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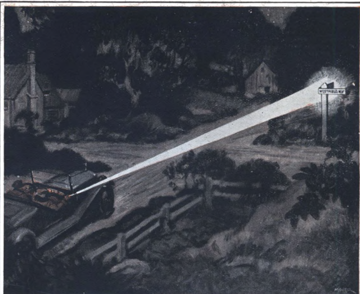

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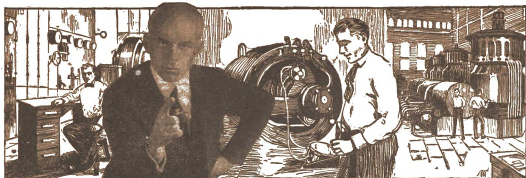

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October 1922

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THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS

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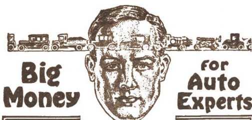

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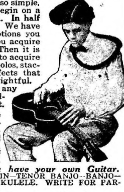

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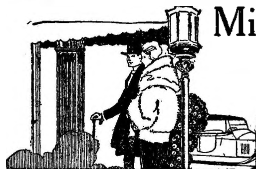


Midas' Daughter

By Winston Bouvé

Author of "Rotten Wood," "Pan's Wife," etc.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. JEROLD SEATON pushed aside the sheaf of blue prints with a gesture of impetuous pleasure.

"This is just what I want!" she told the girl behind the desk. "I'm perfectly satisfied, Miss Paige."

"I'm sorry," laughed Jessica Paige, with a lift of her delicate brows.

The older woman, who had humor as well as an air of rather charming arrogance, laughed too.

"I know it! You think my pillared portico and sunken gardens simply brazen. Admit it—*I* do! But then—I'm brazen myself!"

"You're brazenly beautiful!" declared the girl impulsively.

The phrase defined her client very well. It expressed the splendor of her tawny hair, her hazel eyes, flecked with gold, her rich pallor and strikingly perfect features. And it pleased the beauty.

"For that," she observed naïvely, "I'm going to take you out to lunch."

Jessica frowned down at the tiny watch on her wrist, hesitating.

She liked this rich Mrs. Seaton who had come to the firm of Arnold & Beale, architects, to have them make plans for the elaborate summer place she meant to build on the South Shore. Arthur Beale, junior member of the firm, had been in Florida, recuperating from a bout with influenza, and Mr. Arnold, who had gauged Jessica's ability, had turned over the commission to her, as Beale's assistant. So she saw a good deal of the handsome heiress. But, somehow, she wanted to keep their acquaintance on a strictly business basis. She wouldn't be patronized by any Chicago meat-magnate's daughter! And then, because she couldn't help it, she smiled—at the snobbery of the impoverished!

"I'm not asking you because I kept you waiting an hour and it's nearly two now," Mrs. Seaton informed her coolly, "if that's why you're hesitating. I never do things to be polite—or even decent. Only because I want to. So you'd better come."

A stenographer entered and handed Jessica half a dozen letters to be signed. When she had returned them to the girl she took her hat and suit coat from the mahogany cabinet that served as a closet in the handsome office.

"In that case——"

"You'll come?"

Mrs. Seaton watched her with frank appraisal as she pulled on her saucy black hat. The gray green of the tweeds she wore went beautifully with her pearly skin, her clear, greenish eyes, black-lashed and wide. It brought out, too, a glint of copper in her dark hair.

"You know how to dress," the heiress observed, rising in a faint cloud of the exotic scent that seemed to emanate from her sable wrap. "Of course, I'd rather see you in a dinner frock by Armand—I loathe tweedy things—but you do know cut and color."

"I'd rather see me in an Armand dinner gown, too," murmured Jessica with curved, ironical brows "Unfortunately, I lack credit and opportunity."

They passed through the outer office, and Mrs. Seaton shivered at the ugliness of its walnut and frosted glass and crowded desks; the sound of clicking typewriters, stenographers' chatter in the relaxation of the noon hour. Mr. Arnold's secretary, a spectacled and important young man, hysterically arguing something with somebody over a telephone. Jessica found herself infected by the other woman's disdain of the hive. She hated it all, for the moment. Hated the thing she had been so proud to achieve a short time ago! Why, to be taken into the Boston firm of Arnold & Beale was a piece of unparalleled luck.

She was only twenty-six; a girl who had inherited from a ne'er-do-well father a genuine ability for architectural design, and from her mother—who had died when she was barely twelve—a tremendous capacity for achieving whatever she set out to do. Which, in this case, had been a course at Technology, an apprenticeship with a more or less insignificant concern, and, through an old friendship of her father, her present position.

And because the February day held the languor of spring, and was blue overhead and muddy underfoot, with discontent in its faithless, balmy breath, and a lovely parasite, with paradise feathers dripping from her hat and violets pinned to her sables, had come to look at the blue prints of the Italian palace she intended to build in a prim New England shore town, Jessica seethed with sudden disatisfaction.

And like an echo of her scudding thoughts, Mrs. Seaton's cool voice mused, as they waited for the elevator:

"You aren't pretty—but you're almost beautiful. You needn't lack anything if you're sensible enough to marry as you should. Now, don't tell me you're romantic!"

Jessica, who found herself enjoying the assured insolence of the older woman, shook her head as they stepped into the elevator and were whirred down.

"I'm greedy," she confessed. "I want everything—forever!"

"You're romantic. And that's a luxury that only rich people can afford."

They stepped out into the noonday brilliance of Tremont Street. Drawn up to the curb stood one car that outshone all the others, although there were several of dignified and handsome make. This machine—an enormously long, silver-gray limousine, with a chauffeur in livery that matched the car's color, and an interior of costly comfort—was Mrs. Seaton's.

As Jessica, relaxing against the pearl-gray upholstery, listened to the other woman's languid cynicisms she remembered all she had ever heard of the Jerold Seatons. Seaton belonged to the cliquiest, most conservative group which, for generations, had formed the nucleus of Boston society. That meant that, although he and his mother were poor—nothing was left, gossip said, save the old Seaton house on Beacon Hill, some shabby real estate, and the fluctuating income from Seaton's law practice, a profession that was his by

heritage—they had the entrée everywhere. They had more than that. For old Mrs. Seaton, in her inevitable mourning silks, which could never be said to be out of style, because they had never been in style, with nothing but a bit of ancestral lace at her patrician throat—her jewelry, with the exception of one old-fashioned solitaire had been sold piece by piece—could still give distinction to any gathering.

And when she entertained meagerly in the stately Chestnut Street house, from which, now and then, a carved chest, or a threadbare tapestry, long familiar to her friends, disappeared, the few who were asked were glad enough to come.

Jerold Seaton had met Myron Marshall's daughter at some dinner dance, eight or ten years before. She had been visiting friends in Boston, and, with her beauty and her father's millions, she was easily the season's belle. Yet she flouted a title or two, an heir to as many millions as her father himself was worth, several men as attractive and of as good family as young Seaton, to become his wife. That must have been love. And now she was saying:

"It's perishable, romance. The other thing—money—isn't. It lasts. And it's not intangible. You can see it, touch it."

Jessica, who was a sensitive creature, winced as Bess Seaton's hand strayed to the flowers on her breast. That was a beastly thing to say. It intimated so much to the discredit of the man she had married, and to a stranger!

An impulse to protect him, a man she had never seen, came to her. She chatted swiftly, inconsequentially, of other things, until they were seated in a choice corner of a fashionable grill. Once there, she enjoyed her luncheon; enjoyed the delicious food, the unobtrusive service, the costly surroundings. It was nice to be waited on deferentially by the captain himself; to linger over coffee and cigarettes as long as one pleased, with no thought of hurrying back to work. Yes—these imperishably material pleasures lured her, too. But the thought of work reminded her of the blue prints lying on her desk.

"You're sure you're satisfied with those plans for your house, Mrs. Seaton? I'm warning you—it's much too palatial for Duxbury. I'm afraid you won't like it, after all. You see, a palace needs a setting. It oughtn't to be dumped down upon a country road, half hidden by a pine grove, surrounded by miles of sand dunes. I adore Duxbury, but if you want this sort of house, choose another location for it. Have you thought of Manchester?"

Bess Seaton raised her lovely eyes heavenward, or more literally, toward the frescoed ceiling of the grill.

"Have I thought of Manchester? My dear girl, you don't think I'm building in Duxbury through choice! The place is deadly, simply deadly! The sort of place my mother-in-law would choose. She did, worse luck! My husband happened to be born there thirty-five years ago. He spent every summer of his childhood there, and his passion for the place is absurd. He won't hear of summering anywhere else. So there you are!"

Jessica traced the pattern on the damask cloth with the stem of her water goblet.

"I see. Of course, if you've really decided, I'll mail you the plans to-night so that you can show them to your husband and O. K. them. Then the builders can start work at once."

Mrs. Seaton uttered a dulcet wail of protest.

"Good heavens, no! It's frightfully awkward all around. You see—Jerry mustn't *guess* that I'm building this place. I've just told you how fond he is of the dreadful old frame house that will have to be torn down. He isn't to know anything about it until

June, when it will be ready to occupy. Then he'll have to make the best of it."

She drew on her suède gloves with an air of determination. Her pretty, spoiled mouth could look stubborn in spite of its scarlet curve, Jessica discovered. And while she murmured some inanity the beauty leaned forward confidentially.

"And after all, you know—it's my money. Aren't men unreasonable?"

Her money! That, Jessica guessed, was always the last argument in their disagreements; the argument that won the day for her. What a beastly position for a sensitive man to be placed in; a position of utter helplessness, when you thought about it. For, evidently, he didn't want to be dependent upon his wife's fortune, a hanger-on in his wife's home. It was rather pathetic, his wanting to keep the shabby old house in which he had been born. Perhaps it was the only thing that was wholly his, now.

Still, he had married old man Marshall's daughter, knowing the fabulous amount of the wealth he had acquired so magically, so swiftly, that people and trusts nicknamed him "Midas" Marshall. For everything he touched turned golden under his hand. And he had touched a good many things besides beef. One could almost forget the taint of the stockyards, indeed, remembering derelict Southern railroads he had bought, and made fortunes out of; cotton he had plunged into at its lowest ebb that was soon to blossom not into fleece, but gold; a copper mine, long played out, that revealed rich ore after he had bought it for a song.

And Midas' daughter, used to his golden touch, couldn't be expected to forgo all that it brought to her feet.

"I must fly!" Jessica glanced at her watch, fastened her slender mink scarf that she had thought so smart until Mrs. Seaton's sables dimmed it to insignificance. "I've had a beautiful time—it was sweet of you to ask me. And your house will be under way in a short time."

She held out her small, gloved hand with the engaging air of friendliness and candor that characterized her, and Bess Seaton held it.

"You're a sweet child! Don't go back to that dreadful office! Play with me instead, this afternoon."

She sighed at the girl's laughing refusal.

"What a nuisance! And you don't have to spend your youth that way! You're attractive—awfully attractive. Attractive enough to marry any man you choose. Choose the proper sort of person and I'll give you an engagement dinner that'll be town talk for a fortnight! On my honor!"

"An added inducement! I'll do my best."

"I know!" Mrs. Seaton clapped her hands softly. "I'm having a deadly dinner in ten days. Come and redeem it from utter awfulness, and I'll have an eligible man for you."

The doorman's deference, as he showed them out, the departure from the exclusive grill, with its subdued elegance of lighting and decoration, to the avenue of stately dwellings and clubs, filled the girl with a sort of elated pleasure. She permitted the chauffeur to tuck the robe about her knees with an air of having been long accustomed to such attentions. It was fun, this make-believe.

"You'll have an ancient bore to my right and somebody's husband to my left," she corrected with impertinent gayety. "And I'll have to be coy or clever—or perhaps just attentive and demure. But I've a ravishing tissue frock—new, the color of morning mist, and I'll come."

All afternoon she kept thinking of the dinner she had promised so blithely to attend. She found herself sketching

tiny figures of herself in the gauze gown she had seen in a shop window a few weeks back, and, unable to resist it, having once tried it on, had acquired, though bills and household expenses—which her slender shoulders bore—had to go unpaid. She didn't often give way to such extravagance, even though the love of beautiful things was deep-rooted in her. When one has a nonchalant father whose lineage and tastes and goutiness prohibit him from active enterprise—the last phrase was his!—one doesn't indulge much in personal luxuries. Especially if one's salary is small and hardly adequate for the needs of even so small a household.

But she wasn't thinking of all this, for once. She was thinking of herself, quite perfectly gowned and shod with silver, laughing up at an agreeable young man from the becoming background of a tapestry chair, playing with the drooping feathers of a fan. A fan. Jade green, mounted on tortoise shell. She must have it! And while she automatically dictated prosy letters to contractors, about porcelain bathroom fixtures and imported tiles, she saw only a handful of long-flued green plumes, that, skillfully furled, would cast charming shadows upon her throat and shoulders, and lend her an air of intriguing grace.

CHAPTER II.

"You look very well in that—ah—rather colorless gown," observed Dahlgren Paige to his daughter as she stood before the front window of their shabby sitting room, waiting for the taxi that was to take her in town to the Seatons' Commonwealth Avenue home.

He lay back in the most comfortable chair the room afforded, his gouty foot extended upon a hassock. And from mien and manner, which verged on the magnificent, no one would have taken him to be anything but an indulgent parent, viewing with paternal pride a pretty daughter who had recently wheedled a new frock out of him.

"It was costly, but well worth what you paid for it. Turn around—yes, it has excellent lines. And you, my dear, have excellent shoulders. All the Dahlgren women have had shoulders worth the showing."

Jessica swept him a curtsy, her lips curved in a smile of faint irony. She moved about the room, straightening up here and there, then stopped to lift to her cheek a feather fan, jade green, shell mounted.

"It isn't colorless, really," she remarked. "It's quite opalescent, and with this fan——"

"Most becoming! The fan is precisely what it needs." He took it from her, examined it with his aristocratic, well-kept hands. "Quite beautiful, but not too expensive, I trust."

"It cost twenty-eight dollars," she said clearly. "I bought it instead of paying the last coal bill."

"To grace your friend's rococo drawing-room," he gibed, "while our humble flat stays chilly. Heigh-ho, it's your prerogative, my dear. Youth—youth to the fore, while we elders retire—to a gas log."

He fluttered fastidious fingers toward the imitation hearth and grate, where blue gas flames flickered about tinny logs. That fireplace typified the whole shoddy, two-family house, the first floor of which had been home to Jessica for eight years—ever since she had finished her inadequate schooling at a fashionable girls' school on the Hudson to learn that her school bills hadn't been paid for two years, that her distinguished, dilettant father, having reached the end of a small patrimony, was being floated by nonchalantly begged loans from his friends. Not since his father's death, six years before, and the division of the fine old Virginia property, which brought in little enough, had he been actively engaged in his profession as

draftsman. And Jessica, a giddy thing of seventeen, knew that he never would be again. Henceforth, she knew, she must bear the burden of poverty, of eking out that poverty with what she might earn.

She hadn't minded giving up her girlhood, her association with girls who had all that money could buy. Pleasure wasn't everything to her, nor was luxury. She was glad, with the fervor of early youth, to relinquish the Brookline home—it had been the scene of many a money quarrel, many an ignominious demand for money, long owed. She remembered her mother's youth, sapped by worry and work, her weary struggle to keep up the appearance of prosperity which her father insisted upon so blandly, and yet not be always at the mercy of creditors. She succeeded part of the time. But it meant household drudgery—one ill-trained maid was inadequate in that fifteen-room house; endless, personal economies; self-immolation upon the altar of her husband's selfish vanity. She had hated that house, and that life, and her daughter hated it after her.

So the shabby Dorchester flat wasn't the irritant to Jessica that it was to her father, who, in his dependence upon her, vented all his petulant displeasure in gibing sarcasm. Loving beauty and luxury as she did, small dark rooms, a bathroom whose mottled fixtures dated thirty years back, ugly floors, unredeemable woodwork, were all hard to endure at times. And that gas log, with its obvious piping! She hated that, too. But her father's endless discontent and half-veiled reproaches were the hardest to bear.

She set her small, even teeth, picked up her fan, and drew her remodeled evening cloak over her bare shoulders. A machine was throbbing outside, close to the curb.

"We'll pay the coal people on the first," she promised, "my glory notwithstanding. Who knows—maybe I'll catch a gilded Prince Charming tonight—and all on account of a handful of feathers, to bring out the color of my mermaid eyes, and a dress that advertises the Dahlgren shoulders!"

"There would be no parental opposition!" commented her father, with a sardonic gleam under his gray brows. "Damme, I don't see why you haven't married before now, Jessica. You're a handsome creature; a man's woman from your shell comb to your insteps!"

"Poor Dad"—she bent and kissed his aristocratic cheek—"you'd like to foist me on almost any one, wouldn't you?"

"I want to see you marry well. Any one with money, Jessica, can make a beautiful woman happy." His silver-headed cane tapped peremptorily upon the floor covering. "And Arthur Beale, whom you're treating abominably, has money and a name."

"And myopia. And a dreadful voice, small and still, like one's conscience. That's his asthma, I suppose——"

"A bird in the hand," he warned, not pleased at her levity.

"But the bush lends enchantment!"

The slam of the front door cut short her rippling mirth.

She did not find her own thoughts amusing during the drive in town. Arthur Beale, her employer, filled them. How out of patience with her her father would be if he knew that Beale was no longer a tentative admirer, but her acknowledged lover, waiting for a word from her to announce their engagement! She was out of patience with herself. After all, she was twenty-six—not a romantic chit of nineteen, waiting for an armored *Lohengrin* to sail out of the sunset and rescue her from a shoddy flat, a job that bored her to extinction, a dearth of pretty clothes and care-free pleasures. And Arthur Beale was not much more than forty, a small, nervous man, a gentleman, of course, who, though not especially good looking, and

rather lacking in personal magnetism, was certainly unobjectionable. He was desperately in love with her. She smiled a little at the thought of Arthur's being desperate about anything, but the fact was flattering. If she married him she'd have everything that, from her father's standpoint, she could desire.

Why, then, was she holding off? Not because of any man she had ever known and cared for. She hadn't been captured by the fancies that seemed to assail most girls. She was, as her father had said, distinctly a man's woman. Men had always been drawn to her. She liked them, would not have had their homage withheld. She had even enjoyed certain excursions in romance that she had strayed into. But when it came to marrying——

That took love, she told herself. Because love endured, lasted, with the qualities of the man one married. And if those qualities were exasperating to begin with, if one always had to be polite to a man who was forever arranging everything to an unbearable precision on his desk, and adjusting shades to exactly the same height, and clearing his thin throat before he gave an order, what would it all be like in five years? Hideous thought! But if there was love, instead of petty irritation—— Yet Bess Seaton, smiling scornfully, had said: "It's perishable, romance."

She was aware that the cab had stopped before a white-stone house in front of which stretched an awning and, beneath it, a strip of red carpet, which gave it a royal air indeed. And when a liveried manservant opened the door of the taxi and dismissed the shabby machine, she felt more than ever like Cinderella.

To her dismay, Jessica was the first guest to arrive. She had allowed fifteen minutes too much for the drive in town, and when she was shown upstairs into the white-and-gold drawing-room Mrs. Seaton herself was not yet dressed. She amused herself by wandering about the great room which was clumsily full of handsome bric-a-brac and pieces of furniture picked up at random, to please an exotic taste. Bess Seaton had evidently traveled far and wide and, wherever she went, she acquired whatever took her fancy. To the left of the white-tiled fireplace stood a bronze Buddha, massive, magnificent in its immobility, scorning, with its heavy-lidded gaze, a gilt-and-brocade relic of the Louises that had throned more than one court favorite.

There was an enormous davenport before the fireplace, with mauve chairs to match it scattered about the room—modern comfort—and upon a Florentine refectory table rested rare bits of cloisonné that made Jessica's beauty-loving eyes widen. A buhlwork cabinet loomed dark against one wall and, across the room, a long teakwood chest, exquisitely carved, was piled with brocade cushions.

Jessica was standing on a tiger-skin rug before the mantel, gazing at a huge clock that was one solid piece of crystal, when she heard a delightfully toned masculine voice say:

"You aren't admiring it, are you? The clock, I mean."

She found a slender, boyish-looking man at her side, and she looked into a pair of dark-blue eyes that were lighted, just then, with whimsical humor. She thought she'd never seen a pleasanter pair of eyes.

She laughed back at him behind the feathers of her fan.

"I think it's a masterpiece! Do you know what it really is? It's rock candy. It's the candy clock in the witch's house that *Hansel* and *Gretel* ate their way into!"

He flung back his fine, fair head, and stared up at it.

"You're right. Do you know, you've redeemed it for me! Henceforth, when-

ever I'm here, and can't help looking at it, I'll think of that and break the spell."

Jessica dropped down upon the mauve Chesterfield, knowing well that its pale tint would flatter her gown and herself. People with white skin and reddish hair should appreciate the value of colors that throw them into porcelain-fair relief.

"I'm hideously early," she confessed, picking up a paper weight that was nothing but a bubble of blown glass, in which a cunningly waxed orchid seemed to bloom. "Thank Heaven for you, as long as Mrs. Seaton isn't down yet."

He laughed.

"I've known Bess a good many years, and I've never known her to be on time on any occasion whatever."

He took the blossoming bubble out of her hand.

"I'm going to take you into the conservatory, if you'll let me, and show you some of her real flowers. Are you keen about them? She likes them decoratively, for dinners, and things."

He seemed to be an old friend of the Seatons, from the friendly manner of the gardener toward him, when they sauntered through the glassed-in extension of the library across the hall. Jessica, whose passion for color and scent was overwhelming, breathed deep of the fragrance about her, examined the exotic blooms with delight. And when she exclaimed over a tray of cloudy-blue violets—enormous, perfect-petaled things that exuded sweetness—and he insisted on her wearing a cluster, she didn't demur long.

"You're sure it's all right—Mrs. Seaton won't mind?"

"Quite sure." An odd little smile only emphasized the sudden somberness of his eyes. "Please take them—I'm not trespassing, really!"

She took them, let him fasten them to her shimmering frock, after she had pricked her finger upon the long pin. As he bent over the small task, his crisp hair almost touching her cheek, she caught her breath. An unreasonable desire to reach out and put her hand upon his well-shaped blond head seized her. She felt as if she had known him forever. It was absurd, of course—just because they spoke the same language, and laughed at the same things—but she hoped prayerfully that this was the "eligible man" Bess Seaton had promised her.

She felt ridiculously gay, hummed a lilting refrain under her breath as a door shut somewhere, and the sound of voices drifted out to them. Then, having secured the flowers to her tulle sash, he looked up.

Their eyes met. They traded a long look across a tray of hothouse violets, while at the other end of the conservatory an old gardener puttered over some glossy greenery. That look said a great deal, more than either of them realized, by far. Then Jessica, her own gaze wavering, saw that his hand still touched the violets she wore, as if, unconsciously, they symbolized something precious to him. Color, delicate, even, swept her from the top of her silvery bodice to the roots of her shining hair, dyeing bosom and throat and cheek. It made her look like an adorable child.

"Dear!" he said under his breath. He didn't seem to know he spoke the word.

"We'd better go back," whispered Jessica.

She was suddenly afraid. Of what, she didn't know. It was a queer feeling. But then, the past fifteen minutes had not been banal. One doesn't often meet a strange young man at some one's house, and verge on intimacy with him, as if he wasn't a stranger at all, before dinner is announced. And the way he had said "Dear!"

They strolled back to the drawing-room, in which a dozen people were now scattered. And by the Buddha,

her splendid shoulders white against the bronze, stood Bess Seaton. Most women would have been killed by the vivid blue of her gown, the glitter of the tiara upon her blond head. But not she. She was more insolently lovely than ever. The richness of her beauty seemed to reflect itself in the sequins of her gown, the jewels in her hair. She turned toward Jessica with a cry of pleasure.

"So glad to see you! You two know each other, of course. Now, come and smile your sweetest upon Percy Cummings! He's to take you in to dinner."

Jessica, over caviar and cocktails, smiled up at a sleekly agreeable man who, while he put himself out to be gallant to her, kept looking across the great round table to where the blue goddess sat. Dinner had been announced before she had met many of the guests, and while she and Cummings exchanged dinner-table badinage she speculated on the identities of various people. Across the table, half hidden by a rose bowl, she glimpsed the fair-haired man who had taken her into the conservatory. Why, she didn't even know his name! He was devoting himself to a beaky old lady in black velvet, though he couldn't be enjoying her very much, Jessica thought. That was the sort of thing he would do—be nice to difficult people. She fingered the violets at her corsage, and wondered which man was her hostess' husband. She hadn't even met him.

"Which is Mr. Seaton?"

She rather thought it might be a youngish, bespectacled man seated fairly near her. He had a legal air, and he seemed very much at home.

"Jerry?" Cummings stared at her, then began to laugh. "I say, that's rare! You and he were quite chumming it before dinner, too. Didn't you know whom you were talking to? Jerry!" he called across the table, and Jessica once more met those disturbing blue eyes.

"Miss Paige hasn't an idea who her host is!" Cummings chuckled. "Let me present you."

Every one went on talking, of course. But it seemed to Jessica, for a brief moment, that everything stopped. Her water goblet remained poised in the air while she stared at him, wordless. Then Cummings' voice brought her back to the present, and her salad, and, somehow, the dinner progressed.

CHAPTER III.

It was some time before she knew why the fact of Jerry Seaton's being Jerry Seaton came to her as a shock. That night, after dinner, she managed to file it as a triviality, and to make a jest of her blunder. Yet there was a poignant note of constraint in her greeting when he sauntered over to her side while the small company amused itself with cliquy gossip, and she, the stranger within the fold, sat alone, throned on the Louis Quatorze sofa. But her faint embarrassment didn't last long. Seaton had, besides the whimsical charm she had so keenly felt, an ease, a simplicity of manner that betokened not only his own breeding, but a sensitive reaction to her shy mood. Together they looked through some rare prints, and presently Bess Seaton and Cummings, who shadowed her, came and joined them.

That part of the evening verged on banality. It was, as Mrs. Seaton had warned Jessica, rather a deadly dinner. A duty dinner, really, given as a sop to various dull souls who had to be included in at least one of the season's festivities. Jessica guessed shrewdly—and correctly—that the Harmons, and beaky old Mrs. Cutter-Jones had done much toward launching Jerold Seaton's bride in Boston society, and that she was glad enough to bore herself with them now in order to keep up an intimacy. Quite obviously, the gilded

beauty's vulnerable point was a passion for social supremacy.

Jessica couldn't help wondering if Seaton's great name and his mother's position hadn't won her, rather than his personal attractiveness or any romantic ardor of her own. One didn't associate romance with Bess Seaton, in spite of her glowing youth and loveliness. There was a metallic quality to her; something that rang a little hard in her speech and laughter. And her attitude toward her husband was one of total indifference. The girl banished these conjecturings with an effort, and gave her attention to the colorful prints on her knee. As she lifted one, a square of cardboard slipped from the folder where it had lain concealed, and fell to the floor. Seaton stooped, retrieved it, and handed it to her with a gay little laugh. It was a snapshot of a handsome little boy sprawling on the veranda steps of a low-eaved, pleasant country house.

"Do you like small boys, Miss Paige? This is Jock—my ten-year-old son."

"I adore them!" She smiled down at the serious little face that, diminutive as it was in the photograph, was absurdly like the man beside her. The child had his father's fine eyes and sensitive mouth, the set of his shoulders, even. And yet, in the chiseled beauty of his features, Jessica traced his mother.

"He *is* a darling!"

"Jerry spoils him hopelessly!" exclaimed Mrs. Seaton. "I always dread the end of the school year, for he's underfoot all the time. Jerry won't send him to camp, and won't have a tutor for him—I'm a martyr!"

"Because with a ten-year-old son at heel you can't pass for twenty!" Cummings jeered, holding a match to her cigarette.

"A child that's wholly brought up by tutors and servants has a rotten deal," Seaton said quietly. "I was sent off to school when I was a bit of a shaver, myself, but I was always with my mother during vacations, I remember. She gave me—the most sympathetic companionship."

His wife yawned prettily.

"She had to, didn't she? Tutors and things cost so much, even then—and she hadn't much money, Jerry."

"It wasn't a question of money." His voice was bleak.

"What a dear house!" murmured Jessica, to break the spell. Bess Seaton had moved off toward some people who were leaving.

"Isn't it?" Jerry asked eagerly. "That's our summer place at Duxbury. I'm very keen about it—it's the first thing I remember, that house and garden. Some day Bess must persuade you to come down there."

She could have bitten her tongue out. And while he spoke tenderly of the old house, she stifled her yearning to warn him of the impending change. Why, it was a cruel thing that Bess Seaton was doing! She was going to hurt him horribly, unnecessarily, and she couldn't see it. How blind she was, how hard! Was that what money did to people?

After a plain, red-haired woman with a delightful voice had sung twice, Jessica crossed the room to make her adieus. And it was Bess who insisted upon having her husband take her home. The town car, it seemed, was laid up temporarily for repairs. And the idea of Jessica's going home, unescorted, in an owl taxi was unheard of. So Seaton, to whom she'd already said good night, and who was glad enough to have another half hour with her—he thought her enchantingly pretty, and felt strangely drawn to her—put her into a machine, and seated himself beside her.

"It's such an imposition!" she exclaimed. "I live at the ends of the earth—in darkest Dorchester!"

"You do?"

His face was a pale blur in the dark, but she quickened to the surprise in his voice.

"You thought I was gilded, like all the others?" she laughed. "I'm a daughter of toil; I have a deadly job in an architect's office, and I live in a shabby flat. My grandeur" — she touched her sheer gown and her feathery fan—"will be laid away soon enough."

"So you're Cinderella," he mused. "I'm glad of that."

They were both silent while the machine jolted over the cobblestones of a hilly suburban street. At last it turned down the shoddy avenue of shops and houses that she knew so well, and stopped before the two-family house whose ugliness always smote her afresh. A light still burned in the front room of their flat. That meant her father was still up.

"Shall we be friends?' asked the man beside her. "I feel as though we were already."

"We are!" she told him warmly as they stood together on the tiny porch, while he fumbled with her key.

She was glad he did not suggest that they have luncheon or tea together. That might have spoiled everything. She knew so well the variety of married man who had an eye for pretty working girls, and liked palm-room rendezvous. Jerry Seaton was different. She wanted him to be different.

"Good night, then." His handclasp was admirable; strong and warm and firm, yet gentle, as though her small, gloved hand might be very fragile.

"Good night," she echoed, and stepped into the hall.

Her father was still sitting by the gas log, nodding over a book. And the small parlor, with its green walls and marble mantel of an ugly period, was more depressing than ever after the splendor of the drawing-room she had just left. But she wasn't thinking of marble mantels or gas logs, just now. She was listening to the retreating sound of a taxicab as it sped away toward town.

Her father roused himself, and blinked up at her. He seemed to find something interesting in her abstraction. She was very lovely, with her dark hair a little wind-blown, her lips parted slightly. Softened, in some mysterious fashion.

"Back from the ball," he commented. "Well, did you meet the prince, Cinderella?"

She started; laughed as she drew off her gloves.

"No—only a friend."

"A wire came for you." He pushed a yellow envelope across the table, and she picked it up reluctantly, knowing well it was from Arthur Beale, announcing his return.

She didn't open it just then, thereby whetting her father's curiosity unmercifully. She didn't feel like conjuring small, petty Beale into her presence. In the morning he would be on hand, no doubt early. He was precise about hours. But to-night——

"Who is this friend?" her father wanted to know.

"A man who likes me," she said simply. "Just—a friend!"

Then she went to bed.

When she reached the office at nine-thirty the next morning, she found the younger member of the firm at his desk. And, regretting fleetly that, as his assistant, she shared his private office, she shut the door behind her.

"You got my wire, of course."

He held her hands an unconscionable time, in face of the probability of a stenographer's entering at any moment.

"You're looking magnificently, as usual," he assured her, releasing her at last, and blinking at her behind his thick-

lensed glasses. "I—I don't have to tell you that I missed you."

She was suddenly sorry for him. He was pathetic in his well-restrained ardor, his anxiety not to circumvent the proprieties of a business day, as he gazed adoringly at her quick movements before the mirror in the cabinet, and fumbled with the papers on his desk. But she took cruel advantage of that professional restraint.

"These"—she handed him duplicate blue prints of the house she had designed for Mrs. Seaton—"are plans for Mrs. Jerold Seaton's new Duxbury house. She insisted upon having her own ideas carried out, and she's approved these. The work is already under way. And here's some correspondence that you'll want to see. Our contract with the Meyer Stone people expires this month."

The day wore on, and not until late afternoon did Jessica have to meet the main issue with Arthur Beale. But then, when he had signed the last letter and dismissed his stenographer and his desk was neatly arranged for the next day's work, he came and perched upon a corner of her desk. The western light was not kind to his forty-odd years, his bald head, denuded of all but a few inadequate wisps of hair, carefully brushed across the shining expanse. His pale-brown eyes, his thin, middle-aged mouth could not express the passion that stirred him.

"Jessica—when am I to have my answer? You've been putting me off a long time."

"I know." She looked down at her folded hands, wondering that they could lie so still upon the desk. Whenever Arthur urged the point she got panicky. It gave her the feeling of being closed in upon, put her at bay. She was horribly afraid that, sooner or later, she would marry him. It was so obviously the thing to do. "But it wouldn't be the answer you want—now."

His thin, uncertain hands were reaching for hers, holding them so tightly that it hurt.

"Say yes!" he pleaded. "Jessica, I vow I'll make you happy, look after your father, give you anything you want. I don't ask you to love me—you—you're very romantic, you know. So many women marry men they aren't in love with, and are contented and happy. Love—the thing I suppose you mean—isn't always necessary to a woman——"

"It is to me," Jessica sighed. "If ever I find it isn't——"

"Is it to your father?" inquired Beale softly. "He's failing, my dear. Is his gout his only ailment?"

Jessica shook her head. She knew he was reminding her of her father's bad heart, a hereditary complaint that troubled him more as he grew older, a complaint for which there was no cure, but which could be staved off indefinitely by ease of living and peace of mind.

"That's not fair of you, Arthur." She loosed her hands, and eyed him somberly. "You know that as long as my mother was alive she sacrificed herself to him at every turn, that I have been offered up to him, too. It's a sort of family fetish, but it can't go on always. Twice, I've given up the thought of marrying a poor man, because of Father. I might have been happy—I don't know. I was young, and fancied myself in love. I'll give up marriage, if it interferes with my taking care of him, but I can't marry to please him, and give him a few extra comforts." A satirical little smile touched her mouth. "So you see, if I do marry you, it'll be for the sake of all the expensive things I want—not on his account!"

She rose, and pushed back her chair. But Beale didn't let her escape. Her embittered words lent him the audacity to catch her in his arms, urge her in

broken, endearing terms to marry him for any reason she chose. And with his arms about her, his kiss on her mouth, Jessica didn't repulse him any more than she yielded to him. Her own passivity amazed her. He held her off at last.

"You don't hate me for this?"

He had never kissed her before.

"No." The girl tried to puzzle it out. "I don't hate you—I don't feel anything toward you. It simply doesn't touch me, Arthur!"

His unattractive face saddened. Manlike, he would rather have had her repulse him than submit, unresisting, almost wearily, to his embrace.

"I care enough to want you as a statue, rather than not at all. Look!"

He took from his desk drawer a jeweler's box, clicked it open. An emerald ring of exquisite design lay flashing against the velvet.

"I've had this for months, Jessica—I saw it long before I ever dared to speak of love to you, bought it, because it seemed made for you, so no one else might wear it, if you wouldn't."

That touched her a little, but the jewel itself hardly tempted her.

"You'd take me, not caring?"

"I'd take you if you hated me. But you don't; you're simply unresponsive. And unreasonable."

"To think I might still find some one I'd—love?" Her voice took on a delicious cadence; she gazed dreamily out into the February twilight. "I don't want to be unresponsive always—I want to give something myself."

It was her ardent youth that spoke.

"An old theory. It doesn't often work out, Jessica. The eternal lovers seldom meet in time. One is married, usually—or grown old too soon. Or they never meet at all."

His middle-aged cynicism bit deep. It dispelled the memory of a pair of dark-blue eyes that smiled at her across a tray of violets, of hands that lingered over the pinning of a purple cluster to her girdle. What he said was true enough. Most things, it seemed, did come too late.

Her shoulders, beautifully molded under her sheer blouse, moved in a gesture that he took for surrender.

"You'll marry me?" he cried. Emotion did not become him, but his eager delight moved her to a sort of pity, and touched her vanity as well.

"I won't make you happy," she told him. "I'm capricious and high-tempered and vain—and I don't love you!"

"None of those things matter!" He fumblingly put the emerald upon her slim finger. "I want you, whatever you are—and soon. When can the wedding be?"

It didn't matter much to her.

"In the summer. July—August—but please, Arthur, let's not advertise it beforehand. It would be awkward, while I'm in your office, to have every one know of our engagement."

She got her way easily, but it wasn't so easy to escape his insistent caresses. The buzz of her telephone came at a propitious moment, and she answered it gratefully. A voice whose inflections she knew well came over the wire.

"This is Jerold Seaton, Miss Paige. I'm commissioned by Bess to carry you off for tea—she's waiting downstairs in the car."

"Your time should belong to me," observed her new fiancé with no good grace, as she hung up the receiver. "Really, Jessica——"

She turned panicky, childlike, at the thought of not going.

"I must, Arthur—it's the Seatons—my first clients!"

"You're socially involved with them?"

He didn't object to that; in fact, he was secretly pleased that his bride-to-be had connections of the sort. And he sensed that this was not the time to make any peremptory demands upon her. He wasn't quite sure, yet——

The slam of the door answered him. Jessica, exquisitely flushed under her small black hat, was holding out her hand to Jerold Seaton, who was waiting for her in the outer office. And the emerald pledge of her betrothal, had the donor but known it, lay loose among change and lip stick and keys in her mesh bag.

CHAPTER IV.

Two months later, Jessica was an intimate of the Seaton household. Bess Seaton had taken one of her swift fancies to the green-eyed girl who had drawn up the plans for the Duxbury house. She had a penchant for new people, whom she took up and dropped with surprising rapidity. But Jessica Paige she didn't drop. She liked the girl's supreme independence, and she knew that Dahlgren Paige, whatever he was now, had once been a cotillion leader, a man of fashion. She rather liked to sponsor his daughter.

And—this was the important reason for the friendship!—Jessica was useful to her.

Boston, like many big cities, has its provincial side still flavored with Puritanism. Not even Myron Marshall's daughter, or Jerold Seaton's wife, could afford to flout convention here. And Bess, whose predatory passion for admiration did not blind her to caution, knew that her semi-Platonic intimacy with rich Percy Cummings would not go unchallenged unless his attentions were now and then diverted from her to some other fair recipient. Just now it simplified things to include Jessica in all formal and informal gatherings at her handsome house. And best of all, Jerry—who was hopelessly detached from most of her friends and interests, as a rule—seemed to like the girl enormously. That made things so much easier. So it happened that Jessica and he were thrown together constantly.

That spring was a happy season for her. Not on account of her approaching marriage, to which she gave little enough thought, nor yet because of her gayety, even though it released her from her fiancé's demands upon her time. There was really no reason for her to be in such an absurdly festive frame of mind. Her father, though childishly pleased by her engagement to Arthur Beale, was failing. His heart affection was no longer a legend, but a reality. He suffered now from any exertion. Beale did not cease to irritate her, and her work under him was nerve-racking. She was on the verge of a marriage that she couldn't help dreading. Yet she was happy.

She didn't realize that her happiness was shared by Jerold Seaton; that her buoyancy depended upon his presence. They were warm friends now; she had a right, she thought a little wistfully, to everything pleasant she could crowd into the next few months, to all the friendship, the understanding, the carefree gayety she could get. She didn't let herself dwell upon vain imaginings of what might have taken the place of that friendship.

Then, one bright April morning—it was Saturday, and she had dashed into the Commonwealth Avenue house with some figures for Bess to look over, big figures, that stood for the white-stone magnificence of the house being built at Duxbury—Jerry found her curled up on the drawing-room floor beside his son, who was home for the Easter holidays.

They were playing marbles on the white-tiled hearth, and Jessica, a slim thing in her schoolgirlish frock, her small feet tucked under her, her silky dark head close to the boy's, was as absorbed as he.

"You see," explained Jock's friendly treble, "you've got to shoot 'em more with your thumb, like this."

"Like this!" she triumphed gleefully, pouncing upon a handful she had won.

Seaton, engrossed in the scene, caught his breath. He couldn't visualize Bess in any intimacy with her son, because there had never been anything of the sort between them. Jock had been to school—a school of her choosing, costly, exclusive to the very rich, of too much pomp and ceremony for boyhood, which, at its finest, is supremely democratic—for three years, and even during his baby days she had given him no personal attention. Children bored her, she admitted frankly. And now, at ten, he was so disgracefully tall—she felt aggrieved at having a child that old!

"You're an awfully pretty girl!" burst out his son suddenly. Seaton had been thinking the same thing. He saw Jessica slip a round, slim arm about Jock's shoulder, and give him a tender little squeeze.

"You're a darling to think so!" she said.

And the man, with a queer, tight look around his mouth, watched a lonely little boy forget his sturdy, boyish contempt for display of emotion and fling himself into a pair of arms that held him close, burying his round, fair head into a shoulder that seemed suddenly made to order for a little boy's head.

He turned, with something tugging at his heart, and went blindly upstairs. At his wife's door he paused, and at his knock, her clear, high voice bade him enter. Her room, done in the startling black-and-white effect that was just then in vogue, seemed strange to his eyes. He hadn't been in it since the decorators had finished their work. He hadn't been in it for a long time, for that matter——

As he tried to bridge the chasm that separated him from the beauty before the mirror, tried to remember how long their lives had been remote from each other, how it had happened—for they had cared desperately once—she read aright the somberness of his mouth.

"You can finish that later," she told the beruffled maid, who was busy with a bodkin of ribbon, and a pile of webby lingerie.

She swept into a drawer the builders' statements that Jessica had just brought her, her high good humor spoiled by something in her husband's manner.

"I'm rather rushed for time, Jerry, but what is it?"

"This—and some other things."

He tossed upon the vanity table a square white envelope, which she recognized as the quarterly bill for Jock's schooling. With it was a request that Mrs. Seaton be good enough to register her son for the following year in the third form, as at this early time entrance applications were being filed.

"I don't want Jock to go back there after this year," Seaton said.

Bess lifted her perfect chin, and examined the curve of her throat in the mirror.

"Don't be silly, Jerry—it's the best school in America. He shall certainly finish there unless I decide to send him abroad. There's a marvelous boys' academy at Neuilly where Sue Merlin's son is going——"

"Jock can't go there. I can't afford to send him myself—and I can't let your father do everything for my son." Seaton, standing beside his wife, picked up a gold-topped perfume flask, set it down again. The bit of crystal symbolized a good deal.

"Oh, Father's money!" Bess sulked. But there was a hint of implacability to her, in spite of her aggrieved air. "Haven't we fought this out a thousand times? Are you still trying to get me to sacrifice myself to your whim of living on nothing a year?"

Because she never alienated any man who had ever cared for her she veiled the hardness of her eyes, the hostility she felt. And because she was, to the glance, the same exquisite being he had adored twelve years before, her hus-

band reached out to her, remembering all they had shared.

"I'm trying to find you!" he cried. "Bess, we've lost each other. I don't know how it's happened, except that your father's money has dazzled our eyes, blinded us both. When you married me, came to me, knowing how little I had, you thought you cared enough to give up everything to become a poor man's wife. Then, a little later, when you longed for things I couldn't give you, I was weak enough to let you accept an allowance from your father. That was the beginning of the end. It's come to this now."

His gesture included all the perfect details of the room, and a great deal more than that.

"You wanted a handsome house—servants—jewels, all the trappings of the rich, that I didn't have. You got them; and I, the man you married, whose privilege it should be to support you, am nothing but a retainer in your house. At best—one of your guests."

"You should have known I couldn't live shabbily," she told him as if it were a lesson learned by rote. "I can't do without money, Jerry. You're unspeakably selfish to want me to—that's what you do want, I suppose."

"I want——" He stopped, his fine, troubled eyes upon her. Would she even understand his want?

"I want a wife for myself, a mother for Jock; a woman we can both love—not a golden idol. Try to understand, Bess! I loved you"—unconsciously he used the past tense—"we've been everything to each other. But now we might be strangers, living under one roof—your roof. It's late, I suppose, to talk of love. It won't be too late, though, if you'll come back to me, for Jock's sake, if not for mine. Couldn't you be happy in the little Chestnut Street house, with what I could give you?"

"Love!" echoed his wife, as if the word were in a strange tongue which she did not understand. "You always were sentimental, Jerry. It's absurd in a man of thirty-eight." She glanced at the tiny clock before her, and began polishing her rosy nails. "That sort of thing doesn't last, you know. It can't be rehashed. And as for my giving up everything that makes life worth living, to please your romantic notions of a wife's obligation——"

She laughed.

Seaton wondered how he could ever have thought she might yield to his desire, so hard was her tinkling mirth.

"Then we can't go on like this."

Her cool acknowledgment of the breach between them widened it immeasurably. And it was no trifling difference, no rift in a dozen years of marriage, but an immutable remoteness from each other, a complete separation of body and spirit, that she admitted, while she plied a silver-mounted buffer.

"Because I don't love you! I think our life is very well arranged." She looked up at him and smiled at his confused distress. "And, after to-day, it will be even simpler. You will go your way—and I, mine."

This, then, was the end. She didn't love him, didn't need him in her scheme of life. And, suddenly, he realized that she was less to him than he was to her. She was nothing but a lustrously beautiful creature he had once thought he loved, who, in keeping intact her beauty, had destroyed the illusion that had been her chief charm for him. She wasn't real. And one doesn't grieve for an image, however perfect it may be. Without a word, Seaton turned, and strode from the silk-paneled room.

There was no one—nothing—to stop him now. He felt, not driven out of Eden, but released from long imprisonment in this soft-carpeted, perfectly run house. A manservant, not waiting for his ring, handed him hat and topcoat, ushered him out of the tapestried hall.

And on the sun-dappled steps he paused, drinking in the April air.

Jessica Paige stood on the pavement below, drawing on her gloves. Jessica who, in a simply made dark dress and a feathery little hat, looked as bravely, freshly lovely as the early spring flowers already blooming in the grass plots before all the houses in that block. At the closing of the door she looked back, saw him, smiled.

She simulated gayety, as a matter of fact, because she was thinking about those statements she had brought Bess, and her conscience smote her heavily for her part in the deception she knew to be cruel. She was in honor bound to keep her client's confidence, and she wanted desperately to break her word, to tell him of the white-stone villa that was being reared on the site of his beloved birthplace.

"Will you walk downtown?" she invited, her slim feet tapping time on the asphalt to the symphony of the spring weather.

He joined her, and if his disturbed gaze, his sensitive, embittered mouth, told her of the turmoil within him, she pretended not to see. And her lilting voice, that so often echoed in his ear when she was nowhere near him, eased the dull ache in his heart.

"What are you doing this afternoon?" he asked before she left him to go back to her desk for another hour's work. "I've a tinny little roadster that's just been put in shape. We might drive out in the country, if you've nothing better on hand."

"Won't Jock want you?"

"He's going to my mother's for the week-end. She's mad about him, in true grandmother fashion."

His fine eyes told her that he wanted her, whatever his small son might want. She didn't hesitate long. She had begun to count the weeks until August twentieth, the day she had set for her marriage. There were so few of them

to count! And she knew well enough that Bess would not mind.

"Down here, then, at two?"

"I'll be here."

He raised his hat, and left her, to spend a bad hour in his shabby little law office that was almost all he could call his own. It wasn't an altogether bad hour, though, because visions of Jessica persisted in every dusty nook. She came, wraithlike, between him and the solid old law books that lined the walls. He could not fix his mind upon the briefs that lay before him.

He loved her—had loved her, he knew now, since the night, months back, when he had come upon her, a slim, gracile creature in a moth-gray gown that bared her shoulders, standing in wonder before a monstrous crystal clock in his wife's drawing-room. And only to-day, it seemed, when he saw her with Jock, had he realized that he loved her. That was what had prompted him to go up to his wife and beg her to come back to him. He wanted, as he had told her, a wife for himself, a mother for Jock—not a golden idol. But the wife and mother of his desire were embodied in a dark-haired girl whose laughter was the most musical thing in the world—not in the beauty before the mirror. But, too, honor was his creed. He could have put Jessica out of his life if the woman he had married had kept faith with him.

She had failed him, and now—she had released him. There was nothing to keep him from the woman he loved, save a sense of his own insolvency. What had he to offer Jessica? He, who had not even succeeded in keeping the love of his wife; whose marriage had been a mockery almost from the start, who had neither money, nor the promise of any future——

It was time to meet her, so he left the wraith for the reality, got his small car from a near-by garage.

She was waiting for him, and all the

sunshine of the uncertain April day seemed to hover about her. They drove along the twisting downtown streets, through pleasant suburbs, and, at last, got out into open country. Jessica, content to lie back with her hat off and the wind blowing through her hair, did not question their destination. She was surprised, an hour later, to catch the fresh, salt scent of the sea, and before long they were speeding by long stretches of marshland, unbelievably green, beyond which lay the misty blue of the ocean.

"Do you like the sea?" he asked above the rush of the wind they made.

She nodded, her cheeks glowing, her dark curls straining back from her temples.

"Bess doesn't; it takes her out of curl." His eyes crinkled with amusement. He drew up beside the sandy road, under a clump of budding trees.

"You haven't asked yet where we're going?"

"I don't think I care," the girl admitted. Something in his voice stirred her to poignant compunction because she had come. They seemed to have left the safe shallows of light friendship.

"I'm sure I don't—as long as you're with me."

She knew then what lay in the depths of his dark-blue eyes, and she did not turn away her own. She felt him lift her limp left hand, strip it of its glove, raise it to his lips. Her heart pounded madly. And then he saw, on her slim finger, the emerald Beale had placed there. Only two days before, when her fiancé had insisted that their engagement be kept secret no longer, had she taken to wearing it openly.

"What's this?" he asked blankly.

At the moment, it did not strike either of them as grotesque, that he should be demanding the reason for such a symbol.

"I'm to be married in August to Arthur Beale," she told him piteously. "A friend of my father—my employer."

He knew who Beale was. Then something seemed to amuse him.

"And I was taking you to show you the one thing in the world I've got to offer you," he said. "Just a shabby old house, and a grove of fir trees, close to the bay."

Duxbury! Jessica didn't let him relinquish her hand. She caught both of his, instead, and clung to them.

"My dear!" she cried. She didn't know how to tell him. "Jerry—you won't find it as you left it. Oh, it was a cruel thing to do, but it's done! Your house, your dear old house, isn't there any longer. There's a beastly, glittering villa there instead. Or there will be before long. And it was I, not knowing what it meant to you, who designed the monstrosity, as Bess wanted it!"

It didn't take him long to understand. It was a blow, of course, but with Jessica beside him, her hands in his, her tenderness ringing in his ears, nothing mattered much.

"If it wasn't for this"—he touched the jewel on her hand that glowed like a green eye—"I'd think—you loved me."

She pulled it off, mouth tremulous, eyes shining softly.

"Jessica!"

He took her in his arms, and in a great contentment she nestled there, against his shoulder. Everything seemed to be said. And, she thought wistfully, there was little time for words. By twilight, with the cold mist that settles over the sea, their day would be done. And to-morrow——

A shrieking scarlet car sped past them, brought them back to the sandy road between the marshlands.

"We'll drive on anyway, dearest—and gaze upon the wreckage of my hopes." He could laugh now at the thought of the villa. "There's a fir grove, a heavenly place, near the house. We can find a rustic bench there, if the ground isn't dry enough to sit on."

They drove on, and presently Jessica cried out in delight as they passed through the sleepy old village, and Seaton pointed out a wharf, a low-eaved store, a Colonial farmhouse, connected in some way with historical incidents of his youth. A stretch of blue bay, and golden dunes, summer places of well-bred simplicity, with shades all drawn, and lawns just turning green, unkempt, and after these, just beyond a turn from the main road, an acre of rising ground, fir covered.

They left the machine below the grove, strolled up a woody path, and came suddenly upon the builders' work. No trace of the old house remained. The new foundations had been laid, gleaming white walls erected. A space was laid off for a sunken garden, and a white-pillared portico begun. When it was finished it would be ornate, handsome, a symbol of much money. It would suit the personality of its owner.

But to Seaton it held no beauty.

"She's thinned out the grove, so it can be seen better from the road," he commented. "I'm glad I came, and saw it. There's nothing of the old place left to grieve for. That's a relief."

They wandered toward the grove, and a solitary workman, busy with his belated lunch, hailed them. It was a half holiday, and, save for him, they had the place to themselves.

"Private property ye're trespassin' on," he maintained firmly.

"I'm Mr. Seaton," Jerry told him.

He touched his hat, and moved off with an apology. The pair struck him as looking pretty shabby, and when he glimpsed the runabout down the road he was more puzzled than ever. Still, he couldn't say that the quiet-spoken gentleman wasn't Mrs. Seaton's husband.

In the grove near the water's edge they found a rustic seat that Jerry's mother had had built before he was born. He remembered playing on the grass there, at her feet, when he was a tiny child. And now, kneeling before the girl he loved, he told her all that she meant to him.

Jessica, who never wept, closed her eyes against the tears that drenched her lashes.

"Don't—don't!" she begged. "I'll have that much more to remember. Ah, Jerry, d'you think I can forget to-day? It would almost be easier for us not to have had it at all."

Sunlight sparkled on the water before them. Jerry laughed.

"It isn't to-day, dear heart, it's forever."

"I won't take you!" she interposed swiftly. "You're hers—I've never stolen what didn't belong to me."

"I'm yours. Bess doesn't love me—never has. Our marriage was—a romantic accident. To-day, this morning, we came openly to the parting of the ways. It wasn't your fault, dear; the mischief was done long ago."

"Then——" Happiness flooded her.

"I'm asking you to marry me—a little prematurely. As soon as Bess gets her divorce. I've no money, nothing but a small practice and a shabby little house in town, near the river, mortgaged to its eaves—and myself—secondhand at that. But I'm yours, Jessica."

"And I'm poor and shabby half the time and plain, beside the magnificent Bess!" she cried.

"You're the most beautiful thing in the world to me! Will you have me?"

She didn't have to say yes; she only needed to smile at him, a smile of exquisite tenderness, that told him poverty itself was dear to her, as long as they shared it together.

CHAPTER V.

Seaton came home that April night to find that Bess had gone off for a week at Atlantic City with Sue Merlin, a handsome, fairly youthful divorcee

whose companionship she enjoyed. The butler gave him her brief message, and told him that his mother had come, and was in the library with Master Jock.

He went upstairs at once, and found the old woman and the boy before a small wood fire. Jock was sprawled face down on a rare rug, his chin propped in his hands, talking contentedly of school and baseball. His grandmother, her devotion to his diminutive self undisguised, listened as she busied her thin, ivory-tinted hands with some fancywork for a fair. There was between them the intensely intimate bond that seems to exist between the very young and the very old. Perhaps Bess had sensed that, long ago, and had never forgiven Jock for it.

"My son!" Old Mrs. Seaton worshiped her only grandchild, but part of that worship, at least, was because he was a miniature Jerry.

"It's good to find you here, Mother."

Jerry touched her frail cheek with his lips, realizing, for the first time he permitted himself to realize it, that she only came to the Avenue house to look after Jock, when her daughter-in-law made one of her sudden flights.

"Not gone to bed yet, old man?" he asked, turning to Jock.

"Vacation time," interposed his grandmother briskly. "Jerry, he's playing baseball with the third-form boys."

"I've a good bit of muscle, you see," Jock explained modestly, flexing his arm for his father's benefit.

"I'll say you have!" agreed the man. "This summer, Jock——"

"Gee, it'll be great to get to the country," his son burst out. "I hate this house; it's the clutteredest place. When are we going to Duxbury, Dad?"

He didn't notice the shadow that came upon his father's face, but his grandmother did.

"Your mother's got a surprise for us at Duxbury," Jerry said. "I went down there to-day, and found out what it is. She's had the old house torn down, and a new one is going up. It's larger, far handsomer than the other. White stone of some sort—Italian design. It'll be the show place of the town!"

The boy leaned back against his knees and stared up at him under knit brows.

"We won't like it as well, will we, Dad?" he said, sober-eyed.

Old Mrs. Seaton, her hands arrested in their delicate work, stared at her son. She read the undercurrent of bitterness in his tone, and was horrified at the news of the Duxbury house.

"I'm afraid I can't be down there this summer," Seaton went on. "It takes too long to commute. How does the idea of a boy's camp strike you, Jock?"

"I'd rather be with you," the boy declared.

"We'll pick one close at hand, so I can get there often for week-ends."

"Your old granny can't be neglected."

The child returned her loving look, as he patted her black-silk knee.

"I'll come to you as soon as school closes, until it's time to go to camp," he promised.

A clock chimed ten. Knowing it to be his bedtime, the little fellow scrambled up.

"I'll stop in on my way up," said his father. That was an old ritual between them.

At last Jerry and his mother were alone. She folded up her work, and changed her seat, in order to sit beside him.

"What is it, Jerry?"

"The end," he said quietly. Her hand, gently beating time upon his, still had the power to comfort him by its very touch.

"It isn't possible to go on like this, Mother. I don't know whether you've known it, but we've been apart for a long time."

"I've guessed."

"She doesn't love me, nor I her. There's nothing between us but Jock. No spiritual link of any sort. Our marriage was a mistake—she has admitted that, and separation is all that's left to us. Complete separation."

"When a poor man marries a rich woman he's either her chattel, or a guest in her house. And yet—my son, I don't believe in divorce. The prayer book says, 'till death do you part.'"

"I doubt if it means death of the body," he murmured. "And, Mother, we're both young. Too young to give up the thought of happiness in another marriage."

"Is it Percy Cummings?" she asked swiftly, her mother's jealousy betrayed by the red that crept into her cheeks.

Jerry didn't know, or care. His wife, to whom attention was as necessary as water and sunshine are to a plant, was never without some devoted swain. Cummings was but one of a procession. It was her beauty's due; he had always yielded the point after the first hurt it dealt him, early in their married life.

"I'm thinking of myself, Mother. There's a girl I found this winter——"

"You love her?" It was a distressed cry.

"She means—utter joy to me."

He told her of Jessica, painted her so vividly, in her charm and loveliness, that the old woman, who craved happiness for her son, had to feel tenderly toward the girl who held it out to him so lavishly. But she could not but protest at what, to her secluded world and generation, was a sinful thing. Jerry knew, though, that her stanchest beliefs were water when it came to pitting them against his happiness.

"You'll love her, in spite of all this?" he begged.

"If she's dear to you——"

He knew then that he could trust her not only to be kind, but tender, welcoming, to the motherless girl. And he faced the future with a high heart.

He saw little of Jessica the week that followed their premature betrothal, for her father had a heart attack that left him very ill for a few days, and she never left him until he was up and about again.

Dahlgren Paige was an old, petulant invalid, who was no more selfish now than he had been all his life, but in spite of his selfishness, his petulance, his unreasonable demands upon her, he was as dear to Jessica as he had been to every woman he had sacrificed to his whims. And there had been many of them: his sister, beautiful Nellie Dahlgren, who gave up all life of her own to keep open house for her elder brother; shadowy women, who could not hold him long; Jessica's mother, whom he had married late in life, and whose youth had been offered up to his demanding middle age—other women—and, last of all, Jessica herself. Even now, there was something about the man that, when he was most irritable, gave more than a hint of the charm that was his best point. And when the girl's nerves and temper were strained to the breaking point, when it was all she could do to come at his insistent command, he would disarm her with contrite tenderness, be winning and gallant in a sudden rack of pain, call her his pride, his happiness.

"Don't leave me, Jessica! Where's your hand—there, that's better. Poor child, you're tired. Ah, how selfish we are to the ones we love best. I love you, Jess—you know it, don't you, dear? I want you to be safe, cared for, happy; you've borne the brunt so long."

She knew what he meant, and she humored him like a child, even then.

"Arthur sent you a marvelous basket of fruit, Father. Shall I bring it in? He telephoned while you were asleep. You'll have a dutiful son-in-law, methinks."

That always brought a contented smile to his lips, sent him off in a peace-

ful doze, while Jessica, a crumpled, weary little figure after her nights of nursing, huddled motionless in a chair beside his bed, afraid to move or release her hand from his, lest he waken.

She could not tell him now, of course, of Jerry, or even of her decision not to marry Arthur Beale. Neither did she seek release from the man who had her promise, for she knew that when she did tell him he would try to hold her through her father. There would be a scene, which Arthur was quite capable of making, and old Mr. Paige quite incapable of enduring in his weakened condition.

It was a difficult time, and she often longed for Jerry's tenderness and strength. But he could not come to her. They had promised each other that until he was free, really free, and could be openly acknowledged as her lover, they would be the merest friends. It seemed a little more honorable. And happiness like theirs could wait.

She knew, of course, that Bess was out of town, and counted the lagging days until she should return. Would she hate her, she wondered, for having taken something she herself did not want? Women like her were possessive, predatory—and, ah, how her vanity would be hurt!

Jessica, in her room, peering at herself in the glass, marveled that such a slight, pale thing, with nothing, really, but remarkable eyes and smooth, pale skin and, of course, the Dahlgren shoulders, could have made any man turn from the positive beauty of Jerry's wife. That would be bitter to Bess; she might have found it more easy to forgive her rival had she been ravishingly beautiful. But to lose the man she had loved, and married, twelve years before, to that shadowy image in the glass—— Jessica sighed, put away the doubt that would creep in whenever she contemplated the future, and went to fix her father's broth. Jerry was hers. Nothing in the world, she thought, could tarnish the glamour of her life now.

And then, bored by the ocean city's blatant diversions, and by the unadulterated society of Mrs. Merlin, who was used to being amused herself, Bess came home.

The Avenue house quickened its tempo as soon as her wire was received. Things began to assume a polished air, a glitter. Her favorite flowers were set in low bowls here and there through the handsome, crowded rooms. When everything was ready, the curtain rose upon the set designed for her, and she arrived, in a flurry of baggage and maids and hat boxes.

That night, after she and Jerry had dined alone—his mother had left that morning—he followed her into the drawing-room, and faced her from the vantage point of the mantel. She lay back among the cushions of the mauve davenport, feeling singularly pleased with things in general. Her gown, she knew, was all that it should be; a length of black velvet, cunningly draped about her in a supreme simplicity of mode that made the most of her rare beauty; long strands of jet emphasizing the whiteness of her shoulders, the smooth curve of her back. Percy Cummings had urged her to wear black more —he was rather a connoisseur of women's clothes, she had discovered, and to-night he was coming to take her to somebody's musical. A semibohemian affair, where there would be no lifting of brows, or covert smiles, at her appearing with him instead of her husband.

It was nice to be home. Boston was deadly—but she was somebody here, at any rate. So many people had a lot of money, nowadays; that was hardly the important thing. But to have position, a great name, and money, too—in a word, to be Mrs. Jerold Nottingham Seaton, that *was* something. And Jerry was rather a dear, too. She supposed

he was still sulking because of their quarrel of a week ago. Well, it couldn't be helped. Readjustments had to come. He might have read her thoughts, as he watched her, for his first words were startlingly allied with them.

"A week ago, Bess, we concluded we were happiest apart."

"If you choose to call it that." She made a little gesture of dismay. How tiresome!

He didn't understand her evasion.

"Let's not equivocate. We both want out freedom, Bess. It means as much to me, now, as it does to you." Her look of astonishment amused him a little. "Perhaps more. Because, while we've come to the end, I've found—a new beginning."

"A woman!" She leaned forward, her handsome eyes narrowing. He heard something snap, and saw that it was one of the carved sticks of her lace fan. Then, with an effort, she leaned back, eying him unemotionally.

"Go on. Who is it? Or perhaps I'm not supposed to know that."

He told her, sensing the tension between them.

"Jessica Paige! You—you love her?"

"I do." His low avowal carried more meaning than any impassioned protestation he could have made.

"To think that I never guessed!" she marveled aloud.

"There was nothing to guess until—a week ago," he said steadily. "We're guilty of no clandestine intrigue, Bess. I must have loved her all along, I suppose, but until you told me that you no longer loved me, that our ways must lie apart, I didn't know it. If I had, it would have made no difference. After you released me—spoke of divorce—I felt free to go to her. And at Duxbury——"

She interrupted him suddenly.

"So you've been there. You're furious, of course. Well, I couldn't stand that shabby frame shack another season. And as long as I'm paying for it——"

"Let's not talk about that; it isn't worth it," he declared. "To tell you the truth, I'd forgotten it."

She was exquisitely made up, but sudden color crept into her cheeks, beneath the delicate enamel. So all he could think of was that Paige girl!

"You mention my speaking of a divorce, Jerry. You're mistaken. I've never dreamed of such a thing, let alone mentioned it."

He stared at her; her languid voice was threaded with ice.

"You're thinking of marrying her—a trifle prematurely, since you have mistaken my suggestion that we continue our ways apart for a demand for a divorce. I won't be divorced, and I won't divorce you! She's welcome to you, but your name belongs to me."

He was bewildered, incredulous.

"You mean you'd keep me bound, not loving me yourself, to punish me?"

"What nonsense!" She was listening for the doorbell, and Cummings. "Please, Jerry, let's not brawl about it. Percy Cummings will be here any minute." The look on his face amused her. "You thought I was in love with him, perhaps; that I wanted to marry him? I like him enormously, but he's nobody. A rich Westerner of no position whatsoever. I have money myself, and I have—your name!"

She stood up, her breast rising and falling under her superb pearls.

"I won't give up to her the thing that means everything to me here—your name! Money doesn't mean much nowadays, but the other thing—your kind of thing—does. You've had the benefit of all I've had. I shall keep the only thing you had to give me. I won't be thrust out, while Jessica takes my place. I won't divorce you!"

She was telling him that she had bought his name as she had bought

everything else in this overfull house; that she meant to keep it.

"You'd ruin my life, and hers?" He was aghast.

Just then the bell rang; she gathered up the armful of fur and chiffon that was her wrap, touched her hair.

"You're impossibly sentimental, Jerry."

She stood there a moment, with the light from a crystal-hung chandelier shining down upon her, and Cummings, ardent-eyed, extravagant, bowed low over her hand. Seaton, watching them, wondered if the other man saw her as he did. Beautiful, as gleamingly beautiful as a precious metal, and as hard.

Then, laughing, with a lightly flung phrase and a careless "Good night," they left together.

Seaton brushed his hand across his eyes feeling that his world had collapsed about his ears. With the step of an old man, or a prisoner, whose fetters weigh heavily upon him, he went upstairs.

He always stopped at Jock's door, and he did so now. His son, very small in the white vastness of the bed, sat up and called to him.

"Not asleep yet? Thirsty?"

"Just not sleepy." The boy settled down contentedly as his father seated himself on the edge of the bed. "I say, Dad. 'Member all the stories you used to tell me when I was little? You couldn't think of any right now, I suppose? I've counted sheep so long——"

"A story." Jerry stared out into the big room, dimly lighted by the blue glare of a street light outside. "I can only think of one, sonny."

"Tell it."

Haltingly Seaton began.

"Once—there was a king, called Midas, who loved gold more than anything else in the world. His coffers were full, his palace a treasure house, but still he wanted more. And one day he befriended one of the gods who had come down from Olympus in human guise. In return the god promised to grant any wish of his—and Midas asked that everything he touched might be turned to the metal he loved. Then he stooped, picked up a handful of sand, and the grains that trickled through his fingers gleamed golden. He hastened back to his palace, and when he mounted to his throne, it put his shining crown to shame. He was indeed the richest of men. Even the food from the royal table turned to metal when it reached his lips; water itself was denied him. And when he was famished, athirst, cursing his cupidity, his beautiful little daughter ran in, and before he could stop her, flung herself into his arms—no longer a living child, but a golden image. A golden image——"

His voice, that was bleak with despair as he told the old legend, died away. There the story ended, for him. And to Jock, the ending didn't matter, for he had fallen asleep, his small profile tucked into the pillow, his breathing rhythmical, soft.

CHAPTER VI.

Jessica had to be told; her happiness, which increased each day, destroyed. That radiance of hers marked her, a day later, in the obscure hotel lounge where she awaited Jerry, and he, about to quench it, came forward with anguish in his soul.

She couldn't believe what he had to tell her for a long time. She was piteously uncomprehending. But when she returned to the dreary flat, to find her father much better, and sitting up in a silk dressing gown, she realized what their parting would mean. He couldn't even be her friend, now. She wouldn't fly to the telephone, half expecting it was he, whenever it rang; they would share no more impromptu pleasures; walks on the esplanade, concerts now and then, afternoon browses

in enchanting old bookshops—casual things, all, but so dear to her. If she could have kept the husk of friendship she thought she could have borne it. But he had said:

"It must be all or nothing, dearest. Don't tempt me. I've thought of nothing but an obscure Italian town—a sun-drenched villa on a hill, with a walled-in garden where fruit trees come to early bloom—and the two of us there, like lovers in an old tale."

"It wouldn't be wrong!" The glamour of it had captured her, while his hand, warm and tender, covered hers.

"Yes, wronging you. There's no compromise of a woman's honor. I love you too much, Jessica, to turn our love to clandestine guilt. And then, dear—there's your father."

She had shut out the vision, and come home to the invalid. And he, whose old eyes were shrewd, knew something was very wrong. Dahlgren Paige loved her. But when, clinging pitifully to the consolation his tenderness held out, she told him everything, he could only comfort her as age can comfort youth—with the assurance that all things are forgotten, soon enough.

"I don't want to forget him; I want to have him!"

"Not by stealth, or by smashing all the rules. You won't keep him, that way." The old worldling stroked the girl's hair. "And, Jessica, you bear an honorable name. Don't sully it, my child."

None of this touched her. But when he spoke of his heartbreak, of her troth to his friend, whose flowers filled the room, whose wine and fruit stood at his right hand, he made the plea she knew she could not withstand. She couldn't deny a sick old man the luxury that might prolong his life, the ease of mind that his overstrained heart required. Once more, Dahlgren Paige had won.

"As Beale's wife, you can bury the past so easily," her father mused. "You'll have a full life, many interests—children, perhaps."

Not that, she prayed. But presently, worn out with tears, careless of everything but her loss, she promised to erase the week that lay behind her, and go on with her marriage to Beale, if, knowing she loved another man, he still wanted her.

He did. At forty-five, a man much in love will accept most provisional clauses. He even offered to wait, if August loomed too near. That was clever of him, but then, Beale wasn't the fool he often appeared. And Jessica, touched by his consideration, ready to snatch at anything that would take her from the debacle of her shattered paradise, told him no. What was there to wait for? She had written Jerry, telling him she must not see him again. That was over.

The weeks sped by, and summer descended upon the city. A hot, dusty season.

And at Duxbury, where ocean breezes tempered the heat, Mrs. Jerold Seaton held open house.

Sue Merlin smiled when people inquired politely for Jerry—who had taken a cheap flat in town, while his mother summered in New Hampshire, close to Jock's camp. Very soon they ceased to inquire, for his not coming down over week-ends was obvious enough. Not that it mattered much, one way or the other. Bess was a priceless hostess—she was indolent enough to let people alone—and her new house was always full. There was a yacht club close at hand, and that summer the town boasted an influx of fairly agreeable people.

All in all, it was a gay season. In June, Percy Cummings took a place across the bay, not far from Plymouth, and entertained royally himself, when he wasn't making more money out of his syndicated mining interests.

It was he who gave the ball of the season—in honor of Bess, whose birthday came early in August. That ball was a symbol of everything he wanted to give her. She knew it, of course, and of the pavilion that was being built, of the decorations, lavish enough for a Petit Trianon. It rather amused her, and she went to some trouble to select a gown for the occasion. If he were going to offer her all that, she would come in splendor that would overcast his.

But she didn't, after all. For the morning of the ball, while she was being hooked into her gown, a cloth-of-gold affair, which had just come, a big black car rolled up the driveway and she saw her father's thick-set person descend from it. She had thought he was in Chicago, but her pleasure dimmed her surprise. She hurried down to meet him, without stopping to take off the brocaded gown.

She found him in the silk-hung drawing-room, his hands clasped behind him, feet wide apart. On his square, low-browed face glimmered a grim smile. A smile Bess had seen many times before; whenever she had outdone the rest of her moneyed Chicago set in a fabulous entertainment, or a string of pearls; when, in white satin and point, she had passed up the aisle of St. Bartholomew's, on her new husband's arm, with all the world rustling in its pew for a glimpse of her. He had always paid high for the best, had Myron Marshall, but he enjoyed his purchases.

"Nice place you have here," he conceded, after a man had taken his bags upstairs and the flurry of arrival was over. "It should be!"

He grimaced. She hadn't spared any expense on it, but then, he had always given her carte blanche.

"It is handsome, isn't it?"

She settled down beside him on a sofa, tucking her hand in his. She cared for her father; he stood for all the things she cared for most.

"You've come at the right moment, Father. Percy Cummings is giving me a dinner dance to-night at his place across the bay. The nicest party of the season, by far, in honor of my birthday. You'd better give me some money, by the way—my balance is going to be shockingly low this month."

Marshall, whose bulky shoulders never looked quite right under any tailoring, pinched off the end of a Havana.

"Percy Cummings," he ruminated. "Cummings, of Princess Copper Consolidated, eh? That's a funny thing. Know him well?"

"Very well." A complacent smile touched her lips as she played with her bracelets.

He chewed savagely on his cigar for a moment, then tossed it away.

"No use waiting till after lunch to tell you why I'm here, is there, Bess?" She shook her head, the little smile still lingering upon her lips. "I thought not. Well—I'm in a hole. A bad hole, that's been swallowing up more real money than I like to think about."

He glowered up at a marble Eve, while Bess' hands tightened on the sofa's edge. Was he going to cut her allowance? She couldn't, simply couldn't, manage on less!

"In fact, if it wasn't for my infernal luck that's held so far, I'd think the golden touch had come to an end."

She knew her father too well to take lightly what he said. And, because she was his daughter, she didn't betray the sickening fear that crowded in upon her.

"Don't be technical," she begged. "I'm a fool about money, you know—I just know how to spend it. But tell me, in terms I'll understand."

"It's easy enough. You know how I've made my pile, Bess. Sunk it all in something that I felt sure was good; doubled it; took another chance. That's

what I did three years ago, when I bought up the old Lorraine."

He was speaking of the mining property that, as far as Bess and most people knew, had proved his El Dorado. As he talked on, he sketched, on the back of an envelope, a rough map of the northwest region.

"The copper's there, you understand. No question of that. But I can't get hold of this mountain here, adjoining the Lorraine. It's my outlet, and I've got to get it—or be wiped out."

"And they've put up their shares sky-high?"

"Worse than that; they won't sell at all. They've almost got me, Bess. If I can't get hold of enough of that property to swing me, the Princess people can force me to sell—at their price. And they'll do it."

"The Princess? Why, Percy Cummings is behind that!"

Her father grunted.

"I'm well aware of it. That's why I'm here, my girl."

She leaned forward, set ablaze, in her sequin-studded gown, by the sunlight that flooded the room. It burnished her tawny hair, her eyes; made her warm, fair skin seem tinged with gold.

"I can make him sell to you!" Her voice was vibrant. "He'll do it for me."

"I don't do business that way!" her father barked. So the fellow was in love with her. Nice thing, to be hanging around another man's wife.

"You don't understand." She got up, rested her hands on her father's shoulders, and smiled down at him. "He wants to marry me. I've laughed at him until now—but he'd hardly want to ruin his father-in-law, you know."

"You happen to be Jerry Seaton's wife," said Marshall slowly. "I don't understand."

He did, before long. And, for the moment, he felt as though his child were a stranger. Unreachable.

"I'm sorry about this, Bess. Jerry's a fine chap and—there's more than money in the world."

Strange words, to be coming from him.

"Is there?" Bess glanced about the white-and-green room which was beautiful, in spite of its ornateness; Jessica couldn't have created an unlovely thing. If she should lose all this! "You never taught me what it was."

That night, when she and her father rolled up the drive to the barnlike place that, in a brief space, money had turned to a fairyland of colored lights and sylvan nooks, she knew that nothing but money mattered to her. Money—and the things it could buy!

And she let Cummings, who was always a little too well-groomed in evening things, just as her father strayed to the other extreme, pay her extravagant attention before all the others and break in upon her flirtation with her dinner partner. And when Dolly Varens, a popular débutante of the summer colony, cast wide blue eyes upon him, and maneuvered him into a veranda tête-à-tête before the dancing began, she made manifest her prior claims.

At sight of her father, he guessed, of course, what it all meant. After a smoke with the older man on the lantern-hung terrace, he knew. And later, under a flowering shrub at the foot of the garden, he risked what he had never dared before, a sudden embrace, a long draft of her red lips.

"I love you, Bess!" he whispered hoarsely. His passion was genuine enough. The woman, who had not repulsed him, stirred in his arms.

"Enough to let the Lorraine go?"

She looked at him beneath her lashes, thankful for the wind, presaging storm, that kept most of the guests near the pavilion, or in the house. If some one

should come upon them! Yet she didn't dare lose the opportunity.

"Would you get your freedom, marry me?"

She tried to evade.

"You're hurting my arm—I might. Wouldn't that repay you?"

He released her violently. Something in her narrowed eyes, the caution of her mouth, or perhaps simply his own knowledge of her, made him distrust her.

"For the loss of the Lorraine? Jove, but you're cold-blooded. I'm damned if I'll bargain for you." He was no longer suave or sleek. But something in his unmasked brutality, something primal, greedy, predacious, struck a thrill through the woman, who, after all, was the daughter of such a man.

"I'll take it, and then—I'll take you. Much you'd care for your word once your future was assured! Money's what you want—money!" He caught up a fold of her golden gown, and a shower of sequins fell at her feet. "You're a wife and mother, Bess, but you're scarcely a woman. *What* are you besides white flesh and yellow hair?"

"He called me a golden idol——" She swayed toward him, sure of her power.

"That I'm through worshiping!" His hand released her gown, gripped her shoulder. "I mean it. In a week, Bess, your father will have touched bottom. And you—you'll be dreading the ring of the doorbell, for, when his failure is known, every creditor you have will swoop down on you like so many birds of prey."

"You beast!" she cried above the rising wind, which, rain-laden, eddied about them.

"And then, you'll come to me. Oh, yes, you will." He laughed, his mastery surging through him like wine. "I'll be magnanimous; you can send for me instead!"

"Never!" she stormed, wrenching herself away.

"One word will bring me," he promised, "if the word is 'come.'"

Waltz music from the pavilion was drowned by a peal of thunder; great drops of rain splashed the two in the garden, and Bess, in flight across a flower bed, was overtaken by a breathless youth with a wrap over his arm. She was seething with rage; the sort of rage she had not felt since she had been a tiny child, and had screamed and fought for what she wanted—and usually got. She wanted to strike the young fellow's hand from her arm, loose a volley of oaths at him, leave him gaping after her. But she was still Mrs. Jerold Seaton. Heaven knew she'd better cling to what she still had. So she merely presented her bare, wet shoulders to the cape he had brought her, let him hurry her up to the house, where the gay company huddled, waiting for the storm to pass.

And not far down the coast, just beyond quaint Plymouth, where the storm broke with the greatest intensity, two people in a small motor boat struggled against a dying engine and a sea that threatened to overwhelm them.

The day had been breathless in town, oppressive with midsummer's sultry heat. Jessica had left the office early, meaning to stop at one of the big shops downtown to get some sheer stuff for a dinner dress. She was to be married in two weeks, and only now was she beginning to acquire a slender trousseau. But she had never reached the Tremont Street store, for a hand touched her arm, a voice that thrilled her called her name. The crowd had swept by them, a hot and languid tide; but she and Jerry lingered in a doorway. And having seen him, having touched his hand, and heard his dear voice, she could not pass on without granting him one more hour. He wouldn't take her to the

shabby little flat he had in town; and a tea table was but a poor attempt at privacy. So they caught the afternoon boat to Plymouth, which, on a weekday, wasn't crowded, and took the harbor sail.

They had had dinner at a cool little inn, close to the water, and afterward, before the boat started back to town, there had been time to engage a small motor boat for an hour's sail by themselves. And now, having gone farther out than they realized, they found themselves in a bad way.

Seaton, drenched to the skin, battled desperately with a motor he did not understand. Something was wrong, very wrong, he knew. Every moment a wet mountain threatened to annihilate the little craft; the rain came down in torrents, and lightning, which is a gruesome thing upon the water, split the blackness now and then. And behind him, her thin frock plastered to her, her head flung back to the storm, knelt Jessica. She didn't seem to sense the peril. Or perhaps she didn't care.

"You aren't afraid, darling?" he shouted above the wet tumult.

Lightning glanced down, revealing her gallant smile.

"I had an old Irish nurse who told me it was heaven's glory shining through the storm—and if it struck one dead, it was only the dazzling beauty of it, which was too much for mortal eyes."

Her words sounded clearly in the sudden hush that came just then. And then, as he reached her, clasped her in his arms, there was a flash of forked fire that seemed to play about them, a peal of thunder that was like the crack of doom, a hurtling monster of a wave that was the last thing either of them saw. He lifted her high and plunged, just as the boat was overwhelmed.

"Put your hand on my shoulder, dear—we can't be far from shore," he encouraged her as they breasted the foaming water. She gasped assent, but said no more, for an oar shot out from the sinking boat, striking her squarely on the temple, and she would have slid out of his grasp, had his hand not fastened in her hair.

The violence of the storm was abating, else he would never have been able to swim as far as he did, with the unconscious girl weighing him down. He had a general idea of the coast; knew it was possible, with the aid of the oar that had struck Jessica, to keep strength enough to make the shore. It seemed hours before his feet touched bottom, but, miraculously, they did at last, and he staggered up a strange, dark beach. Heaven alone knew where they were! Well north of Plymouth, at any rate. But he wasn't cursing their lucklessness as he laid the girl down on wet sand, and felt her pulse. She'd be coming to in a few minutes, and the rain was letting up. And more than that, a flash of lightning showed him a single shelter upon the stretch of beach and cliffs. There was nothing for it but to stay there until morning.

Jessica moaned a little, then opened her eyes.

"You're doubtless wondering where the blinding beauties of heaven are," he observed, not daring, in the relief that flooded his soul, to be anything but flippant. "An oar hit you, knocked you out *pro tem*. How do you feel?"

She grimaced.

"Where are we, Jerry?"

"Some forlornly unfashionable beach, I take it. Or it may be private property. However, there's a shack of a bathhouse behind you that offers shelter."

"The boat's gone?" Her voice quavered.

"And you're in no shape to tramp a few miles. I'm horribly sorry, dear, but we're stranded here for the night. I wouldn't have this happen——"

His voice, his hand, clasping hers, told her how sorry he was.

"It doesn't matter," she told him, wringing out her heavy hair. "I telephoned Father before we left town. I don't think he'll worry. And a fig for the rest of them, Jerry!"

They explored the bathhouse, and he arranged a makeshift bed for her on the floor out of beach cushions and a man's woolly bath robe. It all struck them as being extravagantly unreal. Here they were, two people as near to each other as two separate souls could be; they had met peril, death itself, in each other's arms, and, because of certain conventions, they were awkward, ill at ease, because they were stranded here for a few dark hours. And in the morning, they'd get back to those conventions; he to his offices, and his lonely life in a flat, she to the man she was about to marry, who was a stranger to her.

Before he left her, to seek sleep outside—it had stopped raining, and the clouds parted fleecily—he took her once more in his arms.

"I'll give you nothing to regret, dear heart."

Their lips met, and he went out and shut the door.

The night seemed very long, its discomfort interminable. But it wasn't her aching head or the hard floor that dismissed sleep from the girl huddled in the patch of pale light that came in from the window. It was one phrase, beating upon her memory like the sound of slow rain, the rune of tears. Nothing to regret? Nothing, indeed. It was hardly a satisfaction.

CHAPTER VII.

The ball lasted late, after the interruption of the storm, and it was dawn before Cummings saw the last guest off, and dropped into a chair in the library after a pick-me-up of absinth. He knew he should go upstairs for a few hours' sleep before driving into town. But he was too restless to sleep. A woman's limp glove lay on the table; empty champagne glasses, confetti, disorder marked the lower floor of the house as a scene of late revelry. Nothing is more depressing than the gray of dawn creeping in upon the wreckage of pleasure. Carnival demands colored lights, drawn curtains. It flees before pale morning mists.

He suddenly picked up the crumpled glove. The strong, sweet scent that Bess affected assailed his nostrils, conjuring up her golden vision. Knowing her for the insensate creature she was—selfish, predatory, caring for nothing on earth but the costly substance of life, why should he be under her thrall? As a wife she was a statue, as a mother —he was sorry for the nice little chap he had run across now and then. Only as a yellow-haired, white-skinned woman with slumberous eyes and a mouth made to be kissed, was she worth the taking.

Yet he was going to take her.

He walked over to one of the east windows. Beneath the cliffs the sea lay opalescent, a mirror of the pinkish dawn. All night the sense of power had been his; why should daybreak make all things seem futile?

In a few hours he would be in his State Street offices, the tape ticking out in his hands. His brokers would have their instructions, and the Princess Syndicate would be closing in upon the most valuable piece of mining property they could hope to hold. By the fluke of an underground river; by his brilliantly foresighted buying up of all the seemingly worthless land adjoining the once valuable Lorraine, he was in the position to dictate not only his terms, but Marshall's.

And Marshall, in the terms of wealth, would be a ruined man. Oh, he'd have something left; a solid enough founda-

tion to build another fortune upon, in the course of time. And he'd do it; he had a magic turn for finance, shown by all his coups up to now. But he wouldn't have enough left to keep Bess from discontent. She couldn't endure a shabby life. To give over her elaborate town house to auctioneers and part with her dearest possessions would be anguish to her; to sell her pearls—pearls that had graced the neck of a queen—the depth of degradation.

She would have to go back to Jerry, and live on the pittance that was his. But, he remembered, she and Jerry had reached the end; she wouldn't go back to him. Her friend Mrs. Merlin had hinted languidly at some girl Bess had made use of.

The debacle would come. Like a cornered animal, Bess would fight fiercely to keep what she could. And then, when the foundations of her life were crumbling about her, when she had wept and stormed at the inevitable, she'd turn to him, remembering his promise: "One word will bring me—if the word is 'come.'"

His pulses should have quickened, but they didn't. He strove to exult, to feel the victor, but instead, he was conscious only of the oppression of the disordered room. The rosy east was underlaid with gold; the exquisite silence of early morning called to him. He stepped out through the French window upon the terrace, and sauntered down the garden path.

Last night's storm had done considerable damage. The flower beds lay crushed, rain-swept. A square of petunias, stalks broken, blossoms ragged and muddied, spread their ruined purple at his feet. Then he smiled involuntarily; in the midst of the tangled bed, the deep-sunk marks of a woman's French heels were visible. It was Bess who had fled that way, careless of trampled bloom. Something besides rain and dew glittered in the grass; he bent down, picked up a strand of sequins, gold-colored, but tarnished now. The paillettes from her gown! They brought him a quick vision of her as he had held her in his arms, her bright head flung back, her mouth, made for kisses, his for the taking. She *was* his, and he wanted her.

His desire elated him, roused him to enthusiasm for the day. Under its rumpled dinner shirt his big chest expanded with the long breaths he drew. He'd need no bracing, now, for the morning's work in town. Just a dip in the water beneath the cliffs; calm, early-morning water, ruffled by the breeze, shot with sunlight. Better than sleep!

He swung down the twisting path that led to the cliff, and its flight of wooden steps. Farther down the beach, which was private, was a bathhouse. He was sure some sort of bathing things had been left there.

At the foot of the steps he paused, skipping pebbles into the water.

He didn't want to wait for the woman he loved. He wanted to pick her up, carry her off, like some primal lover. He wondered how long divorce proceedings would take. Bess wouldn't hold off long, once her father lost the fight that was already almost finished. It was possible, of course, that her husband might not acquiesce to the divorce. Cummings grimaced. There might be nothing in Sue Merlin's gossip—Seaton was a queer chap.

He opened the door of the bathhouse; stopped short on the threshold.

A girl in a crumpled, damp frock, badly torn, lay in a huddle on the floor, her face shadowed by her loosened, bronze-brown hair and one limp arm.

His first thought was that a dead woman lay at his feet, but he knelt and saw that she was only asleep. His exclamation aroused her; she stirred, opened her eyes, raised herself with a gasp of dismay, and he recognized Jessica Paige.

"What on earth are you doing here?" he asked in excusable surprise.

There wasn't much to explain, and the girl, in turn, marveled at his presence.

"I've taken a place down here for the summer." So this girl, whom he remembered meeting once or twice at Bess' house, was Jerry's inamorata! A handsome creature, even under these circumstances. Almost any woman would have looked like a half-drowned rat, after such a night.

"My house sets pretty well up, above the bluffs. I don't think you can see it from this strip of beach. I'm sorry I couldn't have offered you its hospitality. But won't you come up now and have coffee, and let me send you back to town in a machine? Both of you must be famished."

What a contretemps! Jessica, realizing the man was Bess Seaton's friend, wondered what lay behind his enigmatic smile. She was spared the necessity of answering him by Jerry's appearance. He had been reconnoitering, and had discovered the cliff steps, and the house beyond them.

"That's awful nice of you, Cummings," he said at last. "I wouldn't impose upon you if it could be helped. But Heaven knows what the trains are down here—and Miss Paige must get back to town at once."

Jerry had never cared for Cummings; something about the man repelled him, and he was the last person he wanted to run up against in this particular situation. He might talk. And if he did—Jessica, who looked then like a lovely child, with her hair streaming about her shoulders, would bear the brunt of shame as well as everything else she had to bear. He could not openly bind Cummings to secrecy; he could only rely upon the man's chivalry. And that he wasn't sure of.

However, there was nothing to do but go up to his house, be served with hot coffee by the slant-eyed Japanese valet, and thankfully step into the high-powered touring car that Cummings put at their disposal.

It seemed a long ride to both of them, and, at the same time, all too short. For this, they knew, was the end. And because of the chauffeur, erect in his dark livery, in front of them, they could speak only of casual things, as they clasped each other's hands beneath the robe. But when they neared her home they cast caution aside, and spoke, in undertones, of the thing that lay uppermost in their hearts.

"I sha'n't try to see you again, dear."

"We mustn't." Her small hand tightened convulsively in his. "It would only mean—futile pain. And it wouldn't be fair to Arthur."

"Your husband," murmured the man. His profile, marked with lines of pain, expressed in its drawn immobility what the phrase meant to him. "We've done him no wrong, Jessica. You've nothing to reproach yourself with—remember that, dear."

"There's a good deal to remember, Jerry."

The car was purring along a familiar street. In a minute or two it would come to a stop before her door; she would leave Jerry, with a smiling good-by and a breaking heart. Last night, in the grasp of the storm, close to death as they had been, she had not been conscious of fear. Jerry had held her against his heart, and to die with him would not have been a fearsome thing. But to contemplate life without him—that was different.

"Last night was ours! They can't take that away from us. As long as we live, we'll share that much. I wouldn't forget you, now, if I could," she told him. Rather the sweet bitterness of grieving for him always, than the relinquishment of the happiest days she had ever known.

The car stopped; a gray arm shot out and opened the door for her.

"I'll go in with you, and explain to your father."

"No!" It was a sharp command; she had seen a face she knew peering through the sheer curtain of the lower window, and she forbade Seaton to enter with her.

"Good-by, beloved!" he murmured, but she scarcely heard the words.

He took both her hands, held them a moment, then let her go. And then, through a mist of tears, she saw the hall door open to admit her.

Beale faced her, with the look of a man who had not slept for nights upon his thin, middle-aged face. His myopic eyes, red-rimmed, betraying his tension, swept her accusingly. She passed him without a word, sped into the living room, where her father paced up and down, hollow-eyed, gray.

She flung herself into his arms.

"Were you frightened, dear? Oh, Father, I'm so sorry! You haven't been up all night!"

She pressed him into a chair, and dropped to her knees beside him.

"The storm was very severe—a great many people were killed," he told her, his trembling hands drawing her to him. "Where have you been, child?"

He touched her damp, disheveled gown, her hair, carelessly knotted, tangled from brine.

"With whom?" snarled the man she was about to marry.

"In the Atlantic!" she laughed shakily. At Beale's question she flung up her head.

"I met Mr. Seaton on the street—before I telephoned you, Father. It was so hot that he suggested sailing down to Plymouth, and having dinner there."

Quietly, she told of their mishap in the motor boat, and the ensuing events. Her father uttered a little moan of relief.

"Is that the tale he'll tell his wife?"

inquired Beale, thrusting a chair out of his way, standing over the girl in a fury of accusation.

She sprang to her feet, as people do in moments of open hostility. He faced her; small, mean, venomous in his wrath. But he was suffering all the torments of injured pride, bitter jealousy. She tried to remember that.

"I understand quite well what I'm saying; I'm saying that I don't believe your absurd story. No sane person would! Don't try to tell me any fool wouldn't be able to find a house in a thickly settled part of the South Shore—if he wanted to find it!"

Her voice sounded far-away, patient, to her ears.

"I was dizzy, and ill, Arthur, from the blow, and the salt water. We were glad to take the first shelter we came to."

"And, by mere chance, the man happened to be an old lover of yours!"

Old Dahlgren Paige rose from his chair, the blood beating like drums in his ears. He wanted to kick this whelp from his house, thrash him to an apologetic pulp—and he could scarcely speak. His limbs seemed turned to water and his heart, whose pounding he was trying to quiet with one palsied hand, threatened to strangle him.

"Are you implying, sir, that my daughter has done anything to be ashamed of?"

"She doesn't seem to be ashamed of it."

It is hard to be a gentleman when one is small, and hysterical, and middle-aged, and in fevered fear of having been duped by youth. Beale seemed to find it impossible.

Dahlgren Paige, who was mumbling to himself that he must be calm, calm, and conquer this excitement, controlled himself with an effort that was devastating, hushed Jessica gently. He was old and sick, but he was still able to stand between her and this accusing

puppy, and demand a gentleman's satisfaction.

"First, sir, I must correct your misapprehension. If my daughter chose to snap her fingers at conventions, to go to the man she cared for—and you are not that man, thank God!—she'd do it openly. Not under cover of storm and deceit. That is the way a lady plays the fool. My daughter has not done that thing. She does not lie, and she does not cheat. You stand corrected on that point.

"And now—I'll have an apology, a retraction, if you please, before you leave this house for good. That you, the man whose privilege it should be to shield her from calumny and insult, should offer her calumny—and insult is——" His voice sank to a whisper, but his thin hands sought his daughter's, took from her finger the emerald Beale had put there. "Take this, sir; and get out! But, before you go, apologize!"

"For having been made a fool of!" wheezed the little man. His hysterical laughter cackled out, and Paige took a step toward him.

"You whelp!"

Jessica sprang forward with a cry as he raised his quivering hand to strike the younger man. But the blow was never struck; Paige, a startled look fixing his features in a sort of mask, foam flecking his purple lips, clawed at the air. Then he crumpled up between them like a bundle of old clothes, and lay still.

"A doctor!" begged Jessica frantically, her father's gray head lolling in her lap. "And now that you've killed him, go!"

Life still flickered when the doctor came, but that was all. They got him to bed, where he lay like an elderly doll. The nearest to consciousness he came was when he felt for Jessica's hand, blindly, knowing it would be there, and, having found it, smiled, if the flicker that passed over his twitching features could be called a smile.

For two days he lay there, and then, late one night, he seemed to rally. He spoke, for the first time. The word was "Jessica." She was beside him, and, because a troubled look darkened his face, she cradled him in her arms, as if he were a child, afraid in the dark. He seemed to fear what lurked in the shadows of the lamplit room; yet he faced them with a grave regard. The twitching muscles grew still; he seemed to pull himself together for some important happening. To reassure the girl, he smiled. And in this way, as debonairly as he had lived, he died.

CHAPTER VIII.

After her father's death, the attendant the doctor had sent in stayed, for Jessica would not have eaten or slept if she had been left alone. She went about in a daze, or rather, sat most of the time in a low sewing chair in her own small dark room, gazing out at the brick wall across the way.

Miss Sullivan, a sweet, apple-cheeked Irishwoman, found her docile enough; but she had to be told to eat, to take a walk, to go to bed. After the funeral, a simple, brief service held in the front room, with the merest handful of people present, the girl's vitality seemed to snap, and this lethargy took its place. There was nothing more to be done, Jessica realized dimly. Why not sit, and look at a brick wall? When you looked long enough, all sorts of fantastic designs could be evolved from the red mosaic. And, in the back room, if people came, she wouldn't have to see them.

She had not wept once. There was simply a frightful oppression upon her, a weight like lead where her heart had been. And, the days seemed hideously long, though she scarcely kept track of them. Meals broke them up somewhat,

and occasionally it was time to go to bed. But what was really terrible was looking forward to more days like these.

Once the landlord came, and she gave him most of the money that remained in her purse. A few days later, a stranger called, and Miss Sullivan pushed her gently into the little parlor.

The stranger was a slender, white-haired woman who had arrived in a shabby victoria, and had observed everything about the house, inside and out, as if the Paige flat were of the utmost importance to her. While she waited for the girl to appear she wandered about the room, scanning the books that lined one wall, the few photographs on the mantel above the gas log, the tea table, with its spode cups.

She was standing by the window when a hesitating footstep sounded, and she turned to see a slim creature in nunlike black, just relieved by white at throat and wrists, watching her. As she spoke she was conscious of the beauty that belonged in that oval face, if it were less pale, more rounded. The words were not what she had meant to say.

"I'm Jerry's mother, my dear."

The beautiful, gray-green eyes widened; they seemed to see the old woman for the first time.

"I know of your loss. I wanted to come before, but I wasn't sure you would want me."

"You're very kind," Jessica said tonelessly. She must ask her to sit down, of course. Would she have to talk to her, Jessica wondered? Then her guest smiled, and the girl bent forward. When she smiled, her eyes crinkled like Jerry's; and they were like his, only old, instead of young.

"Jerry looks like you, doesn't he?"

She sounded like a patient little girl. But to old Mrs. Seaton, she was a figure of supreme tragedy, of grief beyond tears. She moved, seated herself by the girl on the little sofa, put her arm about the yielding waist.

"And you look like your father, Jessica." The name slipped out unconsciously. "I remember meeting him, when I was a young girl, myself, visiting friends in Richmond."

She talked on about him, and the girl listened with a queer sort of contentment. Her voice sounded a little like Jerry's.

"I wonder if he changed much in later life," the old woman mused. "As a young man, his carriage was magnificent. He had great charm. Did he keep the quick lift of his chin that used to distinguish him, I wonder?"

"Yes!" cried Jessica.

"And he always laughed with his eyes, while he baited you wickedly," reminisced the other. "Such gay eyes!"

Jessica looked up, half expecting to see him stroll into the room, in one of his gay and whimsical moods that she loved so well; realized, with more poignancy than she had realized anything for a long time, that he would never be bitter or sharp or delightfully gay again. There, in that shabby armchair, he used to rail at the beastly room, or tell her what a lovely thing she was —and now the chair, which he vowed was not fit to sit in, would always be empty——

"Don't! I can't bear it!" she cried wildly, and burst into a passion of tears, which, while they scalded and hurt, brought her relief, and release from the leaden weight in her breast. When the storm had spent itself she found herself in Mrs. Seaton's arms, her head pressed close to the bosom where Jerry's head had often lain.

And she lay back, exquisitely mothered, while her guest had Miss Sullivan bring in some tea, and served it herself from the old spode, as if she belonged there.

Later, when Jessica had discovered that life was more than unmarked time,

and the meaningless mosaic of a brick wall, they spoke of Jerry, which was what his mother had come for.

"He loves you," she said simply. "And so do I. If only you had met years earlier——"

She wanted the right to mother this lovely creature.

Jessica leaned forward, caught the older woman's hand.

"I'm free," she told her, "and there's nothing for me but Jerry. It wouldn't hurt any one now if I were to go to him, ask him to take me away. And I'll even risk not keeping him. We're so young to have reached the end of everything!"

"It would hurt Jock; I would suffer," said the old woman, "and you, my child, would suffer most of all. I'm old, I've had my life, and Jock's a little boy, with a life of his own. But you—would you spend your youth and your middle years and your old age in restless flight? That is what it would mean, my dear. A shoddy life on the Continent; always moving on, to evade some inconsequential person one of you had known before; knowing only shoddy people, who do shoddy things; a life of deception and pretense, of tinsel that's lost its glitter. It would be hard on love, wouldn't it?"

"Not a happy life," agreed the girl, "but all I have. Don't you see, he *is* my life! Shall I give it up?"

There was a long silence. And the old woman, who seemed to have shrunk inside of her black-silk gown, spoke, as if she were very tired.

"I came, Jessica, to tell you this couldn't be; to tell you it would ruin your future and his; to beg you, if you loved him, to give him up. But I can't do it. Perhaps there's something more than security, and name, and what people call the 'decent thing.' I don't know."

Her voice trembled on tears; she reached out blindly to the girl.

"Take each other, if you're brave enough for the quest—and God bless you."

She had to leave soon after that, and as she drove away from the shabby house her lips moved silently. "A bad woman—bad!" was what she whispered. She was thinking of her daughter-in-law, whose caprice doomed Jerry and the girl she had just left.

Jessica watched her drive away, then turned to the desk between the windows. There she found paper and her father's quill pen. She sat down, and began to write.

Miss Sullivan, coming in to take the tea tray, found her sealing a thick envelope; no longer a listless ghost, but an iridescent creature whose tears were burnished with something not far from joy. Jessica smiled at her.

"I'm going away!"

"Where?" beamed Nellie Sullivan.

"I don't know. It doesn't matter, does it?" She left the room, and on her way out, paused at the door of the room that had been her father's.

"Don't you understand?" she asked of the silence. It was still and dark in there, like a room where death has recently been. The shades should be raised, she thought, as she stood by the closet door, her cheek pressed to a velvet jacket he used to wear. A breeze stirred through the western window, lifting the drawn shade, and bars of golden light patterned the floor at her feet.

She went out into the late afternoon to drop her letter in the box. It was to Jerry, telling him she was irrevocably his; that he must claim her.

On her way back she met the paper boy, who handed her the journal her father always read. She barely glanced at the headlines, knit her brows over a familiar name.

Lone Copper King Loses To Syndicate. Myron Marshall fails.

The words met her eyes in bold type. That was Bess' father!

Myron Marshall's failure could make a stir even in these days of stirring things, it seemed. But she didn't read through the columns. What was it to her? Fleetingly, she was sorry for his daughter. Bess loved money. Would she lose her glory now? She laid the paper down, and forgot it. When would Jerry come?

Those same headlines were read all over the city at that hour. And nowhere were they devoured with the zest that was accorded them in the servants' quarters of a certain boarded-up house on Commonwealth Avenue.

The house was boarded up—that kept reporters out of the vestibule—but behind drawn blinds the basement buzzed, and upstairs, where the furniture loomed in summer sheaths of white, the lady of the house had established herself.

She paced the drawing-room now, her lace tea gown trailing over bare, polished floors. In a crumpled ball on the floor lay the front sheet of the paper that had the first "scoop" of the financier's failure. In a tantrum, Bess had crushed it to an unreadable rag, then tossed it from her. She wanted to make a bonfire of every paper that held her father's name. It was torture to think of all her friends gossiping about it over the teacups; wondering how much was left, how she would get along; to know that downstairs the servants were probably enjoying the exciting calamity. They were, as a matter of fact.

The front doorbell pealed, and, after a certain amount of consultation, the parlor maid went to see who it was. Very odd people were apt to be coming now.

This was a portly gentleman who ran to checks and a colored band on his panama. Yes, Mrs. Seaton was expecting him. He creaked upstairs with a speculative eye upon a bronze Venus that appealed to him, and stooped to pinch a corner of the Persian rug that lay before the drawing-room doors.

Bess saw him, and would have liked to kill him with her own beringed hands. But, instead, she smiled, tried to impress him with her laces, and the pearls she fingered.

She took him through the house herself; not for worlds would she have had a servant chatting with him about her and her affairs. And then he dropped heavily upon the Chesterfield, eased each trouser leg so that a length of purple sock became visible, and talked money.

She was her father's daughter, he soon saw, and they haggled over every inch of ground, every foot of concrete, before they came to terms. He tried to bully her; she to overawe him, and neither of them succeeded. After they had agreed on a price for the house and its contents, she got rid of him, and sank raging into a soft, deep chair. Her clenched hands beat upon the arms so hard that her rings cut into her flesh, hurting her.

She couldn't bear this! The ignominy of selling, when she had always bought, before.

The telephone shrilled, and she clapped her hands hysterically to her ears. Some one phoning condolences, or another reporter?

"Answer it, you idiot!" she told the maid who hesitated on the threshold.

It *was* a reporter, and he got little satisfaction.

On the table lay sheets of her uncertain figuring; as she had told her father, she was a fool about accounts, and she had made chaos of her calculations. Only one fact stood out clearly: that was the inadequacy of the income she would derive from her holdings. She'd be poor, pressed all the time. Every penny would count to her, who had never counted any cost.

Her father's long wire, received three days before, lay under her gaze, but she only read one line of it: the line

that held Cummings' name. So absorbed was she in gusty thought that she didn't hear the doorbell when it rang again.

"A man from Briscoll's," announced Margaret, and a frock-coated Parisian handed her a statement from her costly dressmaker. That usually ran six months or so before she thought of it, but now her status was changed. And because the little Frenchman suggested many importunate things she feverishly wrote out a check, thrust it upon him.

Then, forgetting to turn on the light, though it was almost dark in the great drawing-room, and the shrouded furniture took on a ghostly air, she sat huddled before the pile of her scribbled calculations, dry-eyed, dry-lipped. She remembered at last to pull the chain of a table lamp, and as she raised her head, she saw her reflection in a Florentine mirror. She crossed the floor, faced that image in the glass. Was that haggard wreck she? Mechanically, she tried to smooth out with her finger tips the ravages of worry. One can't worry, at thirty-four.

And then, because her eyes seemed netted with fatigue, and the lines close to her mouth wouldn't smooth out, she turned away with a discordant little cry, tore the taffeta shield from the telephone.

It was a long time before she got her number.

"Mr. Cummings himself, please." She had to wait again, and pictured him taking his time. Then she heard his voice. What was it he had said in the garden that night?

"Will one word bring you, now, if the word is 'come?'" she asked.

His answer brought a smile to her lips. As she hung up, she thought quickly of dinner, a soothing massage, what gown to wear. To be able to think of things like that! Release from all care thrilled her. She lived again. With a gesture of passionate delight she swept up the scribbled sheets, tossed them up about her, like Alice, with her pack of cards, and sped upstairs.

CHAPTER IX.

Seaton didn't hesitate long after Jessica's letter came. And when he came to her, saw her loneliness, the desolate life she was leading in a place that was no longer home to her, since her father's death, he felt that it would not be wronging her to let her share a rover's life with him.

He told her, though, what it would mean, painting the picture in unlovely colors. But she only laughed at him.

"We'll be poor and shabby and disgraced, but we'll be all those things together!"

Her arms tightened about his neck; she rubbed her cheek against his.

And when he left her, he engaged passage for them both on a French liner that sailed within the month. They would spend the fall in Paris, at some out-of-the-way pension. Then, with the first cold weather, they would migrate southward. What if their lodgings were cramped, their hotel obscure? Nice was Nice. And they would have each other.

They spent hours over tourists' folders, mapping out prospective charts of their wandering. No engaged pair ever took more delight in planning a honeymoon. But often Jerry winced at that very thought. If only he had a name to give the girl he loved, a thin circlet of gold to put upon her finger!

Although the future held out life itself to him, he settled up his affairs as one does before dying. His law business was not an important quantity, but his small real-estate holdings, whatever property he had, except for his meager income, which was to take care of him and Jessica, he settled upon Jock.

His father-in-law's failure did not mean much to him. He knew Bess

would still be comfortably off, and he didn't realize her dependence upon great wealth. He did write her, telling her that he was leaving America for a time, and, in the event of anything unexpected, was settling what he had upon the boy. He was sorry to hear of her father's failure, hoped he had salvaged a good deal. If she found herself in any financial difficulty, after the sale of her town house, wouldn't she consider the Chestnut Street house her home?

She didn't trouble to answer the letter.

It was an agony to him to leave Jock, but Jock was a child, absorbed in a life of his own. And Jerry realized that love goes out from a parent to a child, not back again. It is all part of the procession. And his mother would devote herself to her grandson's upbringing, make a fine man of him.

So it happened that the happiness of the lovers was not unalloyed. Jessica had less thought than he for the rocks ahead of them. She worshiped Jerry for wanting to shield her from every breath, but she was sure of him, of herself, and she craved all the winds of life. They were taking second best, but better that than nothing.

She was to go to his Pinckney Street flat the morning the ship sailed; that day was to be their wedding day. And when it came, and she left her old home for the last time—all her possessions had been disposed of to people who had subleased the suite—she was without regret.

She was the most gallant and beautiful thing in the world to Jerry that September morning, when he followed her into his living room, dismantled and dark and piled with strapped luggage.

She still wore black, but it was not somber upon her; it heightened her fair coloring, the luster of her wide-eyed, expectant beauty. Very young, it made her look. And so innocent that Seaton's heart sank anew. He remembered meeting a friend of his in some out-of-the-way place, years ago, a nice chap who had run off with another man's wife. Her husband had been a brute, had refused to divorce her, after she fled with the man who held out her only hope of happiness. They had not been wicked, or even weak, those two; just enmeshed in circumstance. But their clandestine life together had done something strange to them both, especially to her. She had looked hard, defiant, secretive; like all her sisterhood.

What would this filched happiness of theirs do to Jessica?

"I'm happy!" were her first words as he drew her into his arms, buried his face in her hair, as soft and dark as the breast of a bird.

"Sure?"

"Very sure." She snuggled close to him, stripped her left hand of its glove. On her third finger was a plain gold band that afforded her immense delight. He had forgotten that, but she, woman-like, had remembered.

"See, Jerry? Take it off, and put it on yourself. It doesn't matter whether we kneel before a man in a high-cut vest or not!"

It did. But that couldn't be. So he took the gleaming circlet from her finger, then slipped it on again. Part of the marriage service came back to him as he thought of that other day, when, in a crowded, fashionable church, he had knelt beside Bess, and promised all the improbable things that people do promise.

"To love and to cherish; for richer, for poorer; in sickness, in health——" He whispered fragments of it in her ear, knowing that this time the troth would be kept.

There were still a few things to be done, and the boat did not sail until noon. But they had the queer feeling of being suddenly let down, after the hurry and flurry of the past weeks. He posted some letters, made sure that the

superintendent of the building had his forwarding address. The woman who came each day to clean the apartment had been paid and dismissed, and had left everything as it should be. All the windows were locked, the shades drawn.

They could go down to the boat any time now, and yet they lingered, in a dark, dismantled room. At last he phoned downstairs for a porter to come and assemble their luggage and take it down to a taxi.

Jessica did something to her hair, that his caresses had disarranged, then drew on her gloves.

The porter knocked, loaded himself with a first cargo of luggage. Jerry picked up his coat, stood stock-still. Was there a gleam of fear in the girl's bright gaze? He fancied the hand that lay on his arm trembled slightly.

"It's not too late, dear. Jessica, if you've the slightest qualm about all this, tell me. I'll give you up now, at the very threshold, rather than bring unhappiness upon you."

"Not a qualm!" she vowed. She had been thinking of other brides, escaping, in showers of rice and confetti, from a crowd of close friends, from their families and homes, where tears and smiles and bridal confusion reigned. It was a little sad to be starting on the great adventure with not one soul to wish them well.

"Must I throw myself at your head any more, Jerry?" she begged tremulously, and he knew that she wouldn't be given up.

They kissed, and sprang apart as the porter came back for the rest of the luggage.

"Two gen'lemen to see you, suh," he stated. "Shall I bring 'em up?"

"Haven't time." Jerry looked at his watch. "We've got to be starting, dear —they can't be anybody in particular."

He didn't want to see them, any one —and winced as he realized why he didn't.

They closed the door, and started down the hall. The elevator came at last, and two men stepped out; accosted them.

"Mr. Jerold Seaton?"

"I'm catching a boat," he said swiftly. "Afraid I can't stop."

"Sorry." The bigger man fished in his pocket and drew out a stiff parchment document, which he thrust upon Jerry. "Have to serve you with these papers, sir."

Jessica, wondering idly what the red seals meant, grew impatient as her lover's eyes wandered down the stiff foolscap sheet in his hands.

"That's all right, you can go," he told them finally, an unreadable look upon his face. The elevator shot down with them, and the porter coughed.

"Taxi's at the door, suh." His hand was nonchalantly cupped, but he was doomed to disappointment.

"We don't want it!" said Jerry, his voice a pæan of delight. "Our trip is —postponed."

Jessica didn't understand, until he drew her back into the dark, dismantled room. And then he seized her rapturously, thrusting the papers before her wondering gaze.

"My dear—my dear!" he rejoiced. "I'll be free, before so very long, to take you openly, before all the world."

She scanned the lengthy document hastily. It was a tedious writ demanding the appearance of Jerold Nottingham Seaton in the court of Suffolk County on such a day, to show why his wife, Elizabeth Marshall Seaton, should not be granted a decree of divorcement from him, on the charge of infidelity upon a certain date.

That date was very recent; scarcely two months back; the date of Bess' birthday, of the storm that had driven her husband and Jessica into a bathhouse at Plymouth for shelter.

"The corespondent is merely 'an un-

known woman,'" Jerry observed dryly. "She had that much sportsmanship—or discretion. Why, Jessica, how simple the whole thing is! I might have guessed—and we wouldn't have come so near the precipice! My name was what she wanted most—of her possessions. But when she had to give them all up, after her father's collapse, it didn't outbalance the rest. She's found some man—Cummings, beyond a doubt—who will replace her gilded trappings. And those are what she wants. She'll be happy, I suppose."

There was no supposition about *their* happiness, his and Jessica's. For they knew that the old sophism of forbidden fruit being the sweetest was a rank fallacy. They'd be a hundredfold happier, they told each other, when their love was divested of its glamorous prohibition, its cheap secrecy.

True romantics, weren't they? And as it turned out, they were right.

OCTOBER MOONS

OCTOBER moons are haunted moons,
October woods hold mystic runes

Written at dusk by hands unseen
Within the great oak's circle green.

Where a late purple aster blooms
The spider folk have set their looms,

And woven for this fairy night
A web of dreams and sheer delight.

In open fields gold pumpkins lie,
Soon to fulfill their destiny,

When, drawn by teams of headlong bats,
Mounted by dames in pointed hats,

They'll whirl about beneath the moon,
And sigh that dawn appears so soon.

The cornstalks whisper overhead,
The maple leaves are gold and red,

The muscats offer yellow wine,
And whoso drinks will be divine,

And read the message of the runes—
October moons are goblin moons!

SUSAN MYRA GREGORY.

Madame de Lisle Gives Herself Away

By Beatrice Ravenel
Author of "The High Cost of Conscience," "The Trump Card," etc.

CLIFFORD RAINES woke with a sound in his ears which did not seem to pertain to a dream. It was as though he had been shocked awake. Mixed with gray drowsiness, the impression of a woman's protest lingered, a woman in need of protection, a woman's scream—like a stab of light through a fog. Everything was quiet; as quiet as things got to be in the country. Outside in the shrubbery even the laurels, which were naturally of a quarrelsome disposition, were composed.

He could not have been asleep very long. The moonlight lay, broad and stiff like a couple of linen pillowcases, over the cushions of the window seat, divided by the mullions between the tall panes. And the moon was due to set a good while before dawn.

He stretched his arm toward the bedside table where his watch lay, then let it relax. It didn't matter about the time. He had no curiosity about anything. He was too tired.

Instead of going to sleep again, however, he lay pondering. That sound! He wondered whether a man could be wakened violently by a memory, the thin vestiges of sinister noises that might get into the pockets of the brain, to venture out only when the will lay dormant and the coast was clear. He grinned weakly. He was at the old habit again. Interesting whimsies for a man to play with, a man who had been a student of psychology all his life and teacher of it for ten years.

His ears had been assailed by the shrieks of women all the evening, dominating the deeper-toned laughter of the men. Shrieks of delighted terror, of feigned combat, of genuine consternation once, when that pretty little Frenchwoman, Madame de Lisle, had slipped on the stairs and sent an unrestrained Gallic appeal up to heaven. Shrieks of challenge that ran the gamut between the imitation and the genuine.

There had been a "rag." Allie had carefully explained to him beforehand that they were very smart. They had them at the very best country houses in England. Ned Carlisle had just come back, and he said so. Whatever happened, Cliff was not to interfere and, above all, he was not to look shocked. That would be brutally rude and inhospitable, and everything that was middle-class and unsophisticated and tiresome. If he didn't want to join in he needn't, but he must be pleasant about it. He was doing very well; he was improving wonderfully, but he was by no means the perfect host yet.

If he had been, well, not shocked, because it takes a good deal to shock a man nowadays, but slightly startled, he had, he believed, played up. He had been not only pleasant, but sympathetic. There was nothing really objectionable, judged by cosmic standards, in a crowd of grown people playing like a herd of rowdy children shut up in a house on a rainy day. If you like that sort of thing, why not?

In the impromptu play which had started the revels, he had taken the part of an Irish tenant, and had brought down the house by shooting the moon

with a practical pistol, fired out of the window. He had cheered on the saturnalia which, led by Carlisle, had raged through the rooms and up and down the corridors. It was not a real saturnalia in the least. It was a half put-on riot, instead of being the irresistible unleashing of blinding passion. It was a thing of sofa pillows and confetti, instead of being song and roses and mad torches. There had been a slight strain in getting the thing started. He recalled the determined smirk of the older women, the side glances of the men at each other, feeling out how far it was safe to go, and whether everybody was going that far.

The wit had not been brilliant. There was Carlisle's whoop, as he took a hurdle of chairs to embrace the entering punch bowl: "It never Raines but it pours!" And, after a whisper from Allie, Doctor Meredith had rather ponderously offered his toast: "Here's to the ideal woman—like a milk punch—an angel with a dash of the devil." There hadn't been any milk in the punch. Uncle Welman's cellar seemed to be inexhaustible. That, like the rest of the housekeeping and the whole machinery of this queer new life he was living, was between Allie and the specialists of the household staff.

If these were the tribal customs of the best people, as Allie assured him that they were, he had no objection. If they did not appeal to him, that was, as Allie also declared, because she and Uncle Welman, between them, had barely dragged him back from the verge of being an old fogy. Uncle Welman had accomplished his part by dying without having made a will, and thus suffering the immense fortune which he had destined for the fight against prohibition, to drop automatically into the pockets of his scarcely known great-nephew. Alison was doing her share by being almost disturbingly alive.

Anyway, it had given him a thrill of real old-fashioned satisfaction to notice the moderation with which Elise Merwin had joined in the orgy. The picture of Elise, with her hair crooked and her shoulder straps in jeopardy, dashing after a man—he wouldn't have cared to add it to his mental gallery of her portraits. Coming to the thought of Elise was like developing the underlying theme of a symphony. She was always an underlying consciousness, immeasurably beautiful and comforting, in his mind.

They had slipped away from the racket, after a while, and found a jut of shadow on the piazza where they could sit and watch the moonlight submerge the terraces like a tide. He drew a long breath of happiness. He hadn't got used to the wonder of Elise yet and, above all, to the miracle of her love for him. She did love him. She was going to marry him. Lovely and talented, sweet-and-twenty-three — ten years younger than himself!

No doubt the world, misled by the fine reserve that went with her statue-tall and statue-noble type of beauty, might hint that her choice was not entirely disinterested. The Merwins were not exactly poor, but there seemed to be a financial instability about their affairs that kept people wondering. Well, he knew Elise's heart. The knowledge made him very proud and very humble.

He was not more modest than most men. But then, Elise was such a wonder. He had a clear conception of his moderate good looks, his more than moderate brains, and his qualities of helpfulness and fair play which instinctively attracted women. In the university world which had been his until a year ago he had been accounted a good man and a good scholar. In this newer environment he had got along well with people. He had fallen in with Allie's passionate plans with a whimsical good nature that was yet not entirely unscientific. As he put the matter,

his subject was the human mind, and all that he knew at first-hand of the human mind bore the university stamp. It was time, as his sister expressed it, to see something, if less enlightened, at least more exciting.

They had seen a good deal. He had given Allie a free hand. She cared so much more than he did. That her progress had logically blossomed into the "rag" of this evening was a conclusion that rather made one pause to take stock. Had he done the best for the child? Alison was, after all, the kind of person whom one can help only in that person's own way. His fourteen years' seniority had given him the responsibilities, without the authority, of a father. He had over her only the check of the purse strings, and he hated to use that. Alison was his half sister; Uncle Welman had been no relation of hers, and neither had his fortune.

She had always kept her brother a bit afraid of something. When he had managed to send her as a day pupil to the fashionable girls' school in their city, there had seemed some danger of her becoming a charming parasite, a little sister of the rich. The intimacies she had formed with the "right" girls, as she later pointed out, had come in well. Without them, even his heaps of money, and their excellent old Southern name, might have proved insufficient passports to the "right" circles. And now that they were in, Allie had started a new, gnawing anxiety in his mind.

Was that a door opening somewhere, he wondered suddenly. The trees, of course, inclined to rattle under the slightest windy provocation.

It wasn't so much her unceasing restlessness after movement, color, variety. That was natural enough. It wasn't even the hardness, the determination to get out of life what she wanted. A memory of her face flashed by him again, her wide-open eyes, her mouth, a tight red line, drawn over the small teeth. She had been after Carlisle—Carlisle! The name summed up his whole feeling of apprehension.

During the past few days he had come upon them constantly together. The man's uncannily intelligent air, the long hands which had a mocking quality of their own, a sort of potency that emanated from him, made him curiously disturbing. Besides, Allie had no right to flirt with other men, having definitely accepted Meredith.

Her choice had surprised, but, on the whole, relieved her brother. Meredith was a man to be taken seriously, a firm-jawed, solid person, considerably older than Alison. He would be kind to her and keep her in order. Rich enough to please himself, he had retired from practice and devoted himself to research work. He was, however, in no way averse to a good deal of social diversion. His courtship had been of the dogged kind. The present house party was in some degree in honor of the betrothal.

With candor, Alison had explained to her brother that some of Merry's people were fearfully smart, and it was just as well to show them that she had some background, too. Uncle Welman's place was at least impressive, with its golf course and its garage and cellar and formal gardens. Meredith's elder brother, who was very important on Wall Street, and the brother's wife, who had been born in the Philadelphia purple, and two choice débutante cousins, looking, in their gauzy draperies, like expensive fresh fruits in tissue-paper wrappings, had participated earnestly in the "rag." There was, besides, Madame de Lisle, some sort of connection by marriage, who spoke English with a haunting charm, and was willing while in savage countries to do as the savages did.

And now Alison was prejudicing the lot of them by her barefaced coquetting with Carlisle. It was very different from her usual caution in social mat-

ters. Well, there was no use worrying. She would settle down soon with Meredith. And he would certainly settle down—if the expression fitted those heights of romance where his future abode was to stand—with Elise, and pull out of all this foolishness, and get back to a real man's work on his book.

Carlisle. He couldn't see the fascination of the creature, though Carlisle had a dire reputation as a conqueror of women. The little debutantes had been frankly carried away. He was like a great cat, rubbing against feminine sensibilities, tangling around feminine feet. Even Elise was attracted by him. Raines had caught her watching the man while he was playing some Balkan rhapsodic mess—a thing of passionate starts and wails of deprivation. He was full of parlor tricks. In her eyes had dawned the exalted, soaring look that Raines had fancied dedicated to himself, to those moments of supreme communion in the moonlight.

It was the music, he assured himself, not the man. Music could do all sorts of things to women. He had to clutch at some such reassurance to curb the ugly, agonized dart of suspicion which astonished him by its intensity. He had considered that decent people were not capable of jealousy. You trusted or you did not. But what does a man know of the infinite hairsplitting which his plainest convictions may undergo when love begins to tamper with them? He was learning new things about himself every day.

What was that noise?

It was not a scream this time. It was more like a jar, as though a heavy body had come in contact with a projecting corner. Then there was a confused rustle. Then silence—tingling, waiting. It came from the wing on the other side of the staircase; the wing where Alison's rooms were, and where Elise had been put, and Madame de Lisle, and perhaps some of the other women—there were a lot more of them. The wing ran back and back, each bedroom separated from the next by a bath or a small boudoir.

Raines slid cautiously out of bed. This was really too much. Some young devil, male or female, not satisfied with the ardency of the "rag," was intent upon carrying it over into practical jokes. He might have expected as much from the raft of young fellows not too far removed from the undergraduate stage, who were, or ought to be, on the floor above. He got into bathrobe and slippers; then took the pistol which had been his theatrical property from the table. If they wanted a practical joke he could give them one! As he persuaded his door to open it occurred to him that all the doors in this house moved with commendable discretion. He had yet to hear one creak.

He stepped into the gallery that ran around three sides of the hall, with the immense well of the staircase in the middle. On the fourth wall an arched window rose from the floor below. To his right a linen closet with beautifully paneled doors jutted out, and beyond that, facing a cross corridor which led to the wing, was the door of Carlisle's room. Meredith's room was next. He listened. All was still.

As he moved noiselessly to the right, the length of the cross corridor came into his line of vision bit by bit. It led into darkness at the farther end, but halfway down it broadened into a bay that sent a bisected oblong of light, like another pair of pillow slips, upon the floor. Raines slipped into the dense angle of shade cast by the closet, and waited.

Something was coming slowly, with exquisite precaution, toward him. Something bulky, portentous, ominous. A chill went through the roots of his hair. This was no joke; this was horror. He saw the back of a woman emerge from

the darkness, the shoulders bent over the long negligee caught up about her knees. The light climbed the pale-yellow folds, past the gold braids, over the graceful head——

Elise!

With a gesture of exhaustion she stooped and gradually laid down her end of the burden. The woman at the other end did the same. Across the mass they gazed at each other, panting without sound. The second woman, shoving the dark waves from her forehead, stepped into the light.

It was Alison.

Raines reached them almost before they were aware of his approach. Before Alison's terrified squeak was actually on the air Elise's hand had closed her mouth.

Thrusting the pistol into his pocket, Raines stooped and lifted a corner of the dark-purple counterpane that shrouded the bulk at his feet. His hand moved here and there. No, there was no trace of a pulse anywhere.

He had never thought so swiftly in his life. Out of the whirl of impressions he caught the one essential thing to do. He lifted the man's shoulders. The women took the feet, swathed in the thick, silk folds. Only when the door of Carlisle's room had opened to receive them and closed again was the silence broken.

"I must call Meredith," said Raines. Although he kept his voice down it sounded abominably loud and grating. "There may be a chance——"

His sister threw herself on him.

"Oh, no! Oh, no!" she moaned. "Don't leave me!"

He freed himself from the shaking little hands and began automatically to rub them. They were icy.

"I must. He seems—dead—but you can't be sure." He added quickly: "You two had better go back to your rooms. I must get Meredith at once."

The imperative duty thrust back the demand that rose to his lips: "How did it happen? What have you to do with it?" He allowed himself only one look at Elise's pale, tight-lipped face. Then he grasped the doorknob, felt it turn from the other side. Before he could act the door opened sharply, and Doctor Meredith, a dressing gown thrown loosely around him, strode in.

"I saw you in the hall," he said with his usual abruptness. There was something ruthlessly professional in the way in which he peered at the form that lay on the bed. With a mutter of impatience he switched on the electric light over the headboard.

"He's gone, right enough," he announced after a moment. He threw the end of the drapery over the still face, as though dismissing it from among the living. He turned to the group, his eyes in their prominent bone cases considering each in turn. "And now what's it all about? How did it happen?" His forefinger shot out and fixed Alison. "What have *you* got to do with it?"

The girl had sunk into a chair. Now she leaned forward, propping herself on its arms.

"I don't want to tell. I don't want to tell," she whispered. Her eyes closed under the flinty look that met them. A spasm of sickness crossed her face. "She—she asked me to help her," she said weakly; then her head went down on her forearm. "To help her bring him out of her room back here."

"Allie!" cried the other woman poignantly. The doctor had turned away to hide the unmitigated relief which betrayed too plainly what the depth of his apprehension had been. She spoke to his averted shoulder. "That is not true. I had hoped to be able to—to keep any one from knowing. But now—you see that she forces me to protect myself. Look at her!" She nodded her head toward the broken little huddle in the chair. "Isn't it easy to see which one of us is more—overcome by this?"

Meredith swung around and caught her hand.

"Your pulse is racing!" he accused, dropping it contemptuously. "You're as nervous as a witch yourself. As for her crying, that proves nothing but the shock she has undergone. People take death differently. Anyway, I believe her story." He leaned over Alison as though dismissing the other from his attention.

"Cliff!" Elise appealed. It was an extraordinary tone. It cut through the confusion that was his mind, making him sure of one thing.

"It is impossible for me to believe you guilty," he answered dully. "I—can't imagine it."

Alison caught his arm.

"Oh, Cliff, you don't believe—that I could—— Oh, you *can't!*"

He looked silently from one to the other. It seemed to him that no man had ever been so desperately placed as he was. It was incredible that either of these girls, his sister or the woman he was to marry, should be the heroine of this vulgar and tainted tragedy. And yet—there was the still figure on the bed. And they were accusing each other.

"Lock that door!" warned the doctor suddenly.

Before Raines, who was nearest, could obey, the door opened with an almost human slyness and adroitness. Through the crevice slid a figure out of a Watteau picture. Between the laces of an elaborate pink peignoir and the gauze of a rose-budded cap the mouse-bright eyes and inquisitive nose of Madame de Lisle peered out.

Raines locked the door with the feeling that the entire house party was on the way through it.

"I notice the voices," madame announced, her winged glances missing nothing. "I think somebody must be sick. Ah, *mon Dieu!*" She was at the bed, learning all there was to know. "The heart? I know he had heem, the heart. *Quel dommage. Effroyable!* In the midst when you are in life you are in deat'," she added piously. "Is it not sad? How it happen?" As a general thing her English was excellent, but the unusualness of the situation seemed to have jarred it, along with other things.

Meredith took in the fact that he was the only person capable of rising to the emergency.

"Mr. Raines heard him call," he began suavely. "Finding that he was seriously ill, he came for me. Our movements disturbed these ladies who came to offer their assistance. Unfortunately, nothing could be done." He drew a breath of relief at his own plausibility. It sounded natural. Then his slightly pompous recital tone dropped into genuine interest. "You say that he had a heart affection? For how long——"

"Oh, long time, long time!" Madame de Lisle interrupted. "I have known him in Paris, years ago." She lifted a fold of the purple counterpane, with its incongruous brocaded butterflies. "Thees?" she asked musingly. Her eyebrows completed the implication that she recognized it. The doctor reddened.

"You do it very well, my friend, but I have seen—the *cortège*, the procession. I sleep ver' light. I, too, come to help. It is best, since there will be a story to tell in the morning, which is not so far, that we tell the same story—*hein?*"

"Undoubtedly," agreed the doctor, recognizing a kindred spirit of sound sense.

"Well, then"—madame made a gesture of delightful candor, as of one laying her cards on the table—"as you, my dear friend, seem the best liar, suppose we tell your story." A thought brought her up short. "It will not be necessary—the eenquest?"

"No. We can avoid that, I think?"

"Ah, how that is fortunate! I hate

to tell lies under oath," said Madame de Lisle ingenuously. "Besides, these newspapers!" Her hands gave a flick of abhorrence. "When they begin who can know the end?" She had adjusted herself to the scene and her English responded; her tenses no longer sounded so foreign.

Raines drove his finger nails into his palm. With the coming of this French figurine, the nightmare atmosphere of the room had precipitated into something like reality—the unsparing reality of a Maupassant story, cynical; capable of any development.

"It might be well to know," she was going on, "though this, it needs not to say, will be no part of the story we shall tell together, in which room this—this so sad accident—— Is it not so?" She waited invitingly.

Alison threw back her head.

"I tell you——" she began in a defensive key. The little Frenchwoman's uplifted hand controlled her as a conductor controls an orchestra. Her voice sank to an intense bitterness. "I tell you that she came to my room and asked me to help carry him here. And I did."

"No," said Elise quietly, "that is not so. It was just the other way. Let me tell my side of the story."

"I don't want your story," the doctor cut in curtly. "I am perfectly satisfied."

Something like resentment at his injustice came into her restrained tones.

"You are afraid to hear it. You have made up your mind and you are determined, in self-defense, not to have your conclusions shaken. You've seen her with him ever since he has been here. You've been raging with jealousy. Why," cried the girl with the thrill of discovery, "I believe that you are *glad* the man is dead!"

Meredith's clenched hands rose an inch, then dropped.

"I've seen you with him, too," he rasped out. "I have watched you when he was playing. You were infatuated."

"With his playing, yes," said the girl courageously. "I'm a musician, too. Not with him."

Alison suddenly jerked her chin toward the bed. All this time she had sat shrinking away from it.

"Madame," she said in a husky whisper, "you have been in our rooms. You know which one that purple thing came out of. My room is blue."

"Yes, my child," answered Madame de Lisle tranquilly, "I know. That is why I think we must hear her. It is only fair."

"She wants to know everything," Raines said to himself. He hated the little figure, perched on its high chair near the bed, so alert, so reasonable. There was a shiny reflection across her cheek bones, and he was sure that, had she been aware of the fact, she would calmly have produced a powder puff and remedied the defect in her charming appearance.

"Oh, very well!" said Meredith shortly, implying that no explanation would make any difference to him.

Elise fixed her mournful eyes on Raines, as though he was the only one in the group that mattered.

"It seems absurd that I should be justifying myself to you," she began, quite simply, "absurd and horrible. And I was so anxious to spare you, Cliff. I couldn't bear to have you suffer, as I knew you must if you found out. I thought everybody would believe that he died here alone, during the night. Ah, well, it's too late now! You'll have to know." She went close to him and her voice sank into an intimacy that went through him. "Oh, my poor dear——"

A gurgle of pity escaped the figurine. She sat upright, watching not only with her long, jewel-bright eyes, but with every nerve of her body.

"I hadn't gone to sleep yet," Elise went on. "The moon—— And I was

thinking of you, and of when I should live here. I was glad it was so beautiful. I hadn't locked my door into Alison's sitting room, which is between her room and mine. Suddenly I found her standing by my bed. She said"—she turned to the girl as though asking whether she would deny her own words —"she said, 'You must help me. You must help me. Promise me you'll keep quiet when I tell you.' Then she put her hand over my mouth and sobbed out: 'Ned is dead!' "

Alison's head dropped lower, as though the horror of a memory shut out everything else.

"I held her hands for a minute. I couldn't say anything. I didn't know what to think. She went on, 'He's been making love to me for days. I know that I shouldn't have permitted it, but—I couldn't help it.' Then I said, 'Do you love him?' And she answered, 'No, no! I love Merry. But you know how he could make you believe anything, feel anything, while he was with you. This evening I had a fight with him—you know how those things happen—he tried to kiss me. Oh, if I really loved him I don't think I'd care so much about my own safety—I'd care more about *him*. What shall I do, oh, what shall I do?'

"I told her to tell me exactly what had happened. She said that he had climbed up to the balcony that runs along all those rooms. She heard a noise outside, and she opened the long French window, and before she could say anything he suddenly stepped in. She was furious, and she whispered to him as loudly as she dared to go—how dared he? Then he put his hand to his heart, and tried to say something—and fell. She said that he fell across the cushions on her couch, so there was no crash. And when she found that she couldn't rouse him she came to me."

"Ah, *quel dommage!*" murmured Madame de Lisle. "And then you decide, as any one would, to put him here before all the world knows?" She lifted a fold of the covering again. "He is fully dressed," she said softly.

Even at this moment of tension, the differences in people of the same world made Raines wonder. He had noticed that fact; so, no doubt, had every other person in the room; but it had not occurred to them to put it into words.

"After we had taken him into the hall," Elise went on, "I went back to my room for the counterpane. It was easier to carry—and it was horrible to look at him—like that."

The doctor's voice ripped through her pause.

"If he was in Alison's room, why didn't you take her coverlet?"

"When I went back I went, naturally, to my own room," said Elise quietly. "There was no time to think."

He turned abruptly.

"What do you say, Allie?"

She lifted her haggard face. She was the youngest woman there, and she looked the oldest.

"That is exactly what happened—except that she's turned it around. *She* came to me. How could she remember what I said, like that? *She* said it. He—he died in her room."

"You know that isn't true, Allie," said Elise patiently.

Madame de Lisle's eloquent fingers made a pass in the air. It was surmise and inspiration.

"There may be something—in the rooms."

Raines started. It was insufferably insulting, this cool suggestion of the crudest detective methods. Elise raised her head proudly.

"I am perfectly willing."

"Allie?" prompted Meredith. She nodded. He put his arm about her and lifted her to her feet.

It was an extraordinary procession that tiptoed its way through the corridor. Meredith had brought the purple cover

and over its folds his strong, square face suggested a Roman emperor. Elise, stately, almost cold, in her pale draperies, might have come from a pedestal in his palace. Above the hard line of her Chinese jacket, Alison looked like a forlorn wraith from an Oriental fairy tale. As for Madame de Lisle's daintiness, that lent a touch of ironical comedy to the scene. An observer might have compared Raines to *Hamlet,* fresh from his father's ghost.

As they entered Alison's room Raines touched the wall switch, and the scene sprang from its poetic, moonlit glimmer into the crisp distinctness of vivid-blue draperies and ivory walls. Madame de Lisle made a little sinuous movement toward the couch. Its heap of pale-gold cushions was mashed as though by the impress of a heavy body.

"She might have been lying there herself," said Meredith defensively. He walked to the long window and tested the latch. It swung. "And people open windows merely to air a room. The window in the other room may be open, too."

"C'est juste," murmured Madame de Lisle thoughtfully. She sat down on the couch, tentatively. "Go and look. All of you. I will stay here. And Mees Raines, she also will wish to remain in her own room." She leaned her hands on the cushions behind her, patting them vaguely.

The instant they were alone, she swept to Alison and took the girl's shoulders in a grasp that was restrained only by main force from being a pinch.

"You little fool!" she hissed. "You little *imbécile!* Why could you not have said that you found him in the hall? Why you had to lose your head and accuse that other girl? She would have kept quiet. She has the brains—she! But you must think only of saving yourself, no matter who you r-r-ruine! No matter who suffer. Why you did not——"

Alison stared at her, forgetting to resent her insults.

"I never thought of it," she murmured blankly.

"Oh, you see how simple it is—now that somebody explain it to you. You have no sense. If you cannot then think of a good lie, why did you not tell the simple truth? It was not so bad. One cannot prevent always *Romeos* from climbing the balcony. One is only responsible if one has invited them in."

"I was afraid that Merry wouldn't believe me," said Alison, in the same helpless voice. "He was so jealous. He accused me of encouraging Ned. And —I had." Her mouth drooped childishly.

"You do not know him—that *docteur.* He will fight *not* to believe anything bad of you. He has, as they say, invest so heavily that he cannot pull out—he loves you so in his pig-headed way. And with men like him, death allays jealousy—oh, a great deal. You have made a big mess—and without necessity. You do not deserve that one should pull you out of the hole, if it were not for that nice man, your brother. No matter which one of you he believes to be *the* one, he will be unhappy. It is too bad. It is insufferable. No," declared madame with intensity, "it must not *be!*"

The others were coming back through the sitting room. Madame de Lisle sank back upon the couch.

"Well," she suggested gently, "the couch was quite smooth and the window fastened? One can air a corner room from another wall."

"Yes," blurted Meredith, "but all that might have been fixed when——"

"When Mees Merwin went for her counterpane?" Madame de Lisle weighed the evidence. "That might be so. Only—it is not so." She slipped her hand from among the cushions. "Look what is here. It is the same color

as the silks here, so I found it only when I put my hand on it."

Raines took the card case, decorated with a braided Celtic pattern on the pale gold. From the central medallion the initials, "E. C.," stared up at him.

"When he collapse on the couch, it fell out of his pocket," Madame de Lisle explained with the unnecessary obviousness of the successful sleuth. "That, I think, do what you call cinch the matter."

Alison turned away. Meredith, his cocksure face piteous and drawn, put out his hand for the case and stood looking stupidly from it to the girl. There was a silence. For Raines it was filled with a bitter humiliation, and under it, a wild thankfulness that never, never for an instant, had he doubted Elise. They exchanged a long look. He knew that she felt, like himself, that anything more, any word, any touch might wound the other two with all the arrogant cruelty of triumph.

"And yet it is not what you think at all," said Madame de Lisle with the unexpectedness of a skyrocket.

As though her cue had arrived, she rose and moved to the center of the floor.

"I am a str-r-range woman," she uttered with a touch of pathos. "I should leave well enough—well enough for me—by itself. But I can never do it. You see, I am artiste."

During these cryptic remarks she had been gathering up the glances of her audience. She continued:

"You say, how clevaire she is, how she finds out the truth. And it might have been much, oh, much worse! The *docteur*, he will readjust himself, he will make up. But you see, I do not like to leave a situation like that when it is not the truth at all. When it is a mistake, a fake, as you say. For that is not art."

Under the combined stare of her hearers her manner dilated.

"You think that poor Carlisle, he climbed up the balcony to make love to Mees Alison. He is a *romantique*. But I tell you—no. He came to see a ver' different lady."

Raines' mind shot to the two pretty debutantes: No. Was it possible——

"She was the one with whom he was really *épris*. And because she would not listen to him during the day—knowing for a long time the man he was, she would not give him the chance to talk to her—he comes to the balcony at night, to plead. And she, on the other side of her shutters, she says to him, 'Go away. I do not like you, I do not like you the least in the world. You are all that I detest.' Some men are like illnesses. After a bad attack, one becomes immune for life. So with her.

"Then when he pleads louder, forgetting himself, Mees Alison she opens her window. Then, of course, his one idea is to protect that woman whom he loves. He will not have her talked about by all the world. So to keep Mees Alison from knowing, he pretends that he has come to see her. He steps into her room. And then"—madame raised her hand solemnly—"the Destiny, it strikes. That is what *did* happen."

Alison swept up to her, her white face flooding with color.

"Is that true?" she gasped. "You wouldn't tell that—about yourself!"

Madame de Lisle's eyes narrowed.

"I did not say that it was myself. But suppose that it was. What difference would it make, to me or to you? I go away to-morrow and you forget me."

"I'll never forget you," said Meredith with a sort of warm brusqueness. He held out his hand. "I think it was—*bully*, your telling us that. I'm no end grateful."

With the awkwardness of a prosaic man driven into sentiment, he wrung the little fingers, kissed Alison, and went stolidly out of the room. With a mur-

mur of good night, Raines followed him. There was no need for any such visible sign of affection between Elise and himself. They smiled at each other. He wondered whether any two people in this shaky world had ever understood each other so well, so profoundly.

"And now, little one, go to bed," said Madame de Lisle maternally to the girl whom she had called a little fool. "It is all right. Only, next time, before putting the blame on your friends, try first if there is not some other way out. Oh, yes, Mees Elise will forgive you, too."

In the hall, with the door safely shut behind them, Elise and Madame de Lisle looked straight into each other's eyes.

"I—I ought to thank you," said the tall goddess, the drag of absolute humiliation in her voice.

"Why?" asked the other coolly. "You do not need any help. You are clevaire, you. You do not tell one word that did not happen. Only—you do not confess what happened first."

"Why did you——"

"Let them think *Romeo* came for me? Give myself away, as you say?" The delicate shoulders rose. "I am artiste. I do not like to see a beautiful thing destroyed. The feeling that your nice lover has for you is a very beautiful thing, a very sacred thing. You must be careful. I do not ask how much you have encouraged *Romeo*. A man does not often go so far without some reason for hope. Though he was of an egotism—— But if your fiancé believed that even the least feeling for some other man, even the excitement of playing with a tiger like Carlisle, had troubled your heart—well, you know him. That beautiful trust he has for you would have clouded, something would have gone out of it, it would never have been the same again."

"Ought I to tell him?" Elise asked in a very low voice.

Madame de Lisle gave a gesture as though dragging a madwoman from the path of wild horses.

"Never, never that! You owe it to him not to tell him. Let him be happy. It is the only reparation that you can make him." With a sad little smile that had on her face the effect of premature wrinkles she went on: "Why did I do it? I am artiste. And, besides, sometimes I like to do a kindness. It is a luxury like any other. And—once I had a beautiful love of my own. It was broken, it was smash'. This may be my revenge—on Carlisle," she added almost in a whisper. "How he would hate to know that I dip my fingers into the mischief he tried to do—and make it right again!"

CHINESE of the highest caste are very much opposed to the flapper styles for Chinese girls in the United States, which, however, is not extraordinary, as it would seem from innumerable articles of protest from all parts of the United States that many Americans feel much the same way about the flapper styles for American girls in the United States.

PARISIENNES have a new pastime which takes one back to the days of autograph albums and ghostly signatures, for this latest whim of the fair ones of Paris is the collecting of prints—not finger prints, but kiss prints. How do they do it? The victim is captured, his lips rouged; a kiss is then imprinted upon the smooth, white page of an album, and signed.

The Closed Door

By John Fleming Wilson

"I LEFT the wreck in the last boat," Gorham told me. "It was a very dark and stormy morning and the sea ran before the gale in great splashes of a kind of vivid, intense white. To the east of us the California coast rose like a shadow out of the spume and spindrift. And that woman sat beside me on the thwart and clutched my arm with a steady, relentless strength which affected me more than if she had screamed."

"I never could understand that affair," I said. "Harry Owen was not only a seaman of ability and experience, but the last man in the world to——"

Gorham sighed and lifted his tired eyes to mine.

"I have never appeared in the affair, of course," he remarked. "I was only a passenger on the *Shearwater*. The underwriters didn't go into the matter." My companion sighed again, staring at me owlishly. He rubbed his great forearm thoughtfully. "That woman's fingers were set in my flesh, I tell you, right through my jacket. And it was precisely as if she were screaming. And any minute I expected a sea to tumble us all into Davy Jones' locker."

"His wife?" I commented.

"Of course," Gorham replied. "So she was—Captain Harry Owen's wife. And although she had been married to him six years she had never so much as suspected, I think."

"Suspected what?"

Gorham made a slight gesture of disdain for my dullness.

"Who the other woman was."

It was my turn to stare. Hadn't I known Owen for years, been shipmate with him, been his friend? And didn't everybody know that after he married pretty Sheila McTodd he never so much as glanced at another woman?

"You mean to tell me that there was another woman?" I demanded of Gorham. Then something in the extraordinary expression of his usually calm face stopped me. "Then that explains——"

"Why the *Shearwater* was, in a way, deliberately cast away," he finished.

"Did you know the other woman?" I asked.

He nodded.

"Did I know her?" I insisted.

Gorham whispered a name and we looked at each other intently, each waiting for the other to speak.

"It is incredible!" I said finally, and I walked to the window and stared out into the rain that was lashing San Francisco. Then I turned on him fiercely. "You don't know what you are saying! I tell you Harry Owen, to my certain knowledge, never so much as went to tea with Kitty Melrose after he married Sheila. And of all women to accuse of being—of being——" I shook my fist at Gorham.

He did not move.

"I *know!*" he said quietly. "I tell you I was there. She was the first woman I saw when our boat finally reached the *Western Pacific* and we were literally dragged on board out of the boiling sea. The instant I caught her eyes, I knew. She was standing in a sheltered corner of the deckhouse, her dark hair set with pearls of spray and her lips parted in a sort of childlike amazement. It was exactly as if I had been working over a puzzle for years and suddenly the missing bit popped up and completed it, solved it."

I came back and sat down. I was rather astonished at my own coolness.

"Kitty Melrose was the most charming girl I ever knew," I remarked. "Clean and fine and upstanding and willful and witching."

Gorham suddenly brought his great palm down on the chair arm with a mighty smack.

"Of course. We both knew her. Half of us were in love with her. She never looked at any of us. She was at once our best of friends and yet aloof. And of us all but one man touched that secret spot which lies in every woman's heart—and he went and married the McTodd girl. Nice enough, probably, and all that; but not in Harry Owen's class nor in Kitty Melrose's set. And Harry Owen threw away the *Shearwater* for Kitty's sake."

"But he hadn't met her in years," I persisted.

"Of course not!" Gorham retorted. "He was in love with her. He didn't even dare think of her. He had tied himself up tight and fast to Sheila. You remember his marriage?"

"I was on the China coast at the time," I growled. "I heard some queer things —which I didn't believe."

"Right!" was his answer. "But we're going to get this thing straight. The world has forgotten the wreck of the *Shearwater* and the mystery of it. But you and I were Harry's friends. We were Kitty's friends. And for the sake of the two of them I'm going to tell you the truth to-night. Then we are never going to whisper so much as a word all the rest of our lives. Some people would misunderstand."

He lighted his pipe deliberately and stared into the grate a moment. Gorham is noted in many ports for his mumness, his almost savage insistence on plain facts, his steady judgment. And here he was talking of a mystery. I felt the note of unsureness in his voice.

"In a case like this," he began, "I want to go back a little and fix the facts we both know, as a sort of starting point. In the first place, Harry Owen was what we call a gentleman, well bred, pretty well educated, sent to sea as a stripling to make a man out of him, as the phrase runs. But one always saw him sooner or later in the old crowd. The nice crowd you and I knew when we were younger. He got his papers easily enough and gossip ran that he was going to stop ashore and be something in the broking line. He spoke to me about it one trip I made on the old *City of Peking*. He thought it would be pretty splendid to be a broker. He was tired of the sea—it was no place for an ambitious man—a dog's life.

"Well, he came home here to San Francisco and played about for a couple of months. Then old Ben Harris offered him a good place in his business. I thought it was settled. Harry was oddly serious-minded about it. Then he suddenly vanished—went off to sea as chief officer of a freighter. You understand me? He fell in love with Kitty Melrose and she refused him. Instead of staying and sticking it out, Harry threw up Ben Harris' offer and went off. That's the time some of us remarked that Owen wasn't the man we thought him. We didn't know he was in love with Kitty Melrose."

"And he came back and married Sheila McTodd. That was the end of him socially," I remarked. "And you ask me to believe the unbelievable—that a man in love with Kitty would marry anybody else. You remember her? I recall one evening I saw her standing in the doorway of her father's house. I came to the foot of the steps and looked up. And with a perfectly simple and unpremeditated motion she stretched out both her arms, barring the doorway, her firm hands resting on the lintels. I tell you that that unconscious attitude made me feel for an instant a chill, as if the

guardian of paradise were barring it to me."

Gorham nodded.

"Exactly. We can both understand Harry Owen's frame of mind. That he was an ass is not to the point. Life wasn't worth living without Kitty—so he went to sea."

"And married," I murmured.

"Instead of getting properly drunk!" was the brutal response.

I was scandalized, but my companion would have none of my pleas for decency.

"The young fellow was half crazed," he repeated, "so he went and married Sheila McTodd. He went to sea the day after the wedding. Some time later I met him in Panama, and he was barely civil. That same night I saw him sitting at a greasy café table staring into nothing, an empty glass in his fist. The next day a skipper more than half insinuated that Harry Owen was going to the devil. So he did, for a year. Then something bred in his bone drew him back from the edge and began to remold him. But, as a matter of fact, no career was open to him, except to con freighters back and forth on the Pacific. He had had his chance and lost it."

"When he lost Kitty Melrose."

"When he married the McTodd girl," Gorham corrected me softly. Then he went on: "His history was that of hundreds of other seafaring men from that time on; dogged, hard work, scanty savings and intervals when he had to tramp the streets in search of a berth. But he managed pretty well. He saved money. He treated Sheila in an exemplary manner. But he avoided all contact with the old crowd; he was almost ferocious, at times, when one caught him on the street and spoke of former times. Yet all the while he was working steadily upward. Then he happened on that salvage job of the *Mary Foster*, and dumped fifteen thousand dollars into Sheila's bank account. I met him in Liverpool six months later. He was embarrassed, as if he had no business away from the Pacific. It appeared he had a very good command. But he was going back to San Francisco, just the same——"

"Gave up his second chance in a big line," I interrupted.

Gorham nodded.

"He couldn't stand it, you see. Kitty was in California. He suffered the agonies of the damned that night in a little hotel near the landing stage—for Harry Owen wanted to talk, to sit there in that infinitely dingy room in that ill-smelling hostel in Liverpool and tell me the truth, the enormous and insurmountable fact of his existence, that he loved Kitty Melrose; and he dared not. But it showed on his face, white and haggard under the tan; in his hard-bitten lips and tense hands. He tossed up his command and took a miserable old tramp back to the Golden Gate. From that time on, he stayed in the coastwise trade.

"Imagine to yourself," Gorham went on, "the manner of life the man led; instead of getting drunk, he got himself married, and so forever debarred from seeing the one woman the world held for him. He was constantly coming into San Francisco and snatching at the papers to see whether Kitty was engaged, or married; he was constantly leaving the city, knowing that he could never be anything in her splendid life."

"Ah," I said, " he talked at last, did he?"

Gorham ignored my thrust.

"There was always Sheila, too. And when I speak of her, of Harry Owen's wife, I am on firmer ground. She made a confidant of me; she used to visit my office on some excuse or other and conclude by saying abruptly and bitterly, 'I suppose you won't tell——'

"That was her complaint about life; none of us who had been part of Harry's old, youthful days could carry over,

so to speak. She was forced to recognize that, when he married her, he had closed a door which she could not pry open."

Gorham tapped the hot ashes out of his pipe thoughtfully.

"I don't profess to understand women, but Sheila was angered by the indisputable fact of Harry Owen's faithfulness to his marriage vows. She knew, as women do know those things, that he was living up to some one else's standard. And try as she might, she could never ascertain even so much as the name of any woman with whom her husband had been in love. She knew he did not love her, nor ever had. You see? He lived irreproachably—and not for her. So, after she had cunningly questioned me about Harry's youth, she would say in her thin, plaintive voice: 'I suppose you won't tell——' I used to look at her in amazement. She was so deplorably"—he sought for the word hesitatingly, bashfully—"immodest about it. I shudder when I think how some women lay bare and open to a passer-by the secrets, the petty obscurities, of their lives.

"At last, Owen got the *Shearwater*."

"You got it for him," I remarked.

"I helped," Gorham confessed. "I couldn't bear to see our old chum handling steam schooners and colliers in and out of the harbor where we had had our joyous and happy youth, while the rest of us went ahead and kept up the old associations and friendships and got a taste of happiness. So I put in a word for him with the owners and he took over the old packet. She carried passengers, as you know, and he sat each evening at the head of his table in the saloon and chatted with people who admired his trim figure and address. Yet you must understand that all this time he never gave me a hint of the truth. I never knew or suspected that Kitty Melrose had refused to marry him, never dreamed that he loved her. Sheila herself had put the puzzle in concrete form for me."

"You mean she told you Harry was in love with another woman?" I demanded.

"Of course not—not in so many words," he returned. "But she had made it clear enough that she thought about it constantly. Naturally enough, I felt there might be grounds—in the event it proved she was right. But here we come to the miracle of the whole affair."

Gorham stirred uneasily, lighted another pipe, and stared at me intently.

"You are to keep in mind that, from now on, I am telling you precisely what passed under my own eyes. I am not sitting in judgment. I am expressing no opinion and drawing no inferences. As I told you, I left the *Shearwater* in the last boat."

"Go on," I said. "I know nothing about it—except that Owen went mad. *That* is certain."

The man opposite me cast his eyes down.

"It was so reported," he acknowledged. "I beg of you to do as I am doing—express no opinion." He lifted his eyes to mine. "I am not a sentimentalist. But when a fact is cast up at my feet like a bottle on the beach, I accept it. Listen:

"The *Shearwater* was to sail from San Francisco for San Pedro on a Friday afternoon in January. In the morning I found I had to go South and, because the steamer would land me in time for business on Monday morning, I telephoned down for passage. A few minutes before sailing time I arrived at the pier and found Sheila there, too; she was complaining bitterly about something. I pulled up and would have gone away, but she made a point of my staying, wiped her eyes, and said in a constrained way, 'I'm going South this trip with Harry.'

"He seemed struck dumb; she went on to say she had arranged it with the

port captain, and then began to fuss about the cabin. She took something from Owen's desk and put it in a rack. It was perfectly apparent that she had never been in the cabin before. She said as much.

"Of course, Harry had to go on the bridge immediately. We sailed on the dot. When we had passed Angel Island he asked me to join him.

"'It will be a dirty trip,' he said to me composedly. 'The barometer is jumping and the *Shearwater* is heavily laden. I wish——'

"He did not finish the sentence; but I understood that he resented Sheila's presence on his ship, in his cabin. We passed on to other topics and so carried on our conversation till we were well abreast of Pigeon Point. It was already blowing very heavily, in squalls, and the sea was making fast. Just at dark Harry suddenly interrupted his talk to say, 'Will you please find Sheila and see that she has her dinner? I must stay on the bridge all night.'

"So I went below and found Mrs. Owen in the cabin, seated in a big chair. She was seasick, she told me quietly, when I had given her her husband's message. I went down and dined by myself. After dinner I rejoined Harry on the bridge. It was a very nasty night indeed, and the old *Shearwater* was making heavy weather of it. I stayed an hour, and during that time the *Western Pacific*, also southbound, overhauled us and was swallowed up in the darkness. She would reach San Pedro twelve hours ahead of us.

"At last I turned in, only to be aroused a few hours later by a quartermaster with a summons to the bridge. Harry Owen was there, sheathed in oilskins, his sou'wester pulled down over his eyes, his whole form streaming with brine.

"'Look!' he bawled in my ear, and I looked.

"Far away and to leeward rockets were going up, throwing a dim refulgence against the overcast sky.

"'It's the *Western Pacific*,' he told me quietly. 'She tried to cut corners and, I suppose, broke her propeller shafts.'"

Gorham glanced at me.

"As a matter of fact that was what had happened. But Owen seemed rather at a loss.

"'I've got to go in and stand by,' he said. 'That goes without saying. But she's within six miles of the rocks and the *Shearwater* can't tow her out against this gale, and the notion of transferring passengers is hopeless.'

"'What kind of line have you—the best?' I demanded.

"The chief mate answered that question. The *Shearwater* had a new, nice, sweet, ten-inch manila. It might do.

"'We'll run in and have a look-see, anyway,' said Harry in something of his old manner.

"So we ran in and a ticklish job it was. But presently we were within a quarter of a mile of the disabled steamship and the wireless got busy. The *Western Pacific* wanted to be towed out of danger—a matter of forty miles. Transferring anybody was out of the question, for the sea was terrific. No boat could live in it. Both captains were pretty anxious. Finally Owen ran the *Shearwater* right up under the lee of the *Western Pacific* and threw his searchlight on her. She was all right, sea anchor out and riding fairly easily. But when Harry Owen laid down his binoculars he was a different man. I know now what he saw. He made no further demur about attempting a tow and we spent an hour passing our new line, fixing chafing gear and so on.

"It was none of my business, you understand.

"We picked up our tow and started out. Within fifteen minutes I comprehended, though not a word was said, that we had tried an impossibility. The

Shearwater was too old; she wasn't up to towing a six-thousand tonner against sea and gale. Her wooden topsides were rotten. We could barely steer her. Then word came to the bridge that the hawser was pulling the after deck to bits. Harry Owen listened and then stared out over the sea, running with a brisk, ugly weight before the wind. He went aft and I joined him. The *Shearwater* was so built that the only place to take the line to was a small windlass directly in front of the steering gear, consequently the great straining hawser was slowly, but surely, tearing out the entire structure that held the leaping rudderhead and the quadrants.

" 'You've got to let her go, sir,' said the mate, showing an anxious face. I shall never forget the queer pallor of his countenance under the dim light of the lantern on the deckhouse wall.

"Owen looked at him fixedly a moment. Then he said, just as I am speaking now, 'Take the hawser around the after deckhouse, mister.'

"The mate gaped at him. But Owen's eyes never wavered. The order was obeyed, though it took an hour, during which sea after sea came aboard the old *Shearwater* and the *Western Pacific* began frantic speech by wireless. However, the job was done.

"From now on the *Shearwater* was, you understand, almost helpless. It was cruel work and, at last, Harry himself took the wheel. Ten-inch lines, no matter how good they are, can't stand up under such a strain as was inevitably put on ours. But Owen deliberately sacrificed his own vessel to save the *Western Pacific*."

"I heard he went mad," I murmured.

Gorham lighted another pipe.

"Get this into your head: the big liner was on a lee shore, no help in sight; she would have gone on the rock in an hour had it not been for the *Shearwater*. But twenty miles south she would have been safe. Tugs were coming to her assistance. It was that twenty miles Owen was trying to make."

"He was mad to try it," I said. "No seaman with freight and passengers is justified in wrecking his own ship that way. And you tell me——"

"The chief officer and the engineer came to me about it," Gorham went on. "That was their idea—that Harry Owen was mad. The *Shearwater* was being picked apart by the seas, as a boy pulls a toy to bits. In fact, when they finally appealed to me—after a deadly scene on the bridge—it looked very much as though we would be lucky to get to port ourselves without assistance. I recall that as we talked, down in the engineer's cabin in full sight of the trampling engines, our voices were mournfully muffled. I was Harry Owen's oldest friend, they told me, while the combers boomed and crashed overhead. It was my business to bring him to his senses."

"Did they really think he was mad?" I demanded.

Gorham puffed at his pipe slowly. Then he rose and went to his portmanteau and fumbled around a little and came back with a bit of soiled, flimsy paper.

"They had this," he explained. "The wireless man had brought it to the chief and it put them all in a blue funk." He spread the paper out on his great knee and read it thoughtfully. "Harry sent it as a message while we were making a fresh hitch for the hawser."

Gorham handed it to me with a gesture, as if to say: "You see what we were confronted with."

I read that little sheet, written in Harry Owen's bold script. It was brief. Then I laid it on the table.

"And what did Sheila have to say?" I asked.

"She knew nothing about that message," he responded. "Nor did she know much about what was going on. I went in to see her several times. She

sat in a big chair fastened to the deck in Harry's cabin and stared at me out of her cold, shallow eyes."

"Did nobody else go to her?" I inquired. "I'd have thought the chief officer——"

"The chief officer had had enough in the wheelhouse," Gorham replied. "He came out like a man in a daze; but he did his duty like a man. No idle hands on the *Shearwater* that night!"

"But what did they make out of that message?" I insisted. "You tell me they went to you as a final resort, to ask you to bring Harry Owen to his proper senses. What did they make out of that wireless he sent?"

Gorham peered at me.

"What would *you* make out of it?"

I thought this over. Now that the story was plain in my mind, I could easily interpret that short, strange message. But what would I have made of it, seated on a lounge in sight of swiftly moving engines, with the boom of a tempest roaring overhead and only this faintest of glimmers to light up the darkness in the soul of a man who was ruthlessly carrying me to destruction? I shook my head.

Gorham went on composedly:

"At dawn we still had six miles to drag the *Western Pacific*. The line still held, because of Owen's extraordinary seamanship. That was his hold on his crew. I am convinced that no other man afloat could have kept his men at work as Harry did. And what work!

"The gale had piled up a sea that ran irresistibly from horizon to horizon, which lifted the *Shearwater* up to dizzy heights, flung her savagely to one side, dropped her into vast hollows that resounded like caverns. And as the vessel disintegrated under our feet, we patched her up. I tell you we labored like men possessed to keep that wretched old packet alive, to keep her going—to keep the steady pull on the hawser that meant safety for those hundreds on the liner. Yet no help came. The carpenter reported three feet of water in the hold, seams opening up in the wooden topsides, beams buckling below under the terrific strain.

"The gale died slowly. At noon it was a breeze; then it shifted to a brisk offshore wind and the *Western Pacific*, as jaunty as ever, signaled she was all right. The wireless reported that within a couple of hours all kinds of assistance would arrive. And before the final cheering message had come our engines suddenly stopped. The *Shearwater* was sinking, and sinking fast. The pumps were choked; every sea that broached over us poured its tons down into the holds through the shattered decks.

"Harry Owens turned the wheel over to a hand and came out, to see his crew crowding the decks. He gave a brusque order to cast off the hawser and listened quietly to the chief officer and the engineer.

"'A bad run of sea yet,' was all he said, and went into his own cabin. I followed him, leaving the officers to get the boats ready for launching. Sheila was still crouched in that great chair, her fingers set into its leather arms. Harry looked at her and remarked very simply, 'The ship is sinking. We shall have to take to the boats. There is time yet. You'll find yourself quite comfy on the *Western Pacific*.'

"She rose with a single movement. 'This ship is going down?' she cried. Then flared up wildly. 'The only decent ship you ever had, and you let her sink!'

"Harry met her eyes calmly. 'Poor Sheila!' he said in a tuneless voice. Then he lighted a cigar and left for the deck, where the crew were sweating about the boats and life rafts. He went to a little group of passengers and told them briefly that he was sending them off to the liner, now riding easily and rather pompously a mile away to the

drag of the hawser we had let go. Then he drew me aside.

"'I shall send you in charge of one of the boats,' he told me. 'You will take Sheila with you.' He twisted his lips into a wry smile. 'Poor Sheila!' he croaked.

"I was dumfounded. I scrutinized the man carefully. He was as sober and as collected as we are now. His eyes were steady. A blob of sea broke over the shattered bulwarks and flooded to our knees. He did not notice it.

"'You saved the *Western Pacific*,' I said, 'and you have ruined yourself. Man, man!'

"I was terribly angry with him. Yet he stood in the midst of that tragedy like one who had succeeded, not failed. He dominated us all, a kind of heroic and pitiable figure.

"So we got into the boats—the sea was going down rapidly, and the *Western Pacific* sent over four boats to help out. Into the last boat we put Sheila, dry eyed, cold, almost, one might say, frozen in her expression. Harry handed her over the broken rail with a kind of gentle compassion. He did not say anything to her. It happened that it was one of the liner's boats and the mate in charge stared up at Owen expectantly. The *Shearwater* was almost awash. Still Harry made no movement to get into the boat. Instead, he thrust me in and I found myself seated with Sheila.

"'Hurry up, sir!' cried the mate in our boat.

"But Harry shook his head with a firm and determined movement.

"'Shove off!' he ordered, and the men obeyed like children. But their officer bawled out, again and again, vainly. Harry Owen stared at us all, rising and falling on the spumy seas, and then turned away and went into his own cabin. As he closed the door the *Shearwater* dipped her battered bows deeply. A surge overran her. She lurched to starboard, righted herself and slowly went down. She seemed to stop when the water was halfway up the deckhouse and floated a moment, half submerged. I think we all stared at Harry Owen's door.

"It did not open.

"As I told you, Sheila did not utter a cry; but her fingers were set in my flesh so I had the impression of some one screaming. A moment later the *Shearwater* vanished.

"In that instant I was enormously puzzled. I had seen a riddle set and staged before my eyes and I had no answer to it. I do not remember the men pulling the lifeboat over to the *Western Pacific*—I recall nothing but the darkness of that tremendous and tragic problem and the incessant pressure of Sheila's fingers into my arm. But when we reached the liner's deck, I supporting Sheila, I saw a woman standing in a little recess of the deckhouse. It was Kitty Melrose. She was as lovely and witching as ever, her eyes shining, her lips parted gently.

"How do women know? I cannot tell. But Sheila caught sight of her and thrust through the crowd to her and peered into her beautiful and shining eyes with a kind of terror. Kitty's expression never changed; she stood there with pearls of spray in her hair and a look of childlike, glorious amazement on her face, which was turned toward the dreary spot where a few bits of wreckage showed above the grave of the *Shearwater*. And do you know what Sheila said?"

Gorham laid his pipe aside and lowered his eyes.

"She said, quite simply, 'Nobody would ever tell me.'"

He stopped and picked up his pipe again.

"At that moment the skipper of the *Western Pacific* came bustling along.

"'Where is Captain Owen?' he bawled.

"The chief officer of the *Shearwater* answered that question: 'With his ship,' he said in an ugly, injured tone.

"I assure you that that captain, faultlessly dressed, quite magnificent and self-confident, now that his own vessel was safe, hadn't a word to say. The *Shearwater's* engineer turned on him with a snarling, 'Captain Owen ran his own ship under to save yours.'

"But, while that was the bald truth, I felt no interest in the affair on that side. I was looking at Kitty Melrose. Sheila's queer, plaintive, 'Nobody would ever tell me,' sounded in my ears. In my pocket was that message that Harry had wirelessed across the night before. What would Kitty say? Nothing, of course. She stood remote and fine and composed in a little space surrounded by anxious and curious and respectful men and women. Yet I saw in her gaze, still fixed on the spot amid the tumbling seas where Harry Owen had gone to his death, something"—Gorham fumbled around a bit, scratched a match, blew it out, glanced at me with a gloomy eye, finished his sentence in a voice suddenly husky—"something Harry must have dreamed of seeing."

"They said he was crazy," I remarked lifelessly.

"Women drive men mad," Gorham returned with amazing earnestness. "Harry's madness was—it was something you and I would give our souls for."

"I looked down at the flimsy bit of paper on the table, and sighed. It was Owen's final message. It read:

Miss Katherine Melrose, SS *W. Pacific.*
You cannot say no this time.
HARRY OWEN, Master *Shearwater.*

"Yes," said Gorham slowly, "I saw her hand rest lightly on her bosom and I knew that Harry's message lay there."

"But she never answered it!" I cried.

My companion stared at me.

"Oh, yes, she answered it. As such women do. That night she came to my room and said abruptly, 'They tell me he—Harry—Harry Owen went into his cabin and closed the door.'

" 'That is true,' I told her.

" 'And he did not open the door again?' she insisted.

" 'No,' I said.

"She lifted her bright and luminous eyes to mine and tried to smile, gallantly.

" 'He wouldn't,' she said quietly. 'It was like Harry to close a door—and never open it again.'

"Then she slipped out of my room without a sound."

DEAD LEAVES

THE leaves are drifting, it is dying weather,
Sighing, they seek a grave beneath the mold,
The year is slipping from its feeble tether,
The wind is cold.

Leaves in the garden of my heart are drifting,
Loosened leaves of hope and young desire,
Sighing a summer gone and downward sifting
To mix with mire.

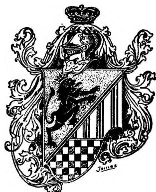
Love put them forth. Now it is dying weather.
Sighing, they seek a grave beneath the mold.
Love—a dead bough—is but a feeble tether.
The wind is cold.

DANIEL MCLEAN.

The Kingmakers

WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Selden, correspondent for the London *Times*, and, notoriously indifferent to women, received an anonymous note summoning him to a rendezvous in the lounge of his hotel at Monte Carlo, and he yielded to a sudden desire to meet the writer, who proved to be an unusually attractive woman, the Countess Rémond. Selden learned, to his astonishment, that he had been the means of ridding the countess of a husband she hated. Count Rémond had been a spy during the war and Selden had stumbled upon the knowledge, reported to headquarters, and the count had met the fate of spies. Their conversation was interrupted by the sudden appearance of Baron Lappo—a friend of the countess and counselor of the banished King of Goritza—and Prince Danilo, the king's grandson. The throne of the Ghitas had been taken by Jeneski, a radical, who was making a republic of the little kingdom. The baron wanted to replace the old king on his throne and was planning to get the necessary money for the undertaking by arranging a marriage between Danilo and Mademoiselle Davis, the daughter of an American copper king whose wealth had been produced by the labor of the very men who were now ruling Goritza. But the prince was already married—morganatically—and the girl hesitated to reinstate the monarchy. As she had been influenced by Selden's glowing articles about the new republic, Baron Lappo was anxious to bring Selden to his own point of view, hoping through this to sway the girl. Later that same evening, Selden met the prince and Mademoiselle Davis' brother at the Sporting Club, where Lappo joined them, seeming annoyed at finding the prince with Davis. He went away with Danilo, leaving Davis and Selden together. While they were talking, two women spoke to Davis, and when they had gone Selden learned that the elder was Madame Ghita; the younger, her niece. He suddenly remembered that Ghita was the family name of the prince. Before he could question Davis further Lappo and the prince returned, and the baron invited Selden to a dinner on the following evening. Next morning Selden met the countess and learned that, after her husband's death, she had come to Goritza with Jeneski—as his adopted daughter, she said—but, for some reason Selden could not fathom, she now hated him. They met again that night at the dinner to which Lappo had invited him and during which the king announced the betrothal of Prince Danilo and Myra Davis, whose consent, Selden feared, was due to his own change of viewpoint. The following day his sense of responsibility made him determine to see Miss Davis and tell her of—Madame Ghita. But the countess assured him that she herself was to have tea with the Davises for that very purpose, and then, observing Selden's evident interest in Madame Ghita, she invited him to join Madame Ghita and herself at luncheon. When she left him Selden saw her greet a newspaper man whom he knew—and did not like; Halsey, of the *Journal*. He wondered what could be the connection between them.



The Kingmakers

By Burton E. Stevenson

Author of "Little Comrade," "A King in Babylon," etc.

CHAPTER XIII.

SELDEN tried to remember what he knew of Halsey, but it was not very much. He had met him casually in Paris a number of times, and had dinner with him once at the Cercle Interallié, when they happened to be working on the same story, but that was all.

He had never liked Halsey's style. He was always seeking to play up the scandalous, never so happy as when he was able to uncover a dark corner in the life of some public man, ever eager to impute unworthy motives to the backers of any cause. Certainly, he was not held in very high esteem by his associates, and Selden's own idea was that he had lived so long in a cynical circle in Paris that he had caught its tone.

Once he got hold of this affair of the prince and Myra Davis, Selden very well knew what he would make of it—more especially if he discovered the existence of Madame Ghita. But of that he was probably already aware, since the marriage had no doubt been played up by him at the time it occurred.

He wondered if the countess, for some reason of her own, was keeping Halsey informed. But she could scarcely do that, since Halsey's jeers would imperil the whole plan upon which her heart was so evidently set. Or was she keeping him in order? Or was he just her lover? But Selden could not imagine why such a woman as the countess——

And then all thought of Halsey and the countess vanished, for he saw approaching the woman whom, from the first moment he reached the terrace, he had hoped to see; the woman about whom his thoughts were centering more and more; who, in the last half hour, had taken on for him a new interest and a new meaning.

She saw him at the same instant, and turned and spoke a word to the man walking beside her, and Selden, looking at him, perceived it was young Davis, completely immersed in Miss Fayard, who walked on his other side, and who was certainly not unreceptive. In another moment, Davis was bringing the ladies toward him.

"Selden," he said, "I want you to meet Madame Ghita. You remember——"

"Very well!" said Selden. "I am happy indeed to meet madame."

"I also," she said, and gave him her hand with a charming smile. "But let us speak French. To myself I said, who can it be, that man so distinguished whom I have not seen here before? And later I inquired of Monsieur Davis. What he told me made me more than ever curious, so when I saw you just now, I commanded him to present you."

"That was very nice of you," said Selden, making a mental note of that word "later." So the prince and Davis had kept the appointment, as he had supposed they would.

Her eyes were resting in his with the same frank and unembarrassed questioning he had noticed the first time he saw her, as though she were seeking to discover what was passing in his mind, what he was at bottom. They were a very dark brown, those eyes, almost black; and again he noted the ivory softness of her skin, innocent of make-up, and singularly glowing in spite of its lack of color.

"This is my niece, Mademoiselle Fayard," she added, and Selden bowed to the young girl. "You two may walk on and continue your French lesson, while I talk to Monsieur Selden."

"She is teaching me the first conjugation," Davis explained, looking ridiculously happy. "We have started with *aimer*."

"Run along!" commanded madame, laughing at the blush which overspread the girl's cheek. "With a Frenchman I could not do that," she added, looking after them. "But with an American, yes. Why is it?"

"I don't know," said Selden.

"But you agree with me it is quite safe?"

"Oh, yes," said Selden, "for the girl, that is!"

She laughed outright.

"You are delicious!" she cried. Then she grew suddenly serious. "Do not be mistaken about her—she is a very good girl, believe me. I have taken good care of her."

"I can see that," said Selden, and they walked on for a moment in silence.

"Are you married?" she asked suddenly. "Forgive me," she added, as he started a little, "but it is something that a woman always wishes to know about a man. I do not think you are, but I should like to be sure."

"Well, I'm not," said Selden. "A fellow who knocks around the world as I do has no business to be married."

"You travel a great deal?"

"I am always looking for trouble. Whenever there is a row anywhere, I pack up my grip and start."

"Was it for trouble you came to Monte Carlo?"

"Oh, no," said Selden. "I came here to get warm, after two months in the Balkans—also to rest a little. I have had the good fortune to meet some very interesting people—one superlatively so!" He made her a little bow.

"Thank you. But you have not rested?"

"I usually find some work to do."

"And then, of course, there are the tables."

"Yes."

"And the women."

"Yes, they are wonderful, aren't they?" he countered.

"Not all of them. But the one you were with yesterday seemed to me rather unusual. Who was she?"

"Ah, that," said Selden calmly, "was the Countess Rémond."

He felt that he had scored, although Madame Ghita certainly did not start. But there was a new expression in her eyes.

"She is an old friend of yours?" she asked.

"No, I met her only two or three days ago."

"I have never met her," said madame, "but I am going to have lunch with her to-day."

"Are you?" said Selden. "I am very glad. So am I."

This time she did start.

"You are sure it is for to-day that you are asked?" she questioned.

"Yes. She told me that she had invited you, but that you had not as yet accepted."

"So you are in the plot, too," she said slowly, and the eyes with which she scanned his face were quite black. "That is a thing I had not suspected."

"No," said Selden quickly, "I am not in any plot. But if I were, I should be on your side, madame. I pray you to believe it."

She looked at him a moment longer, as though striving to read his very inmost thought. Then she glanced around.

"Let us sit down," she said, and led the way to a bench. "Now, you must tell me what you know—everything. In the first place, you know, do you not, that Prince Danilo is my husband?"

"Yes, I know that."

"As legally my husband as the woman you will marry will be your wife."

"Yes."

"Except that I have no claim upon his estates or his title, and our children, if we had any, could not succeed to them."

"Yes."

"And there was, of course, the understanding that some day, if he wished, he would be free to make a marriage of state in order to carry on the title."

"Yes."

"Well, the prince does not wish to marry again. If he consents, it is only because the king commands it, and he conceives it to be his duty to his country."

"I can well believe it, madame," said Selden.

"*Eh bien,* I went to Nice last night to stop it; after all, I have some pride, some rights. I will not be disregarded and cast aside like that!"

"I understand," said Selden. "You are right. Do you want my help?"

She looked at him suddenly, with curious intentness.

"You are in earnest?"

"Absolutely."

She smiled at him, almost tenderly.

"I shall not forget that," she said. "Perhaps some day I may even call upon you. But I did not interfere last night because Danilo gave me his word that he would leave the matter in my hands to decide one way or the other, before the settlement is signed."

"That was fine of him!"

"Oh, Danilo is a gentleman," said madame, "and he will keep his word. Besides——"

She stopped and shrugged her shoulders, but to Selden the shrug was as eloquent as words. She meant, of course, that Danilo was in love with her. And she—was she in love with him? That was the question Selden would have liked to ask, but he did not dare.

"You have not yet made up your mind?" he asked instead.

"No," she answered slowly, looking at him with a queer little smile; "you see, there are so many things to consider. Of course, if Danilo refuses, the king will cast him off—for a time, at least—and there will be no more money. Danilo could never earn any, and he has borrowed all that is possible. So his affection for me would grow less and less day by day—for he is like a cat; he must be comfortable; and at last the day would come when he could stand it no longer, and would tell me good-by."

"You are saying nothing of yourself," Selden pointed out.

"Oh, I could endure it no more than he!" laughed his companion. "Less, perhaps! So it may be the part of wisdom, for his sake and for my sake, to make the best bargain I can, now, while there is a chance. Does that seem very cynical?"

"No—just sensible."

"But one is not supposed to be sensible in affairs of the heart—is it not so? Well, I may not be sensible in this affair—I cannot tell. But I am ready to listen to what they have to say. The

Countess Rémond is an emissary from the king, is she not?"

"Yes."

"And she is inviting me to lunch in order to discuss this affair?"

"Yes."

"I thought so." Again she looked at him, with her strange little smile. "What I do not understand is that you, also, should be there."

"Ah, madame," said Selden quickly, "I pointed out to her that you would not like it. I shall not come."

"But I did not say I did not like it. On the contrary, I wish you to come. Only, if you are an ally of the countess, I must be prepared for you."

"I am not an ally of the countess," Selden protested; "not in any sense. I should like to be your ally, if you will have me."

She glanced at him quickly, then turned her head away for a moment, as though looking for her niece and Davis. Then she looked back at him, and her face was very tender.

"Of course, I will have you!" she said, her voice a little thick.

Selden was deeply moved; he looked away, out over the sea, and for a moment there was silence between them—but it was a silence which said many things.

"Have you met her—this Miss Davis," she asked at last.

"Yes."

"Does she resemble her brother?"

"No," said Selden, "not in the least. She is much stronger and finer."

"You admire her, then?"

"Yes—in a way."

"Is she fond of Danilo?"

"I don't think so—not especially."

"Then it is just ambition—ambition to be a queen!"

"Her mother is ambitious, and of course urges her on. But I think what Miss Davis cares for most is the opportunity to do good with her money."

"No, no!" said Madame Ghita quickly. "A man might believe that, but not a woman! There is something besides that—there must be—something more personal, more passionate. I am sure of it. If I could only see her! Well, it may be possible—why not? I would invite her to open her heart to me, as I should open mine to her, and together we would decide. Yes, yes—that would make it easy!"

A donkey engine which had been unloading coal from a steamer beside the quay gave a shrill shriek with its whistle and abruptly stopped. There came a tinkle of bells from the ships in the harbor.

"Twelve o'clock!" cried Madame Ghita. "Can it be? I must be going! Where are those children? Come, we must look for them."

The children were discovered not far away, leaning over the balustrade, watching a low French destroyer which was steaming rapidly along the coast, and working assiduously at their languages—French for Davis, English for Cicette. They seemed to be progressing very satisfactorily among the tenses of *"aimer"*—though Cicette found it very difficult to get exactly the correct sound of the "o" in love, and Davis thought the way she said it much prettier than the right way—as, indeed, on her lips it was.

Madame Ghita broke in upon them without compunction.

"Come, Cicette," she said. "Bid adieu to the gentlemen—we must be going. It is very late."

Selden, looking at her more carefully than he had taken the trouble to do before, found her much less ordinary than she had seemed at first glance. Her face was yet a girl's, but it gave promise of character as well as beauty. Davis might well do worse!

"But, look here," Davis protested, "I won't see you again till evening, then! Why can't I take Cicette to lunch?"

"Impossible! I have her reputation

to consider," said madame firmly, and led her charge away.

The two men watched them as they went up the steps—the elder woman so straight, so graceful; the younger fluttering beside her like a butterfly, her feet scarce touching the ground. It was difficult to realize that the actual difference in their ages was probably not more than five or six years, and that the impression of maturity which Madame Ghita gave was due almost wholly to her finish, her ease, her perfect poise. As they passed from sight, Davis took off his hat, wiped his forehead and breathed a deep sigh.

"Is it as bad as that?" asked Selden, with a smile.

"Oh, I'm in love, all right," Davis answered, "and I'm going to marry her—I don't give a damn what anybody says! I've never met a girl who could hold a candle to her."

"Look here," said Selden, "if you can get your mind off that young woman for a minute or two, I'd like to talk to you about something else. What about this engagement between your sister and Danilo?"

"Well, what about it?" asked Davis, a little truculently.

"Does she know about Madame Ghita?"

"I don't know—probably not."

"Don't you think she ought to know?"

"What for? When the prince marries again, Madame Ghita becomes his widow, that's all."

"Perhaps so," assented Selden, scenting the baron's teaching. "Just the same, she ought to know there is a widow. It would be squarer."

"Oh, well, I can tell the mater," said Davis.

"I think she already knows."

"Well, then, it's none of my business," said Davis impatiently. "And don't you worry about Sis; she's perfectly able to take care of herself and always has been. If you think she would take any advice from her loving brother you're greatly mistaken—she looks down upon me as a kind of weak insect to be pitied, but not respected. Also, if she has made up her mind to marry Danilo, she'd marry him just the same if she knew he had ten widows! See here, though—I'll tell her if you want me to, provided you'll do something for me."

"What is it?" asked Selden.

"Help me to get mother's consent to marry Cicette. I'm of age, and I can marry anybody I want to—but Dad never had much confidence in me, and my money is all tied up so I can't touch it. Beastly, I call it. Of course, I'd have enough to live on, but if I married Cicette, I'd want to show her the time of her life. Will you?"

Selden looked appraisingly into the pleading face. Perhaps Davis wasn't such a bad sort, after all. The right kind of a wife might make a man of him. Even a big brother might do something. Selden had never had a kid brother, and the thought rather appealed to him.

"I won't promise," he said. "I want to look you both over a bit more first—I haven't spoken two words to Cicette and not many more to you."

Davis must have seen a certain sympathy in Selden's eyes, for he caught his hand and wrung it delightedly.

"All right!" he shouted. "I agree. The more you see of Cicette the more you will like her. I'm not afraid of that. But you've got to convince the mater she's good enough for me."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that!" Selden retorted. "The only question in my mind is whether you are good enough for her! Now, I've got to go."

He left Davis staring after him in delighted amazement.

CHAPTER XIV.

Selden went up to his room and got ready for lunch with a clearer conscience than he had had since he opened his eyes that morning. At last he knew where he was—he was definitely aligned—not on the king's side, or the prince's side, or Miss Davis' side, or the countess' side, but on Madame Ghita's side. And there, he was quite sure, he would remain until the end, whatever the end might be. Whatever help he could give her was hers to command. Not that she seemed to need any help! Just the same, there he was, and the consciousness of that fact might be some comfort to her.

And, as the first step, he decided to be on time, so that Madame Ghita might find him—her ally!—on the spot when she arrived. So, at one o'clock precisely, he was knocking at the door of the countess' suite.

It was opened by a heavy-set woman of middle age, Slav or Italian, discretion personified. Evidently the countess chose her maid not for looks, but for qualities more useful, and one glance at this woman confirmed him in the opinion that the countess was a born intriguer.

She took his hat and ushered him into the salon, where the countess joined him in a moment.

"I know you will be greatly disappointed," she said a little maliciously, "but it is not to be a tête-à-tête, after all. Madame Ghita is coming. You see, I was right."

"Yes—and I feel like the second at a duel," Selden commented.

"Oh, do not be alarmed," said the countess lightly. "There will be no bloodshed—a few feints at the most. Then she will surrender. What else can she do?"

"I am inclined to think she can upset the whole affair if she wants to—so don't be too confident. And I warn you that my sympathies are entirely on her side."

"I know it," said the countess, looking at him with a strange little smile. "That is one reason I wanted you here."

And before he had a chance to ask her what she meant by that, the maid ushered in Madame Ghita.

More than ever Selden was reminded of the field of honor by the way the two ladies shook hands, each measuring the other, and he breathed a sigh of relief, for it was instantly evident that Madame Ghita had nothing to fear from her antagonist. She was, as always, calm, smiling, perfectly at ease, while there was an unwonted flush of color in the cheeks of the countess which betrayed an inward excitement.

"It was too good of you to offer me lunch, madame," Madame Ghita was saying. "I have heard so much of you from the prince, my husband."

Certainly, Selden thought, the lady was losing no time, for the last words had been flung at the feet of the countess like a gage of battle. But the countess chose for the moment to disregard them.

"Yes," she said sweetly, "I had the pleasure of meeting Prince Danilo a few nights ago. Permit me to present to you a friend of mine, Monsieur Selden."

"Enchanted!" said madame. "It is always a pleasure to meet Americans." She gave Selden her hand, her eyes shining with amusement, with a quick little pressure of the fingers which recognized him as an ally with a secret between them.

The countess had given a signal to her maid, who drew apart the curtains before an alcove looking down upon the public gardens, and disclosed the waiting table.

"Come," she said, and led the way to it, placing Selden on her right and Madame Ghita on her left, facing each

other across the centerpiece of feathery mimosa.

"It is delightful here," said Madame Ghita, looking out across the gardens as she drew off her gloves and tucked them back out of the way. "My apartment is on the other side, facing the south, with a little too much sun. Here you have the sun only in the morning. Are you staying in this hotel also, Monsieur Selden?"

"Yes, madame," said Selden, "and my room also faces the south; but I do not complain, for I cannot soak up sun enough after some months in the Balkans."

"You have been in the Balkans? I have never been there. Strange, is it not, when one considers that my husband is prince of a Balkan country? But he himself has not been there for a long time—through no fault of his," she added with a smile.

"It appears he will be going back before long," remarked the countess.

She had nodded to the maid, who served the *hors d'œuvres*, taking the dishes from a table near the outer door, where the waiters left them—a discreet arrangement, to which she was apparently well accustomed.

"Yes, I have heard that Baron Lappo has another plot in hand," said Madame Ghita negligently, and glanced at the maid.

"Ah, you can trust Anita," said the countess quickly, noticing the glance. "For one thing, she is very deaf."

Madame Ghita laughed.

"Deafness is very convenient sometimes, is it not? And I can see she is discreet. An old family servant, perhaps?"

"She has been with me for a long time," said the countess. "She has but one fault—a weakness for gambling. In Paris she wastes her last sou on the races; here the tables take everything."

"It is a terrible vice," agreed Madame Ghita. "Have you been having good luck, Monsieur Selden?"

"Really, madame," said Selden, "I have never played seriously—I lack the gambler's instinct. When I am winning I never dare to push my good luck far enough, and when I am losing I stop just too soon. I always hear my number come as I leave the table! To my mind, the only way to play is to sit down certain of winning—resolved to win, or to lose one's last franc in the effort. But I have not the temperament—I am too cautious."

"Yes," said Madame Ghita, "it is so my husband plays—and he always loses his last franc."

Again it seemed to Selden that there was a trace of defiance in the way she uttered those words—*"mon mari"*—my husband. It was the third time she had used them since she entered the room.

"He does not always lose, madame," Selden corrected. "I saw him win the bank's last franc a few nights ago."

"But by this time the bank has them all back again. I sometimes think it is even worse for a gambler to win than to lose. He is encouraged to go on—to commit new follies. You should be thankful you have not the temperament, Monsieur Selden."

"And you, madame?" he asked.

"Ah, I, too, gamble sometimes, it is true, not because I have the temperament, but because I have great need to distract my thoughts. What would you, monsieur? Here am I, the wife of a prince, but not recognized because I have no money; in a position the most equivocal, knowing that schemes are constantly afoot to marry him to some other woman. Is it strange that I become a little mad sometimes and do foolish things? I tremble myself at the things I think of doing—plan out to the last little detail as I lie awake at night staring at the ceiling. For four years I have been true to him, I have been discreet, I have asked nothing—I have

worked for his interest whenever I could. And what is my reward? That fat Lappo comes to me and insults me!"

"Surely he did not insult you, madame!" protested the countess.

"Is it not an insult to offer a woman a price for her love?" demanded Madame Ghita. "And such a price!"

"If it is only a question of price——" began the countess.

"It is not!" broke in Madame Ghita. "After all, I have my pride! And I have, also, perhaps more power than they think."

"But you have always known, madame," pointed out the countess, "that some day the prince would marry."

"Yes," said madame, "but if I wish, I will take him away from his wife on his wedding night, as I did on the night of his betrothal!" She attacked her salad viciously. "Oh, I am not a fool!" she went on. "I know what is planned —Danilo confides in me. I know what occurred last night. I had made up my mind to prevent it, but——"

"But your better sense prevailed," said the countess. "You said to yourself, since a marriage must take place, it may as well be now as any time, more especially since now it will give the dynasty its throne again, while, in another six months, it will be too late."

"That doesn't matter to me!" sniffed Madame Ghita.

"And since it will also give you an annuity," went on the countess, undisturbed, "on which you can live in comfort—luxury, even."

"I warn you that luxury is expensive."

"One can live very well," said the countess, "even in these days, on a hundred and fifty thousand francs a year."

There was a moment's silence. Selden was deeply moved to see a tear roll slowly down Madame Ghita's cheek and splash into her plate. But there was one tear only; she was herself again in a moment.

"Come," she said, "I must understand where I am. Is it Lappo who sent you to me?"

"Yes. He asked me to see you, since he had failed himself."

"I am afraid I was not very polite to the good Lappo," admitted Madame Ghita, "though I am rather fond of him. But I was annoyed that day, and it seemed to me that he took things too much for granted—as though I had nothing to do but accept whatever he was pleased to allow me. He is in some ways a great man, and I think he even has a certain fondness for me, but——"

"He has told me as much," put in the countess.

"But besides this old king of his, this dynasty to which he is a slave, nothing else matters. I am certain he would not hesitate to murder his son, to kill his wife, if he had one, if they stood in its way. He is a fanatic on that subject. It would be a good thing for him if the dynasty perished. There is another thing I do not understand," she went on, more calmly. "Why is Monsieur Selden present at this discussion? Is he a witness?"

Selden, suddenly crimson, started to rise, but Madame Ghita imperatively waved him back into his seat.

"I am not objecting to your presence, monsieur," she said quickly. "Pray do not take offense. But I should like to understand it."

"Monsieur Selden is not here of his own accord," explained the countess. "He is here because I asked him to come. As a witness, perhaps; but a witness for you, madame, not for me."

"I do not understand," said Madame Ghita slowly, her eyes upon Selden's.

"Madame," said the countess, weighing each word and watching its effect, "Monsieur Selden is, as perhaps you do not know, a very great journalist. Unfortunately, he has always been an admirer of republics, but the baron has, I think, convinced him that in this case

the monarchy can do more for our country than is possible for the present republic. Monsieur Selden's support will mean a great deal to the monarchy, and the baron has labored hard to get it; but one scruple remained in Monsieur Selden's mind—the fear that you would be wronged too much—that you would not be treated fairly. So I asked him to be present to-day in order that he might see for himself what your feeling is. He has warned me more than once that he is here as your ally."

It was wonderful to see the change which came into Madame Ghita's eyes as this explanation proceeded—the tenderness, the happiness of the look she turned on Selden. And when it was ended, she held out her hand to him across the table.

"You will forgive me, monsieur," she said softly. "I am very proud to have such an ally!"

And whether he raised her hand to his lips, or whether it raised itself, he never knew—but as he kissed those long, delicate fingers, he felt them flutter a little against his mouth, like the wing of a bird.

"Come," said the countess, who had lost nothing of all this—who had watched it, indeed, with the satisfaction of a general who sees his plan of battle succeed, "tell me you accept. There is nothing else to do—your good sense tells you so. What would you gain by making a scene? You might prevent this marriage—though even that is by no means certain. But would that compensate you for ruining the prince, upsetting the dynasty, and condemning yourself to a life of poverty? There will never again be a chance like this. If this is lost, all is lost. You are still young——"

"Yes," said Madame Ghita with a little smile, "so there is no reason why I should lead a life of poverty, unless I choose it."

"That is true; but accept now, and you will have something very few women have—independence. You will be free to look for love!"

For an instant Madame Ghita's eyes rested pensively upon Selden.

"Independence—yes, that is very nice," she said. "But it is a pleasure to be dependent upon a man when one loves him!" Then she looked at the countess curiously. "I am astonished to find you on this side—so eloquent! I had always understood that you were Jeneski's friend."

Selden knew that the countess flushed, though his eyes were on the table. But her hand was in the range of his vision, and he saw that it was trembling.

"That is long since finished," she said, a little thickly. "The baron is a much older friend—and I am doing what I think best for my country."

"And for me also?" asked Madame Ghita, with a strange smile.

"Yes, for you also. Can you doubt it?"

Again there was a moment's silence. Then Madame Ghita looked across at Selden.

"Come, Monsieur Selden," she said, "since you are my friend and my ally, what do you advise?"

"Ah, madame," protested Selden, with a gesture of helplessness, "how can I advise? I do not know what is in your heart!"

"But if my heart is not concerned?"

"In that case," said Selden, a little coldly, "I should by all means advise you to accept!"

He was looking at her now—at the vivid, mobile mouth with its little mysterious smile; at the eyes, curiously intent, as though experience had taught her that she must look into people's minds as they talked in order to get their full meaning. And suddenly she burst into a peal of laughter.

"How serious you are!" she cried. "And how shocked if, by any chance, a

woman tells the truth! Come, it is settled! I accept! The prince shall have his little American with her millions, the king shall have his throne again, Lappo shall have his heart's desire, and I—I shall have a hundred and fifty thousand francs a year, and shall be free to look for love! So we shall all be happy! It is understood, of course, that the hundred and fifty thousand will be mine to do as I please with?"

"But certainly!" said the countess, looking at her curiously. "There are no restrictions."

"And you, madame; what do you get? A new title? To serve one's country, yes, that is very noble—men have died for their country—but for a woman it is not enough!"

"Ah," said the countess somberly, "that is my secret! Perhaps you will know, some day!"

Madame Ghita looked at her for a moment with that clear and penetrating gaze; then she pushed back her chair.

"Our business is arranged, then," she said, "and I must be going. I have a niece to look after. I promised her that I would not be long. Madame, I have to thank you for a most delightful luncheon."

"I, also——" began Selden, but the countess stopped him.

"If you will remain for a moment," she said.

Madame Ghita flashed an ironic glance into Selden's face. What she saw there seemed to amuse her.

"*Au revoir, alors,*" she said, and in a moment she was gone.

"So you see I was right," commented the countess, as the door closed behind her.

"Yes," agreed Selden, a wry smile upon his lips, "yes. She is, as you said, a sensible woman!"

"Every woman in her position has to be sensible," the countess pointed out. "She may treat herself to nerves occasionally, but she must never lose her head. And she is right—absolutely right!"

"Oh, of course she is right!" agreed Selden, a little bitterly. "But sometimes it is better to be wrong—gloriously wrong!"

"Don't misjudge her," said the countess quickly. "She may not be at all sensible in the way you think. It was not because of the money she accepted—I am sure of it. I doubt if she will even use it for herself. She is an unusual woman, and the man she really falls in love with will be very fortunate."

She was silent for a moment, looking at Selden's troubled face, as though hesitating whether or not to say something more.

"At least," she added, at last, "your compunctions in that direction are at an end?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"I go to Nice this afternoon, as you know, to see Miss Davis. Then my work will be finished."

"You are going away?"

"Yes, I shall not stay here. But I shall tell you to-night how my mission succeeded."

"To-night?"

"Have you forgotten," she asked with a smile, "that you invited me to dinner?"

"Pardon me!" he said, confused. So much had happened since that invitation was given! "Of course!"

"At Ciro's," she went on.

"Yes, at Ciro's," he assented, regretting the impulse of the previous afternoon.

There was an ironic light in her eyes as she looked at him.

"I can see you are not very keen for it," she said, "but I have a very special reason for wishing to dine with you at Ciro's to-night. So you will be good and take me?"

"Why, of course I'll take you," he said, and registered a mental vow to

give her the best dinner Ciro's could produce. "I'll be proud to take you!"

"You are very nice, you know," she said, her head a little on one side. "Sometimes I almost regret that you do not care for me—but no, it is better as it is! I am going to see that you are rewarded. Now, do not ask any questions!"

"Very well, then, I'll call for you at nine," said Selden, and took his leave.

In his room, he got into robe and slippers, filled his pipe and threw himself on the chaise longue. He must reason this thing out—he must find the key to what was in the minds of these two very subtle women.

Why had the countess looked at him so strangely? What was the reward she planned for him?

And what had Madame Ghita meant by "friend?" What was it she had said? "I thought you were Jeneski's friend."

Why had that long white hand trembled so?

CHAPTER XV.

The London *Times* does not reach Nice until five o'clock in the evening, but by the middle of the morning a crowd of newspaper men, diplomats and motley adventurers were besieging the gates of the Villa Gloria. As the baron had foreseen, Selden's telegram had caused a considerable flutter at many London breakfast tables.

A long telegram of mingled advice and admonition was sent to Jeneski from London and another to the British ambassador at Paris, informing him that the attitude of the British foreign office would be strictly neutral—which meant, of course, that if the king could get back on his throne, pay off his debts to Britain and open up some trade, the empire would have every reason to be gratified.

But the telegram did not reach Jeneski, nor did the ones from Paris, Brussels, and Belgrade, for by the time they had been relayed through to his capital, Jeneski had departed. Nobody knew he had departed, except three of his ministers whom he had called together in the early morning to read a telegram which had just arrived from Nice; the general impression was that he was suffering from a slight cold, but as a matter of fact he was in an aëroplane flying across the Adriatic.

As Selden had suspected, there was no lack of decision about Jeneski in a critical moment, but even his ministers wondered what he could hope to accomplish at Nice.

The stir in London was not only in the diplomatic dovecotes, for a number of people of no discoverable occupation either sent urgent telegrams in cipher or else suddenly discovered that they needed a rest on the Riviera, and booked places on the afternoon boat train. And, of course, the foreign editor of every newspaper wired his Nice correspondent—or his Paris correspondent, if he had none at Nice—an inquiry, more or less polite, as to how the devil he had come to miss this important piece of news.

During the day, this commotion spread to the Continent and, from Paris, Rome, Vienna, and Lucerne, hopeful adventurers turned their faces toward Nice, like vultures gathering for a feast, anxious to assist in the restoration of a dynasty so well fortified with American millions.

All of this was brought forcibly to Selden's notice about the middle of the afternoon when he was startled out of his thoughts by the ringing of his telephone.

"Yes—what is it?" he asked.

"'Allo! Is this Monsieur Selden?"

"Yes."

"'Allo! This is the manager."

"Yes, what is it?"

"'Allo! There are some people here to see you, Monsieur Selden."

"Who are they?"

"I do not know who they are, monsieur," said the manager, "but they say they are journalists and that it is necessary they see you at once. I hope there has been no scandal——"

"Reassure yourself!" Selden laughed. "Have them sent up to my room, if you please."

Three minutes later there was a bang on his door, which was flung open without further ceremony.

"Hello!" he said, as they rushed upon him. "What's the matter with you fellows, anyway? Why, hello, Scott—I'm mighty glad to see you. I didn't know you were down here." He shook hands with Paul Scott, of the *Daily News*, the comrade of many a campaign and one of the best-informed men on international affairs in Europe. "Now, what's eating you?"

There were perhaps a dozen men in the crowd, and he nodded to the others whom he knew.

"You know well enough what's eating us, you old pirate!" said Scott grimly. "Since when have you been the publicity agent for that old toreador over at Nice?"

"I haven't tackled that job yet," said Selden. "I'm still working for the *Times*."

"Then why should he send us all over here to see you?"

"Did he do that?"

"Yes, he did just that."

"Maybe he wanted to get rid of you," suggested Selden with a chuckle. "But sit down, Scott. Sit down, all of you, if you can find chairs. Now, let's have the story."

"My story," said Scott, taking off his hat and wiping his forehead, "is simply this: I came down here partly to get a rest, partly to interview Clemenceau when he gets back from India, and I expected to have a few days just to loaf around. But this noon I got a telegram from Lawson asking if I wake or if I sleep, and outlining that beat you put across. After I had cooled off a bit, I put on my hat and hunted up the villa where the king lives. There I found these boys kicking their heels outside the gates and discussing a polite little note which the king's secretary had just brought out to the effect that there was nothing to be added to your story of yesterday evening, and that he was busy and must beg to be excused, but would be happy to see us at six o'clock. He was busy all right—a blind man could see that!" Scott added impartially.

"Busy doing what?" Selden queried.

"Busy receiving all the diplomats in Nice—to say nothing of the shady characters from various down-and-out circles—all the birds of prey along the Riviera."

"He was letting them in?"

"A good many got past the gates. How much farther they got I don't know."

"Well, and then what?" asked Selden.

"Well—some of these fellows represent evening papers, and couldn't wait till six o'clock, and we sent in a round robin pointing this out. And what do you think old Pietro did? He sent out your address and referred us to you! Fierce, wasn't it? Well, we swore a while, and then we tumbled into some cars and rushed over here. Now, stand and deliver!"

"What do you want to know?"

"Everything."

"All right," said Selden, and filled his pipe. Scott also fished his out of his pocket.

"May I suggest that monsieur speak in French?" asked one of the French correspondents, who had followed this rapid interchange with the utmost difficulty.

"Is there anybody here who doesn't understand French?" Selden asked.

"No, I guess not," said Scott. "Fire ahead."

So Selden told the story very much as he had told it in his telegram, with perhaps an added detail or two and a little more color, and they all sat and listened, and the Frenchmen made notes of the unfamiliar American names and asked how they were spelled.

"I always thought you were a democrat," said Scott, when he had finished.

"I am."

"Yet I infer from your tone that you are in favor of letting this old reprobate bribe his way back to power."

"He won't have to do any bribing. When his people know he has some real money to spend on the country, they'll be only too anxious to have him back."

"That may be true—but it is bribery just the same, only wholesale instead of retail."

"It is national interest—self-preservation—exactly what every country is governed by."

"I seem to remember some articles of yours in which you were rather dippy about Jeneski and his new republic."

"Yes; but I didn't foresee this alternative. You know conditions over there, and how much good this money will do. Besides, there is a certain poetic justice in putting it back into the country of the people who earned it."

Scott grunted skeptically.

"Just how many millions are there?"

"I don't know. They ought to be able to find that out in New York."

"How old is the girl?"

"About twenty-three, I should say."

"Where does she live?"

"In Cimiez somewhere—I think the family has a villa."

"Twenty-two Avenue Victoria," piped up one of the Frenchmen. "It is almost impossible to get inside, and when one does, it is always the same thing, 'Please go away—not at 'ome!' "

At that moment Selden's telephone rang.

"Excuse me," he said, and picked up the receiver.

"This is Danilo talking," said the prince's voice, when assured that he had Selden on the wire. "The king has requested me to speak with you. All day there have been journalists asking —demanding—to see him. Naturally, he does not wish to offend them, and he has therefore promised to see them at six o'clock. He very much wishes you, also, to be present. He will send a car for you."

"No—I can get over," said Selden. "I shall be very glad to come."

"Thank you," said the prince. "Good-by."

"Good-by," said Selden, and glanced at his watch. It was a few minutes after four. "That is all I can tell you fellows now," he said. "It's all I know. Perhaps we will learn something more at six o'clock."

The men who served evening papers hurried away to get off their stories, hoping to catch the last edition. The others departed more leisurely. Scott remained until they had gone.

"Look here, old man," he said, when the door was shut, "what do you really think about this affair?"

"I'm willing to give the king a try," said Selden. "Perhaps the war has taught him something. If he doesn't make good, he can always be fired out again."

"It won't be so easy the next time," Scott pointed out. "Besides, it isn't the king—it's Danilo. And there is one detail you didn't mention."

"What is it?"

"That he has a morganatic wife. It's perfectly well known in Paris. These fellows are all going to play it up."

"Are they?"

"One of them has even dug up an old picture of her—as a ballet dancer."

"Was she a ballet dancer?"

"Yes—at the Opera. But you don't mean to tell me you didn't know about it?"

"Yes, I knew about it; but look here, Scott—she may have been a ballet dancer—I don't know; but I met her to-day and I found her an extraordinary woman."

"Is she staying here?" Scott inquired.

"Yes; she and a niece."

"H'm!" said Scott, and Selden knew as well as if he had said it, that Scott had made up his mind to find her.

"Interview her by all means, if you can," he said. "You'll see in a minute that it would be an outrage to drag her through the mud."

"I'm not going to drag her through the mud," Scott protested, "but, of course, I've got to mention the marriage and it can't do any harm to see the lady. I was wondering, though, how that angle of the story will strike them over in America."

"I have stopped wondering how anything will strike them over there!" said Selden.

Scott grinned cheerfully.

"Yes, I know we are not in the League yet. But this marriage story may make a difference. Doesn't it make any difference to you?"

"Not a particle—and it won't make any difference to anybody. Most Americans have been so fed with cheap romance and pseudo-memoirs and backstairs gossip that they consider a morganatic wife and two or three mistresses as natural to a prince as—well, as two legs or two arms. He is incomplete without them!"

"Perhaps so," Scott agreed. "But I should think it would make some difference to the girl."

"If I were she, I'd prefer him to have one wife rather than a dozen mistresses."

"That is one way of looking at it, of course," said Scott slowly, "but, as a matter of fact, one woman is far more dangerous than a dozen. Does she intend to let the prince go?"

"Yes."

"Oh, well, in that case I suppose it's all right," said Scott, and rose. "She *must* be an extraordinary woman. See you at six," he added, and put on his hat and walked out.

For a long time Selden sat staring at the door. Would Madame Ghita let the prince go? After all, that was not the bargain—she had agreed merely not to make a scene——

Selden took care not to reach the Villa Gloria before six o'clock. He wanted to go in as the others did. But he had taken the precaution to get the king's secretary on the telephone and to give him certain advice to be passed on to his master. So they found the prince with his grandfather when they were ushered into the salon. Both of them were in the national costume. It was the first time that Selden had seen the prince so attired, and he found him much more attractive than he was in the ordinary garb of western Europe. The colors suited his dark hair and skin admirably. He even had a little of his grandfather's dignity.

As for the king, no one could have looked more regal; nothing could have surpassed the urbanity of his greeting as he shook hands with the correspondents one by one. There were a lot of them by this time—Italian, French, American, English—among the latter, Halsey, who returned the king's smile with an expression which seemed to Selden distinctly sardonic. But then, Halsey was always sardonic—there was something wrong inside of him. Perhaps, as the French would say, he listened to himself too much! He caught Selden's eye as he turned away from the king, but made no sign of recognition. Evidently he had cut Selden from his list of acquaintances!

"I am desolated, messieurs," said the

king, "that I was not able to receive you earlier, but I have been very much engaged. It has astonished me, the interest awakened by the announcement of my grandson's betrothal. And I have been deeply gratified by the felicitations which I have received."

"Official felicitations, sir?" asked Halsey.

"No," said the king. "Those, of course, must wait upon the formal announcement, which will be issued in a few days. It is delayed only until the date of the wedding is agreed upon."

"The wedding will be soon, no doubt, sir?" inquired one of the Italians.

"As soon as the necessary arrangements can be made. Baron Lappo, my minister, is already in Paris to that end. I need not tell you, gentlemen, how gratified I am to be allied to this powerful American family! It will enable us to do so much for our fatherland. Mademoiselle Davis shares this enthusiasm. I assure you that you will find her, when you meet her, to be everything that a queen should be."

"A queen, sir?" asked Halsey quickly. "A restoration is planned, then?"

"It is at least envisaged," said the king. "I am going to ask my people to choose, and I have not the slightest doubt what their choice will be. But whether or not we succeed, I am still king, monsieur, and my grandson will be king after me and his son after him."

"We should like very much to meet the lady," some one suggested.

"I will see if it can be arranged," said the king. "There is one thing more I wish to say to you. It is no secret that four years ago my grandson contracted a morganatic marriage with a young lady in Paris—a lady for whom I have the very highest respect and esteem. This marriage was contracted in the regular way and no attempt was made to conceal it. We are in no way ashamed of it, and I should much regret to see it made the basis of scandal or innuendo. The prince and this lady have been happy together; but the hour has come, foreseen from the beginning, when they must part. It is not an easy thing to do, but they do it with brave hearts—for the sake of my country. I find it admirable, this sacrifice. I hope it will appeal to you, also, messieurs, and that you will treat it tenderly."

It could not have been better done; it was evident that, to the Latins at least, the romantic appeal was irresistible. But on Halsey's countenance the sardonic expression grew a little deeper. And the face of the prince was also a study.

Then somebody said something about photographs, and the king summoned his secretary and instructed him to provide them, and then he shook each man by the hand again, and so did the prince, and the interview was over.

"He is a wonder!" said Scott, as they went out together, and that seemed to sum up pretty well the impression the king had made on all of them, to judge by the comments of the crowd. Most of them watched with amused admiration the way the old king managed to carry things off. He was a poseur, yes; he was a medieval old fossil, yes; but he had always been a friend of the journalists—an inexhaustible source of copy. So why not be kind to him? After all, what did it matter who ruled over the few square miles of barren mountains that constituted his kingdom? They were all a little weary of reformers and patriots—so many of them had proved to be mere windbags, or worse! Yes, they would be kind to the king. Even Scott smiled and said, "Oh, well, let's give the old boy a chance!"

Only, Selden noticed, Halsey did not join in this discussion, but hurried away, as soon as they had passed the gates, as though to keep an appointment. Undoubtedly there would be a slashing article in his paper. Halsey

had unusual powers of invective when he let himself go.

But perhaps the countess would stop him.

Well, Selden told himself, in either event he did not care. He was only an outsider looking on at the comedy and applauding the bits that appealed to him.

And yet—was that all? Or had he been involved? Had he a stake in the game?

But a ballet dancer—a woman who was for sale——

CHAPTER XVI.

It was at Ciro's that Selden had promised to take the countess that evening, and, remembering his resolve to give her the best the place had to offer, he drove there, before going to his room, to reserve a corner table and have a word with the head waiter.

He found that worthy, of course, most anxious to oblige, and fertile in suggestion. There had just arrived a shipment of *marènes;* they would be delicious—yes?—good, monsieur. For soup, *petite marmite,* perhaps; no, that would be too heavy; *croûte au pot* would be better. For fish, a sole, perhaps, or a trout prepared in a special way; no—one moment! Jean, bring hither that basket of *langouste.* Behold, monsieur, how fresh, how sweet, and not too large—this one?—good. And then partridges, perhaps, or a wild duck; no—permit me to suggest *l'agneau,* monsieur, *l'agneau véritable,* very young, very tender, truly fed with milk, delicious; with *asperges*—good. And for *entremet* monsieur wishes *crêpes susettes*—good. For wine, Martinis first, of course; then a little Sauterne with the oysters; and then what would monsieur prefer? Champagne? No. Bordeaux, Burgundy? Permit me, monsieur, to suggest a Chateauneuf du Pape of which we are very proud—nineteen-fifteen, the great year—from the banks of the Rhone; good. At nine o'clock? It shall be ready, monsieur. *Au revoir,* monsieur; *merci bien.*

Selden went on to the hotel feeling as though he had assisted at a sacrament.

So at nine o'clock, behold him, seated beside the Countess Rémond on the banquette at a corner table—the *langouste,* with its garniture of pink jelly and ornaments of truffles, proudly displayed near by—ready to talk, to listen, to dine, and to observe the world at its gambols.

For Ciro's was not only the most amusing restaurant at Monte Carlo, but the most discreet as well, for there, sitting in view of all the world, one can talk of the most intimate things much more safely than in a private room, with the certainty that one's voice will be lost in the pleasant medley of dancing feet and music and other voices with which the place is always filled.

Selden watched the *sommelier* fill the little cocktail glasses, then leaned back with a sigh of content and looked at his companion.

She was uncommonly arresting, with her air of distinction, her eyes a little tilted and fatigued—consummate art again! She had chosen a black gown of some filmy material which foamed up over her breast, accentuating its whiteness and delicate contour and the grace of her arms and shoulders. Her only ornament was again that strange stone of greenish yellow which matched her eyes. She was by all odds the most interesting woman in the room; the eyes of the other men were wandering toward her constantly—yes, and the eyes of the women, too, but with a different expression.

For whom had she arrayed herself, Selden wondered. He was sure it was not for him, and he looked at the other men, but he knew only one of them. That was old Scott, who was dining by himself at a table across the room. He looked at Selden's companion with marked interest, and bowed elaborately

when he caught Selden's eye. But Selden answered with a curt nod which warned Scott, as clearly as anything could, to keep away. Selden had no objection to his meeting Madame Ghita, but there was no reason why he should know the countess.

"Who is your friend?" she inquired, as she drew off her gloves.

"Just a newspaper man."

"Your bow was not very cordial," she commented.

"No—I don't want him interfering with this dinner. I don't want anybody interfering!"

"Nobody is going to interfere," she assured him; picked up her Martini and touched his glass with hers. "To the fulfillment of all our hopes!" she said, and they drank together. "What happened to you this afternoon?"

"The press has broken loose," he answered, and told her of his adventures with his fellow correspondents and of the interview with the king. "It went off better than I expected," he added. "All the boys are inclined to give the old fellow a boost—all, that is, except your friend, Halsey."

She turned upon him quickly.

"Why do you call him my friend?" she demanded.

"Wasn't it Halsey we met on the terrace the other morning?"

"Yes."

"And he was waiting for you this morning, also."

"It is true—he is a great nuisance; but he can be useful to me in a certain affair, and so for the moment I tolerate him. That is all."

Selden was certain she was lying, but the *marênes* demanded his attention. The maître d'hôtel stood anxiously by until he ate the first one and beamed triumphantly at his approving nod. Yes, they were delicious.

"One reason I like to dine in a French restaurant," said Selden, "is because every one is so pleased when one finds the food to one's taste. In other countries nobody really cares, you can take the food or leave it; but here it is a matter of life or death; at least, they make it appear so. And you are wiser than we in another way. When a Frenchman enters a restaurant, he puts his affairs, his worries, out of his head; he is smiling and happy; so he enjoys his food and digests it easily. The American enters, thinking of his business, or he brings a paper to read, or he gets out his memoranda and makes computations between the courses; so he not only does not enjoy his food, but he does not digest it, and wonders why he has dyspepsia. It is very foolish! Ah, here is the *croûte au pot.*"

It, also, was perfect. The carving of the *langouste*, followed—a solemn ceremony performed by the maître d'hôtel in person, with two of the waiters as acolytes. It was at this point that Selden tasted the Chateauneuf du Pape, which the *sommelier* had placed reverently before him, and knew definitely that the dinner was a success.

"But you have told me nothing of your adventures," he pointed out. Halsey could rest for a while; perhaps, later on, he might find a way to get back to him. "You saw the Davises?"

"Yes"—she laughed a little—"they are having for the first time the experience of being internationally important."

"Do they enjoy it?"

"Oh, yes—at least the mother does, enormously. About the daughter, I am not so sure—she has something at the bottom of her heart——"

"Yes?" he said, as she paused.

"Ah, well," she said, with sudden vehemence, "what woman has not something at the bottom of her heart—a little worm which gnaws and gnaws!" She checked herself and touched her napkin to her lips. "Do not heed me—it is nothing!"

At that moment came the *agneau*—

those tender and delicious ribs of milk-fed lamb from the country below Bordeaux—and again the head waiter beamed at Selden's approving nod.

"But it was amusing," went on the countess. "Those journalists were camped about the place as at a siege. They have a villa at Cimiez—the Davises—a large place which they have taken furnished. They have picked up their servants where they could, and of course the servants are in no way loyal, but are looking only to make all they can out of the rich Americans. They had orders, those servants, to admit none of the journalists, but first this one and then that one would bribe his way in. But it was of no use. It seems that Baron Lappo had impressed upon Madame Davis that she was not to talk —not a word to any one. He must have hinted at terrible consequences, for she was quite awed, and all she would say was 'Please go away,' over and over again, until the butler would come and lead the journalist away. Indeed, she had rather the air of expecting to be blown up, but she has set her heart upon being the mother of a queen, and nothing will deter her, not even assassination. She has even the idea that it might be well to cement the union doubly by marrying her son to the Princess Anna."

Selden laughed.

"I fancy she will have some difficulty there!"

"Yes, but she is counting upon your assistance."

"My assistance?"

"She is going to ask you to talk to him, since he refuses to listen to her."

"I wonder," said Selden, "if all this could be the baron's idea?"

"But of course—his or the king's. They would like to pluck the family clean."

"Well, young Davis will never marry the Princess Anna."

"Do not be too sure!" the countess warned him. "The baron is one of the cleverest men in Europe—a genius at manipulations of this sort. It is true that in this case he has for an opponent a very clever woman. You know very well that I mean Madame Ghita," she went on, in answer to his look, "and that she destines that young man for the girl she calls her niece."

"I have seen the girl," said Selden. "She looks all right. Is she not her niece?"

The countess shrugged her shoulders.

"How do I know? Cicette Fayard is the name she goes by."

"And she, also, will pluck him clean?"

"Can you doubt it?" asked the countess.

"Well," said Selden philosophically, "since it seems he is certain to be plucked, why worry? At any rate, he will find the process more amusing at the hands of Mademoiselle Fayard than at those of the baron and the Princess Anna. It will do him good to get some hard knocks. But what about his sister? Can you tell me anything about your interview?"

"Yes, it is as I thought. She has made up her mind to carry it through. She was not astonished or offended that the prince should have had a mistress. In fact, I think she already knew it."

"You told her straight out?"

"But of course—why should I use *équivoque?*. She is not a child. I explained that I was speaking, not because I considered the matter of great importance, but because I wanted her to be treated fairly and to understand everything."

"What did she say?"

"She thanked me, entirely without warmth," said the countess, smiling. "She doesn't like me—I seem to remind her of some one she dislikes very much. Nor, to be frank, do I like her. It is instinct, I suppose."

Selden decided that it was time to gather his forces for the attack.

"Did you know her, out there in Montana?" he asked.

"I saw her, of course, but only a few times. She was away at school a great deal."

"Last night she was looking at you as though wondering where she had seen you before."

"Yes, I noticed it. But I have changed a great deal from the girl she saw occasionally; and a little care in make-up changes me still more."

"I noted the Oriental twist you gave yourself," commented Selden, with a smile.

"I repeated it, of course, this afternoon, so she could not place me."

"And you did not recall yourself to her memory?"

"No," said the countess, and her face darkened. "I had a special reason for not doing so."

Selden would have liked to know the reason, but the countess did not explain it, and he could scarcely ask. One thing was clear, however—the person Miss Davis disliked very much, and of whom the countess reminded her, was the countess herself.

His attention was distracted for the moment by the solemn ceremonial attending the preparation of the *crêpes susettes*. This, too, required the finished touch of the head waiter, for whom an alcohol lamp surmounted by a silver platter had been prepared. He lighted the wicks of the lamp, filled the platter with a sauce over which he had been working, whose basis was fine champagne, and, as it began to simmer, immersed in it one of the thin pancakes which had been brought from the kitchen. He turned the pancake over and over, sprinkled it with powdered sugar, folded and refolded it, powdered it again, and popped it upon a plate in the hands of the attendant waiter, who hastened to place it, piping hot, before the countess.

"Please eat it at once, madame," he implored.

And the countess ate it, while Selden's was in course of preparation. There were three for each of them—three indescribably delicious morsels, such as only a French chef could conceive.

There had been a little bustle of new arrivals at the door, which Selden was too preoccupied to heed. And then he looked up to find Madame Ghita smiling down at him—that peculiar little smile which always puzzled him. She was perfectly gowned and fully as arresting as the countess—more so, perhaps—though on a different note; and with her were two companions, Miss Fayard and young Davis.

Selden thought for a moment that she was going to stop, but she did not—just nodded to them and drifted past in the wake of the obsequious patron, with the little fishtail in which her clinging gown terminated sliding noiselessly at her heels, and making her look absurdly like a mermaid, a siren——

Selden could not help smiling as he looked after her—the deep, spiritual smile with which one regards a masterpiece.

"Yes, she is very striking," the countess agreed, "and very intelligent, do you not think so?" She looked at him curiously.

"Of course I think so," said Selden, with a heartiness a shade artificial.

"She is too good for the prince," the countess went on. "She should have for her lover a great artist, a poet, a dramatist—a great journalist like yourself. She would arouse him, keep him awake, furnish him with endless themes, and make his future. With the prince her talents are wasted."

"Perhaps," Selden suggested with elaborate carelessness, "after this annuity business is settled, and she has

further consolidated her position by marrying that girl to Davis, she will drop the prince and look about her. I certainly hope so."

"Why?" asked the countess quickly, still looking at him.

"Because," Selden explained, "the whole point of the situation is not whether the prince has had a mistress—but mistress isn't the right word—after all, he married her——"

"With the left hand," said the countess. "There is a difference."

"Well, the question is not what the prince has done, but what he is going to do. You will remember, she hasn't promised to give him up—only not to make a scene."

Involuntarily he looked across at the other table. Davis and Mademoiselle Fayard had their heads together over the menu. Madame Ghita was sitting with folded hands gazing calmly across at Selden and the countess. The latter had looked at her, too, and so she knew that they were talking about her.

Selden abruptly changed the subject.

"Did you know young Davis' father?" he asked.

"Yes—he came to see my father quite often. They were good friends. He was a very genuine, human man. He and my father and Jeneski used to sit for hours talking about all sorts of things."

"Jeneski also?"

"Yes. He was a sort of deputy for Mr. Davis in keeping the people in order. They were together a great deal."

The waiter had cleared the table and placed the coffee before them. The *sommelier*, at a nod from Selden, filled two tiny glasses with golden Benedictine.

"I saw Jeneski not long ago," said Selden slowly. "I found him very fascinating. I should think he would be especially so to women."

"He is," agreed the countess quietly. "The more so because he finds women less fascinating than politics. Oh, how do you do, Mr. Halsey," she added, in another tone.

It was indeed Halsey, who passed on with a curt nod, sat down at a table facing them and ordered coffee and liqueur. And, looking at his sardonic face, Selden began to glimpse the countess' motive in insisting on this dinner; she had need of Halsey—she herself had said so—and she was disciplining him when he proved recalcitrant. Well, one thing was certain; he wasn't going to be used as a stalking horse for Halsey. If he could only fathom the game the countess was playing.

"He doesn't seem very happy," he remarked.

"Who?"

Selden nodded in Halsey's direction.

"Oh, he is never happy," said the countess. "He is one of those unfortunate men who never know what they want—or, when they do, are afraid to pay the price. Come, I will not sit here with him glaring at me. Besides, I have work to do—my reports to make!"

"To Lappo?"

"Yes."

She was drawing on her gloves nervously. Selden asked for the bill and paid it.

"I, too, have a telegram to send," he said, as they went out together. Over his shoulder he saw that Halsey was also paying his bill. He glanced at Madame Ghita—she was looking after them with that little ironical smile, which deepened for an instant as she caught his eye.

"Monsieur Selden," said the countess, when they were on the esplanade outside, "I have to thank you for a lovely dinner—but more than that, for consenting to take me. I shall not forget it. Perhaps I can do something for you some day."

"You can do something for me now," said Selden.

"What is it?"

"Persuade Halsey to be decent about this affair of the prince."

"But I don't——" She checked herself. "Very well," she said quietly, "I will see what I can do."

They were at the hotel entrance.

"Thank you," Selden said. He did not look over his shoulder, but he was certain that Halsey was not far away. "I am not coming in—I'll go over to the telegraph office and get my story off."

"Good night." She held out her hand. "It is nice of you not to ask any questions. And if I do not see you again remember——"

"You are going away?"

"I may be called away very suddenly. So if I do not see you again, remember that I am your friend and wish you good fortune!"

"Thank you," Selden answered. "Good night!"

For an instant she permitted him to retain her hand, then she drew it away and ran lightly up the steps. She waved at him from the top, and was gone.

As he turned the corner, he could not resist glancing back. A heavy figure was hurrying up the steps to the hotel entrance—unmistakably Halsey. With a sudden impulse, Selden turned, sped back and up the steps into the hotel. He must solve this mystery—at least, he must establish beyond a doubt the connection between Halsey and the countess. He raced up the stairs and reached the upper corridor just as Halsey paused before the door of the countess' suite. It was evidently ajar, for he walked straight in without knocking, leaving it open behind him.

In an instant Selden was peering through the crack between door and jamb. The countess was taking a telegram from the hand of her maid.

"All right!" said Halsey roughly, as he burst in upon her. "I agree—to anything!"

"Wait!" said the countess, without even glancing at him, and ripped open the message with shaking fingers. Her eyes devoured its contents at a glance. Then she turned to him with a strange smile. "So you agree?"

"Yes."

"You swear it?"

"Yes."

"It was time!" she said. "Look at this!" She thrust the sheet of paper beneath his eyes.

Halsey stared at it blankly.

"'Registered parcel wings mailed Nice this morning Okrim,'" he read. "What does that mean?"

"It is from Mirko, Jeneski's minister," she said, her whole body quivering, "and it means that Jeneski started for Nice this morning by aëroplane." Then, looking past him, she saw the open door. "You fool!" she cried.

But Selden was safely around the turn in the corridor before the door slammed.

CHAPTER XVII.

Selden left the hotel and made his way down to the terrace. He felt that he had need to collect his thoughts, to arrange his ideas. He walked up and down for a minute or two until the blood stopped pounding in his temples, then sat down on a bench and started to reason it out.

So the countess was in a plot against Jeneski—well, that was nothing new; she had been on Lappo's side avowedly from the first. And that one of Jeneski's ministers should have been corrupted was easy enough to understand. But the bearing of the countess as she read that telegram—her emotion, her fierceness, her passion—had torn a veil from Selden's eyes. She was not in this because of friendship for Lappo, or because she loved her country—she herself had said it, "For a woman, that

is not enough!"—but for some personal reason, deep, compelling, malignant. She hated Jeneski.

But where did Halsey come in? He had said, "I agree!" What did he mean by that? Agree to what? Something he had held out against—something the countess had driven him to? Perhaps it was only to what Selden himself had suggested—to forgo the chance for a sensation. His air had been tragic—but that would be a tragedy for Halsey.

And his reward? Selden shrugged his shoulders. It was nothing to him what reward the countess might choose to bestow.

Poor old Halsey! He was surely running his head into a noose! She was sure of him now—she had left her door open, knowing that he would follow! She had even made him swear! Heavens, what a fool!

And then a sudden thought brought Selden to his feet. Was Halsey the only fool?

What precipice was it toward which he himself was walking, lured by the vision of a face which grew more vivid with every hour, more dear—a face with calm, questioning eyes.

He would have to have it out with himself, the whole question of his relations with this woman—this Madame Ghita—this ballet dancer—this mistress of a prince; what he hoped, what he feared; have it out without evasion or self-deceit. And his face was grim, for he foresaw that he would not emerge with flying colors.

Hope? Pah!

The placid *gardien* sauntering by was startled to see a man standing by the balustrade suddenly slash viciously at the air with his cane, as though laying it savagely across somebody's back, and he slackened his pace to observe this madman, who had probably lost all his money, and to intervene, if need be. Perhaps he planned to cast himself on the railroad tracks below. That must be prevented, because it would cause a scandal, and scandals are frowned upon most heartily at Monte Carlo.

But there was no need of intervention, for the unknown, after a couple of rapid turns up and down the terrace, ran up the steps, and the *gardien*, following cautiously, saw him turn into the telegraph office, and went back to his post with a shrug of the shoulders. It was not a madman, then; it was only a fool who, instead of killing himself, was telegraphing for more money!

That moment's ebullition had relieved Selden; besides, there was nothing to be gained by beating the air. His immediate job was to get off his special to the *Times*, and during those quick turns up and down the terrace it had taken shape in his mind. First, of course, a paragraph about the sensation which the exclusive announcement in the *Times* had caused; the crowd at the gates of the Villa Gloria; the reception of the correspondents; the favorable impression created by the picturesque old king and his no less picturesque grandson; Baron Lappo in Paris arranging the marriage settlement; wedding to be very soon; the frantic efforts of the correspondents to see Miss Davis, who had denied herself to everybody, except a personal friend or two; it had, however, been the good fortune of the *Times'* correspondent to meet her; here follow with short and complimentary description. And then a discreet paragraph or two about the morganatic marriage, quoting the king and treating it as a thing of the past.

But was it?

That was the crucial question. It was upon that point, in Selden's mind at least, that the whole affair hinged. And it was there, he felt, that he must seek some assurance better than the king's. There was only one place to get it; there was only one person who really knew. For the matter lay wholly in the hands of Madame

Ghita. It was she who would decide. It was from her that assurance must be sought.

Half an hour later, in the telegraph office, he had completed his special and was about to sign his name, when a sudden thought struck him. Well, why not? And he added this final paragraph:

There is much speculation as to what line Jeneski will take with respect to this affair. No one who knows him believes for a moment that he will sit quietly by and permit the republic for which he has struggled and which he believes in so thoroughly to be overthrown without a contest. He has to face no little opposition at home, even among his own ministers, but he has shown himself before this to be capable of rapid and decisive action in a crisis. There is a persistent rumor here that he left his capital this morning by aëroplane for Nice. There is no confirmation of this rumor, and no one can imagine what he hopes to accomplish here, but if he is really on his way, his arrival will give a new twist to a situation already absorbing the attention of many chancelleries.

He signed his name, pushed the sheet through the window, waited to be assured that the message had been started, and left the building.

Just across the way the great globes at the entrance to the Sporting Club cast their light along the street, and Selden, without an instant's hesitation, turned toward them. He was certain that the trio he had seen dining at Ciro's would reach there sooner or later, and he had made up his mind what to do. He was going to demand an answer to the question which was worrying him. He was going to find out definitely what Madame Ghita intended to do.

It was a little early yet for the club, but the rooms were already filled and all the tables were in operation. Selden strolled from one to another looking for his quarry, and he soon discovered Davis and Miss Fayard seated side by side and absorbed in play. Davis was placing thousand-franc notes on adjacent transversales, which gave him a chance on nine numbers out of the thirty-seven, with a double chance on three of them, and seemed on the whole to be winning. His companion was betting more moderately with plaques, or hundred-franc chips, on the carrés, four at a time, which gave her, also, a chance on nine numbers; but she was less fortunate and her last plaque was finally swept away. Davis pushed some notes over to her and told her to go on, and then he looked up and saw Selden watching from across the table.

"Hello!" he said. "Come over here a minute. I want to see you before you go," he went on, when Selden had worked his way to his side. "I've carried out my part of the bargain."

"Have you?"

"Yes; and now I want you to carry out yours."

"We'll talk it over," Selden agreed. "Where is Madame Ghita?"

"In the buffet, I think. A newspaper fellow got hold of her a while ago. You'd better look them up. I'll join you as soon as I've busted the bank."

"I don't think I can wait that long!" Selden protested. "But I'll wait a while." He turned away to the buffet with considerable misgiving.

The instant he passed the door he saw Madame Ghita, and, seated on the banquette beside her, talking away earnestly, was Paul Scott. Selden was conscious of a decided feeling of relief. Old Scott wouldn't do any harm. For some reason he had feared that it was Halsey!

He approached them with a smile. Scott was too absorbed in his talk to notice him, but Madame Ghita had seen him at once, and his heart quickened a little as her smile answered his.

"Good evening, Monsieur Selden," she said, "this is very nice. You will sit down, of course?" She made room for him on the banquette. "You know Monsieur—Monsieur——"

"Scott's the villain's name," said Selden, as he sat down. "Yes, I know him —too well, indeed!"

Scott, his discourse brought abruptly to a halt, stared at him in indignation.

"See here, Selden," he said, "don't you know that when a gentleman is talking to a lady, third persons aren't wanted? It is plain that you are not a man of the world! Run along, now!"

"I like it very well here," said Selden, settling back in his seat.

"Then my seconds will wait on you in the morning!" said Scott fiercely.

"All right—coffee and pistols, eh? Only I'll take my coffee now," remarked Selden, and he told a waiter to bring him some.

"Is it that you are rivals?" asked Madame Ghita, who had listened to this interchange in evident alarm.

"Deadly rivals!" said Selden. "More than ever at this moment. I welcome the prospect of ridding myself of him forever! I must say you haven't lost any time," he added to Scott. "Who introduced you?"

"I used your name," explained Scott, with a broad grin. "It worked like a charm."

"My name?"

"It is true," said Madame Ghita, her eyes sparkling, for she was beginning to understand. "In the rooms out yonder, ten minutes since, monsieur introduced himself to me as a friend of yours."

"The infernal impostor!"

"But it is his fault!" Scott protested, waving his hands. "Figure to yourself, madame, this afternoon he spoke of you in terms so glowing, so complimentary, that I would have been less than a man if my interest had remained unawakened. I made up my mind to meet you. He even approved."

"I consented!" Selden corrected. "I saw I might as well. Now that you have met her, you'd better beat it."

"Beat it?" repeated madame. "What does that mean?"

"I am inviting him to make his adieus," Selden explained.

"I place myself in the hands of madame," said Scott with a bow. "It shall be for her to choose between us."

"Ah, but that is too difficult!" she protested. "You must stay a little while, if only to tell me what Monsieur Selden said of me."

"He said you were an extraordinary and fascinating woman, madame," said Scott, while Selden turned a little crimson, "an opinion in which I fully concur. So when I saw him to-night at Ciro's with a lady, also of unusual charm, I could only infer that it was you. I did not know that he had turned Turk as well as Royalist. When, upon inquiry, I found that it was not you, I confess that I was shocked."

"Yes, it is true," agreed madame. "I fear that he is very, very inconstant!"

"So I warn you against him, madame," added Scott, rising. "Be on your guard—I even hesitate to leave you alone with him!"

"You are going? But it is not I who am sending you away!"

"No—it is duty compelling me. I have to get off my story of to-day's events."

"Good-by, then," said Madame Ghita, and held out her hand, which Scott raised to his lips most respectfully.

Then he paused for an instant to look quizzically into Selden's eyes.

"You old reprobate!" he snorted. "I see through your game! But it's all right!" he added. "Will you have lunch with me to-morrow? At Amirauté's? One o'clock? Good! Till to-morrow, then!"

The two watched him until the door swung shut after him. Then Madame Ghita turned to Selden with a smile.

"A most amusing man," she said, "and a very great friend of yours."

"Yes, old Scott is all right—as square as they make them. We have been in some close places together. What was he talking about?"

"He was speaking of you."

"Of me?"

"Of the work you have done and the ideals you have fought for—I was very glad to listen—and how surprised he was to find you on the king's side now; at least, not bitterly fighting him—willing to give him this opportunity; and how he was beginning to understand and to take the same view, but that it depended upon me, perhaps, that you should never regret it. And then you came before he had time to explain."

"I will explain, madame," he said, his heart very tender toward old Scott, who knew him so well and who had read his heart.

"Then it does depend upon me?"

"Yes, madame, absolutely. When I came into this club to-night," he went on, "it was with the hope of seeing you, for I must talk to you—quite frankly."

"Please do," she said, her eyes shining. "I should love to have you speak to me frankly. And I—I, also, will be frank. I promise it."

"My regret, if I ever have any," he went on, "will not be for the king or for his country. The king takes his chance. As for the country, it will be a great help to have this fortune spent there. Afterward, the people can choose another ruler if they wish."

"My own thought," she nodded.

"My regret will be for the American girl who is involved in all this. She is contracting to place her fortune and perhaps her happiness in the hands of Prince Danilo. But he, too, is contracting something."

"Yes, a marriage; a very serious thing, you would say?"

"It is serious to an American girl, at least, madame. She knows, of course, of the prince's alliance with you. To that she can have no possible reason to object—on the contrary; it has been an honorable and recognized arrangement. But when she marries him, she naturally expects that alliance to cease."

"Ah, well," said madame pensively, "the prince is casting me off, is he not?"

"Yes—but are you casting him off? You have already told me that it is in your hands. You can keep him, if you choose—no doubt of that! You are the most fascinating woman I have ever known, madame, and you are very clever. You can do with a man what you will."

"Even with you?" she asked, and looked into his eyes. "Ah, no—do not lie! You are an American—there is something in you, very deep down, which holds you back from the supreme follies we Latins commit so easily, and which even the English sometimes achieve. I have seen it—how often! You think it a merit; and because of it, at the bottom of your minds, you believe yourselves superior to us of Europe. Is it not so?"

"Perhaps."

"But is it a merit? Is it not rather a cowardice?"

"I do not know, madame," said Selden humbly. "I suppose we have not the same urge."

"That is it—you have not the same urge. But is that a thing to be proud of—to be more vegetable than we are?"

"But if we are happier so?"

"Happy? Can one be happy without great moments? Yes—as a cow is happy; as a sheep is happy. But for me, that is not happiness—that is ennui! I demand more than that! For me, happiness is to risk everything on one turn of the wheel!"

"Well, you are risking it now," Selden pointed out.

"Oh, no, I am not!" she retorted quickly, and leaned back a little wearily. "I am perhaps willing to risk it, but the stake is too high—the bank refuses

to take my bet. Is it that the bank has other bets?" She looked at him sharply.

"I am just an obtuse American, madame," answered Selden steadily, though his pulses were pounding madly, "and not at all good at guessing riddles."

She looked at him a moment longer; then her eyes softened and a little smile played about her lips.

"You are really very clever, Monsieur Selden," she said, "very, very clever. I knew it the first time I saw you—I looked at you well to make sure. And I have a great admiration for clever men—I have met, alas, so few! But you were speaking of the prince. Do you wish that I send him away?"

"I think it would be best."

"I am not asking what would be best, but whether you wish it."

"Yes, I do," said Selden brusquely. He had no intention of speaking those words, of making that admission, but some force stronger than himself drove them to his lips. And he was strangely glad that they were uttered.

She was looking at him with luminous eyes, her parted lips trembling a little.

"Very well," she said softly, "I agree!" She touched his hand lightly with her fingers. "That is finished."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I could be very angry with you if I wished," said Madame Ghita presently, "at certain things your attitude has seemed to imply. It is true that I had never promised to give up the prince; but you have appeared to think that I would consent to share him."

Selden was conscious that his cheeks were crimson.

"Madame," he stammered, "madame——"

"I am not angry," she said sadly, "only I regret that you do not know me better. Perhaps if you did, you would not have thought that of me."

"Yes, I was a brute," agreed Selden humbly, still hot with shame and contrition. "Can you forgive me?"

"Ah, yes!"

"But at least you will prescribe a penance," he persisted, "a severe one!"

"Shall I?" She smiled at him. "Very well. Hereafter, you will be my friend, yes?"

"All my life!" he promised. "But that is not a penance—that is a reward!"

"Ah, my friend," she said, laughing, "do not be too sure! I can be very exacting, sometimes. So you may find it a penance—a very heavy one—before you have finished!"

"I am proud to take the risk," he said, covering her hand for a moment with his own. "We must pledge this friendship!" he added, and called a waiter.

She nodded assent, and the waiter took the order and hurried away.

"What is it you propose to do with young Davis?" asked Selden, after a moment.

"Are you concerned for him, also?" inquired Madame Ghita dryly.

"Not in the least—only curious. I suppose you know that they are planning to marry him to the Princess Anna?"

A flame of anger sprang into madame's eyes.

"But he wants too much, that old king!" she cried. "He forgets that there are other people in the world. Well, in this he shall be disappointed!"

"You will marry Davis to Mademoiselle Fayard, I suppose?"

"It will not be my doing—he loves her."

"Yes, I think he does," Selden agreed.

"And she is a good girl, Cicette; not very clever, perhaps, but more clever than he is. She will make him a good wife. Between us, we will educate him.

He is not bad at bottom, but he is very ignorant. It seems impossible that any man should be so ignorant; it *is* impossible—except in America."

"He has never had to learn anything; he has grown up with his eyes shut; he has been spoiled by a mother who is too fond of him."

"Cicette is fond of him, but she will not spoil him—not in that way. He has one great virtue—he is kind-hearted and generous."

"Yes," remarked Selden, "too much so, perhaps. I noticed that he was staking Mademoiselle Fayard at the table out yonder. That was not wise."

"No, it was not," agreed madame quickly. "I did not know it—I will see that it does not occur again. Every one seeing it will believe that they are lovers. But it is not true—I have taken care of that; and, indeed, he has never suggested such a thing. There is one point in the character of American men which I admire very much," she added. "They are nice to women without demanding anything in return; they will help a girl, just for the pleasure of it, without expecting to be paid in any other way. No other men are like that. And Cicette—she is not silly. Do you know what is her dream? To marry a good man, to settle down, to have many children, and to be faithful to her husband. That is the dream, perhaps, of every woman," she went on musingly, "but many of us cannot bring ourselves to make the necessary sacrifices. We lack strength of character. Cicette is different. She understands things; she will be very good to him, and she will not expect too much. He will be very happy with her. She will not be exacting. She will guide him, without annoying him."

"Heaven knows he needs guidance!" Selden agreed.

"You will not oppose it, then?" she asked, looking at him anxiously.

"Oppose it? What right have I to oppose it? But I don't even wish to; on the contrary, I have half promised to intercede for it with his mother."

"That is good of you," she said, and her eyes were shining again.

"Oh, come!" he protested. "It is nothing. I want to do it! You are absurdly grateful for little things!"

"They have always meant so much to me—the little things!" she said.

"Of course, if I had any sense," he went on roughly, to hide his emotion, "I'd keep out of it, since it is no affair of mine."

"Ah, well——" she began.

"You were going to say that neither is his sister's future any affair of mine. But it is, in a way, since, without knowing it, I helped her to make up her mind; so I want the prince to treat her fairly. Where is the prince to-night?"

"He telephoned that his grandfather is ill."

"Very ill?"

"I don't think so. He has been exerting himself too much. He forgets that he is eighty years old."

"He is a wonderful old man," said Selden. "It is a pity he did not pass on his qualities to his grandson."

"Perhaps his great-grandson will inherit them," suggested the countess, "and some American ones as well."

"I confess," said Selden, smiling, "that, absurd as it may sound, something like that has been in my head."

"How serious you are!" commented the countess. "Do you plan that far ahead for yourself, also?"

"To my great-grandson? Oh, no!" Selden laughed. "I haven't even got to the children yet!"

"But you expect to marry?"

"Some day, perhaps. But not while I am merely a wandering newspaper man. It wouldn't be fair to the woman. Some day, I suppose, I shall settle down. The trouble is I don't want to settle down—not for a long time. You see, I'm like those women you spoke

of—not willing to make the necessary sacrifices—without strength of character."

"But there are women who like to wander, too—who make good companions on the road."

"I know it, but——"

"Confess," she broke in, "the real reason is that you have never been in love."

"Yes," he said soberly, watching the waiter as he filled their glasses. "I am ashamed to confess it, because it proves that I am lacking somewhere—but I suppose that is the real reason." He picked up his glass and touched it to hers. "To our new friendship, which will never grow old!"

"That is the nicest toast I ever drank," she said, and raised her glass to her lips.

"Tell me," he went on, after a moment, "you said something at lunch to-day which puzzled me."

"What was it?"

"You said to the countess that you had always understood she was Jeneski's friend. What did you mean by that?"

She hesitated.

"Are you very fond of her?"

"I am not fond of her at all."

"Is it true?"

"Quite true. She repels me."

She took a quick little breath.

"All I know is what the prince has told me," she said. "He said that Jeneski was living with a woman known as the Countess Rémond, whom he had met in America, and who had been married to Lappo's illegitimate son, and that he had had a small estate restored to her."

"She hates Jeneski now," said Selden. "They quarreled, I suppose."

"Or perhaps he never was her lover—gossip like that starts easily."

"Yes—she said something to me only to-night—what was it? Oh, yes, that he found women less fascinating than politics."

"Well, so do you. So do most men—if not politics, then something else—we are always second to something. But that is as it should be—it is a sign of strength. Life has taught me that."

"I wish you would tell me something about your life," said Selden.

"You really wish it?"

"I have heard so many things——"

"Ah, well, you shall know the truth. I should like you to know—though there is really not much to tell. My father was a lace merchant, a traveler, you understand, selling to the shops in various towns. One of these shops was at Perigueux, and was managed by a young woman with whom my father fell in love. They married and moved to Paris, where they opened a *magazin*—not to sell to persons, but to other shops—you understand?"

"What we call a wholesaler."

"Yes. They did very well, and the business grew until it occupied the whole first floor of a building on the Rue de Rivoli near the Châtelet. My mother really managed it, but she found time, nevertheless, to have two children—two girls. My sister resembled her; but I resembled my father, and he was very fond of me. He still traveled from town to town, taking orders for the business; sometimes he would take me with him. He would wash and dress me in the morning, and comb my hair, and in the evening I would sit at the table with all the men, listening to their talk, and understanding more than they imagined. We were very happy together; but he was a strange man, and once he got an idea into his head it never left him.

"But those good times did not last. My father began to gamble, and the habit grew so strong that, in the end, my mother could scarcely find the money to meet the bills each month. When he came home, there were scenes,

terrible scenes, during which he sometimes threw all the dishes into the street. Then he would promise to reform; but always the habit was too much for him; it was like a disease, getting worse and worse. I do not know what happened at the end—I was only thirteen years old—but one evening I went to his room to call him to dinner. I knocked, but he did not answer. I opened the door and saw him sitting in his chair before his desk. I ran to him and threw my arms around him, and he fell over against me. He had shot himself."

She stoped for a moment, pale.

"That was the end of the business," she went on. "It was taken away from us to pay the debts—everything was sold. My sister and I were sent to England to a convent school—it was there I learned such English as I have—and Mother went to work again in a shop. It was very hard for her, but there was nothing else to be done. We were gone three years. When we came back, she had married again, a *maître de danse* at the Opéra. He was old and very eccentric and all that he wanted of my mother was that she should make a home for him; and she did, a very good one. It was not amusing, but it was better than working in a shop.

"Then came the war, and for a time there was no more dancing, so to amuse himself and keep himself occupied, he gave lessons to me and to my sister. With my sister he soon stopped and sent her to learn to be a typist; but with me he kept on all day, every day, until I dropped with fatigue—not dancing only, but many other things—how to walk, how to talk, how to acknowledge an introduction, how to hold my fork, how to eat from my spoon—he said the French are pigs because they take their soup from the end of the spoon instead of from the side. He was very clever—a little mad, perhaps. But to him I owe everything.

"He was mad about the drama—but the classics only. Whenever there was a great play at the Comédie or the Odéon, he took me to see it—fortunately he could get tickets, or we should have been ruined. When there was no performance, we spent the evening reading—Racine, Molière, Hugo—I know them all by heart. And when, at last, the Opéra opened again, every day he took me with him to rehearsal, and before long I was in the ballet. A year later, the première danseuse fell ill one night and I took her place and did so well that I was given an engagement.

"You know, perhaps, what the life of the stage is—there are no reticences, no privacies. If you have ever been to the Opéra on the night of a ballet, you have noticed that the front row of seats is empty until the ballet is about to begin; then a number of old men come in and take the seats. Most of them have decorations; many of them are famous in art or literature or diplomacy—and each carries an opera glass. They have come to see the girls—and when the ballet is over, they carry them off to supper somewhere.

'Well, it was from that my stepfather protected me, and, later, he made my mother come with me to watch over me better than he could, and every night I went home between them. Everybody called them the 'Dragons.'

"And then, one night after I had danced very well, the director brought Danilo back and introduced him to my mother and to me. I thought him very handsome and distinguished. Then my stepfather came and they talked together for many minutes, my stepfather shaking his head all the time.

"After that, the prince came back almost every evening and talked to us, and brought me little gifts of flowers and bonbons. Once he gave me a ring, but my mother made me return it. He scarcely glanced at the other girls, though they did all they could to attract

him; and he had other talks with my stepfather. At last one day my stepfather took me to his study.

" 'My child,' he said, 'you are twenty years old, and it is time you thought of your future. I shall not be able to watch over you much longer, for some day my weak heart will stop beating, and before that I should like to see you range yourself. This prince, now—what do you think of him?'

" 'He is not bad,' I said, 'but he is too young.'

" 'You are right, and if it was merely the question of a protector, I would prefer an older man; he would know better how to value you, and you would have the benefit of his experience. But none of those old fellows would marry you.'

" 'Do you mean that the prince will marry me?' I asked, astonished.

" 'You will not be his wife, exactly,' said my stepfather, 'and yet you will be more than his mistress,' and he explained to me as well as he could what a morganatic marriage is. 'Some day he will have to marry again for reasons of state, but by that time you will have acquired a knowledge of the world, a certain position, and should be able to look out for yourself. He has not much money, but a prince does not lack money like an ordinary man, for there are always people willing to provide it just for the privilege of being seen with him. It will be a great education for you and I advise you to accept.'

" 'But my dancing,' I objected.

" 'My child,' he said, 'I will speak to you frankly. You are a good dancer, but you will never be a great artist. No—your place is in the world.'

" 'But will his family consent?'

" 'Yes. He has caused them many anxieties, and they wish him to settle down with some nice girl until they can find a very wealthy wife for him. That is not possible at present. Of course, they will wish to see you. What do you say?'

"What could I say except yes? It was, as my stepfather said, a great opportunity—much better than I could have hoped for. A few days later, Baron Lappo came to see me. He approved of me, and so the marriage was arranged. Behold the result!"

"The result is wholly admirable," said Selden. "Yes, you were right to accept. And your stepfather?"

"His heart stopped beating one day as he had foretold," she answered, her lips trembling. "He was the best man I ever knew."

"But your mother is living?"

"Oh, yes; she lives with my sister. My sister married a little bourgeois shopkeeper."

"And Mademoiselle Fayard?"

"She is the daughter of my stepfather's younger sister. I promised him to look after her."

Selden looked at her musingly. How far she had already traveled from her humble beginning! How interesting it would be to watch her future!—to see what she made of herself, to what heights she rose!

"What are you thinking?" she asked.

"I am thinking you will go far," he said. "Some day a man will be a prime minister because of you, or there will be a great poem, a great play, a great picture of which you were the inspiration; and I shall go to the minister or to the artist and congratulate him, and say, 'Monsieur, I foretold this long ago, one evening at Monte Carlo!' "

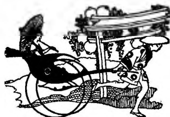
Her eyes were shining again and she laid her hand lightly upon his.

"Perhaps you are right, my friend," she said; "but it is not of that I am thinking."

"What are you thinking?"

"That I hope to find love some day," she said, and raised her hand for an instant to her eyes.

TO BE CONCLUDED IN THE NOVEMBER NUMBER.



The Man from China

By Austin Wade

Author of "Poor Man!" "The Logic of the Lost," etc.

A LITTLE shriek ending in a mighty splash. Then stifled giggles and the patter of running feet on the gravel walk surrounding the outdoor swimming pool.

The full moon slid from behind blue-black cloud barriers and shone on the darkly rippling waters of the pool. A dripping head emerged, and a girl swam with long, curved strokes until she reached shallow water. Heavy black hair streamed behind her and clung thickly about her shoulders when she finally rose to a standing position. The correct evening coiffure of a few moments previous was entirely unrecognizable.

For a space she stood quite still, her arms at her sides; then she spoke softly to herself below her breath. The words were in the nature of a threat, which this startling young water sprite seemed perfectly capable of carrying out, for she was tall above the average, with the lithe build of a sportswoman. Her handsome face was convulsed with anger—a most unpleasant face, one would have said—until the expression changed magically, and the girl threw back her head and laughed. Now she spoke aloud, between chuckles:

"Well, I was pretty much bored with the party, anyway. And my dress is quite ruined, so I might as well have a swim."

She reached down, drew off her dancing slippers, and tossed them up on the steps of the pool. Her evening gown was so short that it did little to hamper her movements. She was all unconscious grace. The silver brocade of her gown glistened like the scales of some fabled sea creature. She slipped, shining, through the water with barely a sound, magnificent, awe-inspiring.

A man stepped from the shadow of the high box hedge which partially encircled the pool. The girl was poised on the edge of the springboard. Her knowledge of the intruder's presence did not prevent her from executing a perfect dive. On coming to the surface she swam lazily to the side of the pool and pulled herself up on the edge. Now he was only a few paces from her, but he came no nearer. He seemed on the point of flight.

"Well, what are *you* doing here?" the girl asked. Hardly an encouraging start for a moonlight tête-à-tête. Then, as the man said nothing, but shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, she added: "You can bring me my slippers, if you want. They're down on the steps."

He obeyed her silently and she watched him with curiosity. He must have come over for the dance, she thought, as he wasn't one of the house guests. She very much wished to see his face more clearly. She wondered, too, how long he had stood there, and if he had heard the argument between Flora Allen and herself, which had ended in her ungraceful precipitation into the pool. Flora had deliberately pushed her in! Again her anger smoldered. It was just like Flora—a petty, childish trick. But it had served its purpose, for it had put Flora's rival out of the way, at least temporarily.

The girl on the pool's edge thought,

"I certainly can't help it, if her fiancé would rather dance with me than with her. It's up to her to hold him." These rather uncharitable reflections were cut short by the return of the stranger with a pair of sopping-wet evening slippers, which she accepted with a cool, "Thank you."

"Aren't you afraid you'll—catch cold?" He spoke for the first time, uncertainly, in a thin, nervous voice.

The man and his voice were disappointing. Both were distinctly commonplace.

Here was a good situation—wasted.

She laughed. The joke was on her. "Aren't you afraid—you'll catch cold?" —it was really *too* funny!

Her laughter seemed to disturb him. He fidgeted before her, moving his hands awkwardly.

"Who *are* you?" she demanded suddenly.

He jumped.

"Oh, I—I'm Franklyn Ballin," he stammered.

She rather liked the name and vaguely remembered having heard it before. "But he's like an embarrassed schoolboy, or a foreigner unused to American customs," she thought. "And how on earth did he happen to have been invited to the Springers' party?"

Grace and Ted Springer's friends were all of a type: clever, witty, sophisticated. It was puzzling.

"Have you known the Springers long?" she asked. "I don't remember having met you down here before, and I'm almost one of the family."

"No—that is, I've just come from abroad. I know very few people in this country."

"You used to live here?"

"Yes. My father was Barrett Ballin. We were from Chicago. He had most of his business interests abroad—in China. My mother died when I was five and we went to live in Hongkong—my father and I. He died there, a little over a month ago, and—well, here I am."

This was news indeed. She remembered, now, that Martin Black, a delightful Chicagoan and a friend of the Springers, had spoken only the other day of the death of Barrett Ballin abroad and of the return to this country of his only son, now heir to several millions.

So this was young Ballin!

"I'll introduce myself," she said calmly. "I'm Beatrix Chase. I'm twenty-five, white, and unmarried. I'm not famous for anything in particular." Then, as he didn't speak: "Are you?"

"No," he said, and Beatrix thought, "He's the dullest man I've ever met. He's quite, quite hopeless!"

She jumped to her feet, disdaining his tardy offer of assistance.

"May I see you to the house?" he asked timidly.

She was standing beside him now and she saw that he was shorter than she. "Thanks, no," she answered. "I've had enough of the party and I'm going in the back way. I don't want to be seen and get a laugh from everybody." Then, as an afterthought, she added: "I'm staying with the Springers over the week-end, so I'll most probably see you again."

"So am I. They've put me up at the club. Can I see you to-morrow?"

"You 'can' if you're conscious," she laughed, and ran off toward the house, her evening gown flapping wetly against her.

He stood a moment looking after her, and then followed slowly.

The following day was brightly clear and golf had been scheduled for the morning. Beatrix, a devotee of the game, appeared early at breakfast in a neat, black-wool sweater and gray, Jersey-cloth skirt. Her black hair was quaintly coiled about her head. She seldom wore a hat.

Martin Black, a tall, straight man with smooth, gray hair, greeted her.

"Where on earth did you hide yourself last night? We hunted all over the grounds for you until you sent down word to Grace that you'd gone to bed."

Beatrix smiled mysteriously.

"I don't believe you looked very hard, Martin. And just who do you mean by 'we?'" She helped herself liberally to scrambled eggs.

"Why, Cass and I, of course." He glanced slyly at George Cass, Flora Allen's fiancé.

"But where was Flora during your hunting trip?" There was mock in Beatrix's glance.

"Eating an ice, I suppose. I hate ices," he added rather childishly.

Martin steered the conversation into safer channels.

"Well, anyway, the lost is found," he said jovially. "Who wants to play a foursome?"

There were plenty of volunteers, and shortly afterward the party set off for the club. The first tee was crowded and they were forced to wait their turn. Beatrix, glancing toward the clubhouse, saw a vaguely familiar figure approaching. As the man drew nearer, she noticed that he had rather untidy, straw-colored hair and a pair of blank blue eyes. His clothes were unprepossessing. His ill-fitting white trousers and clumsy sweater contrasted oddly with the spruce, well-cut golf "knickers" of the other men. His small caddie trailed behind him, carrying an ungainly golf bag filled with an extraordinary assortment of clubs. Beatrix felt rather sorry for him. He simply didn't fit in with the rest of the crowd.

Martin Black greeted the newcomer heartily, then turned to Beatrix.

"Bea, I want you to meet the son of an old friend of mine. Miss Chase—Mr. Ballin."

Ballin shook hands fumblingly. His eyes never left her face. He had recognized the girl of the swimming pool.

"And so this," Beatrix thought, "is the heir to the Ballin millions." He was even more depressing by daylight.

Ballin's coming broke up the foursome. He remonstrated feebly, but Black insisted cordially that they split up into a twosome and a threesome.

On a sudden impulse Beatrix declared:

"I'll play with Mr. Ballin if he doesn't mind gambling for a small sum, to suit my modest income."

"Thank you very much," said Ballin, and selected an odd club from his bag. It was neither driver nor brassie.

"What d'you call that club, Ballin?" George Cass asked caustically, for Beatrix's departure from the foursome had annoyed him. "A Chinese niblick?"

Everybody laughed. Ballin looked at him blankly.

"It was made in England," he said, as if that settled it.

Beatrix came to his defense.

"It looks like a good club. I'd like to try it out later, if I may."

The hole was clear ahead of them now, and Beatrix led off. She got a long ball with a lucky pull to the left, avoiding a sand trap. Ballin came next. Be it said for him that he made no preliminaries. He placed the ball on a high, lumpy tee and swung enthusiastically. When the cloud of sand cleared, every one looked down the fairway. No ball. Presently it dropped, not more than twenty feet away in the rough—a sky shot. George Cass snorted. The others exchanged glances. Beatrix thought rather resentfully, "*Must* he play golf?"

He made the fairway in his next shot, and thereafter approached the green by stealth, raising huge divots, which he neglected to replace.

There followed a desolate morning for Beatrix. Everything went wrong. Her own game was ruined by watching

his, and she drove into the pond on the eleventh for the first time that year.

Once he said:

"You're the girl—last night—by the pool?"

"How did you guess?" Beatrix asked with assumed coyness.

"You seemed to have a slight cold," he explained seriously. "I *thought* you'd catch one."

So much for Romance.

There was to be an informal dance at the house that evening, and Beatrix was dressing for dinner when there came a knock at the door. A moment after, Flora Allen entered rather timidly. She had good reason to be doubtful of her welcome. Beatrix saw her in the mirror and the sight irritated her almost beyond endurance. Flora's fair hair was fluffed about her childish little face. Her gown was of silver lace. Beatrix thought, "She looks sweet enough to—choke! And I'd like to do it."

Flora's voice oozed sweetness.

"Bea, dear, I'm awfully sorry about last night. I guess I lost my temper. Please forgive me. I've come to tell you something: I've just thrown George over. So if you want him, you can have him."

Beatrix's hand that held the hair-brush trembled, but her voice was casual.

"Thanks. Not interested. Mind telling me whom you've got instead? Somebody, I suppose."

Flora became confidential. With many "my dears" she informed Beatrix that young Franklyn Ballin, "who has millions, you know," had shown her marked attention that afternoon. They had gone swimming together.

So that was it! Beatrix laughed aloud.

"So you've turned down George for Franklyn Ballin. How do you know he hasn't a little lady in China?"

"Don't be vulgar, Bea," said the refined Flora.

"Well you never know," grinned Beatrix. "Think you've hooked him?"

Flora smiled modestly.

"Well, he seems to like me. And I like him. He's so quiet and gentlemanly and has such simple tastes."

"I'll say he has," agreed Beatrix dryly, and then asked curiously: "Tell me, can he swim?"

"Not very well. You see, we went out in a canoe——"

"Who paddled?"

"I did."

Beatrix shrieked with laughter.

"Oh," she cried, "that's wonderful. He can't talk to a girl; he can't play golf; he can't swim; he can't paddle. Listen, darling, let me give you a bit of advice," she went on seriously. "You'd best toddle right back to your George, and tell him you can't live without him. Because why? Because you haven't a chance in the world with the 'Chinese puzzle.'" Flora started angrily to interrupt her. "Wait a minute. Let me finish. It's all your own fault. When you so rudely pushed me into the pool last night, who do you suppose watched Venus rise from the depths—of the pool, not despair—but our mutual friend, Frank? And who saw me execute some very good dives, if I do say so myself? I see you've guessed the answer—Frank again. And who do you think brought me my soaking evening slippers, and wanted to see me to the house, and played golf with me this morning, while you were having breakfast in bed——"

Flora faced Beatrix, very like an infuriated kitten.

"You let him alone. Why do you have to go after every man who takes a fancy to me?"

"Now then, don't have a fit, my dear. Or at least don't have it here." Gently Beatrix pushed the other girl from the room, and closed the door after her.

When Beatrix was alone again, she held up the gown she was to wear that

evening and examined it. It was a handsome beaded thing from Bendel's, but it was badly worn. Beatrix sighed as she stepped into it. She was very short of funds these days, and had been for some time. Her father was dead, and her mother was an attractive, impractical, luxury-loving creature, who simply *must* have her hair waved at the Ritz and her face massaged at Hélène Rubinstein's. Their income was not large, and they lived beyond it. But lately, Beatrix had had difficulty in securing further credit at the fashionable stores. Her manner, her prosperous air, had managed for her so far. But now the need of ready cash seemed imperative. Beatrix had thought of getting a job. "Anything from a lady detective to the movies," she had said jokingly to a friend. But she had put off the evil day. The summer house parties on Long Island were in full swing and that meant money from bridge and golf.

Beatrix, considering these matters, finished her coiffure with the addition of a flat crimson comb of Spanish design. She looked idly at the pearls about her neck and the rings on her fingers—perfect imitations, all of them. She had sold the real ones long ago, without mentioning the fact to her mother. She had considered marrying for money, but wealthy eligibles were few and, for the most part, unattractive. Beatrix Chase was handsome and accomplished. She felt that she could afford to wait for several years at least. Her thoughts turned to Franklyn Ballin. Was he quite hopeless? she wondered. Perhaps something could be done with him, after all. But to marry him—"Aren't you afraid you'll catch cold?"—his clothes, his golf. No, she couldn't imagine herself married to the man. An idea slowly took form in her mind—an original and rather daring scheme which would bring her considerable money. But was it practical? Did she have the cool nerve necessary to put it to the test?

"Well, it's worth a try; I can only hope he won't feel insulted," she decided at last, and went slowly downstairs to join the other guests assembled below.

Grace Springer's week-end parties were always successful. The house in itself was a delight—a rambling, white-shingle structure, which had once been an old farmhouse. But its builders would hardly have recognized it, for a bit had been added here and a bit there until it had assumed an entirely different shape. It was situated in that pleasant part of Long Island between Brookville and Westbury.

The hostess received her guests in the large living room, hung with a charming, glazed chintz of rose and black. On either side of the wide fireplace, shelves filled with books lent cheer and color to the room.

Grace Springer was an attractive woman of thirty-five. Her rather coarse, sand-colored hair was always perfectly marcelled.

"Bea, my dear," she said with an amusing drawl, "you almost missed your cocktail."

Across the room, Beatrix saw Franklyn Ballin rise from a couch where he had been sitting with Flora. His evening clothes were not as bad as she had expected. If they only fitted a little better!

George Cass sat on Beatrix's left at dinner, so that she found little time to speak to Ballin on her right.

George said first, in a low voice:

"I've broken off with Flora for good, Bea."

"So I hear," said Beatrix with a touch of sarcasm.

"What did she tell you?" he asked defensively.

"That she was through with you, and that I could have you," Bea answered, with intentional malice.

"And what did you say to that?"

"I thanked her kindly, and refused the transfer."

"Bea," he pleaded, "it's beastly of you to put it that way."

Beatrix looked at him appraisingly. He was an uncommonly handsome man; she liked his heavy, well-shaped features and his moody, gray eyes. Catching Flora's eyes upon her, she smiled at George indulgently. Flora was a little fool.

Presently Grace Springer, noticing that young Franklyn Ballin was silent, made an effort to draw him into the conversation.

"Perhaps," she said, "Mr. Ballin will give us his impression of China."

Conversation ceased. The others stared at Ballin cruelly. It was patently his cue. Beatrix felt like prodding him with something sharp—a fork, perhaps.

"Very well, if you like," he said quietly, and then he talked of China, speaking intimately of the twisting streets; the crooked, dream-filled houses; the dull red and royal blue of ancient embroidery; the beating of a lizard-skin drum in a temple by the sea.

The halting sameness of his voice had altered, and he spoke with much charm until he suddenly realized that he had monopolized the conversation for fifteen minutes. His diffidence returned. He stopped in the middle of a sentence, and ended lamely:

"And that's China."

After dinner Ballin cast longing glances toward Beatrix as Flora talked bubblingly of sundry inanities. Beatrix was amusing herself with George at the far side of the room, but when the floor had been cleared for dancing, she rose and moved across to them, George following reluctantly.

"Flora, darling, George has been boring me to death, telling me how much he loves you. He says he hasn't the nerve to ask you for the next dance, so I'm playing Cupid. I'm sure Mr. Ballin will understand——"

Ballin had risen to his feet dazedly. He allowed himself to be led from the room by the triumphant Beatrix.

Presently, when the two were seated in comfortable, reed porch chairs, Beatrix said:

"Now, I'll tell you why I kidnaped you. First, you were in danger. Blond baby vamps are bad medicine for young men from China. Secondly, I want to make you a business proposition; that is, if you promise not to be insulted."

"Why—I——"

"Then that's settled. Now, here's my point. I'll be quite frank. I'm most awfully hard up——"

"If I could help——"

"Wait a minute. I don't want a loan." But here Beatrix hesitated. After all, it was rather crude—this plan of hers. Her voice was almost pleading when she continued: "I'm counting on you to be an awfully good sport not to take offense at what I'm going to say. You'll hear me out, won't you?"

"Please be as frank as you wish—I can promise you I won't be angry."

This was a long speech for Ballin. Encouraged, Beatrix spoke very quickly.

"Well, this is my plan: I want to help you to make the best of yourself socially; you've a good family and you've lots of money, but—forgive my brutality—China must have kept you several centuries behind the times. You seem to like people, and there's no reason on earth why you shouldn't take your place among men of your own set. What you need is sound advice on practical points. I can give it to you. I should say it would take me a month or two to teach you everything you ought to know, perhaps not that long. You see, I expect to devote most of my time to you. I'm in need of money, as I told you, so I shall want a salary of one hundred dollars a week as long as the job lasts, and a thousand dollars when I've finished, if you're quite satisfied with the result. I know this is an extraordinary proposition, but you are

rather an extraordinary person. Now, what do you say?" she finished rather breathlessly.

He had stared at her in astonishment as she talked. At first he did not seem to comprehend, and she very much feared he was hurt. Then, for the first time since she had known him, he laughed. It was a strangely charming laugh.

"You're a queer girl, Beatrix Chase," he said at last, and then: "You can go as far as you like."

Beatrix smiled radiantly.

"Let's shake hands on it." His fingers closed on hers firmly.

"When do you want me to begin?" he asked.

"Right away. We're all motoring to town to-morrow in Martin's car. I want you to do some shopping. You've accounts in all the stores, I suppose?"

"Not yet. I've really not had time to arrange it. But I'll see to it tomorrow."

"Good. Because there are a lot of things that I can buy for you without your being along, and I'll want to charge them. Shirts, ties, and socks, for instance. You see, I aim to oblige. Now, take a few notes, please."

Beatrix dictated a lengthy list, and Frank took down the items in an address book: names of shops; names of smart places to dine; the address of an excellent bootlegger; titles of talked-about books. In short, modern savoir-faire on the half shell.

He read over the list aloud.

"I think I have everything straight."

"Right," said Beatrix cheerfully. She was already enjoying her job.

"You don't know how grateful I am," he said earnestly. "I've felt like an outsider from the start. You must be Heaven-sent."

Beatrix smiled at him brightly.

"I doubt it," she said.

The month following was unusually hot for September, so that, between week-end parties on the North Shore, Beatrix and Frank had formed the habit of motoring down to Long Beach for dinner in an effort to cool off.

On one evening in particular they were dining at Castles by the Sea. The usual mixed crowd was present: young flappers of the best families in expensively simple ginghams; Broadway's best—and worst—gowned, for the most part, elaborately, in black or dark colors. An amazing contrast. The dancing was erratic. Only an extremely skillful couple could hope to move unscathed through the maze of enthusiastic toddlers.

Beatrix and Frank were dancing. Beatrix had always danced well—she had a natural grace and the knack of lending herself perfectly to her partner's leadership.

Franklyn Ballin—nicknamed the "Chinese Puzzle"—could no longer be distinguished from a number of other attractive, well-dressed men present except, perhaps, that he retained a certain individuality, which was rather fascinating. He was no longer eccentric, but he was unusual.

He danced nicely, with a fine sense of rhythm. Beatrix herself had taught him, after he had been "limbered up," as she expressed it, by a professional instructor.

And Ballin's appearance! He was a stranger, even to himself. He now wore perfectly fitting golf knickers of a tan mixture—for they had played eighteen holes of unexciting, but passable golf at Nassau that afternoon. His blond hair was no longer untidy, but parted in the middle and brushed smoothly back from a rather fine forehead. His eyes had lost their vacant look, and he laughed rather often—that pleasant-sounding laugh which Beatrix had discovered on the night of their bargain.

He would never be called handsome—young Ballin—but he had manner,

and was certainly above the average in general attractiveness. Nor was he at loss for conversation. At times, even, he said really amusing things. With Beatrix's training had come a certain conceit that was not unbecoming, for it had helped to do away with his pitiful lack of assurance, and encouraged him to follow one of Beatrix's modern maxims—"When conversation lags, say something rude. You'll most always get a laugh, and your hostess will be grateful." More than once he had found this useful.

Metamorphosis had set in sooner than Beatrix had expected, and now, at the end of one month, she happily surveyed an almost finished product. She felt that she had more than earned her salary and could accept the thousand dollars without any pangs of conscience.

Beatrix had discovered that Franklyn Ballin had a most placable disposition. She could be as frank as she pleased without fear of hurting his feelings. And she had been very frank. He learned with a rapidity that astonished her, and accepted each of her suggestions with a rather pathetic eagerness.

They had dined together at the correct places—Pierre's, Sherry's, the Ritz. They had danced at Mont Martre, the Rendezvous, and the Club Royale. Naturally everybody supposed that they were engaged. Beatrix foresaw this and hastened to assure Frank that he need have no fear of acquiring an undesired fiancée.

"You see, when you're all finished you'll just naturally stop seeing me," she explained to him. "Not suddenly, so that people will talk, but gradually, as if we had tired of each other."

Several times he had sent her flowers, and she, looking at every act of his from a business point of view, had criticized his choice. The gifts, she said, were too elaborate. They bordered on bad taste.

They were seated, now, at a table just off the dance floor, and he was looking at her with open admiration. He had acquired, of late, a disturbingly candid manner of appraisal, which half amused, half annoyed her.

"That gray gown's becoming, Bea," he remarked lightly. "It makes you look like a lovely, hypocritical Quaker."

She smiled at him mockingly.

"You said that awfully well, Frank, with just the proper lack of enthusiasm. I'm very proud of you."

His face clouded.

"Can't you forget the damned business arrangement and talk to me as if I were a human being instead of an experiment in social training?"

"But you're such a successful experiment—dear old thing. Can't I give myself a bit of credit?"

"Well, forget it for this evening. I'm sick of the whole thing." It was almost a command. Beatrix was both surprised and irritated. But she said quietly:

"What do you want to talk about—China?"

"Hang China! Let's talk about you."

She laughed quickly.

"Do you want my views on life?"

"Yes."

"Well, I haven't any. So that's that. I never permit myself to philosophize. It's dangerous to the peace of mind."

"Don't you ever look ahead?"

"Not more than a month or so," Beatrix replied, and yawned flagrantly.

"If you're tired, we'll go." His voice was flat. He called for the check.

Outside, a leprous fog hung in the air. Street lights, automobile headlights, lights of houses were all the same—blurred, indistinguishable. Everything was damp; the seats of Frank's Cadillac roadster; the pavement beneath their feet.

"Ugh!" said Beatrix, after they had, with much difficulty, located the car among some hundreds of others. "It's almost always like this and nobody seems to care."

Presently they crept slowly out of the town, crossed the bridge and railway tracks in safety, and were able to make a little better time on the long stretch of road leading to Lynbrook. But still the mist clung about them and the going was hazardous. Beatrix stared ahead of her in an effort to see the road. The headlights were two dim blotches. But gradually her eyes relaxed and her thoughts wandered—the copper-colored chiffon evening dress she had ordered from Harry Collins; Frank's strange mood of the evening—"Don't you ever look ahead?"

Of a sudden she saw it—a dark shape ahead of them on the right. She could not tell what it was, but felt instinctively that it was no drifting fog wraith, but something solid, resistant. And Frank obviously did not see it; if anything, he had increased the speed of the car. A horrid fear clutched at her throat. She could not move or speak. Now they were almost upon the thing.

"We're making good time now." said Frank. At the sound of his voice the power of speech and movement returned to her. Her hands fell on the wheel quickly and, with abnormal strength, she swung the car from its path.

Ballin swore fiercely. He thought she had gone mad. But he had presence of mind enough to apply both brakes. The car slithered horribly across the wet road. In a moment he had it under control and, after thrashing through a few feet of undergrowth, it came to a jarring stop. Woods bordered the road. They had but narrowly avoided several heavy trees, which loomed darkly a few feet away.

"What was the idea?" asked Frank harshly. His nerves were badly shaken.

"I—don't—know." She sat white and still beside him, her mouth twitching.

He jumped from the car to return presently, smiling grimly.

"Some fool left his broken-down Ford there—without a tail light, of course. That was too close to be funny. Lucky thing you—why, what——"

She was crying, now that the strain was over. He sat beside her. She felt that he was going to kiss her. He did—thoroughly. His words tumbled over one another.

She felt oddly maternal toward him; as if she were his mother and had overheard him proposing marriage to some unworthy female. But he should not be allowed to throw himself away on the first woman who wept on his shoulder. Why, this woman was only—herself.

The mood passed. At that moment he seemed very dear to her. "After all," she thought, "he could probably do a lot worse."

A week later, Beatrix stood with Frank outside of the Mont Martre. A slight drizzle had set in and the doorman had gone promptly in search of a cab.

"Didn't Flora look well to-night?" asked Beatrix irrelevantly. "Somehow, I don't dislike that girl half as much as I used to. I'm rather glad she and George have made up."

But Frank was not listening. His cane tapped an irritating measure on the pavement. His eyes held a hint of their former blankness.

He had been different of late, Beatrix thought worriedly. He was more than usually absent-minded and his speech had quickened nervously. The change had been so subtle that Beatrix had difficulty in tracing it to its source. Her mind worked back over the events of the past week—a week crowded with parties and gayety and a growing pleasure in each other's society.

There! At last she had it. Two nights ago—Thursday—Frank had arrived at Beatrix's apartment somewhat later than his usual hour. His greeting

had been odd—more than ordinarily fervent, she thought. He seemed depressed, gloomy, and the pleasant laugh was lacking. During the conversation which followed, Beatrix had given him several good opportunities to make her his confidante, but he ignored her advances. He was clammish, self-centered.

Finally she had said:

"Now, see here, Frank. You'll either have to snap out of this, or tell me what's the matter. You've been up to something. Been speculating with your many shekels?"

"No, nothing like that. I've just got the blues, that's all. Everybody gets them. Why not let me have mine in peace?"

She had laughed with relief.

"Gloom on to your heart's content." Then she had ventured to say tentatively: "I thought perhaps you were homesick for China!"

"China can go to the devil!" he exclaimed violently, rather.

"Well, that's that. I feel better." She had touched him affectionately. "Don't think I want to pry into your affairs, old dear. I only hoped to help."

And of a sudden he had demanded: "How much do you love me, Bea?" Rather a trite lover's question, but the tone had startled her. His voice was harshly metallic. Beatrix had an intuitive feeling that a great deal depended on her answer, but with a curious perverseness she was intentionally flippant.

"My love for you, dear, is second only to that of 'Krazy Kat' for 'Ignatz Mouse!' " She paused, as she saw his face.

He was hurt and angry.

"You know that I care a great deal for you, Frank," she hastened to say repentantly. She felt, somehow, disturbed, apprehensive.

Frank had produced an oblong box from his pocket. He tossed it to her carelessly.

"An engagement present." His tone was curt. "A little late, I'm afraid, but it took me some time to get exactly what I wanted."

"But you've only just given me this gorgeous ring."

Beatrix's engagement ring was rather extraordinary—the envy of every woman who saw it. It was an unusually large blue diamond, pear-shaped and set simply in platinum. The stone was perfect in its prismatic beauty.

Beatrix opened this new gift and gazed at it for some minutes in complete silence. Her face went a little white. She had never seen anything like these pearls—never in her wildest dreams conceived herself wearing jewels of such great value. There was a double string of them, beautifully matched, exquisitely soft in coloring; fastened with a superb emerald clasp. She had said at last, laughing a little weakly:

"But, Frank, have you any money left in the bank?"

Her obvious delight in the pearls had dispelled his annoyance. He had laughed with her and seemed quite himself again.

Nevertheless, since that evening Beatrix had noticed the change in him—slight, perhaps, but, to her keen intelligence, unmistakable. Now, as she stood beside him in the rain, she puzzled over the situation.

At that moment the door behind them was flung open, and a strange figure was propelled outward. The man picked himself up from the pavement—disheveled, ludicrous, in correct evening dress—just as the door opened once again and a hat, coat, and silk muffler came hurtling through the air. In stooping to recover his belongings, the fellow lurched roughly against Beatrix. He grinned, made a vulgar remark.

There were no blows struck—of this Beatrix was certain. Frank moved quickly forward, that was all; and yet

magically, unaccountably, the man lay stretched on the sidewalk.

Then the doorman returned with a taxi. As they drove away, Beatrix looked from the window. The man still lay there. His face wore a comic expression of pained surprise, and he was feeling himself experimentally.

"What on earth did you do to him?" Beatrix asked curiously.

Frank chuckled.

"Ever hear of jujutsu? It's a trick I learned in China."

"But it's uncanny. It seems hardly fair."

"Well, it's come in handy more than once, though I'd hardly try it out on my friends." He seemed suddenly cheerful, as if the incident had brought back amusing memories.

Beatrix thought, "Then it *is* China!"

On arriving home, Beatrix was about to enter her own room, when Mrs. Chase called to her. She found her mother sitting, fully dressed, on the edge of the bed.

"Well, what is it, dear," Beatrix said wearily. "I'm very tired——" She stopped abruptly at sight of the other woman's face. "Mother, what on earth——"

Mrs. Chase was a small woman, and now, as she leaned limply against her daughter, she seemed infinitely pathetic. There was fear in the large dark eyes and the thin face was pale beneath the rouge.

"Mother, you'll simply have to tell me."

Silence.

Beatrix guessed at the truth.

"Oh, so that's it. You've broken your promise not to play roulette!" Beatrix's face was hard. "Where did you play?"

"At the Quaintainces'," her mother answered thinly. Beatrix groaned. The Quaintainces had the reputation of playing for very high stakes.

"How much did you lose? More than last time?"

On a previous occasion Mrs. Chase had lost a hundred dollars and Beatrix had sold all her old evening dresses. Now, thank Heaven, she had Frank to go to for aid. She felt reasonably sure that he would help her, although she hated to ask him, for he had been more than generous to both of them.

"How much did you lose?" she asked again.

"Beatrix, it's awful. I——"

"How much?"

"Three thousand dollars."

"You're joking!" Beatrix accused.

"No. It's the truth." Mrs. Chase was weeping now.

Beatrix tried to control herself. After all, there was no use in having a scene. Her mother's fondness for gambling amounted almost to a disease. This was far from being the first time—fifty dollars, a hundred dollars. But three thousand!

"I thought, perhaps, that Frank——" Mrs. Chase paused as her daughter turned on her hotly.

"So you gambled on Frank's credit! Really, mother, that's a little more than I can stand."

"Beatrix," her mother begged desperately, "you've got to help me out of this. We can't be disgraced. You know Harry Quaintaince."

Beatrix *did* know Harry Quaintaince—a hard, crude man who had made gambling his life.

"I won't ask Frank for it."

"But, Beatrix, your old rings—now that Frank has given you so much new jewelry."

"They're gone long ago. These I'm wearing are paste. Remember the money I told you I won at bridge? A man in Park Row makes marvelous copies of expensive jewels—he made these. I didn't want you to know."

Mrs. Chase laughed a little hysterically.

"Mine are paste, too. I didn't want *you* to know, either. I went to the same man. Mrs. Graves gave me his address. He disposed of the real ones for me."

For a long while Beatrix sat silent, playing first with her engagement ring and then with the pearls about her neck. Mrs. Chase moved uneasily.

"Beatrix, I'm so sorry."

"Never mind, dear; I'll see that you have the money within a few weeks. There's always that man on Park Row." Beatrix spoke gently.

So it happened that one day, in his rooms at the Gotham, Martin Black received a card which read simply, "Miss Chase." He was but faintly surprised, for he had known Beatrix for years, and her mother before her, and was used to the eccentricities of both.

He greeted Beatrix in the lobby with obvious curiosity.

"Well, what's the trouble? You see, I don't flatter myself that this visit is due to my personal charm."

She told him in a few words of her predicament. She drew from her hand bag a carefully wrapped package which, she explained, contained the jewels Frank had given her, and which she wished him to accept as security for a loan of four thousand dollars. She was wearing the imitations, which she had received that morning; they had cost nearly a thousand dollars and were rather remarkable—perfect facsimiles of the real ones.

"I really haven't any idea what Frank's gifts are worth," she said to him naïvely, "but I wish you'd take them all. I'm sure you're perfectly safe. Frank has already insisted on giving me an allowance, and I can save out of that and redeem them."

There was a curious expression on Martin Black's face.

"Frank has given you a great deal?"

"Yes, jewelry, mostly. I tell him it isn't necessary—to hold me. But he keeps on just the same. If I ever have to tell Frank about mother, can I count on you to make him understand?"

"I'll do my best. I knew his father very well."

"Is he like him?"

"Not very. But you, my dear, have made another man of young Ballin. It's quite extraordinary."

Beatrix smiled her thanks.

"Then everything's settled?"

"Everything."

After her departure, Martin Black examined the jewels in the privacy of his room. There were the engagement ring, a magnificent pin set with large diamonds—Frank's latest gift—and the pearls. Martin Black knew something of precious stones. He thought, "There's a good-sized fortune here. I'm glad she brought them to me."

During the days that followed, Beatrix found Frank increasingly difficult to understand. His periods of depression were now apt to precede moments of restless excitement—the more intense because of his obvious effort to suppress it. Beatrix felt it keenly. Even her mother noticed it and asked, with unintentional humor, if Frank gambled.

Frank and Beatrix went on party after party. At these times he was lively and seemed to enjoy himself. But when a pause came in the round of gayety, he grew irritable and sometimes quarrelsome. Beatrix was exhausted from late hours and endless activity. Once or twice she hinted as much, and Frank would show unexpected gentleness and repentantly arrange to spend several quiet evenings. But a very definite something had arisen between them, a mental wall of reserve which all Beatrix's efforts failed to remove.

To her great relief, Frank had suspected nothing in connection with the jewels. He scarcely seemed to notice that she wore them. She had started to save out of her allowance, eagerly hoping soon to be able to return the borrowed sum to Martin Black. Mean-

while, she felt secure in the thought that the jewels were safe with him, and not in the possession of some doubtful money lender.

One morning, the unexpected happened. Frank arrived early at the apartment, while Beatrix was having her breakfast. Mrs. Chase was sitting on the foot of her daughter's bed. This was her favorite hour for gossip.

Frank greeted the two cheerfully through the open door. Beatrix noticed that his eyes were vigilant, wakeful, and she said:

"You don't look at all sleepy after the party last night, dear."

He smiled.

"Sorry to break in on you at this unearthly hour. The fact is I had a little business to attend to downtown, and I thought at the same time I'd take your jewelry and have it valued. I've been meaning to for some time. It isn't safe not to take out insurance."

Mrs. Chase rose suddenly and, with a mumbled excuse, left the room. The situation was beyond her. She hated scenes.

Beatrix's face was masklike. Her brain was working furiously. If she could only gain time.

"Won't some other day do, dear? One of the clasps——"

She saw with a kind of terror that he had opened her jewel case, a small leather affair, and was turning over the contents in his hand. He seemed not to have heard her objection.

"Mind if I take the box?" he asked carelessly. "It's more convenient. I'll have them for you at lunch time. One o'clock at the Ritz, isn't it?"

"Yes," she answered dully. Everything had happened so quickly that she had had no time to plan.

He stooped and kissed her.

"Good-by, dear; I've got to hurry to be uptown again by one o'clock."

He was gone and she had not told him. What a fool she was! He would discover soon enough that the jewels were paste and he would be doubly angry, after being made to appear ridiculous before the jewel expert.

Several hours later at the Ritz, she waited fearfully for Frank's arrival. Minutes ticked slowly. The little clock over the telephone operator's desk read one-fifteen. She moved restlessly about the lobby, stopping at the bookstand to buy *Town Topics*. Back again to the clock—one-thirty. She descended the stairs to the grill, and asked Theodore with rather pitiful eagerness if Mr. Ballin had engaged a table. No, Mr. Ballin had not so favored them.

She turned away quickly to hide the tears. Frank must be very angry. Perhaps he did not intend keeping the date at all. The little clock again—one-forty-five.

At length Bea returned to the apartment. The afternoon passed somehow—the slow ticking of one minute after another—and still no word from Frank. Maddening!

She sat in the living room, futilely trying to read. At each ringing of the telephone she jumped to her feet, only to inform some unknown that her mother was not at home. At one moment she blamed herself bitterly for deceiving Frank; and, a moment later, she was incensed, vowing to break the engagement.

Just before dinner time the doorbell rang. Beatrix was feeling the strain keenly. She felt that she could hardly bear another disappointment, and motioned away the maid. She pulled herself together and flung the door wide—outside, the darkness of the hall met her gaze. In her overwrought condition there seemed an occult meaning to the ghastly ringing of that bell. It was a few minutes before she realized that the elevator man had left a letter.

It lay on the floor at her feet—a square patch of white, a bill, probably. Anticlimax. She stooped and picked

it up, then tore open the envelope fumblingly. At last the letter! Endeavoring to grasp the meaning, Beatrix read:

My Dear Beatrix: The least you deserve is an explanation. Here it is:

First of all, my name is Jack Carrol. We met Franklyn Ballin—four friends of mine and I—in Sun Fui's café in Hongkong—a pretty unsavory dive. He looked pretty prosperous and very drunk—a lucky combination. We paid for some more drinks and he became confidential; told us all about his father's death, which he seemed to take very hard; hence, we were to understand, the liquor. He showed us his passport. The photograph attached was unusually bad. It looked, he said himself, like anybody at all. To me the thing looked bigger than a mere holdup.

"Guess all your friends 'll be down to see you off to-morrow morning when your boat sails?" I said experimentally.

He cursed. "Not a damn' one. I hate every one of 'em. Damn' foreigners and chinks. Sent my stuff 'n board to-night—or was it las' night?"

The five of us exchanged glances; Grey, the brains of the game, nodded and jerked a thumb toward an inner room. Well, young Ballin hadn't a chance. We knew the place well—and the proprietor. While Ballin lay sprawled in a bunk, breathing unevenly from the effects of an innocent-looking white powder, which had been mixed with his drink, we examined the contents of his pockets. There were valuable letters and considerable money.

Grey's eyes gleamed and I knew that a plan was forming in his mind. He turned to me suddenly. "Carrol, how much nerve have you?" I was wildly excited, for the game was fairly new to me, and it looked as if I were to play a chief part.

"A fair amount, I guess. What's the plot?" I tried to speak calmly.

Grey chuckled. "I may be a fool, Carrol, but I'm damned if I see any reason why you shouldn't impersonate this fellow. From the line he shot us and from these letters, he must have a lot of coin waiting for him in the States.

"You're not unlike him. With this rotten passport photo and his letters of credit you ought to get by. There's danger, too. But it's worth it, for, with you in charge of this man Ballin's estate, we could clean up in a dozen different ways, before they get on to us. There are always negotiable bonds to be bought without attracting attention. You—as a young millionaire, what do you say?"

"But why me, chief?"

"Because you're young and look the part. Besides, you have a better education than the rest of us. I can trust you not to overact. You can play stupid at first, till you get your cue."

I was only too glad of the chance to show that I could be a useful member of the gang. The others had shown their ability in one way or another—a lucrative jewel robbery; a daring blackmailing scheme.

"I'll try it," I said.

The others were inclined at first to doubt my ability to pull the thing off, but Grey was flatteringly confident. The plan was really very simple: I was to go to America, the game was to work itself out. There were limitless possibilities of a haul, if all went well. Two of us were to hold Ballin prisoner indefinitely, in Hongkong. Grey was to follow me to America by the next boat, and be on hand to receive cables and arrange for our final get-away.

I was somewhat nervous when I arrived in New York. After all, this was the big test. I had in my pocket a letter of sympathy for the "death of my father," whom the writer claimed to have known well. The letter was signed "Martin Black." I gathered from portions of the letter, which was rather long, that he had not seen "me" since "I" was a child, and that he was one of the executors of "my father's" estate.

On sight, I liked him. He was most cordial and not at all suspicious—then. He had arranged for me to join the Springers' house party. It was rather terrifying at first. The people—their habits and conversation—confused me. I felt that everybody must suspect me. I began to get cold feet. Then you came along. Your offer took me by surprise, but I was only too glad of the opportunity you gave me to learn the ropes.

But, Beatrix, you fascinated me. You were so entirely different from any of the women I had known. I repeatedly promised myself and Grey that I wouldn't fall in love with you. I broke that promise and proposed to you. I must have been insane, for I knew the break must come. There were even mad moments when I came perilously near telling you everything. I thought perhaps that if you loved me enough you might come away with me. Crazy fool, wasn't I?

Grey began to get worried. He wanted results. It was then that I started cautiously to buy negotiable bonds. I had to go easy for Martin Black had inadvertently hinted that "my father" never speculated. He seemed to consider—damn him!—that I should follow the old man's example.

It was Grey who suggested that I turn part of the money into jewels for you—the pearls were his idea. They were worth a small fortune and were, he insisted, a safe buy.

I didn't like the plan, but I had little choice in the matter.

A few days ago Grey discovered that Black had made certain inquiries. At last his suspicions had been aroused—I don't know how. Things were getting hot. Grey gave me a long, heart-to-heart talk, during which he showed me clearly how hopeless the whole thing was—my caring for you, I mean. He pointed out that the only thing for me to do was to play fair with himself and the others.

Then, out of a comparatively clear sky, Grey got a cable in code from Hongkong. Ballin had escaped. We knew what that meant. Any hour, word might arrive from the embassy in Hongkong that the real Ballin was in China and that I was a fraud.

That was early this morning. The rest you know. By now, we have left New York by boat, bound for South America, Australia, or perhaps China. There is no chance of tracing us. Grey has attended to that. When this blows over, we shall probably meet the others and then—well, there are always people with money. Besides, I am especially valuable now to any "business syndicate" for I am, thanks to you, a splendid example of New York society man. I know what should be done and said at the correct times. Oh, I shall be extremely popular!

On account of our hurried exit, we have left young Ballin what I consider to be a generous share of his inheritance, so that I hardly think he will be much disturbed. He seemed more or less of a good sort: I remember that he swore with extreme fluency.

That's all of my story. Though you'll doubtless always think of me with anger and disgust, I believe that you *will* think of me sometimes.

Yours, for the last time. FRANK.

"Beatrix," called Mrs. Chase from the adjoining room, "what on earth are you laughing at?" No answer. But the laughter continued unabated until it ended quite suddenly in complete silence.

Theodore bustled impressively about the entrance to the Ritz grill. There were only a few tables left—all reserved.

"But, Mr. Ballin—why, but certainly—if madame will step this way."

Ballin ordered carefully. He spoke in a low, clear voice to his companion. He was entirely patrician. His "I-take-what-I-want" air rather became him.

"You're very lovely to-night, Beatrix."

She smiled at him.

"Two years married, and you still pay me compliments! You're charmingly old-fashioned, dear."

Ballin spoke reminiscently.

"It doesn't seem two years since I escaped from Sun Fui's charming hostelry in Hongkong. I'll never forget those two fellows who took turns guarding me. They were pretty good sports, at that, as soon as they saw that I was as weak as a child from the drug they'd given me, together with that poisonous Chinese rum. They knew that there was no immediate fear of my attempting violence, and they treated me very decently. One of them—a great, red-haired brute—took especial pride in teaching me fan-tan, at which I was confoundedly lucky.

"The other, not to be outdone, showed me a few of the simpler jujutsu holds. That was where he made his mistake. The knowledge was of no use to me at the time, but as the weeks passed I felt my strength slowly returning. I took good care that my two jailers should not realize this. I played possum to good effect, for one night they got careless, and Dagen, the big fellow, returned, drunk as a lord, to relieve his companion.

"Well, in spite of his being drunk, it was a good fight. He was twice my size and kept reaching for me with those long arms of his. Several times I just stepped aside in time. Finally I threw him with one of the tricks his friend had taught me.

"That was the first real fight I'd ever had—I'd fallen pretty low after father's death, for we were great pals. But that fight restored my confidence in myself. It made me feel like living."

He paused and sat for some moments without speaking. Beatrix knew that he was thinking of the elder Ballin.

She leaned toward him and spoke with quick tenderness.

"I've tried to make up to you for your father's loss, dear. I only hope I've succeeded. You were so very kind to me on that first day we met, when Martin Black brought you to see me at my apartment. And how terribly frightened I was! After all, I had spent a great deal of your money. You might have made things very hard for me."

"No one could have been hard on you, Bea. Besides, we needed each other. When I first saw you, I knew that beneath your surface smile you were miserably unhappy. And I had been through a great deal myself. It was mutual sympathy that drew us together."

"But that's not what held us together, Frank."

"No. That is more wonderful still—our love for each other."

Beatrix glanced at the pear-shaped diamond on the third finger of her left hand, to which had been added a plain platinum band. The double string of pearls about her neck gleamed softly.

"I always wondered why you didn't try to trace 'him,'" she said.

"I didn't even prefer charges. What he cost me was nothing to what he gave me. I only felt sorry for him. I really believe he cared for you. To be near you all the time, and yet know that the happiness couldn't last—it must have been hell!"

The waiter appeared with a Chamblanc cup.

"Let's wish him luck," said Beatrix.

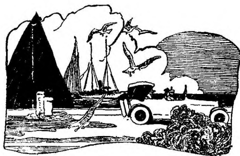
They both drank solemnly.

DRESSMAKERS and chefs of Paris are planning to copyright their art which, to the dismay of women the world over, will increase the price of gowns and special dishes.

So easy is it to copy both gowns and dishes that designers and chefs alike are getting together to devise some way by which they can prevent any one from infringing on their models and their methods. And, if they find it, the public will pay even more than before for the privilege of wearing a copyright Poiret gown—or eating a copyright dish which is the product of a famous chef.

RECENTLY fashionable Paris found a new thrill in the presence in that city of forty of the sacred dancers of King Sisowath of Cambodia. But, though prominent hostesses sought to beguile them into their salons, the little Cambodiennes turned their bronzed backs on invitations the most chic, for King Sisowath ordered them to shun the temptations of the gay city, and, to insure their safety—and the carrying out of his orders—he sent with them a guard of fierce native soldiers.

These Indo-China priestesses of Terpsichore lived in Paris as they did in the seraglio of King Sisowath, whose property they are. Each is the daughter of a subject of high caste, presented to the king at the age of eight and then undergoing arduous training in the most intricate forms of dancing until she becomes proficient, when she definitely enters the harem. After these ballerinas have become true priestesses they are seldom allowed to leave the royal palace. In the present instance they were sent to Paris as propaganda for the French colonial empire.



Sails

By Rice Gaither

Author of "The Pardoning of Belliard"

THEY said the sharks ate Jimmie Whitson. They said that, because, they reasoned, if the sharks hadn't eaten him, he would have swum ashore or he would have swum out to his yacht. The gig was overturned in shallow water, easily within hail of the party on the *Quest*. The sharks, they said, must have done for him forthwith, for no one on the *Quest* heard him call out, although some of the party were on the after deck all evening till the search was organized. There was bridge at first. Then, when Julie Laverne and the Meachams went into the saloon to dance, Mrs. Whitson remained on deck with Freddy Helton. That was all in the papers. There was no hint of suicide, of course. And I will say in the beginning that this is not the story of a suicide.

Nor is this a business story. I apologize, therefore, for mentioning a note, a promissory note written in six numerals, not counting ciphers to the right of the decimal.

Jimmie could have paid that note easily. He had an apartment in Park Avenue—one of those coöperative ownership things, you know—and a small house near the right cove on Long Island Sound. Besides, there was the *Quest*. All owned in fee simple. He could have sold the house and the apartment and paid the note, and Whitson, Incorporated, would have been definitely over the hill. Since this is not a business story I need not tell why the bank didn't extend the note out of hand and save Jimmie all this trouble. But business men will know that banks sometimes have a way of shutting down on a fellow who has the best prospects in the world.

It is necessary, nevertheless, to discover Jimmie in his office, studying the notice from the bank. It was nothing. Really nothing. He could sell the house and the apartment, set the business on solid ground, draw down his salary and the profits, and, after a little pinching, buy another apartment in Park Avenue and another house in the right cove, and everything would become again just as it was, only he would be a little richer and a little older.

Everything would be just as it was. Jimmie frowned at that. Prospect of the cycle did not please him. He did not care to look ten years ahead and see himself motoring down Fifth Avenue to the office as he motored down two hundred mornings in the year, or whizzing in by train the other eighty-five, whizzing in by train from the right cove.

Walters came in treading softly, a little tentatively, considering he was the office manager and knew more about the affairs of Whitson, Incorporated, than did Jimmie Whitson himself. He came in with some papers in his hands, and some penciled calculations on a slip of yellow paper.

"Well, Walters, thought of some way out?" asked Jimmie.

"No," Walters answered, still tentatively taking the chair opposite and laying the papers on the slab of mahogany between them. "No, I haven't found a way. But I just remembered this insurance—this life insurance you took out in favor of the company. We can borrow something on it."

Jimmie took the policies and totaled them.

"Um. Enough to pay the note—if I were dead," he added whimsically. "Pity I'm not dead, eh?" He smiled at Walters.

"Oh, no, sir!" said Walters, quite uncomfortable. "We'll pull her around. And you'll be a millionaire, some day."

"Oh, sure!" said Jimmie. "And as you say, Walters, we shall manage." He was thinking of the house and the apartment, and the odds and ends.

He smiled indulgently after Walters, who let himself out and shut the door.

"Good old scout," said Jimmie. "He could run the business himself—with that note out of the way," he added. And Jimmie would meet the note, of course. The only thing that troubled him was Madge. Madge wouldn't want to sell the house and the apartment and the motor cars. Well, maybe they could manage a sedan for her. He could use the subway going to the office in the morning. She could call for him. There would have to be less tea and things, less bridge, less dancing. And fewer cocktails. Funny life they lived. And damned monotonous. He wouldn't mind changing it. But Madge——

Jimmie strode over to the window and looked out.

Funny little island he lived on. He could just see the tip of it from the high-up windows of Whitson, Incorporated. Funny little people running to catch ferryboats or dart into funny holes. Every afternoon same people ran to catch same ferryboats or dart into same holes. Damned monotonous. Funny little island all towered and tunneled, funny little, hard little, high little island. Everybody milling about, rushing downtown in the morning, uptown in the evening, never getting anywhere, just milling about.

Yet against his cheek he felt the winds of far countries, which blew about that little island anchored there between the rivers. They were the winds of trade wafting ships. There, below him, in her slip was a slim, white fruiter from green, palm-rimmed islands; coming up the bay, a liner from Southampton; lying offshore, an old brig, smelling, no doubt, of China and the Indies. He sniffed the air: spices and salt and the odor of romance.

"Well," said Jimmie to the tip of Manhattan, "I'm reserving the *Quest*."

Then he went home. He couldn't really believe he was going to have to sell the house and the apartment. Not that he minded particularly—but Madge! It would be too hard on her. Yet it was for her that he was doing it. He would be willing to chuck the thing. But the business gave her the things she wanted, and, ironically enough, it seemed that the only way for it to keep on giving them to her was to take them away from her a little while. And there appeared to be no alternative. The insurance was inadequate for purposes of borrowing. It was only help. Unless he died. Then, of course—well, his death would put Madge on Easy Street.

He had time to think about it, for it seemed to him that the line of motors northbound had never been stopped so often from the twinkling towers. He would lay the case before her after dinner. That was his decision at Thirty-fourth Street. No—at Forty-second Street—he'd have to lead up to it some way. It might look to her like a disaster: she might not see the certain future—everything just as it had been. His intentions were still vacillating when, above the Plaza, his car swung into a side street and thence up Park Avenue.

Then the plan came to him full-blown. Perhaps it had been in his mind all afternoon, for it had to do with the winds that blew about his island, and the old brig and the *Quest*. But Jimmie didn't trouble about Freud and the psychoanalysts. He could see the logic of the plan, however: Get her away from tea and bridge and its accompaniments, and he could easily explain to her. Then, the things she must give up simply would not matter. What she needed was a cruise.

He sought her first in the living room where blues and yellows spoke to each other in suave tones. Madge was not there. She was not in the deep chair by the window or in the small chair by the olivewood table, and she was not in the yellow circle of light flowing from the parchment shade of the Chinese vase lamp.

He sought her in her chamber, but she was not curled up on the yellow-damask covering of her Renaissance bed, and she was not sitting between the candles of her dressing table regarding her golden self in the oval mirror.

Jimmie rang; made inquiry.

"Mrs. Whitson is out, sir," said the maid.

Jimmie bit his lip. He might have known it. Out, of course. But it was nearly dinner time. Jimmie looked at his watch. Just time to dress.

Half hour later, dressed, he went back to the living room and waited. There was a silver cigarette case on the olivewood table. He opened it, took a cigarette and lighted it, tasted it and tossed it into the open fire. Turkish. Fingering the case, he observed the monogram. H'm. He might have known that, too.

Just then the maid came into the room.

"Shall I wait dinner for Mrs. Whitson?" she asked.

"Of course. And, oh, Lisette—Mrs. Whitson went out with Mr. Helton?"

"Yes, sir."

He was a little ashamed of asking Madge's maid. Madge would have to give up Freddy Helton. Not a bad sort, Helton. But a luxury—couldn't be afforded after this—and a nuisance. Jimmie was actually glad about the note. Be a good thing if they did have to change their mode of life. It would give Madge and him a new beginning, help them get clean away. And the cruise. Extravagant, in view of all things—but, well, that was the way to do it. He couldn't do it here. The cruise would help him to break through to her. He was glad he had the *Quest*. He'd sell it, maybe, when they got back—plan things out afterward. First the cruise, oh, anywhere!—just to get Madge away from tea and bridge and drinking contests. And Freddy Helton.

Then the maid appeared again.

"Mrs. Whitson has just telephoned she won't be home to dinner, sir."

Damn Helton's effrontery. Well, it couldn't go on. For one thing, Madge couldn't go on paying the checks.

"I'm dining out, myself," he told the maid. Hanged if he was going to eat alone! Bit of a walk was what he needed, anyway. Too many wheels, these days.

It was seventeen blocks down to his club and he savored every one of them: cold, biting air, and a wind off the Atlantic, a wind untamed by towers, blowing free of the rocky island's rim, blowing in from the ocean, sweeping unchecked across rivers and woods, cities and mountains and plains, out again upon the ocean, thundering on coral strands, blowing around the world.

Gusts of warmed-up, slightly used Manhattan air entered his nostrils when he passed the grilled glass doors of the club. And he dined like an automaton, wondering if Madge would be home early. He must tell her of the cruise.

"Madge," he would say, standing by the chintz-covered chaise longue where she reclined in something soft and

clingy, "Madge we're going to get out of all this, going to get out on the high, clean ocean, just you and me, all by ourselves."

That would be all until they got to sea. Then things would be easy, easy to explain. The note and the changes it would make, the temporary changes it would make in his and Madge's way of living. Something good and lasting would come out of it, too. They'd get to know each other better, see each other more. If one lived on a narrow, towered island, motored to the office every day, or took the subway down, it ought to be for something. Something besides——

Madge *was* home early. He heard her voice when he got out of the elevator, her voice and some one else's—Freddy Helton's—in the living room.

"Oh, hello, Jimmie!" said Madge from the small chair by the olivewood table.

"H'lo," greeted Freddy, opposite. Freddy was doing a little trick with cards. Neither he nor Madge looked up till he flipped the pack and the ace of hearts came up. "That's nine-fifty you owe me, Madge," said Freddy.

"Charge it to the dinner check," laughed Madge. Then she turned to Jimmie; let him kiss her flushed face. "We had dinner at the Vanderbilt."

"Tea elsewhere. Few merry syncopations," Freddy sketched for him.

There were blue circles under Madge's golden eyes. He was going to get her out of this, out on the high, clean ocean, all to himself, away from bridge and jazz and Freddy Helton. He needed it as much as she. They'd break the damned routine. Oh, they'd come back to it; they'd have to. People lived that way, these days. But they needed to get away a while. He wished Freddy would go along, so he could tell her. He'd been bottled up too long.

"The Beachams want us to run up to Rye over the week-end," said Madge.

Jimmie didn't answer right away. They couldn't go, of course. They would be well down the coast by Saturday. But he didn't want to tell her that, with Freddy there. The sailing of the *Quest* would be a sort of secret, high adventure. They would go buffeting down the harbor, dodging ferryboats and car floats and tugs and ocean liners, go buffeting out to sea.

"Who are the Beachams?" Jimmie wanted to know.

"Oh, don't you know the Beachams? I must have been with Freddy. Met them at the Ritz one evening; played bridge in their apartment afterward."

"Oh, bridge!" said Jimmie.

"Well, what about it?" Madge persisted. "Freddy's going by to let them know."

"Can't we telephone?"

"Oh course. But can't we tell them now? You haven't any other plans?"

"Well, yes, I have," Jimmie confessed. "Meant to tell you, explain to you. I'm going to take the *Quest* out."

"Oh, a party?"

The thing was not coming off. Not as he had pictured it. Madge talked like an examiner. He had meant for them to plan it all together.

"Well, no, not a party."

"Oh!" She gave the syllable a most embarrassing inflection. It said: "Oh, well, if you're going to make a mystery of it——" There was a little silence. Freddy took the cards from her and shuffled them. Madge put a cigarette in a long jade holder, tapped it on the chair arm and lighted it. "Then I suppose we couldn't ask the Beachams to come along with us."

"It wasn't going to be a party, Madge."

But the cruise of the *Quest* didn't turn out as he had planned it.

To begin with, they didn't get aboard the *Quest* in East River and go buffeting down the harbor, dodging ferry-

boats and car floats and tugs and ocean liners. It seems absurd that they should not have gone to sea that way. But they went by motor to the Pennsylvania Station and thence by Pullman to Savannah, Georgia, where the *Quest,* sent on ahead, was to be waiting.

Jimmie lay awake in his berth on the train wondering just how it had all come about. He could still see the spots on the cards—for there had been bridge, even on the train—and Beacham's face across from him, a polite poker face. And he could still hear Elsa Beacham's slow, English drawl close to his ear. She would persist in kneeling on the seat behind him and looking over his shoulder. To give him luck! He laughed at that. Beacham seemed to have the luck—about eighteen dollars' worth.

He didn't understand how he had been let in for this. Only he hadn't been able to avert it, even after Freddy had left that night. Madge hadn't lain on the chaise longue in something soft and clingy. She had sat on the edge of the bed and taken down her hair and suggested that he proposed to act in a queer sort of way. Room for the Beachams, room for Freddy—lots of it. And he hadn't been able to say that bit about the high, clean ocean. Sounded silly.

So here they were.

His heart was in the *Quest.* She would be off Charleston light by now if she were making schedule, swimming through warming seas. Damn parties, anyway! People who couldn't stand a little stinging air on the way down. And that Laverne woman. Pretty as the devil, but—well, she made six. Madge had to bring her along. Five *was* rather odd.

He could smell the train smoke and a kind of gas. Thank Heaven, it was only around the clock to Savannah and the *Quest.* Then, the open sea.

The party resumed at breakfast. He found himself at table with the Beachams and Julie Laverne. Madge and Freddy had a table for two across the aisle. Beacham passed his pocket flask.

"Too early for me," said Jimmie. He fell to looking out of the window. Pine trees with notches and tin cups.

"Wake up, Jimmie!" Madge called impatiently, and he looked up to find the waiter standing by their table with the checks.

Then, bridge and more pine trees out of the window, and other checks at luncheon, and bridge and palmettos out of the window and night and Savannah.

He could smell the sea. The breeze off tropic islands, the breeze that touched white sails on blue water touched his cheek and went singing inland over pine trees and rushing rivers. But the party got into a taxi like a touring car and went skimming over asphalt along parked streets to a hotel with a marble lobby and elevators and black bell boys and indoor palms and white-shouldered women and black-coated men and—— Oh, a hotel.

They went ultimately to the place of eating and divertisement.

"Might be New York, eh?" said Beacham, passing the pocket flask. That flask was like the widow's cruse.

"New York with a warm blast," said Madge.

And there was a band, largely brass, mostly trombone. Black. Some sort of jazz babies.

"C'm on, Madge, you can step to that," said Freddy.

Jimmie found himself circling Elsa Beacham's waist, measuring his step to hers.

"To-morrow," Jimmie promised Jimmie. But on the morrow——

They found the *Quest* in the narrow, muddy little river. She looked trim and white. The captain waited for them on the wharf.

"Just got in, sir, barely made the time," he smiled, when Jimmie held out his hand. "Rough off Barnegat. Big

seas. The engine missed a bit and we couldn't hold her head. Smashed a glass for us, that's all."

"Wish I could have been along," said Jimmie. "Calm enough, down here, I suppose."

"Oh, yes, it's like a lake to-day."

Well, they were going down the river. Air. That was what he wanted. Air. They slipped along low, green banks. Jimmie was forward on the open deck. They wind blew sweetly from the ocean, and the river widened into mysterious reaches. White beaches glistened as they approached the sea. Madge ought to be getting this. But then—her guests!

"Where to?" asked the captain when the deck heaved under them.

Jimmie nodded toward the south, where Florida looks wistfully toward tropic islands.

"All around Florida," he said.

They were in reality at sea. His spirits rose. Three weeks of this: the high, clean ocean, after all. No jazz. No high balls. That flask of Beacham's would be empty now. And he had nothing on board. Bridge, of course. Bridge of necessity. But blue sky with billowing white clouds, sun on the waves, flying fishes, infinite stretches of white beach. Sails on the horizon. That would do Madge good.

He went in search of her. Voices led him to the after deck. There he found wicker chairs and wicker table under blue-and-white striped awning.

"Four hearts," said Madge's voice.

Madge and Freddy and the Beachams. Bridge. Well, he expected that. And Julie Laverne sitting in a wicker chair and humming, one silken leg moving to the syncopations of her song, the other curled up under her. And Wang, the cabin boy, grinning, with a bucket showing bottle necks, and a tray of thin glasses.

Pop!

"My treat!" laughed Beacham.

"Three cases, Jimmie," called out Madge.

"Sly dog, what?" said Freddy.

Jimmie sipped politely. Julie Laverne set her empty glass on the edge of her chair and ran inside the cabin. A moment later, the strains of the most popular "Blues" mingled with the clink of glasses. Jazz!

"That's what you call an infernal machine," said Freddy.

A phonograph.

"From Julie to the *Quest*," said Julie Laverne, gliding rhythmically from the saloon. "Oh, Mr. Whitson, do you Chicago?"

"You'll have to show me," Jimmie said.

Oh, it *was* a party! All around Florida.

All around Florida.

"That's Pensacola on your right and back a little—Pensacola Bay." The captain was speaking. "And ahead of you, that's Mobile Light."

Julie Laverne, whose slim hand rested on the sleeve of Jimmie's blue yachting coat, sang a phrase in which the pronunciation of "Alabama" was modified to the requirements of syncopation. Then she ran down to play it on the phonograph.

"And that island just beyond the light," went on the captain, "that's Dauphin Island. Used to be a pirate stronghold."

Jimmie took a deep breath. Warm, moist air blowing from tropic seas, rustling the leaves of palms, filling white sails, blowing, blowing around the world. And Madge. Where was Madge, anyway?

"Read all about it in a book." Still the captain's monologue. "Island has a line of sand dunes. Pine trees between them and the sea. Says the only other island like it's one a chap named Stevenson made up. Called it 'Treasure Island.' "

"Could we go in there?" asked Jimmie.

"I'll see, sir," said the captain, going for his charts.

Julie's record was turning now. Jimmie could hear voices on the after deck.

"Four clubs." Ah, there was Madge.

"We can get in from the bay side," said the captain, coming down again. "There's a channel to the Mississippi Sound. And a little fishing harbor on the north side of the island. We can get close to the island on the *Quest* and make a landing in the gig."

"Go in," said Jimmie. He'd take Madge ashore, take her away from the rest, seat her on a sand dune, looking toward the sea, and tell her the things he had hoped to tell her on the yacht. Only, there was more than ever, now, to tell her, now that he had seen her in these daily, hourly contacts with the people she had chosen. And there was much to ask her. Why had she brought along the Beachams? They were obvious to him. Gambling adventurers. And Julie Laverne. Of course, he was not sure. Only—— And even Freddy Helton. Not a bad sort, Freddy. But, frankly, a pleasant parasite, living by invitation only. Surely, Madge could not know these things. They were going to have a talk. He went in search of her.

But he found her with the others on the after deck. Of course. He had forgotten.

"That's five odd for us," said Madge, not looking up.

"Mobile, eh?" said Freddy, flipping the cards. "When do we reach the Battle House and other jazz babies?"

"We don't!" said Jimmie pleasantly. "We're going to Dauphin Island."

There was a quartet of protests. Only Madge did not speak.

"Come," begged Julie Laverne, "let's go back to Palm Beach."

"Or Miami," Freddy amended. "Jimmie doesn't like Palm Beach."

"How far is it to Cuba?" Beacham wanted to know. "Cellar's almost empty."

"Dauphin Island's our last stop," Jimmie announced, persistently good-humored.

Then Madge raised her lashes, and looked at him with level, golden eyes.

"Really," she asked, "are you going to land us in some queer place?" Some place, she seemed to say, where there is no Royal Poinciana, no Everglades Club, no wheel chair. And no Bradley's. But she looked that way because she was really giddy, drunk with the people she had lived with on the yacht—how long? He must take her ashore and tell her, explain to her that they were living wrong. But he said nothing. He joined the captain forward.

The *Quest* was entering the narrow mouth of the far-reaching bay. On the right, a long finger of land pointed toward the white beach of Dauphin Island.

Their last stop. To-morrow, they turned back. Back around Florida and up the coast. Back to Manhattan. Back to sell his house on Long Island and his apartment in Park Avenue, so he could pay the note for Whitson, Incorporated, so he could buy another house on Long Island and another apartment in Park Avenue. Only life would be different when he had talked to Madge. He hadn't had a chance. But he was going to talk to her to-night—on Dauphin Island. He couldn't on the yacht—couldn't in New York; had to go ashore on Dauphin Island. That would be the only chance. Sitting on the sand dunes among the pines——

In the anchorage they passed an old green brig, her bowsprit jutting seaward, masts bare, but eloquent in towering height of sails that should be run. Jimmie fancied that she smelled of spices.

"She'll go out to-morrow on the tide," the captain told him. "Where to? I

don't exactly know. She's British, sir, and loaded. Bound for some foreign port."

The phrase intrigued him. Sails in clouds—blue water and some foreign port. Bombay or the Celebes. Rio or Buenos Aires. Or smudgy London, or Naples of the smoking mountain. But he was going back where trains run under ground.

"Four spades," came Madge's voice.

It was late afternoon when the *Quest* dropped her anchor. The sun, round and red and low, was smoked over with cloud, and the water of the sound, still and blue with the blue of a Maxfield Parrish color tube, sloped upward toward an invisible horizon.

He found Madge and Freddy Helton leaning very close together on the after-rail.

"Madge!" he called.

She turned swiftly, as one turns when surprised.

"Madge, I want you to go ashore with me."

"I don't think we want to go ashore," protested Madge. "Do you think so, Freddy? Run ask the others. There's a dear!"

"Wait, Freddy!" Jimmie stopped him. "Madge doesn't understand. She's right about the party. It wouldn't interest them. I am asking only her." Madge was different. She played bridge with them, danced with them and drank with them. But she was different.

Then he looked at her. Again that slow raising of the lashes.

"Why me?" asked Madge. As if she could ask that. As if she weren't Madge, his wife. As if he shouldn't want her sometimes to himself.

"Why—why I have something to say to you." Something that touched their happiness, somehow; something extraneous; yet something that mattered tremendously.

But she only went on looking at him out of those level, golden eyes of hers.

"What is it, Jimmie," she said at last, "that you can't tell me on the yacht?"

Jimmie went ashore alone just as the red disk of the sun dropped into a slot of heavy cloud. It was as well he went alone, for, after all, he didn't know that he could make her understand, even sitting on a sand dune.

"Better have a man or two along," the captain urged. But Jimmie took the oars himself.

"No."

Voices floated after him.

"Where's Wang?" came Beacham's basso. And Madge's soprano: "Let's have another rubber." Then a silence in which he fancied he could hear the hiss of the sun plunged into the water of the cloud.

It was better that he came alone.

He rowed up between the reedy banks of a long lagoon, high banks that shut out his view of the sound; and tied the painter to a ramshackle little wharf. He got out and walked over to a clearing in the pines, a clearing wide and straight, showing him the brilliant sky across the island.

The wind from the sea, having touched the fronds of palms and the glistening peaks of tropic mountains and the white froth of waves, played lightly on the high green aerials of the pines. Behind the line of sand dunes, a mile away, the surf sounded in rhythmic undertone.

He struck out through the clearing, walking toward the sea. Behind him was the *Quest*, invisible, remote, the only link between him and the things he called his life: money, motors, Madge. And he was walking straight away from them. Oh, he would turn back, but he was walking straight away.

He topped the sand dunes, saw the wide, white beach, and the pine trees near the sea, the pines that vied with "Treasure Island." It ought to be simple, sitting on the dunes, to prove the

theorem that bridge, champagne, and what Freddy called a "few merry syncopations" aren't the essence of happiness. Yet he knew his Q. E. D. would have convinced no one but himself.

He walked along the hard, smooth beach, walked briskly eastward toward the point that marked the entrance to the bay.

Dim in the twilight, he could make out the masts and spars of that old brig lying in the anchorage. Bound for some foreign port. But he couldn't think about that. He was going back to New York. Downtown in the morning, uptown in the evening. He'd be darting into those funny holes, just like the little people he could see out of the office window, little people out of drawing, darting into holes and running down the Battery to catch ferryboats. Every day. Same holes. Same ferryboats. He could almost swim out to that brig. Only he was going to New York to sell the house and the apartment, pay the note and pinch a bit. Then everything would be again just as it was before. Downtown two hundred days by motor, whizzing in the other eighty-five by train from Long Island.

He was around the point by now. Night had fallen. But the moon was coming, big and round, out of the east. Ahead of him he could see the lights and trim whiteness of the *Quest.*

It was rough along the beach on this side of the island, and he was grateful for the moon, sailing in and out among the clouds. Old drift logs lay across his path, and there were shell banks and the shore moorings of abandoned wharves. From one wharf, evidently not abandoned, hung drying nets. Made fast to a piling was a rowboat, oars shipped, waiting for to-morrow's trusting fisherman.

He was nearly to his own wharf, now, the wharf in the lagoon, where he had tied the gig. He found it, loosed the painter, took the oars. He could still hear the wind as it came soughing through the pines, still hear the breaking of the waves upon the wide, white beach across the island.

It was a goodly wind. It made ripples in the quiet lagoon. It urged the gig along between the reedy banks. An oar stroke now and then. Not too fast. He'd get there soon enough. Not too fast. Unless he had a sail. Wait! Wasn't there some sort of an arrangement? Collapsible mast? And canvas in the locker aft?

Ah, so there was. He was clumsy with them, though. He was no sailor. Still, the mast must fit in that socket forward. And the sail must hang to it, somehow. Looked triangular when hoisted. He'd seen hundreds of such sails.

He was working with it when the gig went blowing out of the lagoon into the sound, stern first. He had the mast properly in socket, and the sail—— That must be right. All he had to do was pull the rope. The sail would go up and catch the wind as it came whistling through the pines of Dauphin Island, blowing clouds athwart the moon.

Jimmie pulled the rope.

The gig went over on her side.

In the moment he was under water, Jimmie had all the mental reactions which persons who have never drowned ascribe to the experience of those who have. With this modification: Instead of a review of his whole life, which is said to pass before the drowning man, he saw, rather, a summary of the situation into which circumstances had plunged him, saw them with a sort of whimsical irony.

There was the note and there were the means of meeting it. He'd have to sell the house and the apartment, which would be hard on Madge. Suppose that he should drown—he might have been pinned under the gig. Or suppose the sharks should eat him—he knew that

there were sharks. Then there would be the insurance—adequate to meet the note. The business would be assured—old Walters was there to run it quite as well as Jimmie ran it—and the house and the apartment and all that they implied for Madge.

The irony lay in the fact that he was not pinned under the boat and the sharks did not eat him. And he was an excellent swimmer.

The first thing he heard when he came up was Julie's phonograph. And voices. They were quite distinct across the water.

"One heart," said Madge's treble; and Beacham's bass, "No trump."

He was easily in hail. He might have been in sight of sharp lookouts aboard the *Quest* except for the fact that clouds still hid the moon. Besides, the gig had settled in a shallow ooze, and by standing on her gunwale, he could keep his head above the water without swimming.

But he didn't hail. It would have made him feel like a fool to be rescued. He could easily reach the shore whence the trusting fisherman's dry skiff would take him to the yacht. Or, with but little more effort, he could swim the distance to the *Quest*.

"Game and rubber," Beacham's basso said. He heard chairs scraped on the deck. It was breaking up—the party at the table. Julie's phonograph was running yet. Shadows flitted across the portholes of the saloon. There was dancing on the *Quest*. Julie, of course. Julie always danced. But some one else. It might have been Beacham.

Jimmie, kicking off his shoes and shedding his coat, struck out for the yacht, swimming silently with long side strokes.

Still there were voices on the deck. Though he was nearer they sounded low, almost inaudible, a sort of humming in dialogue. Masculine and feminine. He couldn't hear the words. Not then. Small waves broke over him, smiting his ears.

He struck on, easily and silently. Freddy's voice and Madge's. He was annoyed. Not that it was wrong for them to sit and talk. That was all right, of course. But it could not go on. It looked—oh, well, pointed.

He was getting close and he would have to hail, although he hated it, hated making a fuss. He'd have to have a rope just like a drowning man. Jimmie, who had swum the Hudson, Jimmie needed a rope to get aboard the *Quest*.

Couldn't he? He caught the rudder chain, held it, considering. He was very close to Madge and Freddy now, and the little waves no longer pounded against his ear, now that he had pulled up by the chain. He could hear quite distinctly. Really, he ought to hail.

"No, Freddy," Madge was saying, "there's no use talking. I can't do it."

He really ought to hail. There was nothing wrong in what she said, of course. But her tone and the little silence between them! Nothing but the phonograph and the voices in the saloon.

"But you love me," Freddy said.

The water chilled him, and then Madge went on, deliberately choosing words.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so, Freddy. I like you, like to be with you. But I—you know I'm not a pioneer. Suppose I went away with you. We'd not be happy. We'd be just like the Beachams—card sharps—begging invitations. Just as you do now. No, it won't do, Freddy. I couldn't love any man unless—— If I just had something of my own! You know—the guarantee of motors and a yacht and, oh, houses and things to wear. And if I went away with you, whom would you win your money from?" She even touched the note of lightness.

"That's so," said Freddy. His discarded cigarette struck the water so close that Jimmie heard it hiss.

It was dawn when Jimmie, in the fisherman's dry skiff, sculled alongside the old green brig and caught the rope tossed down to him. The brig was called the *Columbine*, and she smelled like the devil and she was going to Singapore.

"Sailor, eh?" said the captain, eying Jimmie with suspicion.

"My card," said Jimmie, handing him a wet one-hundred-dollar bill.

¶ I met Jimmie in Hongkong. He has a little line of steamers. I'm in tea, myself. We often gab together at the club, and one day he told me.

"But, man, you're a fugitive!" I said.

"I know," said Jimmie—he's called Alden there. "I know. But I'm going to settle with the insurance companies. Shipping's been pretty good for me, and I can pay them up in full. After that, I think I'll go back to New York. It's pretty damned monotonous out here."

THERE IS ONE ILL

THERE is one ill for which I seek no cure,
No ease for its intolerable pain;
For all the flowers of beauty spring from it
As all the flowers of summer spring from rain;

There is one ill whose basest penury
Is wealthier than any miser's store—
Love, that with one kiss heals a hundred woes,
And sows a thousand more!

HARRY KEMP.

SONG

WHEN I am old I shall not care
To view the kingdoms from the air,
Or sail along the seven seas
Beyond the oft-sung Hebrides.

When I am old I shall not care
To let the wind blow through my hair,
Or feel the horse beneath me leap
To mountain trails, pine-dark and steep.

When I am old I shall confess
No rapture in a wave's caress,
No joy to scale a dizzy height,
Or lie out with the stars at night.

So help me, Youth, to lay away
Full store of living for the day
When I shall sit beside the fire,
And nurse a quieter desire.

ELEANOR MATHEWS STEVENS.

Kings of Hearts

By Anice Terhune

Author of "More Super-Women"

Chopin: the Genius Who Played Upon Heartstrings

A JOLLY group of young men were on their way to the house of a friend, where a literary reception was in progress. Among them was a pale, delicate-looking youth, slender to emaciation. Just outside his hostess' door, he stopped short.

"I'm going home," he said quietly.

"Going home!" echoed his companions in amazement. "Why, what's come over you, Frédéric? All the prettiest and cleverest women in town are just ahead waiting for a nod or a look from you!"

"I can't help it," he murmured. "They may be just ahead of me; but there is something just back of me—a violet-scented phantom has been following me right along—is following me still. Fate is warning me not to enter this house to-night."

His friends treated the matter as a joke, and at last, in spite of his strong desire to turn back, he yielded to their entreaties and went on—to his doom.

For at the reception he found a pair of brilliant dark eyes gazing into his—eyes that were to break the heart of one of the greatest heartbreakers in all history.

The youth was Frédéric François Chopin, first and greatest of "romantic" composers, and the idol of all women who heard him play.

The woman who, later, was to burn his very life up in the fire of her love and whose jewellike eyes now hold his in a fascinated gaze, was Madame Dudevant, known to the literary world as "George Sand," most celebrated of French authoresses.

If the man had heeded the warning of the "violet-scented phantom," which his sensitive soul felt was following him, the most dramatic part of this story might never have been written. He listened, instead, to the protests of his friends. So he and George Sand were brought together—for their mutual undoing.

"I have made the acquaintance of an important celebrity," he wrote to a friend that night, "Madame Dudevant, well known as George Sand—but I do not like her face. There is something in it which repels me."

It would have been well for him if he had never seen her again; but Fate willed differently, as I shall tell you later.

For the moment we must hark back to Chopin's early life.

He was born in 1809, at Zelazowa-Wola, a village not far from Warsaw. His father was French, his mother a Pole.

"Frederic was a quiet and thoughtful child," says Haweis, "with the sweetest of dispositions. He was frail and delicate, and a source of constant anxiety to his parents—always suffering and never complaining."

He showed unmistakable signs of genius, almost from the cradle; and began composing before he knew how to put down his thoughts on paper.

When he was nine years old, his musical education was intrusted to Ziwny, a Czech musician. Before long he had made such progress in piano playing as to excite wonder in all Warsaw drawing-rooms. When he was but ten years of age, the pale and delicate boy completely captivated the Italian opera singer, Madame Catalani. Her gift to him, a rare and beautiful gold watch, was the first of hundreds of offerings which were to be showered on him by women during his brief span of life.

Through the kindness of Prince Radziwill, who was always a liberal patron of budding geniuses, Chopin was sent to Warsaw College, where he received a liberal education, and where his music bloomed into glorious flower.

Here, in spite of his dreamy nature, he acquired habits of severe and systematic study which stood him in good stead in later years and gave him a complete mastery over his moods.

He is a shining example of the difference between a real genius—which means hard work and mental discipline plus natural talent—and the person who contents himself with being "temperamental"—which generally means temper, plus a facility for scrambling through things.

Chopin worked harder than any day laborer, and he loved his music job.

At college, Frederic made many friends, and most of his friends' sisters promptly fell in love with him. With no effort at all, he soon found himself firmly placed in society—a position which he retained as long as he lived and for which nature had peculiarly fitted him.

"Gentle, sensitive, and very lovely," George Sand writes of him, later, "he united the charm of adolescence with the suavity of a more mature age; through the want of muscular development, he retained a peculiar beauty, an exceptional physiognomy, which, if we may venture so to speak, belonged to neither age nor sex.

"The delicacy of his constitution rendered him interesting in the eyes of women. The full, yet grateful, cultivation of his mind, the sweet and captivating originality of his conversation, gained for him the attention of the most enlightened men, while those less highly cultivated liked him for the exquisite courtesy of his manners."

George Sand certainly should have known him, if any person did. And it was never her way to whitewash people's faults; so we may believe all she says in this case.

A mysterious aura seemed always about him. As pianist and composer, he was the acknowledged mouthpiece of the weird, poetic spirit of Poland. But beyond all this was the peculiar quality which made him a King of Hearts.

The first of his loves of whom there is any record was Leopoldine Blahetka, a musician, who adored him, and by whom he lazily allowed himself to be adored.

Then followed a wild affair with the daughter of Prince Radziwill, Princess Elisa. This, naturally, came to nothing; for even among the most fanatical music lovers, in those days, a princess did not marry a pianist. The intrigue ended with Elisa sobbing out her broken heart

over the piano keys, while Chopin, still heart-whole, went on to conquests new.

Both these episodes were over and done with before Chopin was twenty. At that age, he met Constantia Gladovska, a concert singer. Her lovely voice conquered the musician's heart for the time. During one of their brief separations, he sent her this message through a friend:

"Tell her that as long as my heart beats, I shall not cease to adore her. Tell her that even after my death, my ashes shall be strewn under her feet."

They became engaged, and Constantia was wearing Chopin's ring when he left Warsaw for Paris, where he was received with open arms.

"His bearing and manners were so distinguished and high-bred, that he was involuntarily treated like a prince," says a biographer. "With his fair complexion, blond hair and slightly aquiline nose, and his slender figure, and, above all, his heavenly music, Chopin was soon the center of admiration.

"In Paris, queen of the art world, there was no more brilliant or cultivated circle than that which surrounded the young Polish artist when he arrived there at the age of twenty-three."

Everybody and his daughter—especially his daughter—clamored to take lessons of the great pianist. Notables fell over each other trying to get him to accept invitations to their parties.

Sometimes Chopin's musicianly soul wearied of all the hullabaloo. Often he must have longed, just for a moment, to be a nobody—a person with no "stunts" to do—to be an onlooker, to be entertained, rather than to entertain; but his was the burden of the great who are destined always to entertain and amuse their mental inferiors.

At one of these formal affairs, a dinner, the gentle worm turned—just a little. When the dinner was nearly over, the host announced, unctuously:

"I have a great treat in store for you! By way of dessert, I am going to ask Monsieur Chopin to play for us!"

As the guests rose from the table, the host bounced forward to lead the composer to the piano.

"But I have eaten so little, my dear sir!" exclaimed Chopin languidly.

At another time, his audience kept him at the piano until his frail body was ready to drop from fatigue. He was playing in the dark; and his faithful friend, Franz Liszt, realizing that Chopin's strength was spent, slipped quietly up to the piano stool and took his place. He imitated Chopin's style so exactly that the audience never knew the difference—especially as the program was made up entirely of Chopin's compositions.

"I am not fitted for concert-giving," he said once to Liszt. "The public frightens me. Their breath stifles me."

Yet he loved playing to his own friends, in his own salon. And some of his most wonderful music was born in this way.

In Paris, Chopin was destined to break many hearts; and Constantia, hearing increasing reports of her lover's conquests, took him to task. Chopin reiterated his vows of eternal faithfulness—but they lacked conviction; and the girl, in pique, finally broke the engagement and married another man.

Sentimentalists love to mourn over the fearful havoc Constantia wrought upon Chopin's heart; but I think the wound was healed before it was made. He was hardly more than a boy, anyway; and women were mad about him.

"He found himself unable to avoid accepting some of the countless hearts that were flung like roses at his feet," writes a contemporary. "It seems he could modulate from one love affair to another as fleetly and as gracefully as from one key to its remote neighbor."

Maria Wodzinska, sister of two of his Polish friends, stands out from the crowd of sweethearts at this time from

the fact that Chopin was genuinely anxious to make her his wife. They became engaged, with the glad consent of their relatives. Everything seemed rose-colored.

Chopin himself was in the highest spirits, full of fun and happiness. He was a great mimic and used to entertain Maria in the intervals between their ardent love-making by imitating the playing of the most celebrated artists in Europe, even to the minutest mannerisms. Maria used to shriek with laughter at these clever impersonations, and Chopin was as happy as a child at having pleased her.

Preparations for the wedding went on. The couple were filled with brightest hopes for a glad future. Chopin determined to leave Paris and all its fascinations, after his marriage, and settle down quietly in Warsaw.

But again Fate intervened. There was a quarrel—merely one of the foolish misunderstandings in which lovers so often entangle themselves—and before either of them quite realized it, the match was off.

This time, Chopin was really heart-broken.

There were plenty of other adorers, of course; notably the Duchess Ludvika Czetnertynska, and the Countess Alexandra Morrolles, both of whom would gladly have laid down their lives for Chopin; but his delicate, gentle soul felt there was nothing left to live for.

Perhaps it was necessary for him to suffer in just such ways; perhaps nothing else would have imparted quite that wonderful, tender, tear-drenched quality to his "Préludes" that we find in no other composer.

He was playing one of the "Préludes" when his eyes first met George Sand's. It had been raining, earlier in the evening, and the continual drip, drip of the raindrops from the eaves had seemed sadly in tune with Chopin's spirit as he sat at home brooding over the loss of Maria. And when his gay friends had burst into the room and carried him off, half protesting, to the reception, the "violet-scented phantom" had followed him, even into the house. Presently, he had found himself pushed toward the piano.

With his fingers on the familiar keys, Chopin forgot the giggling and adoring women who had crowded around him from the moment he entered the house. He forgot the noise, the heat, the chatter, the suffocating atmosphere.

He remembered only the drip, drip, of the raindrops. He began to play. He caught and imprisoned the raindrops in one of the most beautiful "Préludes" the world has ever known—the one in D flat—and poured them in a sobbing shower over the heads of the spellbound guests who crowded around the piano.

It was at this moment that he happened to raise his eyes, and to meet the gaze of the simply dressed woman whom, later, Franz Liszt brought up and introduced as Madame Dudevant. As their eyes met, the woman smiled through wet lashes, and the blood rushed to Chopin's face.

Blindly he finished the anguish-torn "Prélude," mingling with the sobbing raindrops the sinister chords of Fate.

I have told you how he wrote of George Sand to a friend, that night. But when next they met, he forgot that he did not like her. Her brilliant conversation made him unaware of her ugly face.

She had fallen wildly in love with Chopin at first sight; and before he knew it, he had become her slave. Their very oppositeness drew them to each other.

George Sand, France's best-known superwoman, was hopelessly ugly. Balzac describes her thus:

"I found her in her dressing gown, smoking an after-dinner cigar, beside the fire, in an immense room. She wore very pretty yellow slippers with fringes, coquettish stockings, and red trousers.

Physically, she has acquired a double chin, like a well-fed priest. She has not a white hair, in spite of her trrible misfortunes. Her beautiful eyes are as sparkling as ever.

"When she is sunk in thought she looks just as stupid as formerly—as I told her—for her expression lies wholly in her eyes. She goes to bed at six in the morning and rises at noon. She smokes to excess and plays, perhaps, too much the *grande dame.*"

Carlyle is less merciful in his summary. He says bluntly: "She has the face of a horse!"

Another historian announces: "Her hair is as black and shiny as ebony; her swarthy face is red and heavy; her expression fierce and defiant, yet dull."

In spite of all this, she was a skilled heartbreaker.

Yet, when she met Chopin, King of Hearts, all her defenses went down. His frail beauty, his ethereal soul and gentle manner, found their complement in her masculine make-up and brutally rough, dominating ways. Her strength seemed to buoy him up, to give him new life.

They loved each other more deeply, more absorbingly, than either had ever loved before—could ever love again.

Chopin was already marked for death when he met George Sand. Tuberculosis had laid its grisly hand on him. The woman actually kept him alive, it was said, by the fire of her love and the force of her vitality.

He took a new lease of life for a time.

Of course, they quarreled often and fiercely. That could not be avoided; for George Sand quarreled with all her lovers and with all her friends. In spite of this, Chopin longed to make her his wife; but she would not listen. She knew that he had had many affairs of the heart; she knew that women were insane about him. She feared that if he were tied to her irrevocably, his love might wane. So, in spite of the sick man's earnest pleadings, she refused to go through a ceremony.

For a time their life was very happy, though it was always tempestuous. Then, in 1837, Chopin was taken dangerously ill and was told to seek a milder climate. Together they journeyed to the island of Majorça. The house they took there was poorly built, and was damp and cold in rainy weather. Chopin became worse. George Sand nursed him faithfully, and won him back to life almost by magic.

She chased his melancholy forebodings away and the two were ideally happy, each admiring the other's genius, the woman doing some of her best writing under the spell of Chopin's music; the composer writing immortal works for his beloved piano.

Then, almost imperceptibly, the rift appeared. George Sand was not intended by nature for an invalid's nurse. She had always been impatient. She grew more so. Chopin did not get well—so, at last, she deserted him.

Partly to excuse herself for her inexcusable conduct, she spoke of him to her friends as "that detestable invalid." She told the world at large that she was a patient, devoted nurse and comrade to him, and that he was too fretful to live with. As we have no authority but hers for this side of his character, there is the temptation to believe she was trying to condone her own actions with a lie.

"We never addressed a reproach to each other," she writes, "except once, which was the first and final time."

Her desertion was Chopin's deathblow. He tried bravely to go about as before, and appeared often in public, but he sank steadily.

"All the cords that bound me to life are broken," he said.

The two met again, by chance, in a friend's house. The woman walked up to Chopin and held out her hand.

"Frédéric!" she murmured in a voice audible to him alone.

He saw her familiar form standing before him. She was repentant, subdued, and seeking reconciliation. His handsome face grew deadly pale, and, without a word, he left the room.

From that time on, Chopin kept away from all places where he was likely to meet her. Not long afterward, the end came. When Chopin knew that he was dying, he sent for the woman who had absorbed his heart and his whole life. She did not come. Perhaps she did not get the message. At any rate, hour after hour, the dying man waited for her, struggling to keep breath in his body until he should see her beloved face again. His ears strained in vain for the sound of her heavy tread.

After an eternity of waiting, he realized at last that she was not coming—that he could never see her again. Then he broke down and cried like a child.

"She promised I should die in no arms but hers!" he sobbed again and again.

Around his bed were grouped his dearest friends. One of his most faithful worshipers, the beautiful Countess Potocka, weeping, sang a last song in answer to Chopin's trembling request. It was Stradella's "Canticle to the Virgin." As she finished, with the tears streaming down her cheeks, Chopin whispered:

"How beautiful it is! My God, how very beautiful!"

Yet the love and devotion of all Chopin's dear friends could not make up for George Sand's absence. His last thought was of her—his last longing was to die in her arms.

On the thirtieth of October, 1849, Chopin's gentle spirit left his worn-out body. The next day, so many flowers were sent by those who loved him that he seemed to be reposing in a garden of blossoms. Universally beloved and mourned, he leaves an immortal memory.

He has been called the "Shelley of music." His warm, tender, love-breathing notes bear the same relation to other music that the month of June does to the rest of the calendar. Not the greatest music of all, not the grandest or the most religious; but the tenderest—the most appealing, the most personal—and in some ways the saddest music in the world; even as a lovely June day seems sad, one does not quite know why.

Perhaps we are more indebted to George Sand for all this than we realize. Perhaps, but for Chopin's all-worshiping love of the horse-faced, cruel woman, he might never have reached the heights to which his music soared.

She lived to regret, most bitterly, her rôle in the final act of their love drama.

Chopin's was the better part, for he had nothing to regret, and he left behind only a fragrant, flower-laden memory.

HARRY COLLINS, who is considered one of America's authorities on women's dress, has recently advocated the wearing of dark, rather than bright, colored hats. He states that in this he is following nature's law, since the hair is always darker than the tones of the skin.

AT a recent exhibition of the School of Floristry a new kind of bridal bouquet, designed for the convenience of brides who go direct from the church to the train, was demonstrated. In the center of the large conventional type of bridal bouquet a smaller one is inserted, ready to be detached after the ceremony and worn with the going-away suit as a corsage.

Roof of Paradise

By Mildred Cram

Author of "Exhibit B," "The Cheats," etc.

TIRZA was romantic. She loved her conception of life, but had not so much as a nodding acquaintance with the real thing. And when she fell in love with Willard Graves she fell in love with an ideal, not with a fallible human being. She was the potter, he the clay.

Tirza was pretty—not too pretty—tall and slim, with lots of brown hair, and eyes that are called "Irish."

Nothing had ever stirred her except beauty. She had had her dreams, but they were the dreams of a romantic child. She wanted perfection. She was somewhat of a prude. She had decided that certain things were ugly and, to avoid seeing them, she closed the eyes of her mind. Old people liked her because, like them, she had so few desires. Young people were a little afraid of her, took their troubles to her, and left her out of their games.

Tirza had been very well brought up by particular parents. She had "wintered" in Rome and "summered" in any number of Swiss and French resorts, always protected, abetted in her instinctive postponement of reality.

Left an orphan at twenty-five, she came back to America to win her way out of a respectable poverty. Europe, and all that expensive, dangerous love of beauty had been paid for out of her father's capital.

She landed, poor falling rocket, in the office of a fashion magazine, where she wrote captions and polite little travel articles that flowered shyly among the advertisements.

She lived uptown—One Hundred and Fifty-sixth Street. Tirza's setting: A gilded-cage apartment house; two rubber plants and a genuine Persian rug in the lobby; an intricate parking of baby carriages before the entrance. For atmosphere, the roar of roller skates.

It is no exaggeration to say that Tirza was mentally nauseated. From her windows she saw nothing but the pink-and-yellow brick façade of a motion picture theater where electric lights flashed expensively night and day.

Tirza shrank from the elemental and beribboned perambulator brigade in One Hundred and Fifty-sixth Street. Any one could have a baby apparently, but only the chosen few could build beautiful, immortal things—— The idea tapered off.

What she really wanted was the realization of an ideal. It is simple enough to cherish idealism in a setting of marble and cypress, but in the Broadway subway a confirmed dreamer either surrenders or becomes a driveling optimist. Tirza suffered, where you and I, seasoned to the inevitable, would have entered a private imaginative vacuum until released at Times Square to a glimpse of the sky.

She met Willard Graves at a birthday party given by the office staff in honor of the editor, who had reached forty-five

and still believed, professionally, in his illusions.

The staff frightened and puzzled Tirza. These young people were all so pleasantly and carelessly sophisticated. She couldn't understand them. For one thing, they liked New York; they called its ugliness picturesque, its vulgarity stimulating, its incongruity beautiful. Tirza was out of place that afternoon. She sat by the window, isolated, looking out at the harsh, clear-cut skyscrapers picketing the horizon.

And now, at last, you have Willard Graves.

He was the invited guest of the art editor, a mere newspaperman at this gathering of witty young sophists.

Perhaps because he, too, felt out of it, he spoke to Tirza and offered her a cup of weak tea, brewed in the decorative office samovar.

Willard Graves asked her to tell him all about herself. This was common politeness, the ordinary bait flung out to pretty nibblers. But Tirza had had no experience with anglers. She told him, with appropriate melancholy, all about herself. The recital would have chilled most men, but Willard Graves wasn't listening—he was watching the curve of her lips and the lights in her hair and her lovely, healthy slenderness.

He was thinking that he ought to marry and settle down; he was thirty and it was time that he got somewhere. For ten years he had played with a sophomore lightness of heart. He must, he decided, make a man of himself, get out of boarding houses, work, climb the ladder of achievement——

His idea, also, tapered off. No pert, bobbed sophist could have taken him so far. Tirza was that rare anachronism, a potential wife.

Willard Graves wooed Tirza with patience. He was not imaginative, but he tried to make her see New York as he saw it—a great torso slapped into suggestive outline by the hand of a new race. Tirza saw only the crude mixture of architectures. The American landscape struck her as being Nature left too much alone; she preferred the ancient lawns of Oxford and the clipped hedges of Versailles—Nature smoothed, subdued. But she tried to share Willard's enthusiasm, tramping across Queensboro Bridge at sunset, or breasting the cold winds pouring through the funnel of lower Broadway to stare up the stone cliffs at the stars. It was superb ugliness, she told him, but it was ugly! She dreamed of the terrace at Revello, a cloud above the sea, and yellow roses thick as cloth of gold.

One night he asked her to marry him.

Tirza didn't answer at once. She glanced down at their two hands clasped together, then up at his face, asking herself with desperate urgency whether she loved him. His eyes never ceased to stare at her, and a shiver of fear and hostility ran through her body like a flame.

"Please don't!" she said.

"Don't what?"

"Look at me like that."

"But I can't help it. I love you. I'll do any earthly thing for you. I'll dig down into the earth or build up into the sky. Say the word!"

"You ought to write," she insisted.

"I'm no good at it."

"You will be."

He shook his head.

"I'm not sure. I have an itch to build something visible."

"Material?"

He sensed the light irony of that word.

"Well, perhaps. A book. What does it amount to? Paper! Printed words! If they're not *great* words——"

His hand tightened over hers.

"But I'll stick at it, if you'll marry me, Tirza."

His eyes were so close, so strange. She didn't know him, understand him. Yet, if she desired, she could belong to him.

"I'll marry you," she said suddenly, turning her face away.

They were sitting on a bench in Central Park—this was a limelighted wooing—and now she stood up, wanting to move, to avoid for a moment the triumph in his eyes. And they walked down from the crest of a small hill toward the city. It lay beyond the feathery barrier of trees, a pool of lemon-yellow light, a vague and immense sound, an antagonist.

"We'll be poor for a while," Willard Graves said. "I haven't a cent."

"I know."

She felt the completeness of his dedication and there was a touch of cruelty in her enjoyment of her power. But in the shadow of a long passageway, a place dim and echoing, empty of passersby, he caught her close, tipped her head back, and kissed her.

Tirza's first thought was that she must look ridiculous. She pushed him away.

"Not here! Some one might see."

"Beggars can't be choosers," he said. "I'd prefer moonlight and nightingales. But a kiss is a kiss."

"Not in Central Park."

They went on, unsteady, self-conscious, estranged. Tirza knew that she had failed, and tried desperately to justify herself.

"It's so *common*, kissing in public."

He swung around.

"I wonder," he said, "if you're romantic or if you are simply a prude?"

They had not left the shadow of the passageway. She held her hand out to him, unrepentant, wanting only to experiment with that wonderful new power. And this time, surrendering, she lost herself for a moment. She loved him. She must love him to feel this way. Yet, she wasn't sure. She heard herself saying: "I love you. I do love you. *I do!*"

They were married in April. Tirza wanted to go to Revello for the honeymoon; Willard was more practical. Between them they had a thousand dollars. They could squander it all on a Mediterranean sunrise or they could furnish a little flat somewhere above One Hundredth Street.

Willard was weary of boarding houses. An Axminster rug on his own hearth, a morris chair, a bookshelf and an honest-to-goodness kitchen struck him as things supremely, delectably romantic. He hankered to help with the dishes, wrapped about by one of Tirza's gingham aprons. He wanted a resting place for his college trophies, his precious books and photograph albums, his stamp collection. He didn't expect that Tirza would understand his passion for stamps, but he did want her to respect it. After all, he respected her love of seven-branch candelabra, terra-cotta boxes and sepia prints.

Tirza wanted Revello. She longed to walk with him, hand in hand, through the high-flung gardens above the sea; to feel the passion and beauty of life there where it is most passionate and beautiful——

"That sounds great," Willard said. "You make me dizzy. Honest you do! I'd like to go. But how about furniture, and stuff for the kitchen, and rent? We'd come back from Italy stone broke. To what? To a boarding house!"

They compromised on two weeks in Virginia. The old farmhouse where they stayed was quaint enough to satisfy Tirza, and Willard put up with the inconveniences because to Tirza they were picturesque.

Together, they walked through the forests of dwarf pine, and when Willard had exhausted Yale and "the good old days," he would lie stretched at full length, his head in Tirza's lap, listening to her. There were moments when he felt certain that he was boring her. But never for an instant would he admit that she bored him. He hung on her words, watching her mouth, her quiet, innocent

eyes, as if fascinated by her very aloofness from him, from reality.

Perhaps he was too sure of her, too triumphant. She would have preferred him to remain in the attitude of a supplicant, pleading with her for her gifts. He accepted her love, not carelessly, but boyishly, with a frank, simple pleasure in her and in himself. Tirza was vaguely troubled that anything so radical as marriage could be entered into so lightly—as, for instance, one walks down a sunny road. She wondered whether he valued her dedication, understood what an effort it had cost her to come out of her shadowy girlhood into the dazzling sunlight of maturity.

Yet there were moments when she loved him beyond question. Then, he was grateful, exuberant.

What a wonderful life they were going to have! He would go back to the newspaper, write special articles, Sunday-supplement stuff, perhaps, in time, signed editorials. From these he would graduate to the short story—Tirza could help him there, out of her knowledge of places and people. He was sorry that he hadn't traveled. Some of the men in his class had gone to the Low Archipelago, others to South America. One chap he knew had settled in Africa. Somehow he, himself, had missed all that. He wasn't, he imagined, an adventurer.

"Adventurers don't marry," Tirza said.

"We'll adventure together."

"Some day——"

"Tirza, I'd like to buy a schooner and knock about as Jack London and Charmian did."

Tirza knew that such mating is rare. Willard was no vagabond. He would be content with the things she hated. He hadn't the flame. She looked down at his face. His eyes were closed and he sucked at his little brier pipe. A boy. A very ordinary, lovable boy. With

tentative fingers she caressed his hair, suddenly afraid of the doubt in her heart. "I do love him," she said to herself. And aloud she murmured:

"I love you. I do. You know I do!"

"Of course," he said, not opening his eyes. "Of course, darling. I know it. I'm sure of it."

Willard worked very hard at the business of being literary.

The servant's two-by-four bedroom was set aside as his "study." Here, squeezed behind a workmanlike desk with his precious encyclopedia at hand, a bowl of very black ink and stacks of yellow paper, he spent his days and a great part of his nights for three years. While he worked, Tirza tiptoed from room to room, holding her breath as if actually in the presence of that terrifying phantom "inspiration." She waited, growing paler, thinner, fainter, watching Willard Graves with a sort of accusation in her eyes.

She was waiting, Willard knew, for his masterpiece.

In the meantime, he emerged from newspaper work into some of the magazines. It was a very narrow squeak financially and nothing much of a début. If only Tirza weren't waiting! If only he believed in himself! If only he understood how those fellows—Kipling, Conrad, Galsworthy—turned the trick! What was the proportion? What the strangeness? Their secret eluded him. He tried to make music and made only a dull sound, the tom-tom of mediocrity. He hated the dark study. More than anything he hated himself because he had won Tirza on a pretense, had given her, not his true self, but a false image of himself.

"Materialist" was Tirza's word of contempt. She wanted him in some way to be distinguished. She wanted him to write for the "better" magazines, with that mincing and mannered restraint

which is called *précieux*. Without saying so, she made him feel that he was commonplace.

"But what *is* good and what *is* bad?" he demanded. "Are you *sure?*"

"Of course I'm sure. Aren't you?"

He shook his head. It was quite true; he wasn't sure.

He saw very little of other men, being too cloistered to meet men casually and too poor to afford clubs. In desperation he haunted the offices of his literary agent, eager for talk of the world. But more often, attracted by symbols of visible achievement, he hung about buildings in process of construction, watching the delicate upward crawling of spidery steel framework. Here was something to get your teeth into—a man's job!

He said nothing to Tirza about these expeditions. Every morning she put out fresh paper, sharpened the pencils, filled the inkwell, dusted the thesaurus and tiptoed out again, leaving Willard to bleak labor, to servitude in an intellectual treadmill.

One day he said to her:

"My stuff's rotten, and you know it!"

She did know it, but she flew to kiss him, to reassure him that she believed in him.

"I'm not an artist," he insisted. "I'd like to be, for your sake. I think I must be an artisan. A builder. I've always liked to do things with my hands—I'd rather wield an awl than a pen. I like being with men, talking to them, getting their point of view. It isn't that I don't love you—but we're together too much. I have a feeling, and it may be only a feeling, that you're *waiting* for me to do something I'll never do; waiting, watching, perhaps praying. I'm in there, in that room, alone with an empty mind, alone with the *fact* that I've failed. You're out here waiting. It drives me crazy. Some day I'll stretch up my arms like Samson and push the walls out and bury both of us in the ruins."

"What do you want to do?" she asked, turning her eyes away.

He pulled her down on his knee and smoothed the hair back from her forehead, caressing her because at that moment he hated her.

"Well," he began after a moment, "there's Dad's business——"

"Roofing!" she said, and bit her lips.

"Why not? There's money in it. Dad wants me; has always wanted me. In Heaven's name, Tirza, why do you prefer five thousand printed words to a damned good roofing job?"

"You needn't swear!"

"Don't be feminine."

She pushed his hand away.

"Talk to me like a man, Tirza—like a friend. Forget we're married. Try to see *me*—what I am—what I need!"

"You promised me."

Willard Graves stared hard at her. He thought how sullen she was, with her brows drawn together and the corners of her mouth turned down.

"I made a mistake," he said at last. "I thought I wanted to write. Have you ever noticed those saleswomen who 'walk' walking dolls up and down shop windows? How many children do you suppose envy them that deadly job? Well, I have held my own particular walking doll by its bisque hand, and for interminable hours I have walked it up and down. I'm sick of it. I'm going to quit."

"Very well," Tirza said.

He destroyed his manuscripts with a vicious pleasure in scattering the pieces, not to the four winds, but to the wastebasket. Then he went to his father and confessed himself a failure, disclosing a passion for roofing and a good old American desire to start at the bottom and work up—presumably to the roof. His father chewed his cigar in the good old American fashion, grunted, ruminated, rang an electric bell and set Willard to work.

Thereafter, his days were full of plans and specifications, contracts, factory details—roofs upon which he trod with the light heart of a prisoner set free.

Tirza was left at home to wonder about love, life and her unsatisfied heart. She no longer tiptoed. She no longer waited. She didn't understand roofing, and didn't want to. It seemed more and more impossible to find anything to share with him. She knew that she had no influence whatever; Willard's point of view, now that she had dropped the reins, had galloped off to fields unfamiliar to her, there to crop delightedly. He was forever pastured in "business."

"What shall I do?" she demanded of the discontented woman reflected in the mirror. "I've got to *live*. Marriage isn't the end; it isn't even a beginning. I'm young. I'm pretty. This flat. Willard. *Roofs!*"

It was characteristic of Tirza, who wanted contact only with things she liked, to underestimate this new grazing ground. Willard Graves had gone where she could not follow him, so. naturally, she did not want to follow him.

She joined a political club and for a year or two interested herself in feminism. Willard was a passive feminist. It amused and vaguely embarrassed him when Tirza made speeches from the tonneau of an automobile. Once, for her sake, he marched in a suffrage parade, ashamed, self-conscious, advertising his state of mind by his grin.

But there was none of the spectacular martyrdom of England's suffrage campaign to carry Tirza far. This interest faded and she came to another closed door. What next?

Very naturally, beauty came next, since the roofing business prospered. They moved downtown and Tirza let her imagination run riot hand in hand with expensive decorators. The black-and-gold drawing-room was a long cry from Willard's Axminster and the old morris chair before the gas log.

"Do you like it?" she asked.

Willard wrinkled up his eyes.

"Very nice."

"You're very inarticulate."

"What do you *want* me to say? I don't understand all this color and flub-dub; but if it's what you want, dear—I'm game."

"Game!"

Then Tirza met Hal Jowett. It was perhaps inevitable that the triangle should have been pointed by a painter. Hal Jowett was what Tirza called "distinguished." His sleek and amiable personality was known in the casual, bohemian circles frequented by illustrators and fashionable portrait painters, the serious, rather somber haunts of the "big men" and the mannered studios of Greenwich Village. He was somewhat of a "big man" himself. Yet he fell between the timid conservative and the dashing modernist and seemed destined to follow rather than to lead. His work was successful because he was always a lap or two behind the revolutionists. To be exact, he belonged to the romantic school of impressionism. He had a facile technique and a sure-fire formula. The initiate, entering a gallery, could pick a Jowett at fifty feet. And the public, finding it simple enough to imitate the critics, was subtly flattered—and purchased Jowetts.

"Ah! There's a Jowett! Have one at home. Patches of snow; birch trees—charming!"

Not being troubled with discontent, Jowett found time for Tirza. He looked at her, on the occasion of their meeting, as if he found her beautiful, and so, of course, she became beautiful, her beauty leaping out to meet his appreciation. Suddenly, life was worth living, after a stale interlude in which it had seemed that her youth was gone, her spirit quiescent. To Willard, she had been simply

Tirza; he had fallen out of the habit of making love to her. It was somehow more satisfactory to make love to the roofing business. Willard supposed that sooner or later all women, all wives, retreated into this chaste aloofness; after his first disappointment he had made his adjustment, blaming himself for lack of comprehension.

Jowett had no such misgivings. He was not afraid of Tirza because he guessed how eager she was for what he had to offer. But he was far too skillful to tell her that she was starved or to hint at thirst. He found her plastic, but not fragile.

"I met an interesting man to-day," Tirza remarked at dinner. "An artist. I think we'll be friends."

"That's fine!" Willard said.

"You won't be jealous?"

Willard flushed.

"Naturally not!"

"Thanks. I expect to see a good deal of him. His name's Hal Jowett."

"Um. Don't know him."

"No. You wouldn't," Tirza said, and to her own amazement she tempered this barb with a smile.

Jowett was patient. There was just enough of the feminine in the leavening to endear him to women like Tirza. He was the sort of man who makes the dressing of a salad a religious ceremony. He had an expert's appreciation of women's clothes, who made them, why they were good or bad style, and whether they were or were not becoming.

Whenever Tirza bought a new hat, Willard Graves would say: "A new dip? Pippin!"

But Jowett would say: "A Lucette? Very amusing. But you wear it too far forward—a little to one side—delightful!"

The cut of Hal Jowett's coat and boots was deeply satisfying. Willard Graves would have thought himself turning decadent had he taken an interest in his appearance—to be clean-shaven, brushed, decently clothed in blue serge was enough. Tirza might have fallen in love with him had he worn tweed overcoats, mufflers and tan spats. His two-year-old derby hurt her like a personal affront.

"*All* your ties are dark blue with white spots!" she said to him one day.

Willard glanced at himself in the mirror and wriggled his chin.

"What's the matter with dark blue and spots? Neat, not gaudy."

"But don't you *see*——" Tirza began.

"I see. Perfectly. Too well!"

Hal Jowett saw, too, in his way. He waited an artistic interval. He wanted Tirza with a very particular longing, since he knew that he was the source, she the thirsty one.

Jowett did not expect opposition. So that when he found Tirza waiting for him in her little black-and-gold drawing-room, all her nerves on the surface, her eyes eager, her hands unsteady when he grasped them, he kissed her fingers and said:

"I can't help myself. I love you."

"You've spoiled it," Tirza whispered. "We were friends—now there's *this!*"

But Jowett was stubborn.

"I love you. I have, always. Oh, I know that's old—lovers have said the same thing from the beginning of time and love. But what's new about the way I feel? You're the one woman. Don't tell me you love that husband of yours!"

"I don't know."

"You'd better find out. I'll say now what I've wanted to say all along. You're being cheated. A woman like you—here!"

"He's good to me."

"Of course. Don't think I'm painting him black. I think you're cheating *him.*"

"I?"

"You!"

"But I tried!"

"Well?"

She covered her face with her hands.

"I tried. I don't understand him. I don't like his friends. My friends don't like him. Business is *important* to him. It isn't to me. I hate it. I hate details. I hate the commonplace."

"There's only one life," Jowett said gravely. "Isn't it amazing how carelessly we waste it? As if there were more and more—an endless supply of lives, of intact personalities, of identical chances. And before we know it——"

She interrupted him.

"I always wanted to give him beauty. And you say I've cheated him. It isn't so!" She pushed Jowett away, both hands against his breast. "I don't know! I've got to *think*. Give me time!"

Tirza was afraid now that she had found what she had so long been seeking. To justify herself, she fell into the habit of underrating Willard Graves. She lacked the courage to tell him that Jowett could offer rarer spirit fare. Somehow the truth would hurt, put that way. Instead, she sought to topple over the matrimonial edifice by removing, one by one, the supporting walls. Breathless, fearful, tormented, inwardly shaken, she became outwardly indifferent, a creature shut away from, shrinking before, Willard Graves' dumb and matter-of-fact affection. He *must* see! He must open the door and admit her happiness!

Willard Graves was not a fool. He watched her, bewildered only by her methods. The facts he understood. She was unhappy. She seemed so small, so unimportant, just a woman, muddled, self-centered. She would turn her head away to avoid the touch of his hand on her forehead—— Perhaps, if he could talk to her, he could make her understand that her happiness was in his keeping. She had never grasped, dealt with reality. Poor little girl. Poor little Tirza, chasing rainbows.

Once, finding him with the "Dialogues of Plato," she said:

"I didn't know you cared for such things."

He gave her a curious look, and put the book down.

"You don't know much about me, Tirza. We're growing apart. Something's wrong. We don't talk any more."

Tirza let the moment pass. She shrugged her shoulders.

Willard came over to her and put his hand on her hair.

"Let's get away," he said. "Away from people and business and all these little happenings that clutter up life. Let's go abroad—it will do you good—Italy. What do you say? That place you used to talk about—what was it?"

"Revello," she whispered, with a strange feeling in her heart. Suddenly she caught his arm, and put her face against it.

"Then it's a go!" Willard said. She felt his awkward hand on her hair. "I'll get the tickets. You pack. I've been a fool. I didn't know you still remembered that place."

"I've been remembering for six years," she reminded him.

She wrote Hal Jowett that she was sailing. Jowett's answer was good-humored and characteristic:

> I understand why you're going—— Well, he won't meet the test. There's no roof on paradise! I am going to Capri within ten days, there to wait your change of heart.

They sailed in April. Willard had never crossed the ocean before. He was excited and exuberant. He paced the decks, throwing back his shoulders and taking deep breaths of the salty wind. He played quoits and shuffleboard with the ship's doctor, spun yarns in the smoking saloon, visited the steerage, the engine room, the bridge. Tirza, tucked into her steamer chair, watched the sea, where a shivering and splintering of sunlight dazzled her eyes. All the critical devils in her mind were sitting in judg-

ment on Willard Graves, appraising him, finding him provincial, awkward, a bore. She thought of Hal Jowett with a leap in her heart.

All down the Mediterranean Willard talked roofs to an Italian contractor. She heard his voice booming prices and estimates. There was a full moon. Tirza saw Chopin's Majorca—a sable island in a silver sea—Minorca, Corsica. The air was warm and sweet, full of the promise of fresh grass, fruit blossoms, mimosa and furze. Willard Graves turned his back on this beauty; flicked his cigarette; laughed. This and that cost so much and so much.

Then Naples. Willard called the cabby "Tony."

"Jove, I've never seen so many wops!"

The Toldeo was a "dirty joint." But he enjoyed Vesuvius and its single plume of purple smoke. After dinner he bought post cards and spent an hour penning messages to his office staff at home:

We're in Wopland. Having a great time.
Yours, à la spaghetti. W. G.

In the morning he was triumphant:

"Found a New York *Times*. Only two weeks old. What do you know about that?"

In the afternoon they drove to Pompeii. Then to Salerno. Then, over the dizzy Amalfi road, to the Cappuccini, where they spent the night. Willard would have preferred a motor to the Sardinian ponies with their pheasant-feather headdress and their merry ringing of little bells. He took photographs at every turn, scattered pennies for ragged urchins to fight over, spoke "guinea English" to the driver.

"I'm ashamed of him," Tirza thought. "I'm *ashamed!*"

On the terrace after dinner she slipped her arm through his and leaned against him.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" she asked.

Her query seemed to mute his loud exuberance. He held his breath as if he heard for the first time the insistent demand of her spirit.

"Why, yes," he said at last. "Very beautiful."

"Thank Heaven!" she thought. "He didn't say 'nice.'"

He went indoors to send off more post cards, and she stayed on the terrace, walking up and down between the ghostly pillars. Far below she heard the surf on the beach and the light jingle of bells and a man's voice singing as he drove his cart down from the vineyards. She pictured herself running away to that other—the romantic lover. With a little shiver she heaped audacity upon audacity. There was only one life, and she was wasting it. The wind on her face was like the touch of gentle fingers; it ruffled her hair and lifted her scarf, fluttering it out behind her.

The drive to Revello was a bitter pilgrimage. As if seized with a deliberate perversity, Willard talked of nothing but the heat, the dust, the scorching sun.

There were roses at Revello. And the sun went down in a bank of crimson clouds.

Willard complained of the dinner:

"I'm sick and tired of veal and salad! I'd give my right hand for a sirloin steak and baked potatoes. *And* corn on the cob!"

But he found a congenial soul in the little salon—a lawyer from Wichita—and they took their cigars and coffee indoors. Tirza went out alone into the blue twilight, walking swiftly, afraid of her thoughts. Off there in the sea was Capri, and Jowett waiting for her! What had he said? "There is no roof on paradise!"

All she had to do was to drive to Amalfi before Willard woke in the morning. She could find boatmen there to take her to Capri, to Jowett, to her dream.

She thought: "I have a right to my dream. I'll go."

She fancied that she could see Capri through the gathering darkness, and Jowett smiling to himself at this sentimental journey of hers. And with a shiver of delight and a sort of shame she realized how sure he must have been —to have crossed the ocean to that rendezvous! Sure of her. Perhaps too sure! She paused, lifting her head, tasting the sweetness of the night. Unless there should be a miracle, she would go down to Amalfi at dawn.

Then, behind her, she heard Willard's voice:

"Getting late, Tirza! We'd better turn in."

"Very well," she said quietly, "I'm coming."

She did not sleep at all. Beyond the open window the stiff leaves of a camellia bush rattled and whispered; a cock crowed somewhere; once a sound of light laughter and singing passed through the darkness, growing fainter and fainter down the hill. Willard slept, unstirring, breathing quietly. Tirza could see his dark head on the pillow— if only he had sensed her intention! But he slept like a man secure in his possessions, a man without enemies.

It seemed to her that she stood at the very last gate of all.

She tiptoed into her room and dressed by the light of a candle, startled by unexpected glimpses of her white face in the mirror. She was finding romance in the essence a bitter brew.

She packed her suit case, putting in the folding leather frame containing Willard's photograph. This seemed the least she could do, and gave her a faint glow of comfort. She wondered whether Jowett would be quite so easy an old shoe. Living up to Jowett would mean being always at her best. He was particular about a woman's hair, her hands, the perfume she used. Tirza hurriedly packed her bottle of *eau de Cologne* —she should have *ambre* or *lilas* or *jasmin*. "I can't do it," she thought. "Not even with *ambre* or *lilas*. I'm *eau de Cologne*."

She went to the threshold of Willard's room and stared through the darkness. How could she tell him that he bored her? She remembered all the little things he had done to please her. She remembered how intolerant she had been of his tolerance. And suddenly she wondered whether he, too, had not been bored, abysmally bored, with *eau de Cologne*.

A cool wind came in through the open window. Outside there was a deepening of the shadows. She felt her heart contract, and her eyes filled with tears. For the first time in her life she knew the cleansing fire of self-distrust. She wanted Willard to open his eyes, to speak to her, to save her from herself. She wanted to be certain that he would accept her, as he had always accepted her, for what she was. She unpacked the bag and undressed again, quickly, quietly.

Her romantic dawn found her standing in the doorway. The sun came up, thrusting long spearheads of golden light through the mists of the morning.

Willard Graves opened his eyes and saw Tirza watching him with a strange new humility in her eyes. He blinked, turned his head on the pillow, and stared.

"What the deuce——"

Tirza began to tremble. She got down on her knees by his bed and got hold of his hand and kissed it.

"Why, hello," he said, "this is our dawn! Why, Tirza. Why, little kid, I forgot."

"I love you," she whispered. "I do. *I do!*"

"I know," Willard said. And, leaning sidewise, he kissed the top of her head.

Irish Nemesis

By Stanley Olmsted
Author of "The Asra"

"I WOULD say of the man," deliberated Meakins, "that in what he does he is somehow deeper than in what he feels."

Jenkens nodded.

"An equivocation. But it fixes both his guilt and his own especial brand of magnitude."

In a blank interval of repose they puffed cigars and ruminated.

Jenkens mused aloud:

"Let me see—the pair were married some time before the Spanish-American war. She taught an infant grade in one of the public schools. He was supervising principal of them all. In those days she was willow slim and of a gliding height. There was a sort of deliberated awkwardness about her—a supple gawkiness that seemed to hint at some unheard-of grace—a new ideal maybe of anti-Delsarte. Nobody could lay eyes on her for a moment and ever forget her. She had gray eyes, black-fringed, wide-apart—wide-open. Remember them? They always appeared in literal transcription in those miniatures of her heroines—those invariable frontispieces of the novels, the 'best sellers' she was to write years thereafter. Remember her nose? Something rakish about it——"

"Tip-tilted," interrupted Meakins, "as if for sniffing from the very air the maximum of her personal effectiveness."

"Yes, yes. She was inveterate at dramatizing herself. We can't blame her for that. In those days—recall?—there was a little Irish-born mother living with her in a tiny house in a brick row. When Candler, with the biggest educational position in the city, proposed to her it was like offering her a coronet."

"Deeper always in what he does than in what he feels," repeated Meakins. "Every item of the man's history, sentimental or secular, bears that out. His social prestige there in Washington was a kind of miracle. He could have married one of the wealthiest girls in that city, where so many of the wealthy sojourn a while. In fact, his quiet engagement with Vera Longbow was broken off shortly after Nell played *Lady Teazle* in that entertainment for funds for the high-school library—Nell's own idea. And Nell broke her own plighted troth with poor Bob Sullivan."

"Yes. They were both of them utterly ruthless—Nell as well as Candler. Nell represented his own species of ambition. He wanted a domestic atmosphere of coruscation—of delicate pose and persiflage—more than he wanted money. She wanted to 'put it over' exactly as a manager wants to put over a certain type of clever play."

"Or, briefly," agreed Meakins, "Nell dramatized him into the marriage."

The newspaper with the half column which had set these two not quite middle-aged men debating old matters lay on the floor near their leather chairs.

An attendant of the club approached softly and picked it up. Neither of them

"Some day," he expostulated with inevitable, profane Celticisms which may be omitted here, "you'll get some such fool to worriting until he really does puncture his dome—and it may be with a long-range gun that can also put a hole in your reputation."

"Tut, tut, child," soothed Nell. "Tommy was my chosen escort home from the party. After I'd instructed him in some more picturesque modes of dying, I let him kiss me good night. Sure, lad, he'll stay alive a while longer for the bliss of thinking on it!"

It was somewhere at this point that the chalk hit the emotional six-year-old in the eye, at the back of the schoolroom, as Candler entered with his retinue, to find a strange young man planted by Miss Maloney's desk—a weird young man with tousled, curly hair, and a manner of distraction too abruptly controlled.

Poor fellow. He was to control it, with a single exception, far better after that.

Before the curtain had fallen on the last scene of "The School for Scandal," Nell, standing in the wings for a moment, was considerately told by some one that Miss Longbow did not admire her acting.

"Perhaps the Longbow has been shooting beyond its true mark," was her comment. She seemed not at all displeased.

There was a sort of general reception, while the floor was being cleared for dancing, after the performance. Evans Candler did not have to be reintroduced this time.

While they renewed their acquaintance Nell watched Vera Longbow, whom he had brought with him, out of the corner of her eye. The tall, classic beauty was flattering Bob Sullivan unstintedly about the excellence of his *Sir Peter*. He still wore his black knee breeches and white wig, and looked incredibly handsome.

Miss Longbow showed the lack of canniness not infrequent in persons whose ascendancy in material things berefts them of caution in subtler ones. She made rather too crude a matter of showering her praises on triumphant, happy, embarrassed, and overwhelmed Bob.

It was the more conspicuous because she had complimented Miss Maloney in a manner purely perfunctory.

"Bless me! She damned me with such faint praises that the devil to whom she was consigning me couldn't hear, and I got absolution," Nell told Bob, later in the evening.

She also took advantage of their moment of relative privacy to instruct Bob to be especially nice to Miss Longbow.

"Shadow her around, laddie," she admonished. "Dance with her a lot. I never yet failed to know when a woman likes a man at sight."

"How about the favor an air-takin' nose may be findin', at sight, with a trimmed beard?" returned Bob.

"Tut, tut! It's taken two years and this smear of grease paint and mascara to make me visible, under his magnifying lenses—with the gold rims! Draw the string of the Longbow, laddie! It can tranfix more real-estate sales for you in a week than my rooting could in a year. Dance with her a lot. I'm not punning!"

"But I only want to dance with you, Nell—all the rest is just endurin'!"

"Oh, gossoon, gossoon!" she wailed. "And can't I ever be teachin' him good taste? Only dancing with me and everybody knowing we're engaged! It wouldn't look respectable."

"Every other dance, anyhow," pleaded Bob.

Nell showed him her program, already devastated with scrawls that looked the worse because of the predominance of one neat signature.

"The near-French count's the man that's been greedy, you see. But what can a colleen do, heart of me heart? It's the losin' of me job, poor as it is, that I've got to shy on. It's the buyin' of fluffy summer clothes and the rent payin' in a row of five-room bricks that's a-stirrin' of me conscience."

"Drop the brogue," demanded Bob too irritably. "You talk it best when you mean the worst. As for fluffy rags and rents—I've sold two lots in the past three weeks, on the Columbia extension. Drop the blowzy teaching, too! You're dandlin' me, Nell!"

She soothed him, squeezing his arm.

"Nice laddie! That's the business man! Now, run along and scratch your banking signature on every available inch of Miss Vera's program. Such a winning signature—'Robert Burns Sullivan'—enough to melt the waxen heart of her! Make up to her, Bob. Nail down her good will, and get introduced into circles where we can sell lots so fast we'll build our dream castle on the pick of them!"

She had won. His gray eyes, as black-rimmed without the mascara as hers were with it, went moist with his adoration.

"Oh, Nell, Nell—when it's that tone you use I'd dance with the kitchen wench o' Satan himself, if you were for wishin' it!"

There were many onlookers that night for each of the four of them. In the talk outcropping thereafter some expressed their conviction that Bob was at heart a fortune hunter who would throw over poor Nell Maloney at the first chance of marrying money.

Miss Longbow was, for her part, no fool.

"I am a little curious, I confess, to hear your outspoken opinion of Miss Maloney," Candler said to her as they drove toward her home.

"You really want to know?" she returned. "Outspoken be it, then. She's a very bad actress—but she shows promise as a matchmaker. If ever she has grown daughters, she'll marry them off."

Candler mused half sighingly.

"They'll be reared in poverty. They tell me the boy has no real business ability."

He had, be it perceived, missed the point in some preöccupation with the problem.

There can be no doubt that it was in self-defense that Vera admitted Nell to her very desirable circle shortly after she had received Bob at her home. And Candler had been seen with Nell, by this time, conspicuously once or twice.

Bob, however, never would have followed up Vera's invitation to call had he been given any quarter about it. Every chance of success he would have in the world, Nell reasoned with him, was dependent on his social advancement. He simply must "keep in" with Miss Longbow.

But Nell was as surprised as he, when, a short time thereafter, she found herself included in Miss Longbow's seeming favor. She had not looked for that.

And Miss Longbow, was taking on some of the subtlety she had failed to show in the beginning. Her calculation proved correct to the letter. She was twenty-eight. Candler was ten years older. People thought it charming that they should go out of their way to be nice to the most picturesque young engaged pair on the local horizon.

Nell was an instant success with several people who counted, and who wondered where she could have been kept in hiding. She made such a hit with Mrs. Hattie Brewster Stowbridge, the rich authoress, for instance, that within a little while she might have gone ahead on that alone, removing Vera, had she been so minded, as a mere extra prop.

Also, Bob's real-estate business began to speed up. He sold more building

lots in "Greater Washington" in one month than he'd formerly sold in six.

When, capping the climax, Miss Longbow gave him the sole renting agency for one of her big office buildings, that lady's courageous plan looked utterly successful.

"Oh, colleen, colleen," he exulted to Nell, "we're all right now! There's neither stoppin' nor holdin' of us now! We can hitch together the day you turn your little piggies to summer pasture in June. Your teaching hour is almost run!"

Then, gazing down upon her, looking straight at her face held in his two hands—tapering hands, somehow, for all their vital muscularity—a sudden, inexplicable shiver went over him.

"And why, girl, are ye so a-tremblin'? It's not a bit as glad as I hoped, that ye seem to be!"

"Bob," she began, very pale, "we—we can't marry—not ever, Bobby."

"Too much an actress!" ridiculed Bob, but the shiver was on him again. "Always for playin' at little scenes! Please, *please* don't joke now, colleen! I know how ye love to aggravate. But don't taint this moment—it's too rare!"

"I'm not acting or joking. I mean it, Bobby. I've always meant to do something big for you—if it killed me. I want you to marry Vera Longbow. You can, you know, if you set that square jaw toward it."

She went on weakly with bromidic sophistries. Anybody could do anything he set his mind to. Men and women were the masters of their destinies, and sentiment must be discarded in strength of purpose. Personal sacrifice was the price of greatness. The love which renounced in behalf of the thing it loved was the greatest love. Twaddle. It sounded as if she had been pumping her brain fat, with dumpy Mrs. Stowbridge's novels—as if she had passed too many evenings witnessing Mrs. Stowbridge's plays.

He held himself in until he could do so no longer; then he blurted out words like blows from an upraised fist.

"Blitherin' addle-pate!" he nearly screamed, turning altogether ruffian in the pain that clutched him. "What is it next you'll be conjurin' up, to make your witch messes out of? Loony—turnin' giddy every day before every cracked mirror! You know she's betrothed already—plighted to old Pointed-beard, just like ourselves to one another. You know she's fair daft over the man!"

Beneath such wasted impact, Nell regained some of her poise.

"Don't make the mistake that she's daft over him or daft over anybody," she pronounced. "She's not that kind. He isn't either. Never was there a more adjustable old maid or bachelor."

He was not, however, reassured by her tone, too gentle in its matter-of-factness. His full lips quivered.

"Oh, Nell, Nell," he moaned. "Something's awry, somehow. What has put such stuff into the mind of ye—at such a time of all times, when I stand before ye with my heart leapin' with the joy you seem to want to kill?"

"I mean it, laddie. We mustn't marry. I suspected we mustn't, a long time ago. You'd be beating me in a month—and I'm one of the strange kind that wouldn't like it. Our happy hearth would be the solar center of billingsgate. Besides, we're both so mortal poor and friendless. This stray friendly arrow from the Longbow will stop, you know, the moment it's pinned us safely to the wall. She'll drop us before the ink's dry on our wedding certificate. I'd keep doing weird things—I can't help them. This prissy American town would shun your vacant lots and your life insurance because of me——"

He broke in, again a savage.

"Ye talk and ye talk and it's naught

that ye say! Tell me what it is ye've got to say! Out with it!"

There was now a vicious set to the square jaw she had cited for her argumentative scheme.

"That's a man!" she said proudly. "Now hear me, Bob—and don't strike me with your fists, because it's cowardly for a man to strike a woman and if you bruise me up you'll suffer the remorses of hell. It's the Scotch in your Irish. I know you, Bob. I'm going to give you back your ring. Take it. It can't bite. I'm going to marry Evans Candler. It is all settled. He and Vera agreed to disagree last night at eight o'clock. We're going to have a big wedding in church, the day after the school closes. I'm going to wear a white-satin train—five yards long—my brother in New York has telegraphed me five hundred dollars. He's just made a lot of money—he's prouder of what I've been doing than if I were his heiress. Oh, say something, Bob—don't be a ghost—say something!"

Bob was too silent now. He listened in an ominous stupor. Again she rattled on and on in sudden terror, as though to forfend the torrent; as though she would build a dam before its bursting and deluge.

"A white-satin train five yards long, Bob—Tom's sent me five hundred dollars for a trousseau—and we're all going to have a regular salon next winter. All the clever people—all the gifted, good-looking people—and you and Vera, of course. You'll be the closest friends we have. You'll be——"

She stopped, breathless. A blank specter of the Bob she had known seemed to tower in her vertiginous line of vision, half swaying, half oscillating—seemed to revolve, and loom and elongate, like something that swirls, grows misty.

The answering voice for which, a little before, she had begged like a pleading child, she could hear now, far away—as if it intoned ancient prophecy, or stark saga exhumed from the irrevocable.

"Now," it began, too slowly, "by all the powers of the hell you're preparin', I say to ye, Nell—you'll live to rue this act. You'll live to rue it—and when it seems to win for ye, it will fail ye. It's not that it's all selfishness, Nell. You love me well enough to tell yourself you ought to sacrifice—to convince yourself, halfway, ye might undo me. I know ye to the ground, Nell. You tell yourself it's the sacrifice that'll make absolution for your vanity. Maybe it is marryin' the Longbow woman that I could accomplish. I don't say I can't—the more that now her heart and faith and pride will be gouged almost like mine—almost—not quite—since no woman or man ever loved man or woman as I've loved ye, Nell Maloney. But whether I can or can't—whether I do or don't, it's beyond the point.

"You've made your bed, Nell, and stuffed it with the pieces of this heart you've flung away—and it's goin' to be damp, oozy pillowing when, in a few years, ye turn restless and long to sink into pretty dreams. The dream that will one day come to ye on this bed will take vengeance on me, Nell, though I may not be here to see it. You'll outlast me, I'm thinkin'. You're still all alive, and I'm like a dead man. But you'll have a late dream some day that will avenge me, Nell—though I love ye too well for the wishin' it to ye. You've made the play for a curse of your own that's none of my givin'."

He went from her; seeming to vanish from her sight ere any stirring from her numb detachment could find wordless lodging in depths below consciousness. She had depersonalized herself into a wide calmness where she had ceased to be moved, and was unafraid.

When she shifted from the rigidity with which she had listened, her limbs had stiffened; her muscles were like

something frozen and incased in felt; and it seemed to her that her soul followed the outline and the stillness of her slim, insensible body.

But there was no regret with her, nor any muddled instinct toward turning back on that which she had resolved to do.

Nell's gusto for limelight must have found satiety in the wedding. Invitation cards had to be presented like tickets of admission. But even at that the largest church auditorium in town was crowded to suffocation an hour before the wedding. Eventually, fire-department restrictions were called into enforcement. A squad of policemen had to keep a packed throng in orderly formation outside the church doors.

Vera Longbow headed the procession of bridesmaids. Those most familiar with current whispers found this phase of the spectacle thrilling. She seemed taller than ever, whiter than ever; of a height and paleness suggesting old, old legends or modern posters. Nor did the thrill end with this astounding feature. Bob Sullivan, as everybody had learned, was Evans Candler's chosen best man.

There is always a way of reconvincing the multitude about the inside truth of anything. From Nell's wedding on, the popular view of the story modified steadily. There came into being a growing body of opinion that explained and defended. Nell and Bob had never been anything more than old school pals, more like brother and sister. Miss Longbow and Dr. Candler—he was a Ph.D. of course—had been mere intellectual intimates of a stamp the most purely Platonic.

By the time Bob's engagement to Vera began vaguely to be rumored about, that acceptance had become wide enough to rescue the situation altogether for them both.

Bob and Vera were never married, however. Within a year or two the Spanish-American war flared with due intensity, while it lasted. Bob was among the first to enlist. His crumpled body, wasted already with the sickness that had scourged the expedition, was picked up with a bullet hole through its chest.

And that was before the sun of Nell's blazing day had more than pushed a first pale edge of rose-hued morning over her horizon.

She had married with less reckless disregard of exact assets and possible deficits than might have seemed likely. To be sure, Candler's salary was no more ample than are such incomes usually. But he had a small annuity of his own.

She and Candler honeymooned in Europe, and, on their return, occupied a charmingly fitted house in a nine-room row, built up as far as the second story in reddish, hewn stone, and located not ten minutes' walking distance from the city's most imposing mansions, including that of Mrs. Hattie Brewster Stowbridge.

Nell hadn't accepted the famous Mrs. Hattie Brewster Stowbridge's invitation to accompany her to her London home in Park Row. But she and Candler spent a week there, as one of the features of their trip. The impression she made in Mrs. Stowbridge's circle, from Beerbohm Tree to Alma Tadema, strengthened her relief at having passed beyond the authoress' chaperonage. Her contentment was, in fact, the worse for the undeniable sensation she made. They likened her to famous ladies, from Nell Gwyn to Peg Woffington and Diana of the Crossways. But it was too briefly over.

"A flash in the pan!" she grouched to her husband. "The Stowbridge frump will keep up with us back in Washington because it's dull there. But she'll never invite us here again. We

must come back together some day, count, when we can tarry longer."

The years that immediately followed were at their best in their beginning. The Candlers entertained much and irreproachably on the small but selective scale they had set for themselves. But, alas, Nell had had her week of London. Only now and then were what she now rated as the Worth-While-of-the-Earth to be found in her pretty little Aubusson parlor, with the alcove and the baby grand as a sort of music-room extension.

When she charmed these Worth-While-of-the-Earth, on their flighty pilgrimages through Washington it had to be, for the most part, in the drawing-rooms of Mrs. Stowbridge, who had a music room big enough for a hundred.

She was never more delighted than when Tude Jenkens made a witticism to the effect that she and Mrs. Stowbridge held "rival saloons"—mispronouncing the word drolly in allusion to British brandy-and-sodas. But how Mrs. Stowbridge encouraged and patronized! The encouraging was, if possible, more painful than the patronizing.

By the seventh year of their marriage, things began to look unendurable. The very bills for their "bohemian" Sundays at home were depressing.

"Ah, count," she said to her husband, "it's time we're a-wastin'—time and peace o' mind—breasting the current like this."

They had just returned from Vera Longbow's box party at the briefly visiting opera. Elinor let her silver-brocade cloak fall to the floor, kicked it petulantly toward the grate full of chilling embers, and sank on the Aubusson sofa—the set had been one of their wedding presents.

"If you've neither fame nor money, count, you're nowhere—even though you combine the fascinations of the nine muses with the glory of the evening stars as they sing together, in your own proper person! That dumpy, henna-haired Stowbridge 'woman"—she made a little gesture—"she's got it all over your alluring wife—nice, dear old count!"

She fondled his scrawny hand as he stood above her.

"She took the prima donna and the tenor home to supper with her to-night, you know. If I'd ask them here they would have said they had to save their voices with their beauty sleep."

Candler handed her a gold-tipped cigarette, held a light for her, fixed some cushions behind her. He drew up a chair.

"It's taken me a long time to make up my mind about you, Elinor," he began.

"Faith and profanation!" cried Elinor, in mock terror. "Is Napoleon going to announce a divorce to Josephine?"

"Never in all time while I shall live! Don't ever imagine it. That would be the one dangerous mistake you could make."

"And will ye listen to him!" she tried to jest.

"You're as fixed in my life, dear girl, as if you were embedded in me."

"But the decision, man, the decision! I'm suffocating for the hearin' of it!"

"Say rather, a conclusion—that you yourself might be a celebrity, if ever you made up your mind to it!"

It was a let-down, after his ominousness about the eternal impasse in the matter of any possible divorce. She took no pains to conceal the boredom in her answer.

"Oh, I see—you mean the stage—the same old bromide, ever since *Lady Teazle!* Ugh! How I should hate the stage!"

"You're a bad guesser."

"Flesh, fowl, or fish?" She shrugged, but he cut her off.

"You're more envious of the least attractive woman you know than of any

other woman alive, because at heart, Elinor, you are——"

"I am? Faith an' it's killin' me by inches he is with this suspense!"

"A romancer," he finished. "An inveterate spinner of yarns."

She laughed gleefully.

"He had to come to it in the end, bless him! In other words, an unconscionable liar!"

"That, too," smiled Candler. "You'll never be a realist, Elinor."

In telling how she happened to take up writing, Elinor later constructed and adhered, rather better than was her wont, to an effective story.

The hollowness of the social frippery and idle emptiness of her existence had come over her one night, she narrated, after a vast reception she'd held, with diplomats and cabinet ministers, and singers from the opera. She had stood in the silence of the rooms they had just vacated, a great loathing welling within her, and she had announced to the insipid, pink-brocaded walls, and the glaring lights and the candelabra: "I'm through."

They gave up their house, at the beginning of summer; stored their furniture. They went to England for their vacation, lodging themselves not in London, however, but in some village, picturesque and remote, which Candler had discovered on the coast. Elinor's health had been delicate since the first year of her marriage.

She had become a victim of susceptibility to nervous headaches. In the final months of her social gayety in Washington there had been one or two hideous attacks—little agonies darting like tic doloureux from eyelids to chin, distorting the piquant, impudent oval of her face into something at which she screamed aloud when her shaking fingers reached out and clutched a hand mirror.

In the tangy, salt-swept fishing village, absorbed in the new work Candler

had set for her, with his technical guidance ever at her call, and his presence never obtrusive, her girlhood healthfulness flooded back upon her in a tidal wave. To insure her literary freedom he took his lodging in another house.

She stayed on to finish her first novel, after he had to return. He had accepted an offer in a Middle-Western town—salary doubled; expenses cut in half. Then, while Nell's book was being typed in London she ran into friends she had met through Mrs. Stowbridge. Her sinuous, effulgent youthfulness was hardly modified. But her outlook had changed.

In New York, on her way back, she called up Tude Jenkens. He told her of members of her old Table Round who had passed from her knowledge, mentioning Billy Meakins among them, and his rise in the world of law. When she spoke casually of having turned writer, he introduced her to the proprietor of the great publishing firm in which he himself had risen to be an important figure.

"I'll vouch for it without reading it, you're the heroine of your book!" said the publisher over a very expensive lunch at Mouqin's. "We'll need your photograph for an imitation miniature, stamped in arabesque, on the cover."

Certainly, Tude had no desire to report unfavorably upon her brain child. But he would have endangered his job if he had done so.

Her eighteenth-century romance appeared with record-breaking speed, as the nineteenth century it reflected was drawing to its close.

The Middle-Western city where Elinor joined her husband proved the worst of climates for her susceptibility to headaches and neuralgia.

She saw little of Candler in the years that followed, save during the summer. It may be that in the annual total Vera Longbow saw more, for he was always making trips to Washington where Vera

was a part of the social order. "See as much of her as you can, count," Elinor always admonished him. "An endurin', deathless friendship like that is the best bet of any man—or any woman, either, for that matter. Look at *us,* for instance!"

She wrote her novels in England, in California, in the south of France, in mountain resorts of West Virginia, but was not prolific. Her first book had taken four months, with Candler's unceasing guidance and all the impetus of Candler's will sustaining the uplift behind it.

After that, her romances were two years or more apart. The second novel was full three years in appearing. Apparently, it was worth it. Its seventeenth-century heroine frankly bore her own first name and its furor was instantaneous. It remained the selling sensation of eighteen months. It was dedicated to Candler in Stevensonian blank verse printed on the flyleaf; eulogistic lines implying that he had been the model for the hero—the hero, recognized as poor Bob Sullivan by all who had known him, and no more like Candler than a creature from another planet.

"She keeps away from him as much as is consistent with keeping in with him," Jenkens reported during this period to Meakins, always his interested listener on the subject. "I think she genuinely enjoys seeing him once in so often. He is, in a way, necessary to her."

"I did run out to Westchester one evening," said Meakins. "I walked from the station to their cottage, along about dark. I had to pass the low window of their little dining room before reaching the knocker on their door. I couldn't help looking in.

"They sat alone on opposite sides of a circular table, covered with plate glass. Between them was a huge mound of pink roses—just as if they'd held a ceremonial dinner in each other's honor. They had finished eating. Dishes and doilies had been removed. Nell, in a black-sequin gown,. with a wonderful make-up of black around her eyes and heavy crimson beneath them, was puffing her cigarette and skyrocketing her witticisms in her finest form. I couldn't hear her, but I could see her. Three fourths of her scintillance, you know, was always just her way of saying it.

"I caught the idea. Nell was simply refascinating her husband against the winter, when he would see nothing of her."

"She's sailing for London next week," Jenkens told him. "She has quite a little salon of her own there. Candler's got to stay here to preside at some educational congress, or something like that."

"Ah, to be sure. She's even been having Vera Longbow up for a visit," said Jenkens.

There came a time for Candler, however, when more time from his wife was an absolute essential.

When the highest-salaried position, in his line, in America was fairly thrust at him, he must have been taken unawares. He no doubt seized it. Some of the glamour of his wife's glory had been shed upon him. They wanted him, this time, as much for his wife as for himself—maybe a little more than for himself.

There was, indeed, something spectacular about the post. A multimillionaire had died, endowing all of a huge country estate in the Appalachian foothills as a school for boys. All sorts of minute and explicit exactions went with the bequest. The vast château, crowning one of the leveled eminences, must be the residence of the president, maintained with all its possibilities of splendor. Only a married man of recognized distinction could be chosen by the trustees. A salary commensurate with the requirements was stipulated. A def-

inite extra sum of many thousand dollars a year was set aside for social entertainment of the students by the president.

There was no help for it. Nell must take up her residence with Candler in the vast château. The trustee had practically stated the fact in plain terms. His wife would be expected to preside at the fostering of a new generation of experts in evening clothes—the term was coined by Elinor when she heard about it.

It was at the initial big reception of the new president that Elinor had her first glimpse of Patrick McManus, athletic trainer.

She had looked up negligently from a settee of wicker, nearly hidden behind some palms on a stone balcony to which she had fled.

The pretentious insipidity, the self-conscious inarticulateness of scores of half-grown lads had induced in Elinor Maloney Candler the state of mind of some hunted creature who gasps for air.

The balcony offered sanctuary. A full moon poured sheeted softness over the turrets and spires beneath it, sweeping the long campus stretch with its background of wooded heights. For the moment nobody seemed to be looking for her.

Her first thought was that the figure in the arch was another of the eternal "boys," and she bit her lips with vexation. Something made her peer more closely. The figure had paused before stepping outside, and presented the stocky silhouette of the relaxed lounger with endless reserves of physical power.

Unaware of any presence other than his own, Patrick McManus drew a stumpy pipe from the pocket of his Tuxedo, and moved out on the balcony in the act of filling it with tobacco. He turned, directly, but unsuspectingly facing Nell. She started, even when the flat moonlight ironed out his square-set face, smoothing all details but the rich fullness of his lips. But when he struck the match to light his pipe, adding one illumination to another, she uttered a strange little sound.

She imagined, nay, for an instant of time actually believed, that there stood before her some reincarnation of Bob Sullivan—his ghost—a hallucination come to make deafening the ominous rumbling that had been going on in her head.

Patrick McManus showed genuine distress.

"It's a thousand pardons I'm a-beggin' of ye, mum! I never fancied there'd be anybody here—much less a lady!"

"Oh!" she faltered in a worried, piping voice, thinned beyond recognition. "It's nothing. I must have dozed a moment—out here in the quiet." She laughed hysterically.

"Intrudin' where I don't belong, like this!" he apologized again, but made no move to go.

If he had made such a move, if he had fled precipitately, she felt that she would have called him back, so loud that all the house would have heard. She found more voice to reassure him that intrusion was impossible on an occasion like this.

"Every inch of the palace belongs to the guests," she explained. "It's expressly stated in Simon Salter's will."

The intruder appeared amply satisfied.

"You're somebody connected with the school, of course," she went on. "Sit down and tell me all about it. I'm Mrs. Candler."

He realized this fact slowly. He had heard of there being a Mrs. Candler who was a great and famous lady.

What he saw beneath the palms, under the moonlight, was a woman almost too long and slim for his ideal, with piled dark hair and dilated pupils. In the indistinct light she seemed a mere girl—

wound tight as any mummy in white velvet, from bust line to where its coiling burst apart, somewhere above her feet. The gown was lower than he would have thought possible, for the wife of a schoolmaster.

He accepted her invitation to sit beside her on the wicker settee.

As their acquaintance progressed, the moon climbed inexorably higher, but time had ceased to be for Nell. She had a spectral, heart-pounding sense of disembodiment. The past had turned back—or she had been lifted on wings of the vast Unseen and Unguessed beyond veils which curtained the Beyond—it hardly mattered which. Bob's, every breath of the voice—in this visitation, tangible in its intangibility! Every brusque move of his embarrassed head—Bob's!

The sense of it deepened instead of diminishes as she drew him on and on.

She had observed from the first sentence which fell from his lips that he had lacked even poor Bob's very moderate advantages in training and environment. That but knitted the fiber of the wrought illusion; as if the essential, true Bob, the elemental essence of the lad so long dead, had been stripped of the final trace of tawdry, futile veneer.

He was voluble as an encouraged child. All the inflections of Bob's long-silent voice steeped her as he talked. And the rumbling in her head grew to a mighty roar, which mounted ever and again toward a sinister climax, only to dispel itself anew in a soft mistiness shot with fire; a pæan of bells, luminous, soft and silvery, pealing away the languors of twenty long years.

It had to end when Doctor Candler found her and told her with gentle reproaches that the whole house had been upset and searching everywhere for her for an hour.

But by that time she had learned all the salient features of Patrick McManus' story—had drunk in all the homely, candid phrases shot with little unconscious, or half-conscious whimsies—Bob's once more, with that superfluous, awkward touch of labored literacy brushed away.

Everybody about the school believed him twenty-five or six. He confessed he wanted them to believe that. But he was not yet twenty.

"Just half my age," mused Nell as she listened. "Six years younger than Bob was when he——"

There are lads who have attained, by their eighteenth year, a maturity that is the measure of their ripeness through life. Patrick was one of these. He was self-taught as far as he had been taught at all. Ireland had been *his* birthplace—not merely that of his parents. From his thirteenth to his seventeenth years he had worked as a sailor on merchant vessels. He told her he had been bigger and more grown-up at twelve than most boys five years older.

Two years before, in New York, he had been given the chance to get training and backing as a pugilist. He had always had a talent for boxing—but no real liking. He had worked awfully hard at night school, during his employment at a public gymnasium. He was here to study hard between his duties as a trainer. He wanted an education.

"You shall study your English, in private lessons with me," Nell told him, putting him thereby into an ecstasy that matched her own in quantity, if not in kind. "English and—wouldn't you like, also, to learn to speak the French language? Nothing suits an Irishman's need to express himself like it! I'll have plenty of time on my hands here. You shall learn the French language, too."

"With an Irish accent!" he flashed.

Then Dr. Candler came and found them and chided Nell indulgently, for her dilatoriness as a hostess.

She talked to the pale, unlistening stars that night, from the balcony of the

great room, when the moon had gone dark and her husband slept in another great room beyond. It had to come. In the first recoil was the first of the penalties she must face in the glowering thing she knew would now be with her to the end—an end of which there was no longer any foreseeing.

A chill wind blew from out the hills, presaging the coming of dawn. Yet she stood as she had stood for hours, clad only in her thin, crêpe gown, unshivering, because of the fever within her, clutching the stone balustrade, dank with the after-midnight dews, leaning far over the parapet. The spiked turrets below her seemed multiplied to myriads, hungry for her white, haggard body as enemy bayonets upthrust. She could not find the resolution to hurl herself upon them.

"Not in that way, Bob," she whispered, speaking to the paling stars. "Not in that way can ye be avenged. I can mess and mangle the soul of me easier than the body, Bob. But ye spoke the truth, laddie. Ye spoke the truth of all that was to be—as if it was a rune of our dead fathers ye spoke. The avenging ye couldn't wish to me, and knew was to be, has started spinning. Oh, Bob—Bob! Patrick—Patrick!"

The club member who had wanted the *Times* dropped on the floor by Meakins and Jenkens had finished with it long ago.

"It will never be known, I suppose," said Meakins with a note of inquiry, "how much of the scandal is true—or whether she did top it off by running away with that young trainer?"

"Never. Candler saw to that. Clever man, Candler."

Jenkens paused, sighing deeply. Meakins waited.

"He resigned, it appeared, because of Nellie's health," Jenkens went on with the far-away manner of one talking to himself. "They stayed on, though, to the end of the term after the—scandal was so unprecedentedly hushed up by Candler. One can imagine how it happened easier than one can imagine how he did it. The plum trees foamed in the campus orchards. It was spring. One can see Nell—walking out under the scented bloom—and vanishing as if the earth had swallowed her. The young athletic trainer—I forget his name—had vanished on the same night. They must have been marked figures. It was said that they were seen together on the train.

"Candler invented a perfectly plausible lie, and followed the couple. He brought them back—both of them. Some even say he had to go aboard the ship on which, in a few hours, they would have sailed for France. But that can't be proved. He explained that he had merely gone to New York to be with her for the end of her flying trip, as arranged between them beforehand."

"That wouldn't explain away the young trainer!"

"He managed that, too. He and his wife, he declared, had taken legal steps and adopted the boy—proved by his birth certificate to be still under age. Elinor had no children of her own. Candler told—where he knew what he said would get repeated—how motherhood in her was starving. He had a legal exhibit proving that the adoption had taken place, privately, a month before Nell's 'trip.' He refused to dignify that first rumor of a 'disappearance' even by denial."

"There must have been considerable incredulity, at that. No position whatever was offered him for the next year?"

"None," answered Jenkens. "The doctor prescribed travel for Nellie's health. Candler took the boy and went with her—wherever she wanted to go. I have it from those who know that never for a moment, after bringing back the runaways, did he let Nellie out of his sight—never for an instant. She

could see and be with her adopted son all she wanted to—but Candler or a trusted female nurse he engaged by the year was with them every hour of the twenty-four. He explained how her susceptibility to neuralgic attacks required some one always at hand."

"She might have thrown his respectability in his face and broken away again—if she'd wanted to," said Meakins.

"Ah, you don't know Nell—you didn't keep up with her enough. She was the one woman to 'get' the fine side in all her husband did—to evaluate the complicated, difficult chivalry by which he saved her name from utter disaster."

"After all," remarked Meakins, "one way of looking at it, it was a marvelous, generous thing—the thing Candler did."

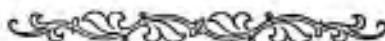
But Jenkens shook his head with something very like bitterness.

"There is an old French story, Bill—we've seen it dramatized into one of those gruesome, one-act plays. A husband knows of his wife's infidelity, but pretends ignorance along with the most paternal fondness for her lover. He invites the lover, in fatherly fashion, to enter and examine a 'vacuum chamber' he has invented—a sort of big cabinet with an arrangement for pumping out every last cubic inch of air. There is a spring door to the vacuum chamber—so constructed as to close and hermetically seal it, at the pressure of a button."

"I get the parallel," interrupted Meakins, "but it isn't perfect. In the one-act play, if I recall rightly, it was the lover who was shut in the vacuum chamber, while the wife had to look on and know that he went to his doom. In Candler's case, it was exactly reversed. It was the wife who entered—and in the full knowledge she herself must be asphyxiated. The lover seems to have been a mere magnificent lowbrow, who couldn't have minded looking on so very much. Probably he expected to inherit Nell's book royalties. That's the plausible explanation of why he stuck to the last."

Jenkens folded the obituary clipping which recounted with formal detail the obvious side of Nell's literary successes. Reverently he deposited it in a flat, leather pocketbook, which he replaced inside his coat.

"It took just one year to kill her," he concluded in the tone of one who utters *"De mortibus."*



THE BODYGUARD

SO many men, the mocker and the wit,
  Braggart, adventurer, toiler, jester, tease,
Stoic enamored of the grace of grit,
  Logician, cynic, egotist; all these

Protectors of the vulnerable man,
  Essential self within that shadow troop,
Guarded from life's keen agonies that can
  Most swiftly make the finest spirits droop.

Dazzle of shifted shields and flashing swords,
  Quick play of irony and gay disdain,
Yet through it all chance now and then affords
  A glimpse of eyes haunted by love's old pain.

KATHARINE LEE BATES.

Tremayne's Luck

By

G. M. Purcell

THE sea pounded in on the beach of Tuloa as if to mock the silence that lay about it. The vast, smooth stretches of sand swung clear around the island, heavy and brilliant with tropical sunlight.

A man rose dripping from the sea. His wet clothes clung to him and weighted him down, and the rollicking surf tossed him about like a ball.

Finally he gained the beach and flung himself, exhausted, on the sand. His left arm relaxed; from its sheltering grasp dropped the tin dispatch box he had not relinquished in all his battle with the surf. He lay utterly spent, letting the sun blaze on his face. His luck had held.

This last affair had nearly finished him. It had almost made him doubt his luck. It was damnable that the captain of the little packet had discovered that it was he, Glenn Tremayne, his best hand, who had figured so largely in the stabbing and mutilation of the little Malay dealer in corals and pearls.

He shut his eyes and remembered the events of the night before. There was the whispered conversation on the deck, with him listening in the shadow; the captain's sudden: "Good heavens! Tremayne?" Then: "He's in his bunk—call the rest and put him in irons."

He had waited to hear no more. He had slipped off his shoes, crept with naked feet back to his bunk, seized the box which held his booty, and had just had time to plunge through the door and dive off the rail as the excited crew swung round the deck.

It had been a mad thing to do, but capture meant certain death, and Tremayne had no intention of dying yet. As far as he knew, there was no land in sight, but the thought that he might drown had never occurred to him. Even the shots they had fired after him had missed. The thought that anything unfortunate might happen to him never did occur to Tremayne, anyway. That was the secret of his amazing luck.

And his luck had held. Not that he had the right to expect anything from the hands of Fate, being one of the choicest scoundrels that ever the Southern Cross shone on, but his luck had held, as it had always done.

At present, however, it was better to let Fate rest a while. Even this unknown, uncharted island in the uncharted South Seas was not too far away from civilization for Glenn Tremayne, former gentleman and man of honor, now—the less said about what he was now, the better. He was known, and not too popular, for various unsavory reasons, from Shanghai to Colombo, from the Far East to the farther West. Haiphong and Saigon knew him, and Callao and Barranquilla. There was not a port this side of heaven or hell where Tremayne did not enjoy an unenviable notoriety.

So now he sat up on the sand and hugged his knees and laughed at the memory of the crew swinging around

the deck in hot pursuit, and seeing him vanish before their eyes. They would spread it through the Line that he was dead.

"I'm dead!" shouted Tremayne jubilantly to the sounding waves. "Dead, do you hear?" He shook his fist at the sea. "Do you hear, all you fools of civilization? I'm dead, dead, dead!"

His voice echoed back to him from the hills. Very faintly the sound came back, like a mocking ghost: "Dead, dead, dead!"

With a sudden shiver he scrambled to his feet. There was something eerie in that echo.

"Let's see what kind of a joint I've stumbled on now." He spoke aloud to give himself courage. The waiting silence of the South Seas surged around his words and engulfed them.

"What kind of a joint," he repeated carefully. Speech or silence made no difference in this waiting calm. The tall, drooping palms, swaying quietly to and fro, heard him unmoved. Slim coconut trees lifted clustered fronds on high.

"At least I shan't starve," he told himself. At the foot of the largest tree three coconuts had fallen to the ground. He opened them and drank the milk from them thirstily. Then he picked up his box and proceeded to make a tour of the island.

The hot sand burned his bare feet. He stopped to contrive a pair of sandals from the cool coco leaves, then went on, shuffling in his unusual footgear. At last the burning sun drove him inland to the fringe of coco trees, and so climbing and stumbling over the luxuriant vegetation, he went steadily on.

At sunset he was no nearer his original starting place. As far as he had gone, there was not a sign of human habitation.

"Damn it!" he swore. "I see where Robinson Crusoe will have nothing on me." He flung himself down where he stood, and composed himself to sleep.

For the longest time he stared, unwinking, at the brilliant purple sky over the ghostly purple sea.

"Some picture for a painter," he conceded grudgingly. "Only I don't happen to be a painter." He turned the word over and over in his mind, conscious of a vague discomfort. A painter—a painter. Oh, yes—he must have been thinking of Jeffrey Lestrange. Poor old Lestrange. A sudden distaste for meditation seized him. He had long ago lost all remorse for the wrong he had done Lestrange, but to-night, in the silence, under that vast, vaulted sky, the memory of it haunted him.

First, their happy, bachelor friendship. Then, their continued happy acquaintance after Lestrange's marriage. Then a sudden vision of *her* face, the long, pale oval framed in banded, golden hair. The face Lestrange had loved to paint. Evelyn's face, Lestrange's wife, and his—Jove, why had it ever happened!

He turned restlessly on the sand.

"You damn fool!" he told himself. "That was ten years ago—it's a little late to feel sorry for it now."

But the memory refused to be consigned to oblivion. Other visions thrust themselves before his tired brain: the last terrible interview with Evelyn, when she had followed him to London, the day before she shot herself; the hideous encounter with Lestrange on the steps of the club; the look on his friend's desolate, unrecognizable face; the last words Lestrange had said in a hoarse, choked voice. He could hear them now and see the lifted hand.

"Save yourself, you cur! The next time we meet means death for you."

Death. Death for him, Tremayne. Why had Lestrange not killed him then? Only his luck had saved him—Tremayne's amazing luck.

This was luck, too, his miraculous es-

cape to this island. To put his crowding recollections from him, Tremayne seized this thought and held it. Why become melancholy-mad because his luck had cast him here? Suppose it *was* lonely. That made it all the safer.

His egotism rose and jubilated. He had been saved for something—something important. His destiny was still unfulfilled. Destiny—that was it. His destiny had overshadowed fate. His destiny. Nothing mattered but belief in that.

He held his hand out in the crystal starlight. It still shook a little. He must get that damnable Lestrange affair out of his mind. He chose a softer, cooler place on the sand and stretched.

A light breeze had sprung up. It rippled the long grasses beside him. They sent out waving, dancing shadows across the sand. He watched them idly. One tall fern moved with languorous grace, bowing and swaying, light as air. So Spanish Rosita had danced in that gambling hell in Lima. She was dead, too, and all her young beauty dead with her. He saw again her upturned face, livid in the moonlight.

She was dead, too—dead like Evelyn. One so dark and one so fair. Tireless, his mind took up Lestrange again. What had happened after? He, Tremayne, had fled from London and cast his lot with the vagabonds of the world. But Lestrange?

He remembered vague rumors and vaguer news he had heard from a young interne in the hospital in Nagasaki. Lestrange had left London, too, unable to bear the scene of his tragedy. There were tales of his utter disappearance from the world of art, until strange, colorful canvases had begun to appear in the more radical art centers. Grief had turned his brain, the critics said. Never had there existed places like the ones he painted.

Tremayne recalled one that he had seen. It was a beach in moonlight.

A beach in moonlight. His eyes idly took in the long swerve of the sand as it met the sea, the jutting headland that reached out and pointed, like a pointing finger.

A pointing finger. His eyes narrowed. The thought froze in his brain.

He leaped to his feet with a shout.

"By Jove!" His voice rang out on the startled air. "It was this beach! It was this beach!"

He tried to run, but his weakened knees gave under him, and he fell prone on the sand. Long, racking sobs shook his frame. In the still serenity of the tropic night he writhed, a thing in mortal agony.

At last he drew quieter breath. The same stars still looked down unwinkingly. He drew himself together, and even managed to get out a shaky laugh.

"Oh, you fool, you utter fool!" he groaned. "There are hundreds of islands like this, hundreds of beaches! Hundreds—do you hear?—hundreds!"

He sat up, softly swearing at himself. He felt reassured and ready to ridicule himself and his ridiculous nerves.

"I'll make a thorough tour of the island in the morning," was his thought as he sank to sleep at last.

Up at his cabin on the hill Jeffrey Lestrange sat out under the star-strewn sky. He lifted his face to the serene, overarching night. He could almost feel the starshine on his eyes.

He, too, was thinking of the past. He had come out of his long agony as from a darkened tunnel. Now he could think of it with only passive pain. Between his tragedy and this, the end of his achieving, stretched the years of great accomplishment, which perhaps happiness would have denied him.

Now, in spite of the long, dark years before him, he was not unhappy. The calm of the Southern seas had stilled the tumult in his soul. It had taught him the great lesson of acceptance. He

accepted his darkness as he had accepted his light. It was all in the game, and out here, close to Nature's heart, men learned to play the game as men, not whining beasts.

He threw back his head and listened. The boom of the distant surf sang in his ears. It was a sound he had grown to love. It said all the unutterable things the South Seas made men feel. The scent of rich, exotic blooms was wafted through the air. Far down the hill, from the native village at its foot, came a plaintive song.

Jeffrey Lestrange felt his way into the cabin and thanked God for the beauty of the night as he lay down to sleep.

The pearl-tinted dawn of the tropical morning wakened Tremayne early from his uneasy sleep. He sat up and rubbed his eyes. The sight of the beach, tranquil in the early sunlight, made him laugh at his fears of the night before He whistled loudly as he made a rapid toilet, with a little pool for a washbasin He laughed back at the glowing, healthy face mirrored in the water. After a breakfast of coconuts he felt equal to anything. He picked up his tin box of booty, and started on his tour of inspection.

A sense of calm security made him stride out joyously in the early morning. As long as he was himself, he need not fear. To play his game against Fate iron nerves were needed. Glenn Tremayne's nerves had always been iron and he was not going to mingle baser metal with them now.

A sudden turn of the beach swung into view a sight that made him gasp with amazement. It was a thriving native village, far enough inland to have its sounds of life deadened by the boom of the surrounding surf. The white hive-shaped dwellings clustered at the foot of the friendly hill like a flock of confiding sheep. Bright palms and coco trees provided shade. Poppies and magnolia shed fragrance and riotous color on the air. It was a paradise.

Tremayne's eyes narrowed as he took it all in. It might prove a treasure-trove for him. He started back under the sedge grass as a native canoe shot out into the inlet, manned with at least twenty tawny forms. They were tall and well built, these natives.

The high-powered boat slowly swept by his hiding place, so near that he could have touched the steersman. But what made his eyes glitter with excitement and greed was the sight of the jeweled ornaments in their ears, the bracelets clasping the muscular arms, swinging in rhythmic unison.

These niggers, as he termed them, one and all wore trinkets set with pearls, large, lustrous, magnificent.

"Pearls worth a king's ransom," muttered Tremayne, watching them darkly.

The boat passed and disappeared round a turn.

A vision of hope and wonder rose before Tremayne. His magnificent luck! The sight of the boat had reassured him completely. He was used to South Sea natives, knew their dialects, their habits, their weaknesses, had more than once proved himself capable of mastering them. The pearls and the boat would make his fortune. The boat was certainly large enough to set out in to get back to civilization. Surely, with his luck, it would bring him to one of the charted islands, whence he could ship on one of the numerous little missionary schooners. To Tahiti, perhaps.

There was the matter of disguise. But that he could easily manage. Besides, they all thought him dead, out there. And dead he would remain, to them. It was safer so.

His confidence and hope grew boundless. He saw himself back in London, Paris, Madrid, wealthy, respectable, a pillar of society—with a new name, of course. He saw himself with all the sordid past behind him, forgotten,

blotted out as utterly as if it had never existed. He saw himself the patron of charity, his name blessed by the poor and sick. His name, his new name, would be a byword for all that meant magnificence.

It was here that Fate stepped in, Fate in the form of a white-clad European figure that walked slowly down the main street of the village.

Tremayne started. Anger surged through him. A white man! He might complicate matters. If he did, let him look out. One human life would never stand long between Tremayne and his magnificent destiny. His hand smoothed the box he carried so carefully.

Whoever this European was, the natives seemed to hold him in respect. His slow progress between the rows of houses was somewhat like a triumphal march. Tawny figures tumbled out in haste to greet him and bow low.

Tremayne's lip curled. This lordly personage had them well trained. Perhaps he would not have sneered if he had noticed the uncertain gait and the hand resting lightly on the shoulder of a native boy who guided him. All that Tremayne saw was an enemy.

He drew farther back from view as the white man and the native boy drew nearer. Something in the set of the shoulders made Tremayne's breath come quickly. He watched the white man settle himself comfortably on a rock on the shore of the inlet. He cautiously moved near them and listened.

"Do you want anything, white lord?" the boy was asking in the soft native dialect.

"Nothing, Tula. You may go," came back the answer in a voice that flung Tremayne back to the days at Eton with Lestrange.

He blinked. Instead of the tropic, colorful bay there stretched before him the burned stubble of a cricket field. Lestrange, head boy of the school, was defending Tremayne, a new youngster, from the attack of a hulking bully. He saw again the bat they were fighting over and the mud-stained shin guards on Lestrange. Then brilliant water and dazzling sand blotted out the picture.

He shook his head impatiently. He *was* nervous, after all. The idea of remembering a silly thing like that. He had Lestrange on the brain.

The native boy had gone away. Alone, the man sat motionless, silhouetted against the sea.

For an instant, the teasing recollection stirred again.

Angry with himself, Tremayne strode out to accost the stranger. The crunch of his footsteps sounded on the sand. The man turned suddenly.

Tremayne stopped dead in his tracks. Facing him, hair grayed at the temples, but every line and lineament the same, sat Jeffrey Lestrange.

"Some one is there," said Lestrange quietly. "Who is it?"

Then Tremayne saw that the wide, unblinking eyes were blind.

Out of the dead, forgotten past, horror found a voice.

"The next time we meet," it said, "means death for you." Over and over again he heard it. He wondered that the blind man, sitting so quietly there before him, did not hear it, too.

Lestrange rose.

"Who is there?" he repeated.

The movement and words galvanized Tremayne into action. Without a word, he turned and fled.

The unseeing, waiting figure out there on the sand was terrible. He must get away from it—away, away! He tripped on a twisted root, and fell. In an instant he was up again, panting, agonized.

At length he flung himself down on the beach, his breath coming in great, sobbing gasps. He lay like a log where he had fallen, the sharp edge of the box he still grasped pressing into his chest.

The box. With hasty, fear-shaken hands he opened it. There, among the

pearls he had nearly lost his life to steal, lay his salvation.

The voice from the past grew louder, more insistent.

"Means death, means death, means death!" it chanted in his ear.

"Oh, God, I know it!" He cried aloud to drown it out.

His fingers closed on the revolver hidden in the pearls. It was dry and untouched by sea water.

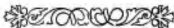
A flock of startled birds rose screaming in the air.

Lestrange stood up startled, listening. A throng of natives hurried down to him.

"White lord, white lord, what is it?" they demanded, rolling frightened eyes, trembling.

"Go and see," he answered.

When they reached him Tremayne, with his amazing luck, was already dead.



AFTER MANY YEARS

NOW there is neither wind, nor breathing air
  Nor any life-warm, or tempestuous thing
To keep you from me; you are everywhere
And yet in no place, ever wandering
And ever yearning, ever beautiful;
A breath I almost breathe, but never take,
A song I almost dream, but never make,
A light that falls into an endless pool.

And you who once were lonely and remote
Grow nearer, dearer, clearer with the years;
Though a few rhymes alone recall your tears,
Though memory, mist-enshrouded, seems to float.
Two scattered stars on haze-bemisted weirs,
Our hearts keep tryst—your name sobs in my throat.

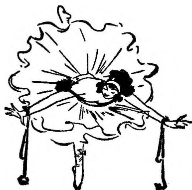
MARYA ZATURENSKY.

THE FRIAR

BRIONY berries, scarlet-flung
  Down hedgerows' russet aisles,
Autumnal votive chaplets hung
  Through frosty, lane-set miles
By pilgrim winds that walk the woodland naves
With beech-leaf tapers and gray, wind-bared staves.

Briony berries, scarlet-strung
  In rosaries down the lane
Where, wrapped in hill-white robe, close flung,
  The Winter Friar again
Strides cowled along the path their chaplets lead,
And stops to tell them over, bead by bead.

MARTHA HASKELL CLARK.



In Broadway Playhouses

By

Dorothy Parker

Marking Time

HOW time, as my little nephew says, flies! It seems but yesterday, or possibly day before yesterday, that I was sitting right here, in this very place, crabbing busily away because there were so many shows opening, these pleasant summer nights. Providence, or whoever it is that manages such things, must have been looking over my shoulder as I wrote, and with its customary inability to take a little kidding, fixed everything all up for me.

Anyway, all openings ceased abruptly. The theaters were dark and silent. Up at the modest Parker flat, the gloriously free evenings were filled with laughter and song and bridge and motion-picture magazines. All went peacefully on—until it suddenly crashed in on my consciousness that there I was, flat on my face, with nothing to write the monthly letter home about.

Naturally, the least you can expect for your twenty cents is a comprehensive and lifelike account of all the varied expositions that the theater has had to offer—the melodramas, the comedies, the tragedies, the farces, the realistic pieces, and, by way of bringing up the rear, perhaps the musical shows. And, also naturally, there is nothing we would rather do than beguile our boys and girls with a chatty account of all that has happened. But when the month's offerings consist of, reading from right to left, exactly three musical pieces, one of which has already gone on into the Great Beyond, what, I ask you, can any of us do about it?

The little offering which has gone from us was doubly handicapped right at the start. In the first place, it bore the catchy title of "Raymond Hitchcock's Pinwheel Review Whirled Around by Michio Itow." And you know yourself that is nothing to call a show if you have any desire to make a hit of it. Somehow, you cannot picture a jolly group sitting around a dinner table joining in with shouts of acclaim when one of their number suggests, "I tell you what let's do to-night—let's go see this 'Raymond Hitchcock's Pinwheel Review Whirled Around by Michio Itow.'" It is not, somehow, a name that makes you want to fling aside everything and rush right down to the theater where the entertainment is being offered.

"The Pinwheel Revue," as we might as well nickname it by way of saving time, started out to be two and a half solid hours of æsthetic dancing, with here and there a bit of ballad singing thrown in for the sake of the mezzo-brows in the audience. Some time during the course of its rehearsals, some one must have seen how big that was going to go with the midsummer visitors to New York, and so, along around the last minute, Raymond Hitchcock was asked

to run in and help out the young people. Mr. Hitchcock obliged, even to the extent of bringing Frank Fay along with him to snap things up a bit.

But alas—*mais hélas!* Neither Mr. Hitchcock nor Mr. Fay turned out to be at all funny.

I should love to be one of those who can get a glow out of watching a muscular male dancer dressed as a satyr leap around the stage after a pirouetting lady all done up in a couple of bunches of artificial grapes. Somehow, I feel that I should get so much more out of life if I could only respond to things like that. If some one who is up on those matters sits next to me and explains, while the dance progresses, "Now, you see, he represents the Spirit of Modern Plumbing, while she is the Soul of the Built-in Soap Dish, and this step symbolizes his desire to win her for his mate, but not until after the evil Prince Facecloth has been driven out of the country"—then I can string slowly along after the idea of the thing. Left to figure it out by myself, however, I am hopelessly sunk, without so much as a trace of oil coming to the surface.

Barring a lovely waltz by two graceful girls in sea-blue chiffon draperies, a ballet like a Degas painting come to life, and a quaintly and touchingly humorous dance by a number of deeply serious gentlemen dressed as hobos, "The Pinwheel Review" had much the same effect on me as closing my eyes and counting sheep jumping over a fence.

Those who sat up with it on the opening night realized only too well that "The Pinwheel Review" was not long for this world. And in but a few short weeks it was indeed gone. The producers promised faithfully to bring it back again, after it had had a good rest—a statement which comes close to ranking as the oldest story ever told.

The other two shows of the month also may be included in the group headed "Little Dandies." "Sue, Dear," is, in especial, entitled to all the air that can be given it.

Thus runs the plot of "Sue, Dear," which was heralded as being another "Irene," as well as another "Sally!"

The next-to-the-leading-lady enters, expressing petulant disappointment, in a refined way.

"I have here," she explains to the nice young juvenile who plays the rôle of her fiancé, "a telegram from Lorraine Lawrence, who, as you know, was to be one of my bridesmaids, and who, as you also know, was to have been the center of the gayeties at the party which I am giving for her this very night. She wires that she is unable to come. It is an odd coincidence that none of my guests have ever seen this Miss Lawrence. Now the party to-night will be ruined since she will not be present at it. What, as you know, shall we do?"

The juvenile has evidently been to see many musical comedies in his life, so he knows the right move at a time like this.

"I have it!" he cries, boyishly slangy. "The little girl who brought up the pearl necklace from the jeweler's waits in the hall even now. You say that by an odd coincidence none of your guests has seen Lorraine Lawrence? Well, then, what a lark it would be to have the little girl who has brought the pearl necklace impersonate Miss Lawrence, who, as I know, was to be one of your bridesmaids, at the party to-night! You can lend her one of your frocks, which will fit her, of course, perfectly. And, incidentally, she can lay siege to the heart of your brother, who, as you know, is a confirmed woman hater."

It required the united cerebrations of Mr. Bide Dudley, Mr. Joseph Herbert, and Mr. C. S. Montanye to evolve that idea.

Mr. Dudley has also contributed the lyrics, which are doubtless as dashing and novel as the plot, but the singers see to it that but few words may be distin-

guished. After all, things always work out for the best, as my grandmother was constantly saying.

The other offering, "Spice of 1922," is on view at the Winter Garden, and you can wear the thesaurus to a fringe without finding a phrase that better describes it than "a typical Winter Garden show."

There is a large and doubtless staggeringly expensive cast, headed by Miss Valeska Suratt, who has returned from wherever she has been lately, and whose entrance is greeted with applause as rapturous as ever Sarah Bernhardt commanded. It is a shade difficult for an outsider to discern just why there should be such an emotional upheaval when Miss Suratt appears on the stage. Undoubtedly, she must be just loads of fun when you get to know her, but as an actress she seems to lack depth.

Also present are Mr. Arman Kaliz, who worked hard on the show itself, and therefore feels it only fair that he should allot himself rôles which necessitate that various show girls throw themselves at his feet, proclaiming that there is no charm like his; and Mr. James Watts—oh, a great deal of Mr. James Watts—the female impersonator. Personally, if an edict should go forth tomorrow forbidding the appearance on any stage of any female impersonator whatever, I doubt if I could work up a single tear-dimmed eye about it.

There are, however, two dazzlingly bright spots in "Spice of 1922." One of them is Jimmy Hussey. It seems, on inquiry, that Jimmy Hussey is probably one of the best-known figures on the American stage, having appeared in vaudeville for years and years. But we, who do not get around much, never happened to have seen him until this appearance of his at the Winter Garden. Out on the stage strolled a quiet and seemingly pathetic, eager-to-please young man, remarkable for nothing save his large derby. No especial fuss was made over him. The orchestra played nothing in particular, and no highly decorated back drop was lowered for the occasion. He advanced to the footlights, and in a mild voice started to sing. And from that moment on he became one of our favorite actors. If there is a funnier Jewish comedian anywhere, I'd just like to see him, that's all.

And the other bright spot is, as she always is, Adele Rowland. If only the show were worthy of her presence in it, it would be the hit of the year.

Not exactly a brand-new production, for it had been given several private performances at the Garrick Theater, is the Theater Guild's "From Morn to Midnight," moved up to the Frazee and let go along on its own as a regular play. It is rather hard to say anything definite about the piece, for opinions differ so about it that whatever you say, you are apt to get in deeply wrong with some dear friend. Only upon one thing do all those who see it seem to be agreed; that, for the first twenty minutes or so, it is impossible for the normal brain to discover what, if anything, it is all about.

After that, however, it develops into a curious, merciless, often moving and always, somehow, interesting study of a bank employee who steals a large sum of money and attempts to spend it in a day. Somehow—do stop me if everybody up around your way flouts the notion—it is oddly suggestive of "The Emperor Jones."

The dauntless Frank Reicher has another of those parts of his that compels him to be on the stage for practically the whole stretch of the play. Aside from his somewhat trying habit of speaking every line as if those to whom he addressed it were just within earshot, his is a fine performance. Lee Simonson has again designed some remarkable settings, and the whole production is, like all the Guild's offerings, sincere and worth seeing.

Talks With Ainslee's Readers

NOT so very many years ago a young and very charming and determinedly ambitious girl sold her first story to a magazine editor. He was encouraging and she, spurred on by the sale, more than ever committed herself to writing as a profession. And for several more years she kept at it, with varying success. Much of the work of those beginning years she disposed of to the editor who had given her her first foothold in the literary climb she was attempting.

THE editor is gone. He gave his life in the war. But the girl whom he backed from the start as a winner has indeed won out. She is to-day one of the two most successful woman writers in the country. And, in the way of big people, points proudly and gratefully to her start, made possible by the faith of a discerning critic in the efforts and grit of determined youth.

THE girl is Nina Wilcox Putnam. The editor Robert Rudd Whiting. The magazine that opened its doors so encouragingly to admit the work of an author, whose name at that time had no commercial value, was AINSLEE'S. For the slogan of its editors has always been "good stories by any writers rather than any stories by good writers.'

THE young woman whose success has been so tremendous, albeit won by hard work, has never relinquished her affection for the milestones which marked her progress in those early days. Nina Wilcox Putnam, hedged about by contracts and requests from editors and play producers, is still the human, approachable, enthusiastic young woman she was at the outset. Success has not for a moment cramped her style. She is never too busy to be gracious, in the manner of some of the youngest and most fleetingly successful writers of the day.

AND all of this is but to prelude the announcement of a big return engagement of Nina Wilcox Putnam in AINSLEE'S. The November number will contain one of her inimitable longer tales of the "uprising generation," which she has made famous throughout the land. They never have failed to make a tremendous hit with readers. You're due for one of those long, protracted, epidemic laughs once you have embarked on "Boomerangs Come Home to Roost." It is the fervent confession of one Lila Lee, flapper, who is troubled only by butlers, low-hung motor cars, country-club parties, and too-frequent proposals by the frantic males with whom she surrounds herself. The issue carrying this modern maiden's prayer of Mrs. Putnam's will not long adorn the news stands. If you mean to read any part of it you had better have a confidential word with your newsdealer now.

THE November number will prove memorable for other reasons, too. The last installment of the big serial, "The Kingmakers," appears in it. We have had from this novel the most whole-hearted, delighted response, so that we wish Mr. Stevenson could carry the tale on indefinitely. But, like life itself, even the most thrilling stories run their course, and the fates of the players are accomplished. In the well-rounded story nothing remains to be said. Even a sequel, that boon of all reading children, becomes anticlimactic, if not utterly fatuous. You will feel, in the case of "The Kingmakers," that there has been an increase, rather than a decline of power, in the story as it nears its end.

AND in the November AINSLEE'S, as usual, Dorothy Parker will take you to the season's best plays in New York. Through her eyes New Yorkers who are really *comme il faut* and entirely smart follow the dramatic season. Get in line and do the thing as those "who know" do. Dorothy Parker is to-day the least artificial of the play critics. Refreshingly humorous at all times, never smugly caustic in her comment, she stands alone as New York's most brilliant and clever dramatic reviewer.

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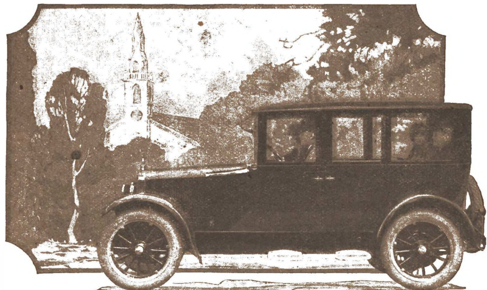

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"The Lady" was Florence Nightingale.

From the far-off day—
of the Crimea—down through the years—her beautiful spirit has shone undimmed. It was the light that illumined the way for the first training school for nurses. It was in the glow of her inspiration that the Red Cross was founded.

And it is to Florence Nightingale—
that the world owes the knowledge that in terms of national power, prestige and wealth it pays to nurse men in times of war. But even with that knowledge it was not fully realized until a few years ago that it would pay to nurse men, women and children in times of peace.

Then came the Great Light—
what the world needed was to make health, instead of disease, *catching.* The Light pointed the way—the visiting nurse.

The Lady With the Lamp

For who could take health into the home as she could? Who could come into such sympathetic relations with the family? Who else could so completely gain a mother's confidence? Who could win such love and respect that big men obeyed her as little children? Who could bring such a sense of security as this self-reliant woman in her trim uniform—a badge of service that even the lowest criminal respects?

And in whom else could be found the tenderness of a woman and the courage of a man? Often in rural districts where the doctor is miles away—she fights alone through the long night. In the slums of the city she hurries through darkened streets and up foreboding stairways on her errands of mercy.

10,000 Public Health Nurses—

are at work today, in towns, cities and in rural districts. Still there are not enough to go round, for there are few business, educational, civic or religious bodies that do not *now* recognize that it pays to nurse people—few that do not recognize the need for extending the service.

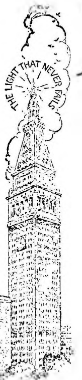
And the Home Cry for Help—

comes from every quarter. From the lonely mountain cabin, from the factory settlement, from the crowded tenement; wherever there is sickness—they are calling for the visiting nurse.

"Angels"—

the president of the world's greatest life insurance company calls these nurses. And angels they are in thousands of troubled homes—ministering angels whose work has come about because of the example set by "The Lady With the Lamp." The Lamp's symbol today is the great lantern atop the Metropolitan Tower—

"The Light That Never Fails."



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HALEY FISKE, *President*

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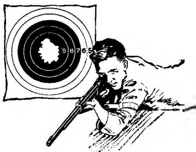

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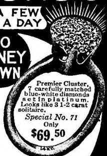

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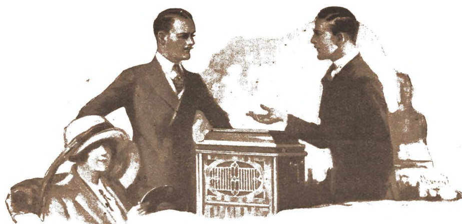

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I'll Prove YOU Can Make $100 a week

No Capital Required—No Experience Needed

Are you interested in a chance to make some real money quickly—$10, $15 or even $20 a day right from the start? I have a big-paying proposition now ready for your acceptance. You do not need to leave your own locality. You can make big money right in your own community. You can have your own Hudson Coach which I furnish. You can have money in the bank. You and your family can enjoy all of the luxuries of life.

Here's Proof That You Can Make $100 a Week

Don't get the idea that my proposition calls for special training or experience. It doesn't! Mabel Travis, a nineteen-year-old girl, has made as much as $22.87 in one day. Christopher Vaughn made $125 in one week. John Scotti made $97 his second week. Henry Albers made $100 in a week. Ralph Mosher made $100 in two weeks' spare time. R. Lile made $26.73 in one day. Eugene Ducat cleared $45 the first two days. Chas. Underhill made $22.30 his first three hours. A. V. Harman made $26.13 in one day. R. T. Moorehead made $12 in an evening. These earnings show how simple my proposition is. And you can do as well as anybody. You can start the very first day to make big money.

Control Your Own Business

You don't risk a cent of capital to get started. You don't need any experience or special training. I furnish you with complete equipment.

We are the largest and most successful company of our kind in America. We have been established for nineteen years. If you read the **Saturday Evening Post** and other leading magazines, you have seen advertisements of ZANOL Products. We make 350 wonderful products—foods, toilet preparations, perfumes, soaps, and other household necessities. The demand for them is enormous. We have hundreds of thousands of customers in every part of the country. Last year we received millions of dollars' worth of orders through our Authorized Representatives.

Here's All That You Do

You simply represent us to our customers in your neighborhood. That's all you do. And I help you to get every dollar's worth of business in your locality. I protect your interests so that you, and you alone, will get all of the profits.

This is the very same opportunity that enabled Albert Peters, Ky., to make $20 in three hours. Mrs. G. H. Michelsen, Neb., made $16 in a single afternoon. Del Hebert, N. Y., made $27 in ten hours. Mrs. B. L. Hodges, N. Y., averages $18 to $20 profit a day. Mrs. Clara Stiteler, Ill., made $17 in an hour. In fact, for doing this pleasant, fascinating, dignified work, our Representatives last year made nearly $2,000,000 for themselves.

HUDSON SUPER-SIX COACH FREE

We want to help you in every way to make large profits and we offer to provide a brand-new Hudson Super-Six Coach, without any expense to you whatever. The car is given to you outright and becomes your personal, permanent property. Mail the coupon for details of our new plan.

No Experience Required

Remember, all that we ask of you is to introduce yourself as the ZANOL Representative in your locality. The rest is easy. You will be astonished at the way the money will come rolling in.

You have the opportunity to duplicate such earnings as these: Thos. Chiasson, Massachusetts, $33.20 in ten hours; Ed H. Belding, Michigan, $25.60 in one day; Edgar Morris, Ohio, $210 the first two weeks; R. E. Edgerton, South Dakota, $21.60 in a half day. Yes, earnings like these can be yours because I show you how to duplicate them. I tell you what to do, where to go, and what to say.

My Free Offer to You

If you will sign and mail the coupon immediately, I will tell you how to get started quickly in this wonderful money-making business. I will give you all details. I don't want you to send me a cent. I will hold your territory open for you for a limited time awaiting your decision. I will tell you everything you'll need to know. I'll furnish complete equipment. You'll have the same opportunity that enabled M. P. Stetar, Pennsylvania, to average $18 profit a day; Frank Brown, North Dakota, to make $27 in a day; Geo. Backes, Oklahoma, to make $15 in one afternoon.

You do not have to agree to pay anything or do anything. You take no risks. This is your big chance to get ahead. I show you how to make $100 a week without working as hard as you do now. So send for full information at once. Don't wait until some one else gets in ahead of you. Don't delay until it is too late. Mail the coupon now!

THE AMERICAN PRODUCTS CO.
Albert Mills
President and General Manager
7044 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio.
(c) A. P. Co.

MAIL THIS NOW

Albert Mills, Pres., American Products Co.,
7044 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Please send at once complete information telling me how I can become a big money-making ZANOL Representative for my locality. Send all the facts without cost or obligation to me.

Name ....

Address ....

....

(Please print or write plainly)

Leadership

"All Curtiss Candies are good candies. The same wonderful quality which has earned for **Baby Ruth** national popularity and undisputed dominance in its field, will be found in our other popular sellers—Peter Pan, Milk Nut Loaf, Ostrich Egg and Cocoanut Grove.

They are all pure and wholesome for they are made of fresh milk, pure sugar, crisp nuts and rich chocolate."

Otto Y. Schnering,
President

CURTISS CANDY COMPANY
CHICAGO

"Buy [illegible] the Box"