionate gesture. "Don't talk about that," she said. "You know that I should have come to you ever so long ago—when you first asked me—if it hadn't been for the child. You don't realize that I shall never see her again; they'll keep her away from me. Jack's people will take her, I expect; for his sake they're pretty certain to be good to her. For God's sake let's talk about something else—anything else you like." She looked quickly round the room. "These were Jack's rooms—weren't they?" she asked quickly.

"Yes—before he married you," Calloway said. "I took them over—lock, stock and barrel—furniture and all. They suited me, and I didn't want the bother of buying things for myself."

"Isn't it funny? I remember Jack giving a tea party here—soon after I first knew him. There were a lot of other girls, and some men; and I think I knew then that he was—fond of me. And now to-night, nearly seven years later, I'm sitting in the same room—with you. And we're running away together—from Jack."

"You seem to lose sight of the fact that Jack ran away from you. You haven't seen him for something like twelve months."

"Yes—I wonder why?" She spoke in a dull voice, without looking at the man. "We were so happy—Jack and I; and then quite suddenly he seemed to change, and all the old lightness and brightness went out of our lives. And then he went away, and I've just had a letter or two—letters that mean nothing at all—and giving no address."

"I suppose there's another woman," suggested Calloway. "When you come to think of it, there always is another woman. But, now since you belong to me, we'll have no more talk of Jack, or of anything that concerns him. I forbid it."

She looked round at him, and laughed. "Don't begin by being a tyrant—please," she said. "And there's no harm in talking about things that have happened, even if they've been sad things. I've had to hug them to myself so long—to brood over them, and cry over them; I'm rather in a mood to cry over them to-night. But I won't begin by showing you that side of me; I'll try and show you the sunshiny side—the side that is grateful to you for what you're going to do for me. It will be nice to begin afresh; and I'll forget that Jack ever existed, or that he ever tried to break my heart by going away from me. I'll remember only—— What's that?"

The bell in the outer hall had rung suddenly; and then, while they waited, looking at each other, had rung again. Calloway got slowly to his feet, and stood frowning. He made a movement toward the door, and then turned to the woman again.

"Look here, Olive," he whispered; "I think you'd better go into the other room there. I don't know who it can possibly be at this hour, but I'll get rid of them as quickly as I can. Oh—all right; I'm coming," he added viciously, as the bell rang again. "You'll be quite safe in there, and I'll guarantee to turn 'em out in less than five minutes, whoever it is."

He closed the door of that inner room into which she had gone, and then crossed the sitting-room, and went into the hall, and opened the outer door. A man stood there looking in at him—a tall man in a tweed suit, with a tanned face. Calloway stood rigid as he looked at the man, and his face went suddenly gray. "Hullo!" he said lamely.

"Oh—it's you, Steve—is it?" said the man curiously. "I thought it might be your man. If you're all alone, I'll come in."

"Yes—I'm all alone," answered the other in a strained voice. "I didn't expect to see you, Jack. You can come in."

"Thanks." The man walked past him, just lightly touching the wall as he went, and turned into the sitting room. Only then did Calloway realize, with a gasp, that the woman's hat and cloak lay where she had tossed them on a couch; and here was the husband standing in the room, and looking at them. Calloway closed the outer door, and went into the room, braced for anything that might happen. John Stannard was standing by the table, with one hand resting lightly on it, and with his face toward the door. His eyes—surely the bluest eyes in all the world, as Calloway had so often thought, were looking straight at him, and he was smiling.

"Give me your hand, Steve," he said, in his big voice. "Touch mine; I haven't touched the hand of a friend for Heaven knows how long." Then, as the other man grasped his hand, he gripped it, and, still holding to it, went on in a voice that was almost tender. "Ah—I know the old grip. By Jove!—it's good to touch hands with you again, Steve—and in the old place. I wish to God I could see you!"

"What do you mean?" asked the other, in a startled voice.

"You didn't know that—did you?" asked Stannard quietly. "They look all right—these eyes of mine, I mean; that's the pity of it. It's all dark, and I can't see a thing. I never shall see anything again as long as I live. When I venture out men swear at me, because I blunder against them; I suppose they think I'm drunk. I never go very far—just round the houses, as you might say; I haven't got used to it all yet. Here I'm on familiar ground; I know these old rooms as I know my own pocket. It is good to be with you again; I'm just going to sit down, and yarn away until I bore you to death. Here's the table"—he began to move quickly round it—"and here's the arm chair; and now I'm at an anchorage. Give me a drink, old man, and speak to me. What's come over you; I haven't heard your voice yet."

Calloway had stood staring stupidly at the man now seated in the chair. It had all happened so suddenly, and the fact that the man was blind was so incredible when one looked into his face. The blue eyes were wide open, and were smiling; only something of the buoyant expression that had been on the face in years gone by had vanished from it, leaving the upper part, at least, with a curious stillness upon it. Calloway, with a jerk, pulled himself together, and essayed to speak naturally. In a dull fashion he wondered what Olive Stannard would do, and if she had realized that her husband was in this room. She must have done that, because John Stannard's voice was naturally a heavy one.

"I—I'm sorry, Jack; you took me by surprise. I didn't realize that you couldn't see; I can't realize it now. Are you sure?"

The other man laughed bitterly. "Oh—yes—I'm sure enough," he answered. "It took me quite a long time to realize it myself, and to understand the horror that had fallen upon me—the sort of death sentence I had received. But I know all about it now, thank you; I shall know all about it till the end of my life."

The door of that inner room had opened very slightly. It was behind the arm chair in which Stannard was seated,

and Calloway knew that the woman was listening. With a hand that shook he moved across the room, and mixed a drink for Stannard and for himself; at the sound of the hissing of the soda water syphon the blind man turned his head quickly in Calloway's direction.

"That sounds quite cheerful," he said. "You've no idea how I hesitated before I came here to-night; how miserable I was at the thought of coming up here, and facing you in my present maimed state. And then I said to myself that I was a fool. 'Steve will understand,' I said to myself. 'Steve's my pal—and he'll understand all I've gone through, and all I've suffered.' I've been down into the depths, Steve—and only to-night have I climbed to the surface again. I've been mad—but now I'm sane. It's been a long, tough fight, but I've got my old grip on things, and with God's help I'm not going to let go again."

"Here's your drink," said Calloway, putting it into his hand. "What's been happening to you?"

The other man took a deep draught, and then felt for the table carefully, and set down the glass. "There was a time when I shouldn't have cared to talk about it," he said—"but now I don't mind. I'm used to things. I'm living in a new world, and I'm beginning to light up the dark places of it for myself, and to find them not so terrible as I once thought. I'm beginning to find that life—just the sheer joy of healthy living—is something fine, after all. There was a time, Steve, when I had made up my mind that I would kill myself. Did you speak?"

"No—only an exclamation," said Calloway. But the exclamation—a mere frightened gasp—had come from the other room.

"You see, I had been a bit worried about my eyes; used to get curious pains in them—and a sudden dimness every now and then. So at last I thought that it was time something was done for them, and I went to an absolute top dog of an oculist, and I let him run over me. He talked for a long time, asking me questions about myself, and looking mighty grave; but of course that's their job. And then, after a time, he said he supposed I was a plucky sort of fellow, and could face the inevitable."

He leaned forward in his chair, with his palms pressed together between his knees; he went on talking in a quieter tone, much as one would speak of some old sorrow that has been a little bit covered up and partly forgotten in the years.

"He told me that my sight would gradually get worse, and that there was no remedy. Some long crack-jawed name he gave it; I've forgotten. And then I should get quite blind; in other words, I should be a useless burden to every one for the rest of my life. Of course, I was rich, and it didn't matter so much to me (that's what he said) as it might to anyone that had a living to earn. Of course he didn't understand the life I'd led—out of doors whenever possible, with golf and hunting and all the rest of it; he simply didn't understand."

"What made you go away?" asked Calloway, merely for the sake of saying something.

"Well—I'd brooded over it a lot—and most of all I'd thought about Olive. It seemed so bitterly unfair to her—to be tied for life to a man that wanted a dog and a piece of string. I know I got awfully grumpy in those first days—and fretful, and all the rest of it. I couldn't sleep at night; I tried all sorts of things. I had an idea once that I would take a double or a treble dose of some stuff I had to cure insomnia; and so make it look like an accident, and never let anyone know the real truth. And then at last the real solution seemed to come into my mind, and, however blunderingly, I've acted on it."

Stannard ran his hand along the edge of the table until his fingers touched the glass; then he picked it up. He seemed in no hurry to go on talking; it was a wonderful thing for him to be with this man who was his friend, and gradually to relieve himself of some of the burden that had lain so long on his mind, and had been brooded over in silence.

"I made up my mind that I would just drop out of things, and be forgotten. I couldn't tell Olive, because the dear woman would have stuck to me, and made the best of things; and I wasn't going to put

up with that. It hurt me horribly to go away and leave her—and then there was the child. If you knew, old man, how I've hungered for that kiddy—how I've eaten my heart out, thinking about her, and feeling her small arms about my neck—— What was that?"

Stannard sat up, looking startled; there had come the sound of a dry, strangled sob from the woman in the inner room. Calloway broke in hurriedly.

"Nothing—nothing at all," he said impatiently. "Your ears are playing tricks with you; I just coughed—that was all. Go on with what you were saying."

The other man sank back into his chair again. "Yes—one does fancy that one hears strange sounds," he said, in a tone of relief. "Well—I was talking about my going away. I went away, as you know—and I stopped away. I wrote little callous notes to Olive—brutal things that hurt me as much as they must have hurt her; but I was doing it all for the best. I thought that in time she might forget about me; God forgive me, I even thought that she might come to love some other man, who would be good to her and good to the child. Honestly, I tried to think that."

"And what are you going to do now?" asked Calloway; and somehow it seemed as though he did not speak, the words himself, but as though some inner spirit was beginning to guide him as to what he should say.

"I'm just going to clear out again," answered the other. "I've just come to the surface to-night, and it has cheered me to find my old friend—cheered me more than I can tell you. Presently I'm going to drift away again."

"I don't think I should do that if I were you," said Calloway slowly. "I think I'd go back again—to her, I mean."

Stannard sat quite still; he seemed to be listening intently. "I can't do that," he said at last. "It would mean the undoing of everything I've striven to do. No—I'll leave things where they are. She's got plenty of money, and she doesn't want me. I made up my mind a long time ago exactly what I ought to do, and I've done it."

Calloway was watching that partly opened door leading to the inner room; he wondered what the woman was thinking. The other man sat quite still, with his blind eyes turned in the direction of his friend, and waiting for that friend to speak.

"I think you're wrong," said Calloway at last. "If I know anything, I know she loves you, and longs for you, and wonders about you. Beside, there's something else. What about this other man of whom you spoke just now?"

"What other man?" asked Stannard sharply.

"You said just now that you almost hoped that she might come to love someone else who would look after her, and be good to her and to the child. How do you know that such a thing hasn't already happened?"

Stannard gripped the arms of the chair, and jerked himself suddenly to his feet. "What are you talking about?" he demanded roughly.

"I thought it possible that that might touch you on the raw," went on Calloway, with a little laugh. "Suppose I told you that such a man had come into her life, and was trying to make her go away with him? Only, of course, you would have to understand that the man wanted her—and not the child. There would be no room in his life, or in hers, for the matter of that, in the future, for little Prudence."

"What are you talking about? Why don't you speak plainly? Who is this man?"

"Don't get upset; I have only been putting a case to you—something that might happen. It isn't true yet—but one never knows, when a woman believes that she is slighted or neglected or misunderstood."

"Does she think that?" asked the blind man after a pause.

"What else is she to think? You've left her completely in the dark."

"I did it all for the best," said Stannard. "And do you really think that I might go back to her—and that she'd understand?"

"I think so," answered Calloway slowly. And even as he spoke, a sudden thought came into his mind that checked

his tongue and held him there, silent and perplexed. Suppose Stannard, on the impulse of a moment, went straight back at this hour, and found her gone—perhaps even had some message delivered to him concerning her flight. Was it possible to get the woman out of that room, and out of the flat, without Stannard knowing any thing about it?

"By jove! you tempt me, Steve; you tempt me sorely," said the blind man. "To go back to her—to hear from her own lips that she was glad to see me, and that there never had been any one else to whom she had turned in her loneliness. That would be wonderful—wouldn't it? I'd like to do it."

"Well—why don't you?"

Stannard turned his head quickly. "How silently you move about," he said. "I'd no idea that you were behind me. What are you doing?" For Calloway had moved to the door of that inner room, with the vague intention of beckoning the woman out, and getting her away.

"I'm not doing anything," he said, moving back again toward the table. "I was just moving round the room; you know my restless way. Well—have you made up your mind?"

"Yes—I've made up my mind; I'm going back," said Stannard. "After all, I'm young yet, and strong; and I've got rather clever during these past months in finding my way about; it's just as though I had another sense. I could move about this room without knocking things over; I could find anything in it—that is, if you've left the furniture where it used to be."

"Nothing has been changed," said Calloway.

"That reminds me," said Stannard abruptly. "You've got something of mine here, and I want it. I've been puzzling my head for a long time to know what had become of it; and I remembered suddenly. You know that cabinet that stood in the corner of that other room, the little Dutch thing?"

"Yes—it stands there still; what about it?" Calloway was watching him intently.

"There's a little sort of secret drawer in it; and in that drawer is an old cigarette case that was given me by poor Burton. You remember Burton—chap who died out in India. When I was clearing out the cabinet, at the time you took over my things, I forgot all about that drawer; and I remember that poor Burton's cigarette case is in it still. Now you shall see what a poor blind devil can do with his hands, even when he's working in the dark. I'll go in there, without any guidance from you, and I'll find the secret drawer and the case. Just you watch."

On an impulse Calloway would have stopped him; would have made some excuse to hold him back. But the next moment he realized that perhaps here was the chance. He forced a laugh, and said quickly: "Go on then; let's see what you can do. I won't even guide you round the room."

The blind man laughed happily, and turned about, and touched the edge of the table. He moved from that straight across to the door of that inner room; looked back over his shoulder toward his friend—or seemed to look, so clear and steady were his eyes—and called out to him.

"That's not a bad beginning—is it? Now time me."

"Right," said Calloway, watching the door as the man, with his hands spread out to touch each side of the doorway, disappeared into the room.

She came out quickly, almost brushing the man as he entered, and crouching low to get under his outstretched arm. Calloway, with his watch in his hand, pointed quickly to her hat and coat; she caught them up, and whispered in a mere breath of sound as she tiptoed past him toward the outer door:

"Oh—God bless you! I'm going home—to wait for him. Send him to me—send him to me!"

He opened the door swiftly, and let her out, and closed it noiselessly after her just as Stannard came quickly back into the room, holding aloft the cigarette case.

"There you are!" cried the blind man.

"Twelve and a half seconds!" exclaimed Calloway. "Not bad."

"Not at all bad," said the other. "By the way, Steve, it's funny how one gets

impressions when one moves about in a black world as I do. I could have sworn that there was someone in that room—just for a moment; I thought there was someone breathing just close to me—someone that brushed past me. Funny—wasn't it?"

"Look here, old chap—it's pretty evident that you want someone to look after you," said Calloway seriously. "Finish your drink—and have another to steady your nerves. And after that I'm going to put you in a cab, and send you home to Olive. Here's your glass."

A LOCK OF HIS HAIR

By Robert Carlton Brown

"MORNING, Marion!" exclaimed young Turner breezily, entering the front room of a comfortable New York apartment overlooking the Hudson and addressing a lithe girl, curled up languidly on a window seat with her dog and a writing pad.

Marion wrinkled her nose in greeting and made Fluff, the dog, hold out his silky paw to shake hands.

"What's this you are doing?" asked the tall young fellow, knitting his black brows and glancing at an envelope and a lock of hair tied with pink ribbon which Marion was trying to conceal.

"I wouldn't let it worry me, Tom," she said with a blush, completely covering the lock and envelope with a sheet of writing paper on which she had been scribbling. "It's nothing. Get down, Fluff!" she pushed the dog off her lap, brushed the wrinkles from her skirt and laughed nervously.

"Well, if it is nothing, why are you so awfully self-conscious?" he asked wonderingly. "Who sent you the lock of hair? What's his name?"

"Oh, Tom, please don't be so curious!" she cried with a quick, anxious smile. "I was just going to mail this lock of hair, I——"

Tom Turner sat down beside her on the narrow window seat, his manner momentarily serious. "Let me see it," he demanded, placing his hand firmly on hers which was covering the secret.

"Oh, Tom, it was so foolish of me! I can't bear to show it to you. Please don't ask me to." She blushed quite crimson down to the carnelian necklace encircling her throat.

Gently, but with the firmness of necessity, he pulled her hand from the pad. She struggled mildly, laughing nervously as he pushed her hand away resolutely, releasing his hold only for a moment in the struggle when her flushed cheek brushed against his.

As her clutch slipped, Marion became excited. "Please don't, Tom!" she cried. "I'll show it to you."

He ceased struggling for the possession of the paper, but held her hand firmly, fearing a trick.

"Why are you so afraid to show it to me? Who is the fellow? What are you doing with his hair?" he demanded in an injured tone.

"Let go my hand, you hurt!" she cried.

He released her hand for an instant; Marion quickly crumpled the paper, whipped the envelope out of his reach and darted toward her room. But Tom caught her hand and secured possession of the crumpled note and lock of hair just as she dodged into her room and slammed the door.

In a very glum mood he stepped back to the window seat, picked up the envelope from where it had fallen during the scuffle and read:

Madam Hortense,
Queen of Horoscope,
226½ Sixth avenue, New York City.

He twisted his face into a displeased expression and smoothed out the note on his knee, reading:

"Dear Madam: I enclose lock of hair and twenty-five cents for reading. He has bluish eyes and his birthday is June 16th. I am anxious to know his real character.

"Sincerely yours,
"MARION THORNTON."

Tom picked up the rumpled lock of hair, glared at it sourly, mechanically noted that it was brown, curly and fine. He sniffed at it and it smelled sickeningly as though it had been kept in some sacheted treasure box.

"Marion," he cried, approaching the girl's door wrathfully, "what barber or perfume salesman gave you that lock of his hair?"

There was no answer. Tom pressed his ear against the door and heard a stifled sob.

"Marion, how long since you have been trusting to fortune tellers instead of common sense?" he demanded, nettled by the sobs wasted on the perfume salesman. "Next thing you'll be writing to Laura Jean Libby asking advice for your lovelorn heart."

He paused. There was no answer. Angrily striding back to the window he lifted the sash and hurled the brown lock into the air. It didn't hurl very well, being only silky hair, but fluttered down and alighted quite neatly in the folds of a lady's hat, where it was probably found later by another jealous man.

With lips pursed and eyes snapping, Tom Turner picked up a pair of manicure scissors marking Marion's place in a book down among the pillows, and rapidly jagged off a pinch of his own black hair. Without stopping to tie it with a pink ribbon he wrapped Marion's note around the lock and stuffed it into the envelope addressed to Madam Hortense, Queen of Horoscope. He added a quarter from his own pocket, sealed the bulky missive and, holding it carelessly over the scraggly patch in his black hair approached Marion's door again.

"Well," he said, "if you're going to be sulky I'm going home. I'll mail your letter to Madam Hortense on my way She'll give your perfume salesman a nice little puff for my quarter and then I'll have something to tell you."

He smiled grimly to himself, anticipating Marion's consternation when she should learn that it was really his own black hair from which Madam Hortense had written a glowing description of beautiful character.

"Marion," he said by way of further reproof, "I can't yet understand why you would be so foolish as to employ a soothsayer."

"Oh, it was silly of me!" came a low wailing voice from the other room. "He is so jealous."

Tom stood in doubt, not knowing whether it was the scoundrelly unknown with the brown hair who was so jealous, or himself. Nevertheless, he called out good-by and withdrew with dignity.

Instead of posting Marion's letter at the corner he took the subway downtown and personally dropped the missive through the letter slit in Madam Hortense's street door. Then, relieved that Marion's reply would reach her within a day, he pulled his hat well down over the jagged patch in his back hair and strolled about town, trying to solve the mystery of Marion's sudden interest in a stranger with curly brown hair that smelled of Japanese sachet.

Next morning, anxious to spring his surprise on Marion, he called her up and asked eagerly, "Well, did you get Madam Hortense's reply?"

"Yes," she answered, suppressing a giggle. "Can you come right over? I'd like to read it to you."

"Sure think!" cried Tom, slamming down the receiver with one hand and grabbing up his hat with the other.

In ten minutes time he was sitting beside her on the window seat and she had mysteriously drawn out a letter scrawled in purple ink on pink note paper.

She read:

"It is easily seen that you are attached to a man entirely unworthy of your pure, young love. He is not all that he would make you think he is. The color of his hair shows that he has dealings with the devil. I must warn you against this wolf in sheep's clothing.

Place no confidence in him but send me one dollar to tell you more details about this scoundrel and how you can avoid his attentions.

"MADAM HORTENSE."

Tom grinned sickly. He could not spring his surprise of the transposed locks after hearing that letter. His joke had fallen flat, he felt rather uneasy and out of place, especially since Marion was laughing at him.

"There now," he said with dignity, "you see what that red-headed fellow is. I'm glad you sent to Madam Hortense after all. I hope she's showed up your perfume salesman so you won't dream about him any more."

Marion looked at him impishly and said with a droll smile, "I like him as much as I do you, anyway; particularly after the way you acted yesterday."

"Marion, how can you say that!" he cried.

"But I do. In spite of his faults, I love him still," she cried, striking a histrionic pose and looking at Tom with laughing eyes.

"That's just like you women," said Tom bitterly, "as soon as you find out that a man is a crook and a scoundrel you love him all the more. I guess you'd like to marry this perfume salesman to reform him. But you're mistaken. Madam Hortense was right. Those fortune tellers are a whole lot keener than you give them credit for."

"But yesterday you said I shouldn't put any faith in them, that they were all frauds," Marion reminded him.

"Well, this Madam Hortense is an exception," he replied. "You can believe every word she tells you. But who is the fellow; tell me that? I've a right to know."

She drew closer to him and glanced fondly into his face. "Will you never be jealous again if I tell you who he is, Tom?" she whispered.

"Yes, tell me."

"Here, Fluff!" she whistled, and her little spaniel came running up to burrow his head in her lap. Marion lifted his silky, curly brown hair and showed Tom a bare patch on one shoulder from which a lock of hair had been cut. She raised her eyebrows significantly and both sat silent.

"You don't mean you were sending Madam Hortense a lock of that pup's hair?" cried Tom, throwing his arms around Marion in an ecstasy of relief.

"Why, yes. It was just idleness. I was waiting for you. I saw the ad. in a magazine; I didn't have anything to do, so just for fun I thought I'd spend a quarter and see what kind of a character the Madam would give my old friend Fluff. Beside, I've been doubtful just what kind of a character he really is since he chewed up my white kid shoes the other day."

"But why didn't you tell me this yesterday?" cried Tom.

"Because you were so mean and took everything for granted. What if I *had* fallen in love with a perfume salesman! I guess I still have the right as long as we are not married."

"Yes, you have the right," smiled Tom, "but I'll see that you don't have the opportunity after this."

BILLY DU MONT, REPORTER

By Rex T. Stout

BILLY DU MONT sat on the edge of the stenographer's desk, swinging his legs in a crisscross fashion carefully copied after a young Frenchman he had met at Nice. Finding this monotonous, he added a few bizarre variations of his own.

"Stop that," commanded his father, gruffly.

Billy thrust his hands in his pockets, and sliding down till his feet touched the floor, began drumming on it with his toes. The elder Du Mont eyed him with growing disapproval.

"Well?" said Billy, encouragingly.

His father grunted. "How long do you think it will last?" he demanded.

Billy looked grieved. "There's no use asking me questions like that," he declared. "It's discouraging. You know very well I've decided to buckle down and work."

There was a silence, while Billy walked over to the mirror to smile approvingly at his carefully nurtured but scarcely perceptible moustache, and his father turned around in his chair the better to observe this modest proceeding.

"Well," said Du Mont, Senior, with a sigh, "go on down and report to Allen—God help him."

He turned to his desk in a manner which indicated that the interview was ended; and Billy, properly ignoring the implication in the prayer for Allen, left the room and proceeded down the hall and stairs to the office of the city editor.

"Hello," said Allen, cordially, as Billy entered without knocking. "On the job, eh?"

Billy nodded and seated himself on a rickety cane chair, while Allen fumbled among a pile of little yellow slips, with an amused smile.

Billy saw the smile, and resented it—inwardly. But no hostile feeling could long survive in the cheerful and optimistic breast of Billy Du Mont, and when Allen looked up from his desk he met a smile even broader than his own.

"Allen," said Billy, "you've been listening to the voice of the siren—in this case my revered parent. Go on and have your fun. But give me a chance, and I'll show you all up."

Allen laughed—a privilege he had earned by dandling Billy on his knee on several occasions some eighteen years before.

"I hope so, Billy," said he. "We need it. For a starter, here's a run up Riverside Drive to see a beautiful heiress and make some casual inquiries concerning the whereabouts of her heart."

Billy frowned. "Must I go where you tell me to?" he demanded.

"Of course."

The frown deepened. "All right. Go on."

"It's this," said Allen. "There's a rumor that the Count de Luni has come to America solely for the purpose of marrying Cecily Lyndon, daughter of the banker. He landed yesterday on the *Morania*. It's said that it's a love match, only old man Lyndon has interposed a firm and gentle nix. The Count is staying at the Ritz-Ritz, and I want you to see both him and Miss Lyndon, and get a story out of it. If there's any——"

He stopped abruptly. Billy's face had during this brief recital undergone a series of remarkable changes. It had gone from pale to red, from red to splotched, from splotched to a rosy pink, shaming his moustache. He had risen from his chair and advanced toward Allen threateningly.

"Who told you that?" he demanded.

Then, realizing that he was making a fool of himself, he sank back into his chair, embarrassed.

Allen regarded him with surprise. "You'd make a fine chameleon," he observed. "What's the row?"

Billy recovered quickly. "Nothing," he said, calmly, rising to go, "only the Count is an old friend of mine. I'll get the story, all right."

Allen was curious, but time was precious, and Billy gave him no time to answer.

"Good luck!" Allen called, as Billy was closing the door.

"Thanks!" said Billy.

Five minutes later he was seated in an uptown subway express, his forehead puckered into a frown, his lips compressed in a thin line, his hands clenched tightly. Clearly, he was thinking—a most unusual occurrence in the life of Billy, his friends would have told you.

Billy was richer in friends than in anything else. A year previous he had graduated at Harvard—barely; he had then tried the brokerage business, thereby adding to his own amusement and subtracting more from his father's bank account; and when his distracted parent had sent him on a sixty days' tour of the Mediterranean he had calmly altered the carefully arranged program into a six months' visit to Paris.

He had been the most popular man of

his class at Harvard; he had won the good will of every broker on the street in five months; and there was a certain crowd of students in Paris who loved him well, and drank his health whenever they thought of it—or had anything to drink. But these are acquisitions which are hardly calculated to gain the commendation of a father; which fact was impressed upon Billy in terms more forcible than elegant on the day that he arrived home from Paris.

Du Mont, Senior, owner and editor of the New York *Clarion*, had been unwilling that his son should become a journalist; but with Billy's insistence and his mother's tears he had been forced to acquiesce. For Billy had written from Paris that nothing else would bring him home; and when the elder Du Mont received a letter informing him that his only son was about to become a waiter at the Café Sigognac, and soliciting his patronage in the event of his coming to Paris, he cabled two hundred dollars and an unconditional surrender at once.

On the morning after his arrival, accordingly, Billy had reported at the *Clarion* office for duty. He had informed his father that he had decided to begin with editorials and special articles. Any one else would have been disconcerted by the torrent of sarcasm which this statement elicited; but not Billy. He smiled cheerfully at the assertion that the only articles he could write were the advertisements of haberdashers, and agreed willingly to the course of reportorial work proposed by his father.

As the subway express roared into Grand Central Station and out again, Billy's look of gloom changed into the dreamy smile of one who was recalling sweet memories. A certain afternoon on the Seine, and a fair laughing face that had looked out at him from the cabin of a luxurious motor launch, as he lay stretched on the bank while a student friend belabored him for going to sleep over de Musset; the subsequent meeting at the Club House at Argenteuil, when he certainly had not appeared to the best advantage; the round of drives and theatres during the remaining week of her stay in Paris, necessitating a hurried amalgamation of funds among his friends at Lampourde's; these things flitted across his mind with a distinctness that spoke highly of their importance.

As for the Count de Luni—but before Billy could decide on the particularly horrible fate to be reserved for that gentleman, the train reached Ninety-sixth street, and he found himself again in the open air, with an April breeze coming caressingly up the hill from the Hudson, directly in his face. He sniffed it with the air of a *dilettante* and with an evident appreciation.

As he entered the imposing marble hall of the Elemara, on Riverside Drive, a feeling of timidity assailed him. With Billy timidity was so rare a visitor that he paused for a moment to enjoy the novelty of this strange sensation. Then, with a shrug of the shoulders and a reflection that what was worth getting was worth going after, he sent up his card.

Seated in the reception room in the Lyndon apartment, Billy felt an apathy and indifference steal over him which he strove vainly to drive away. This, after all, was not Paris. The sunny Seine of Argenteuil was very different from this sullen Hudson, obscured by the smoke of a thousand chimneys. The glaring magnificence of the decorations and hangings of this commercial castle were in unpleasing contrast to the genuinely artistic tawdriness of Lampourde's and the Café Fracasse. Billy hated show.

He was stopped in the midst of these reflections by the appearance of Miss Cecily Lyndon, about whose slender form the velvet curtains seemed to cling lovingly as she passed through them. Billy rose at her entrance, and as she crossed the room to where he stood, regarded her with frank approval.

This was not the Cecily whose frank friendliness had been so thoroughly charming, but she was as fair. That look of detached politeness could not hide the witchery that lurked in the blue of her eyes and the curve of her lips.

"Good morning, Mr. Du Mont," said Miss Lyndon, with some dignity.

Billy extended his hand, smiling, refusing to be impressed. Miss Lyndon took it languidly, let it drop almost mean-

ingly, and remained standing, politely attentive.

Billy regarded this studied ceremony with mild amusement, and was stubbornly silent. Finally, when she felt that another second would make her ridiculous, Miss Lyndon asked coldly:

"Have you been in New York long?"

"Not long enough to find my way around," said Billy, exasperated. "I started out this morning to call on a friend—a dear friend—and I find that I have somehow made a mistake and intruded on someone I don't know."

Miss Lyndon started to answer, then bit her lip and remained silent.

"I beg your pardon for annoying you," continued Billy, rising to go. "As an excuse I can only plead an invitation which I thought sincere."

"That was the night before," said Cecily, without thinking.

"Before what?" demanded Billy.

Miss Lyndon was silent.

"Before what?" Billy repeated.

"Before—before you annoyed me by *not* coming," said Cecily, because she couldn't help it.

Billy stared at her for a moment, not understanding.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, and dropped back into his chair. He had forgotten all about his promise to go to her train in Paris, and his failure to keep the promise because of the financial impossibility of a sufficiently glorious parting gift.

"I was sorry," he said, "sorrier than you would believe. Really, I had the best excuse in the world."

"It's of no consequence," said Cecily, with elaborate indifference. "One always has excuses."

"It isn't an excuse. It's a *reason*. And it is of consequence—to me."

"It's hardly worth discussing, is it?" asked Cecily, dryly.

Billy regarded her for a moment in angry silence. But then, she had a right to be offended.

"Miss Lyndon," he said, "I am sorry. I—if you knew my reason—but I can't tell you. Will you forgive me?"

This was more than Cecily had bargained for. She looked uncomfortable.

"Will you forgive me?" repeated Billy, humbly.

It puts a girl in a sad dilemma to ask her forgiveness. It is sweet to forgive—but it is also sweet to refuse. If she could only have both pleasures at once!

"You don't deserve it," declared Cecily, holding out her hand.

"Of course not," agreed Billy, holding the hand tightly.

"I don't believe you're a bit sorry."

"Not now."

"Haven't you held my hand quite long enough?" sarcastically.

"Not quite," calmly.

Cecily withdrew her hand abruptly and walked to the window.

"I'm going for a drive," she announced, after a brief silence. And as Billy looked at her inquiringly she added, "with my mother."

"Oh!" said Billy, thoughtfully. "Is your mother very—er—fond of driving?"

"Why?"

"Because—if she isn't—I thought we might bring her back some violets or something, and she wouldn't need to go."

"You're a silly goose," declared Cecily.

"We could go to Larchmont, for instance," continued Billy, ignoring the compliment, "and pick some goldenrod and stuff."

"Goldenrod! In April!"

"Why not, in April?" demanded Billy.

Cecily laughed. "You are very ignorant," said she, pityingly.

"You are trying to make me vain," Billy asserted. "First, silly goose; second, ignoramus. I can't possibly live up to it. Besides, I didn't mean goldenrod, really. I was merely referring to your hair."

Cecily greeted this assertion with contemptuous silence.

"How soon are we going?" asked Billy, presently.

Cecily gasped at his impudence.

"I shall never forget," continued Billy, "that wonderful day at Argenteuil, the cool garden, the—everything. And how surprised I was when you called me 'Billy' without my even suggesting it! And on the way back to Paris you—your——"

"Please stop," Cecily implored.

"Well," said Billy, magnanimously, "we'll forget that. Beside, the night *was* cold. But on Monday afternoon you broke two engagements to visit the quarter with me. On Tuesday evening at the Opera Comique you admitted that I was more interesting than the play. On Wednesday afternoon at the Louvre when Lord Hailes insisted on carrying your scarf you handed it to me. On Thursday evening you put three lumps of sugar in my coffee *without* tongs. On Friday morning, in a retired spot in the Luxembourg Gardens, while your mother had gone ahead to feed the swans, you put——"

"Stop!" commanded Cecily, her hands to her ears.

"Well?" demanded Billy, sternly.

"I hate you," declared Cecily. "We shall start at once. The sooner it's over the better."

"Do we pick goldenrod for your mother?"

"Yes."

"And go for a sail on the Sound?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Then I forgive you," said Billy, generously.

"I have decided," said Billy, as the touring car sped up Seventh Avenue, "to tell you my reason for not going to the train."

"It's of no importance," said Cecily.

"At that time," continued Billy, ignoring the remark, "I was living on a monthly allowance from my father. When I met you the month had nearly ended. That last dinner at the Sigognac was contributed to by no less than fourteen of my devoted friends. I was, in short, completely strapped."

"You could have walked," said Cecily, trying not to smile.

"Certainly," agreed Billy, "and I did. I am shameless enough to admit that I watched you board the train from behind the friendly shelter of a protecting post. But nothing less than the most beautiful flowers in Paris would have suited you, and that was—impracticable."

There was a short silence.

"I had the bouquet made up," said Billy, reminiscently, "by Vidaline of the Haussman. It was most gorgeous. My friends admired it immensely. It was wonderful."

"But I thought you—I thought it was impracticable," said Cecily.

"So it was," agreed Billy. "But I wanted to see how it looked. I had thought the thing out so carefully, and I wanted to see if it met my expectations. Vidaline was most accommodating. Only, of course, I had to——"

"Do you mean to say," Cecily interrupted, "that you had that bouquet made up without intending to buy it?"

"Why not?" asked Billy. "It was for you. I would do anything for you."

Cecily laughed. It was a silvery, musical laugh.

"Billy——," said she, and stopped short.

"There!" said Billy, sternly. "You're at it again. You know what that does to me."

"I am sorry," said Cecily, with averted face. It was positively red. "Mr. Du Mont," she added.

"It's too late," said Billy, gloomily. "I love you."

"Mr. Du Mont!" exclaimed Cecily, as severely as possible.

"I couldn't help it," declared Billy; "but I'll try."

Silence.

"Not to say it?"

"Not to love you."

"Oh!" said Cecily. "You—you probably won't find it difficult."

"Probably not," agreed Billy, almost cheerfully.

Cecily should have been gratified by this sincere effort to obey her wishes, but she wasn't. She looked out across the swamps toward the Sound without seeing them, and then turned and glanced at Billy curiously. His lips were puckered into a round and unmistakable O.

"Oh!" cried Cecily.

"Well?" demanded Billy, surprised.

"You were going to whistle," said Cecily, accusingly.

"Yes. 'Love Is a Jolly Good Fellow.' Have you heard it?"

"I hate you!" declared Cecily.

"Thank you. I was afraid you pitied me."

"Not I," scornfully.

"*May* I whistle?"

No answer. Billy hesitated for a moment, then began to whistle a lilting, catchy tune that sailed out over the fields and seemed to arouse even the sleepy violets tucked away in their modest beds. They had just passed New Rochelle, and the car had left its rough brick pavements for the long stretch of smooth, oily road that leads to Larchmont. Cottages and bungalows appeared at either side of the road at frequent intervals. To the right lay low meadows, reaching to the Sound; to the left and north, miniature hills and undulations that gave only an enticing hint of Mother Earth's great breasts. Over all lay spring's fragrant mantle, alluring, transparent, a continual reminder of the blazing passion of the summer to come.

As Billy whistled tune after tune, seemingly unconscious of all the world save his own agreeable self, Cecily was far from comfortable. There was every reason in the world why Billy should be sad, even sullen; instead, witness his heartless mirth. She turned away in vexation.

Billy, having completed his repertoire of happy tunes, and disdaining the mournful ones, turned to her with the air of one about to divulge an important secret.

"I forgot to tell you," said he, "that I have become a journalist."

Cecily gazed at a bungalow they were passing, with deep interest.

"I am beginning at the bottom," continued Billy, "as a reporter. I began work this morning."

"Aren't you afraid you're working too hard?" Cecily asked, sweetly.

Billy shifted himself a little to a more comfortable position.

"Well," he said, thoughtfully, "to tell the truth, no. I think hard work is good for a fellow. This morning, for instance, I have been successful where any other man on the paper would have failed."

A pause.

"Would you care to hear about it?" Billy asked.

"No," said Cecily, shortly.

"It was this way," continued Billy; "the papers have all printed reports that the Count de Luni has won the heart of a certain Miss Lyndon, and Allen—that's our city editor—wanted the rumor confirmed or denied."

Cecily caught her breath with indignation, and her eyes flashed dangerously.

"Am I being interviewed?" she demanded.

"No. The interview is ended."

"Then we may return, I suppose?"

"As you please."

"But I—but you——" Cecily hesitated.

"That's the same as 'but we'," explained Billy, kindly. "But we what?"

"Oh!" cried Cecily. "How I hate you!"

"That's three times you've told me that," said Billy, "and it's getting monotonous. Once more, and I'll believe it. Besides, I am not hateful. If you don't believe me, ask Cecile—a most charming girl who admired me."

Cecily smiled contemptuously.

"Who *admired* me," repeated Billy, with emphasis. "She admitted it. It would do you good to know her. She is the dearest and sweetest girl in the world. Perhaps she didn't love me, but once in the Gardens she told me that she would never——"

"I didn't say 'never'," interposed Cecily, hastily.

"You did," Billy contradicted. "Twice. You said; 'I will never, never forget this——'"

"No! no!" cried Cecily.

Billy stopped obediently, and there was a short silence.

"Why do you always stop when people tell you to?" Cecily demanded. "Haven't you any tongue?"

"Did you say 'never'?" demanded Billy, exasperated.

"Yes."

"Did you *mean* 'never'?"

"I—I've forgotten."

As she spoke, the car drew up at the Larchmont Yacht Club. At a word from Billy the chauffeur descended from his seat and, disappearing into the Club office, returned shortly with a telegram blank.

Billy placed the blank against the back of the chauffeur's seat, and wrote on it.

Then, holding it before Cecily's eyes, he commanded:

"Read that."

The message was short:

"M. L. Allen,
"New York *Clarion,*
"New York.

"Rumor of engagement positively false. Best authority.

"WILLIAM DU MONT."

"Is it true?" asked Billy, as he handed the message to the chauffeur.

Cecily was silent.

"Is it true?" repeatedly Billy.

"Yes," reluctantly.

"Yes, what?"

"Yes—Billy."

And then; "Billy! Stop! He's looking!"

"Can you blame him?" asked Billy, shamelessly.

LITTLE LONESOME BOY

By Margaret Widdemer

ALICIA'S delicate face flushed, and she felt her heart flying up and down. She made a conscious effort to hold herself still and move indifferently toward the door. Yet it was only her husband whose step she had heard—her husband, to whom she had been three years married. He came in quietly, as he had a hundred times: spoke to her in his ordinary, gentle way, spoke to his father. Alicia scarcely touched the hand he held out to her. He had never, since the very early days of their marriage, offered to kiss Alicia when he returned in the evenings. Alicia was, in her sweet fashion, proud, and she had drawn herself further and further away, as time went on, from what courtesies he cared to give.

Nothing happened that evening. She went, as always, gently and courteously through the smooth routine of things with the two gentle, courteous men who were her housemates. There was nothing that one could imagine as happening out of the ordinary routine, in such a placid place as this: nothing, that is, except in the sensitive heart and restless mind of Alicia.

She talked to them evenly and lightly of the little house-things that had happened through the day. Then, while the two men played chess together she took her accustomed place at the piano, and let the soft, staid music Robert's father loved slide from under her fingers. Outwardly she seemed the very guardian spirit of the still old room, delicately tinted, sweet, serene. But the inward Alicia, the real woman, was pacing the floor breathlessly, a wild thing, twisting her hands together, and screaming as she paced: "I cannot stand it! Oh, I cannot stand it one more day!"

She wondered with bitter amusement, as she played evenly on, just what Robert would think, what he would do, if she should give way to herself, scream, strike him—if any wild act of hers could break that gentle coldness that was driving her mad. For she loved him very much—so much that it seemed to her as if one more day of living with him would kill her.

That night she lay wide-eyed for hours, thinking restlessly. The wakefulness was no new thing. What was new and terrifying was a strange sense of the end. It seemed that she had come to the verge of her endurance, and that something *must* happen now. Some relief must be given her.

She had loved Robert when they first met. So, when he asked her to marry him she had given herself to him with a child's sweet certainty that he must of necessity love her, too. And now—now she had not the least doubt that he had never cared at all. For long, tense hours she reviewed all the old dreadful possible reasons why he had wanted her for his wife. Had there been some other girl who was denied to him? Had the

two men merely wanted a woman to be in the house, and chosen her together because she was good and gentle? For Robert's father had always seemed in his silent way nearly as fond of her as Robert himself, and people had always called her sweet, kindly, serene—as indeed she was, above the inward fire. And there was a last dreadful possibility that always flushed her with shame in the dark—had Robert seen how very much she had cared for him, and married her for kindness? For he was very kind—oh, always very, unendurably kind!

She tried over and over feverishly to think what there was to do with her life. She could not bear it much longer, she knew the continuous hurt of things

"Oh, I must have someone who cares —something——" she whispered to the dark, piteously, childishly. All her life she had been surrounded with love. The unaccustomed starvation of the last three years bewildered her almost as much as it hurt. "If we had a child I wouldn't mind so much, maybe. Some women forget everything else when they have children. Perhaps——"

A little son with eyes like Robert's—the thought comforted her. And soon, tired from crying silently into her pillow, she fell asleep.

When she was a little girl she had often been able to dream satisfyingly of the things passionately wanted, and denied her by daylight. So when she was first married she had tried to dream that Robert was kissing her, holding her, calling her loving names, telling her passionately how much he had always cared. But she could never do it. Even if she had succeeded in finding him, in those old dreams, he had always gone away from her just as she came; or he was awaiting her in some unattainable room up countless twisted stairways whose final step was never achieved before she awoke.

This night she had not tried at all to dream of Robert. All she sought was comfort—comfort and someone who wanted her. She thought afterward that her dream was woven of the ever-present loneliness and the thought of a little son; though the child in her dream did not seem to belong to her that way.

She dreamed that she was passing along the main street of their little town, as she had often in the first year of her marriage, toward where the other house had been. It was not the old family house—they were living in that now. It had come to them by will from the older branch of the family, a year after she was married. The house she dreamed she was going toward was the large gray square building, dating from perhaps the early nineties, where she had been brought on her marriage. When the other house had come to them they had sold this to the church beside it.

Yet when she reached the spot, the gray house was not there. In its stead, far back on green turf, stood a little old-fashioned white cottage. Nothing is strange in dreams, so Alicia merely saw the cottage with a quiet realization of its right to be there, and mounted the steps of the stone church beside it. For on the steps awaited her a little boy she had come to see. He was a little boy who belonged to her in some strange way, and they had known each other always. He ran down to her, meeting her half-way with out-held arms.

"Oh, you've come, you've come at last, Princess, dear!" he said joyously.

Alicia caught his hands, laughing light-heartedly. "Yes, I've come at last," she said. "And I've wanted to get here for such a long, long time!"

"But you were a very, very long time coming, too, Princess," he said. "Were there tasks to do, like mine, or was there a wicked witch you had to escape from? I'd have rescued you, you know, if I had known!"

They sat down on the grass together as Alicia answered him. (She could never remember whether she seemed to herself any older than he was. They were merely on an equality which left out those things.) "I came as soon as I could," she said. "Oh, did you want me?"

"*Want you!*" said the little boy. "Don't you know? Why, Princess, you're all I have to be glad about! And don't you remember how we love each

other very, very much—don't you remember, Princess?"

There was a forlorn note in his voice somehow too wistful for a dream.

"Yes, dear, I know," said Alicia tenderly, remembering as he bade her. Here was someone who really wanted her, wanted her very much! It was like a warm air of comfort about her hurts. He cared, and he had cared always. She laughed happily again, and flung herself full-length on the soft grass.

"Where shall we go to-day, Princess?" he asked beside her gayly. "Aunt Katherine is away till evening, so you and I can have the whole afternoon together, just you and I! Shall we have the gold boat and let it go sailing on the crystal river? We can go looking for giants, or for pearls. Or shall we find a cavern, and kill the giants inside and live in it? That would be the most 'citing thing to do."

"Yes, indeed!" cried Alicia. "We'll do that!"

There was nothing that happened in between. As soon as she spoke they were in a gold row-boat, Alicia, in blue satin and a crown, steering, and her companion, very knightly in velvet and many weapons, at the oars. There were gold cushions, and a gold net that Alicia dipped down into the clear water now and then. Afterward he killed the giants, a great many of them, and found pearl necklaces in the gold net. Then they played with a little brown dog which came into the dream from somewhere, and found the cavern, full of more giants. They were huge shadowy creatures whom her companion routed royally.

Yet all through the fairy-tale scenery Alicia was conscious dimly of the old church steps, with the little white cottage alongside. Now and again, too, the velvets of her companion, wavering, were the brown, quaint clothes of the child on the stone steps, sitting gravely and staring ahead. This one thing, however, was vivid and continuous: there was someone who loved her and wanted her: who always had, and always would. Whether they went in search of fairy godmothers or giants, or, as happened before the dream was done, dwelt happily in a chocolate castle atop of a hill of ribbed tumbler-glass, they two belonged together forever, and were infinitely at ease and comforted by so belonging. Through every cloudy shift of the dream she could feel the little hand tight in hers, and hear the child-voice, lovingly wistful:

"You do care, don't you, Princess, dear? You're sorry I'm lonesome? You do care?"

"Oh, indeed, I do care, Little Lonesome Boy!" she would answer...and the adventures would go fantastically on.

"Good-by, Princess," he said suddenly. "She's calling me."

The little brown dream-dog had raced off already, and as the boy turned to go the dream faded. Alicia found herself awake in daylight, saying softly: "Good-by, Little Lonesome Boy!"

The dream was vividly present with her for days afterward. She went about with a singular feeling of lightness and well-being: the thought of someone who loved her and needed her, even in a dream, seemed a support and stimulation through all those little indifferences and denials of Robert's which had once wounded her so insistently. It was long before the comfort of the dream entirely went.

It was after a day of intense discouragement that she had it again. She had fallen asleep, as before, with a bitter sense of the unendurability of things, and of the humiliation there is in giving love undesired. So when she found herself hurrying toward the church where she knew Little Lonesome Boy would be waiting for her, she was very glad.

But something unexpected and disquieting had stolen into the dream. Little Lonesome Boy, when she came toward him, was not watching for her and smiling. He was curled on the grass in a corner beneath the steps, a sobbing little brown heap.

She dropped down beside him, and they clung together, the brown dream-dog pushing about them in a frenzied attempt to shove his nose against his master's face and sympathize. There was scarcely any fairy-tale scenery—only the

glass hill, very shadowy, wavered doubtfully beyond the lawn.

"Oh, what is it, my Little Lonesome Boy!" cried Alicia. "What did they do to you—what did they do, dearest?"

"They don't do anything," he sobbed. "I only wish they would. No one cares. They give me things to eat, and clothes—they take care of me, the way they do of Rover—but—no one cares! They never call me love-names—or anything. There isn't—anybody—cares——"

"But I care! I do care, dear Little Lonesome Boy!" cried Alicia.

"Yes, but you—oh, Princess, I didn't want to tell you—I never told you before—but—you aren't real! You're only a Pretend-Princess I made, so somebody would care, and say they loved me. I can almost feel you cuddle me now, and I do love you—but—you aren't real—and they say—they say pretends are silly—and—nobody cares!"

Alicia recognized quite simply that what he said was true. She knew she was not real. Still, that did not so very much matter, except that it made her less of a comfort to him.

"Yet I do love you, dear, even if I am only pretend," she said wistfully.

"Oh, I know you do," he sobbed, "and it does help—truly it does. But what would you do, Princess, if you wanted to love people dreadfully hard, and they wouldn't love you back?"

Alicia recognized her own waking bitterness, afterward, in the reply she made.

"Pretend you don't care, either," she said. "After awhile you won't care, except deep down where nobody knows—and you forget, yourself, sometimes."

The dream-boy sat up straight and looked at her with his wistful, tear-filled blue eyes. The brown dream-puppy whined a little, restlessly.

"I'll try," whispered Little Lonesome Boy. "I'll—try, Princess——"

This time Alicia had no sense of lightness or comfort on her waking, only a dreary feeling of the dream's reality. And her own loneliness pressed on her harder than ever, and the thought of the dream-child, "trying," hurt her all the day. For he had no one to care, she thought sorrowfully—nothing but the little dog.

That evening Robert had some errand which took him by way of the church. Alicia watched him restlessly as he made ready to go. Then on a sudden impulse, she offered to go with him. If she could see the stone steps where her dreams had been played, she thought, she might get rid of the haunting weight of depression the last one had laid on her. It might make her Little Lonesome Boy seem less real and sorrowful.

Robert looked at her, she imagined, in surprise. But he only said, gently as ever, that he was glad she was going, and waited till she was ready to go with him.

Her heart beat quickly as they neared the church. They had fallen silent. The gray stone looked dreamlike in the moonlight. There were no passers-by—nothing to spoil her illusion. Surely on the other side was an old-fashioned white cottage set far back on green turf, and, very surely, flung in the shadow of the steps, a forlorn little brown heap, her dream-boy was curled with his dog!

"Little Lonesome Boy!" she said softly, looking across the steps. "My Little Lonesome Boy!"

She felt herself caught, suddenly, passionately in her husband's arms.

"Alicia!" he cried breathlessly. "Was it you—very long ago? Did you go down the river with me, by the old cottage, years and years ago? Were you my Princess? Oh, was it you, Alicia?"

She looked up at him. And below the shattered mask of endurance she saw the wistful, love-hungry look of her Little Lonesome Boy. And the blue eyes—why had she not known them for Robert's till they were full of tears?

She did not stop to wonder how she had found the lonely child of so long ago, in her longing dreams of this year. She knew, suddenly and surely, that there is no past or present or future when two people love each other.

"Oh, Robert, Robert—and it was I that told you to pretend you didn't care!" she whispered. As she lifted her face to his there was a touch of mother-pity in the love of her kiss.

"My Little Lonesome Boy!" she said.

ON BROADWAY AND OFF

CLIFTON CRAWFORD, of "My Best Girl" company, tells this story of an inebriate:

"The late Reverend Doctor John Hall was once walking home from preaching at a Sunday night meeting out in the country. In the moonlight he saw a man lying drunk in the gutter and, going up to him, gave him a shake.

"'Here!' he said. 'It is a shame for a nice, respectable looking man like you to be lying in the gutter like that.'

"The man opened his tipsy eyes and saw the long, black coat. He said:

"'Are you a minister?'

"'Yes,' said Doctor Hall. 'Come, get up out of here!'

"'Preshbyterian?' queried the inebriate.

"'Yes,' was the answer somewhat impatiently, 'I am.'

"'Then,' said the other, 'help me up. I'm a Preshbyterian myself.'"

Henry Miller, starring in "The Rainbow," gives an anecdote of continental craft:

"A troupe of wandering musicians were playing before a Swiss hotel. At the end of the performance one of the members left the group, approached the leader of the band and pulled out a little paper box, which he emptied into his left hand while the eyes of the leader followed every movement.

"He then took a plate in his right hand, passed it around, and a large sum was collected, every one meanwhile wondering what he held in his left hand.

"'Why, it's very simple,' said the leader when questioned. 'We are all subject to temptation, and to be sure of the fidelity of our collector he has to hold five flies in his left hand, and we count these when he returns, to make sure of the money.'"

"What's in a name?" quoth Taylor Holmes, appearing in "The Million." "It all depends upon its relation to the subject in hand.

"A certain proud father to whom a college education had been denied met his daughter at the train on her return from college.

"'But Helen,' he said, 'aren't you unusually fat?'

"'Yes, dad,' she replied, 'I weigh one hundred and forty pounds stripped for gym.'

"'The father looked dazed for a moment and then demanded: 'Who in thunder is Jim?'"

"Vagueness in art is all very well," declares Helen Ware of the "Trial Marriage" company, but in everyday life the average mind requires accurate explanations.

"A young doctor, recently graduated," announces this charming actress, "had among his first patients a fat girl whose obesity weighed upon her and she wanted to get rid of some of it. He drew up a careful diet. At the end of a month she could hardly get through the doctor's doorway. 'Did you eat what I told you?' he asked, aghast. 'Religiously.' Suddenly he had an inspiration. 'Anything else?' he asked. 'Only my ordinary meals.'"

Christie MacDonald, the fascinating "Spring Maid," gives this version of a newsboy's story of a fire:

"'We stood aroun' an' de smoke was rushin' out of de buildin'. Gee, it was high. I guess it was seven or eight stories. De fire was comin' out and every one was yellin' and howlin' an' de bells was ringin' and de engines was smokin' an' dere was firemen in front an' dere was firemen at de side, but dere was no firemen in de alley. I says to Mickey, 'Let's go 'roun' into de alley and see what's dere.' We went 'roun' dere an' gee, de fire was just as bad as it was in de front. Dere was a guy lookin' out of a window on de sevent' story. Gee, he was high up, an' dere was no firemen or ladders dere. He was shoutin' "Help, help, police." Mickey says to me, "Hully gee, look at dis," an' den he shouted to de guy, "Jump! we'll ketch you in dis blanket," an' de guy jumped, an' gee, I t'ought I'd die laughin'—we didn't have no blanket.'"

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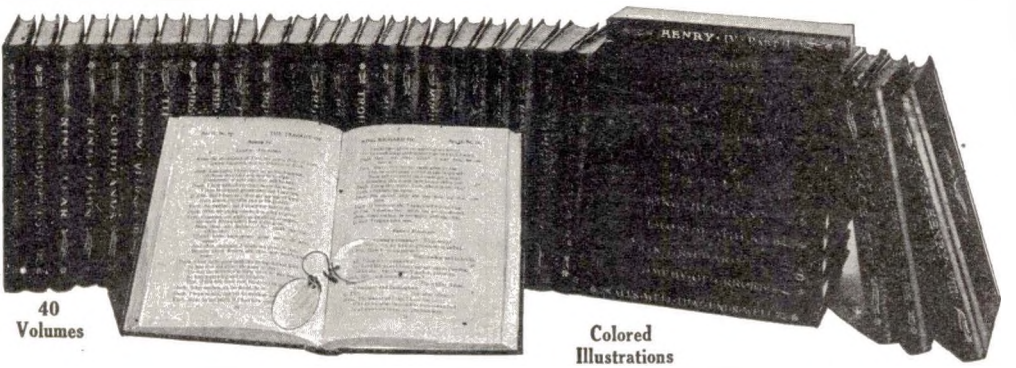

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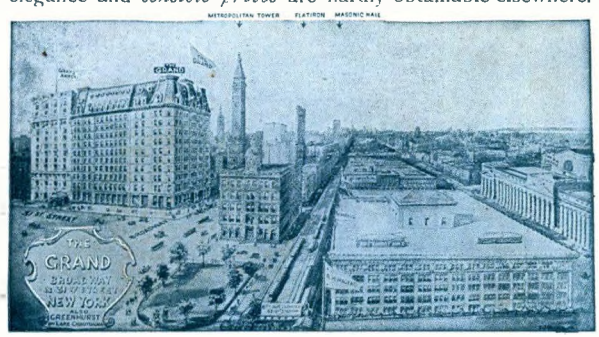

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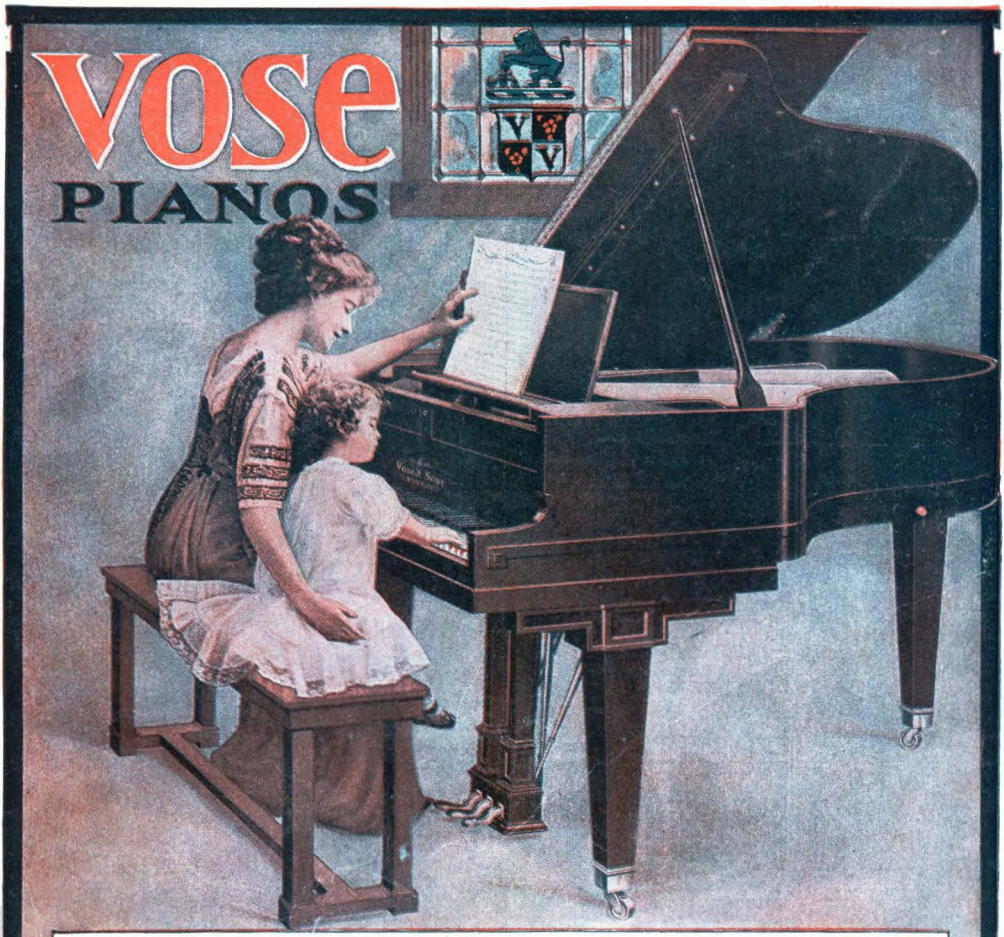

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