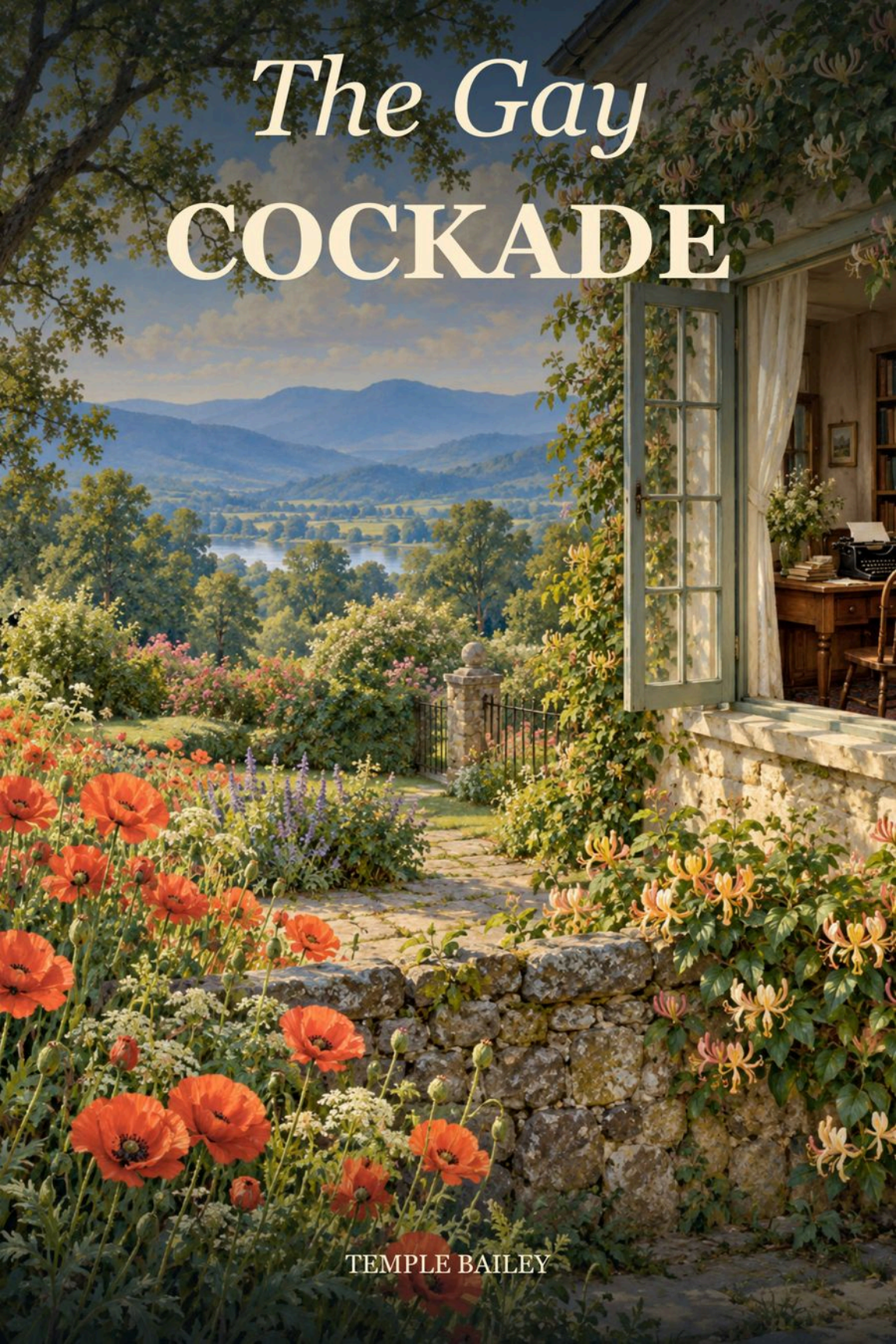
The Gay COCKADE



TEMPLE BAILEY

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THE AUTHOR



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1869 - 1953

AI-created interpretation after photograph published in Book News Monthly, June 1915, page 470.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Temple Bailey

Temple Bailey was an American novelist and short-story writer, born Irene Temple Bailey in Virginia in 1869. Educated in private schools, she became a successful author of romantic fiction. Washington, D.C., formed an important part of her adult social and literary life.

Her books include *Judy*, *The Glory of Youth*, *The Blue Window* and *The Pink Camellia*. Many of her stories first reached readers in popular magazines. Serial publication made the intervals between instalments part of the reading experience, encouraging anticipation and sustained involvement with the characters.

Bailey attracted a large readership, particularly among women and younger readers, with stories of affection, aspiration and emotional difficulty. Her success belonged to a publishing world in which magazine fiction and books supported one another. She continued writing over several decades and died in Washington in 1953.

When reading her romances, look at the connection between a private wish and the expectations of a household or community. A conversation, a misunderstanding or a change in circumstances may transform what a character believes is possible. The resolution matters, but so does the route towards it: notice which sacrifices the story rewards and how its characters learn to recognise one another.

Biographical references: Women in World History: A Biographical Encyclopedia. Portrait source: photograph published in Book News Monthly, June 1915, page 470. Full source records retained in the edition archive.

THE GAY COCKADE

From the moment that Jimmie Harding came into the office, he created an atmosphere. We were a tired lot. Most of us had been in the government service for years, and had been ground fine in the mills of departmental monotony.

But Jimmie was young, and he wore his youth like a gay cockade. He flaunted it in our faces, and because we were so tired of our dull and desiccated selves, we borrowed of him, remorselessly, color and brightness until, gradually, in the light of his reflected glory, we seemed a little younger, a little less tired, a little less petrified.

In his gay and gallant youth there was, however, a quality which partook of earlier times. He should, we felt, have worn a feather in his cap—and a cloak instead of his Norfolk coat. He walked with a little swagger, and stood with his hand on his hip, as if his palm pressed the hilt of his sword. If he ever fell in love, we told one another, he would, without a doubt, sing serenades and apostrophize the moon.

He did fall in love before he had been with us a year. His love-affair was a romance for the whole office. He came among us every morning glorified; he left us in the afternoon as a knight enters upon a quest.

He told us about the girl. We pictured her perfectly before we saw her, as a little thing, with a mop of curled brown hair; an oval face, pearl-tinted; wide, blue eyes. He dwelt on all her small perfections—the brows that swept across her forehead in a thin black line, the transparency of her slender hands, the straight set of her head on her shoulders, the slight halt in her speech like that of an enchanting child.

Yet she was not in the least a child. "She holds me up to my best, Miss Standish," Jimmie told me; "she says I can write."

We knew that Jimmie had written a few things, gay little poems that he showed us now and then in the magazines. But we had not taken them at all seriously. Indeed, Jimmie had not taken them seriously himself.

But now he took them seriously. "Elise says that I can do great things. That I must get out of the Department."

To the rest of us, getting out of the government service would have seemed a mad adventure. None of us would have had the courage to consider it. But it seemed a natural thing that Jimmie should fare forth on the broad highway—a modern D'Artagnan, a youthful Quixote, an Alan Breck—!

We hated to have him leave. But he had consolation. "Of course you'll come and see us. We're going back to my old house in Albemarle. It's a rotten shack, but Elise says it will be a corking place for me to write. And you'll all come down for week-ends."

We felt, I am sure, that it was good of him to ask us, but none of us expected that we should ever go. We had a premonition that Elise wouldn't want the deadwood of Jimmie's former Division. I know that for myself, I was content to think of Jimmie happy in his old house. But I never really expected to see it. I had reached the point of expecting nothing except the day's work, my dinner at the end, a night's sleep, and the same thing over again in the morning.

Yet Jimmie got all of us down, not long after he was married, to what he called a housewarming. He had inherited a few pleasant acres in Virginia, and the house was two hundred years old. He had never lived in it until he came with Elise. It was in rather shocking condition, but Elise had managed to make it habitable by getting it scrubbed very clean, and by taking out everything that was not in keeping with the oldness and quaintness. The resulting effect was bare but beautiful. There were a great many books, a few oil-portraits, mahogany sideboards and tables and four-poster beds, candles in sconces and in branched candlesticks. They were married in April, and when we went down in June poppies were blowing in the wide grass spaces, and honeysuckle rioting over the low stone walls. I think we all felt as if we had passed through purgatory and had entered heaven. I know I did, because this was the kind of thing of which I had dreamed, and there had been a time when I, too, had wanted to write.

The room in which Jimmie wrote was in a little detached house, which had once been the office of his doctor grandfather. He had his typewriter out there, and a big desk, and from the window in front of

his desk he could look out on green slopes and the distant blue of mountain ridges.

We envied him and told him so.

"Well, I don't know," Jimmie said. "Of course I'll get a lot of work done. But I'll miss your darling old heads bending over the other desks."

"You couldn't work, Jimmie," Elise reminded him, "with other people in the room."

"Perhaps not. Did I tell you old dears that I am going to write a play?"

That was, it seems, what Elise had had in mind for him from the beginning—a great play!

"She wouldn't even, have a honeymoon"—Jimmie's arm was around her; "she brought me here, and got this room ready the first thing."

"Well, he mustn't be wasting time," said Elise, "must he? Jimmie's rather wonderful, isn't he?"

They seemed a pair of babies as they stood there together. Elise had on a childish one-piece pink frock, with sleeves above the elbow, and an organdie sash. Yet, intuitively, the truth came to me—she was ages older than Jimmie in spite of her twenty years to his twenty-four. Here was no Juliet, flaming to the moon—no mistress whose steed would gallop by wind-swept roads to midnight trysts. Here was, rather, the cool blood that had sacrificed a honeymoon—*and, oh, to honeymoon with Jimmie Harding*!—for the sake of an ambitious future.

She was telling us about it "We can always have a honeymoon, Jimmie and I. Some day, when he is famous, we'll have it. But now we must not."

"I picked out the place"—Jimmie was eager—"a dip in the hills, and big pines—And then Elise wouldn't."

We went in to lunch after that. The table was lovely and the food delicious. There was batter-bread, I remember, and an omelette, and peas from the garden.

Duncan Street and I talked all the way home of Jimmie and his wife. He didn't agree with me in the least about Elise. "She'll be the making of him. Such wives always are."

But I held that he would lose something,—that he would not be the same Jimmie.

Jimmie wrote plays and plays. In between he wrote pot-boiling books. The pot-boilers were needed, because none of his plays were accepted. He used to stop in our office and joke about it.

"If it wasn't for Elise's faith in me, Miss Standish, I should think myself a poor stick. Of course, I can make money enough with my books and short stuff to keep things going, but it isn't just money that either of us is after."

Except when Jimmie came into the office we saw very little of him. Elise gathered about her the men and women who would count in Jimmie's future. The week-ends in the still old house drew not a few famous folk who loathed the commonplaceness of convivial atmospheres. Elise had old-fashioned flowers in her garden, delectable food, a library of old books. It was a heavenly change for those who were tired of cocktail parties, bridge-madness, illicit love-making. I could never be quite sure whether Elise really loved dignified living for its own sake, or whether she was sufficiently discriminating to recognize the kind of bait which would lure the fine souls whose presence gave to her hospitality the stamp of exclusiveness.

They had a small car, and it was when Jimmie motored up to Washington that we saw him. He had a fashion of taking us out to lunch, two at a time. When he asked me, he usually asked Duncan Street. Duncan and I have worked side by side for twenty-five years. There is nothing in the least romantic about our friendship, but I should miss him if he were to die or to resign from office. I have little fear of the latter contingency. Only death, I feel, will part us.

In our moments of reunion Jimmie always talked a great deal about himself. The big play was, he said, in the back of his mind. "Elise says that I can do it," he told us one day over our oysters, "and I am beginning to think that I can. I say, why can't you old dears in the office come down for Christmas, and I'll read you what I've written."

We were glad to go. There were to be no other guests, and I found out afterward that Elise rarely invited any of their fashionable

friends down in winter. The place showed off better in summer with the garden, and the vines hiding all deficiencies.

We arrived in a snow-storm on Christmas Eve, and when we entered the house there was a roaring fire on the hearth. I hadn't seen a fire like that for thirty years. You may know how I felt when I knelt down in front of it and warmed my hands.

The candles in sconces furnished the only other illumination. Elise, moving about the shadowy room, seemed to draw light to herself. She wore a flame-colored velvet frock and her curly hair was tucked into a golden net. I think that she had planned the medieval effect deliberately, and it was a great success. As she flitted about like a brilliant bird, our eyes followed her. My eyes, indeed, drank of her, like new wine. I have always loved color, and my life has been drab.

I spoke of her frock when she showed me my room.

"Oh, do you like it?" she asked. "Jimmie hates to see me in dark things. He says that when I wear this he can see his heroine."

"Is she like you?"

"Not a bit. She is rather untamed. Jimmie does her very well. She positively gallops through the play."

"And do you never gallop?"

She shook her head. "It's a good thing that I don't. If I did, Jimmie would never write. He says that I keep his nose to the grindstone. It isn't that, but I love him too much to let him squander his talent. If he had no talent, I should love him without it. But, having it, I must hold him up to it."

She was very sure of herself, very sure of the rightness of her attitude toward Jimmie. "I know how great he is," she said, as we went down, "and other people don't. So I've got to prove it."

It was at dinner that I first noticed a change in Jimmie. It was a change which was hard to define. Yet I missed something in him—the enthusiasm, the buoyancy, the almost breathless radiance with which he had rekindled our dying fires. Yet he looked young enough and happy enough as he sat at the table in his velvet studio coat, with his crisp, burnt-gold hair catching the light of the candles. He and his wife were a handsome pair. His manner to her was perfect. There could be no question of his adoration.

After dinner we had the tree. It was a young pine set up at one end of the long dining-room, and lighted in the old fashion by red wax candles. There were presents on it for all of us. Jimmie gave me an adorably illustrated *Mother Goose*.

"You are the only other child here, Miss Standish," he said, as he handed it to me. "I saw this in a book-shop, and couldn't resist it."

We looked over the pictures together. They were enchanting. All the bells of old London rang out for a wistful Whittington in a ragged jacket; Bo-Peep in panniers and pink ribbons wailed for her historic sheep; Mother Hubbard, quaint in a mammoth cap, pursued her fruitless search for bones. There was, too, an entrancing Boy Blue who wound his horn, a sturdy darling with his legs planted far apart and distended rosy cheeks.

"That picture is worth the price of the whole book," said Jimmie, and hung over it. Then suddenly he straightened up. "There should be children in this old house."

I knew then what I had missed from the tree. Elise had a great many gifts—exquisite trifles sent to her by sophisticated friends—a wine-jug of seventeenth-century Venetian glass, a bag of Chinese brocade with handles of carved ivory, a pair of ancient silver buckles, a box of rare lacquer filled with Oriental sweets, a jade pendant, a crystal ball on a bronze base—all of them lovely, all to be exclaimed over; but the things I wanted were drums and horns and candy canes, and tarletan bags, and pop-corn chains, and things that had to be wound up, and things that whistled, and things that squawked, and things that sparkled. And Jimmie wanted these things, but Elise didn't. She was perfectly content with her elegant trifles.

It was late when we went out finally to the studio. There was snow everywhere, but it was a clear night with a moon above the pines. A great log burned in the fireplace, a shaded lamp threw a circle of gold on shining mahogany. It seemed to me that Jimmie's writing quarters were even more attractive in December than in June.

Yet, looking back, I can see that to Jimmie the little house was a sort of prison. He loved men and women, contact with his own kind. He had even liked our dingy old office and our dreary, dried-up selves. And here, day after day, he sat alone—as an artist must sit if he is to achieve—*es bildet ein Talent sich in der Stille*.

We sat around the fire in deep leather chairs, all except Elise, who had a cushion on the floor at Jimmie's feet.

He read with complete absorption, and when he finished he looked at me. "What do you think of it?"

I had to tell the truth. "It isn't your masterpiece."

He ran his fingers through his hair with a nervous gesture. "I told Elise that it wasn't."

"But the girl"—Elise's gaze held hot resentment—"is wonderful. Surely you can see that."

"She doesn't seem quite real."

"Then Jimmie shall make her real." Elise laid her hand lightly on her husband's shoulder. Her gown and golden net were all flame and sparkle, but her voice was cold. "He shall make her real."

"No"—it seemed to me that as he spoke Jimmie drew away from her hand—"I am not going to rewrite it, Elise. I'm tired of it."

"Jimmie!"

"I'm tired of it—"

"Finish it, and then you'll be free—"

"Shall I ever be free?" He stood up and turned his head from side to side, as if he sought some way of escape. "Shall I ever be free? I sometimes think that you and I will stick to this old house until we grow as dry as dust. I want to live, Elise! I want to live—!"

But Elise was not ready to let Jimmie live. To her, Jimmie the artist was more than Jimmie the lover. I may have been unjust, but she seemed to me a sort of mental vampire, who was sucking Jimmie's youth. Duncan Street snorted when I told him what I thought. Elise was a pretty woman, and a pretty woman in the eyes of men can do no wrong.

"You'll see," I said, "what she'll do to him."

The situation was to me astounding. Here was Life holding out its hands to Elise, glory of youth demanding glorious response, and she, incredibly, holding back. In spite of my gray hair and stiff figure, I am of the galloping kind, and my soul followed Jimmie Harding's in its quest for freedom.

But there was one thing that Elise could not do. She could not make Jimmie rewrite his play. "I'll come to it some day," he said, "but not yet. In the meantime I'll see what I can do with books."

He did a great deal with books, so that he wrote several best-sellers. This eased the financial situation and they might have had more time for things. But Elise still kept him at it. She wanted to be the wife of a great man.

Yet as the years went on, Duncan and I began to wonder if her hopes would be realized. Jimmie wrote and wrote. He was successful in a commercial sense, but fame did not come to him. There was gray in his burnt-gold hair; his shoulders acquired a scholarly droop, and he wore glasses on a black ribbon. It was when he put on glasses that I began to feel a thousand years old. Yet always when he was away from me I thought of him as the Jimmie whose youth had shone with blinding radiance.

His constancy to Duncan and to me began to take on a rather pathetic quality. The others in the office drifted gradually out of his life. Some of them died, some of them resigned, some of them worked on, plump or wizened parodies of their former selves. I was stouter than ever, and stiffer, and the top of Duncan's head was a shining cone. And the one interesting thing in our otherwise dreary days was Jimmie.

"You're such darling old dears," was his pleasant way of putting it.

But Duncan dug up the truth for me. "We knew him before he wrote. He gets back to that when he is with us."

I had grown to hate Elise. It was not a pleasant emotion, and I am not sure that she really deserved it. But Duncan hated her, too. "You're right," he said one day when we had lunched with Jimmie; "she's sucked him dry." Jimmie had been unusually silent. He had laughed little. He had tapped the table with his finger, and had kept his eyes on his finger. He had been absent-minded. "She has sucked him dry," said Duncan, with great heat.

But she hadn't. That was the surprising thing. Just as we were all giving up hope of Jimmie's proving himself something more than a hack, he did the great thing and the wonderful thing that years ago Elise had prophesied. His play, "The Gay Cockade," was accepted by

a New York manager, and after the first night the world went wild about it.

I had helped Jimmie with the name. I had spoken once of youth as a gay cockade. "That's a corking title," Jimmie had said, and had written it in his note-book.

When his play was put in rehearsal, Duncan and I were there to see. We took our month's leave, traveled to New York, and stayed at an old-fashioned boarding-house in Washington Square. Every day we went to the theatre. Elise was always there, looking younger than ever in the sables bought with Jimmie's advance royalty, and with various gowns and hats which were the by-products of his best-sellers.

The part of the heroine of "The Gay Cockade" was taken by Ursula Simms. She was, as those of you who have seen her know, a Rosalind come to life. With an almost boyish frankness she combined feminine witchery. She had glowing red hair, a voice that was gay and fresh, a temper that was hot. She galloped through the play as Jimmie had meant that she should gallop in that first poor draft which he had read to us in Albemarle, and it was when I saw Ursula in rehearsal that I realized what Jimmie had done—he had embodied in his heroine all the youth that he had lost—she stood for everything that Elise had stolen from him—for the wildness, the impetuosity, the passion which swept away prudence and went neck to nothing to fulfilment.

Indeed, the whole play partook of the madness of youth. It bubbled over. Everybody galloped to a rollicking measure. We laughed until we cried. But there was more than laughter in it. There was the melancholy which belongs to tender years set in exquisite contrast to the prevailing mirth.

Jimmie had a great deal to do with the rehearsals. Several times he challenged Ursula's reading of the part.

"You must not give your kisses with such ease," he told her upon one occasion; "the girl in the play has never been kissed."

She shrugged her shoulders and ignored him. Again he remonstrated. "She's frank and free," he said. "Make her that. Make her that. Men must fight for her favors."

She came to it at last, helped by that Rosalind-like quality in herself. She was young, as he had wanted Elise to be, clean-hearted, joyous—girlhood at its best.

Gradually Jimmie ceased to suggest. He would sit beside us in the dimness of the empty auditorium, and watch her as if he drank her in. Now and then he would laugh a little, and say, under his breath: "How did I ever write it? How did it ever happen?"

Elise, on the other side of him, said, at last, "I knew you could do it, Jimmie."

"You thought I could do great things. You never knew I could do—this—"

It was toward the end of the month that Duncan said to me one night as we rode home on the top of a 'bus, "You don't suppose that he—"

"Elise thinks it," I said. "It's waking her up."

Elise and Jimmie had been married fifteen years, and had never had a honeymoon, not in the sense that Jimmie wanted it—an adventure in romance, to some spot where they could forget the world of work, the world of sordid things, the world that was making Jimmie old. Every summer Jimmie had asked for it, and always Elise had said, "Wait."

But now it was Elise who began to plan. "When your play is produced, we'll run away somewhere. Do you remember the place you always talked about—up in the hills?"

He looked at her through his round glasses. "I can't get away from this"—he waved his hand toward the stage.

"If it's a success you can, Jimmie."

"It will be a success. Ursula Simms is a wonder. Look at her, Elise. Look at her!"

Duncan and I could look at nothing else. As many times as I had seen her in the part, I came to it always eagerly. It was her great scene—where the girl, breaking free from all that has bound her, takes the hand of her vagabond lover and goes forth, leaving behind wealth and a marriage of distinction, that she may wander across the moors and down on the sands, with the wild wind in her face, the stars for a canopy!

It tugged at our hearts. It would tug, we knew, at the heart of any audience. It was the human nature in us all which responded. Not one of us but would have broken bonds. Oh, youth, youth! Is there anything like it in the whole wide world?

I do not think that it tugged at the heart of Elise. Her heart was not like that. It was a stay-at-home heart. A workaday-world heart. Elise would never under any circumstance have gone forth with a vagabond on a wild night.

But here was Ursula doing it every day. On the evening of the first dress-rehearsal she wore clothes that showed her sense of fitness. As if in casting off conventional restraints, she renounced conventional attire; she came down to her lover wrapped in a cloak of the deep-purple bloom of the heather of the moor, and there was a pheasant's feather in her cap.

"*May you never regret it, my dear, my dear*," said the lover on the stage.

"*I shall love you for a million years*," said Ursula, and we felt that she would, and that love was eternal, and that any woman might have it if she would put her hand in her lover's and run away with him on a wild night!

And it was the genius of Jimmie Harding that made us feel that the thing could be done. He sat forward in his chair, his arms on the back of the seat in front of him. "Jove!" he kept saying under his breath. "It's the real thing. It's the real thing—"

When the scene was over, he went on the stage and stood by Ursula. Elise from her seat watched them. Ursula had taken off the cap with the pheasant's feather. Her glorious hair shone like copper, her hand was on her hip, her little swagger matched the swagger that we remembered in the old Jimmie. I wondered if Elise remembered.

I am not sure what made Ursula care for Jimmie Harding. He was no longer a figure for romance. But she did care. It was, perhaps, that she saw in him the fundamental things which belonged to both of them, and which did not belong to Elise.

As the days went on I was sorry for Elise. I should never have believed that I could be sorry, but I was. Jimmie was always punctiliously polite to her. But he was only that.

"She's getting what she deserves," Duncan said, but I felt that she was, perhaps, getting more than she deserved. For, after all, it was she who had kept Jimmie at it, and it was her keeping him at it which had brought success.

Neither Duncan nor I could tell how Jimmie felt about Ursula. But the thought of her troubled my sleep. Stripped of her art, she was not in the least the heroine of Jimmie's play. She was of coarser clay, commoner. And Jimmie was fine. The fear I had was that he might clothe her with the virtues which he had created, and the thought, as I have said, troubled me.

At last Duncan and I had to go home, although we promised to return for the opening night. Ursula gave a farewell supper for us. She lived alone with a housekeeper and maid. Her apartment was furnished in good taste, with, perhaps, a touch of over-emphasis. The table had unshaded purple candles and heather in glass dishes. Ursula wore woodland green, with a chaplet of heather about her glorious hair. Elise was in white with pearls. She was thirty-five, but she did not look it. Ursula was older, but she would always be in a sense ageless, as such women are—one would thrill to Sara Bernhardt were she seventeen or seventy.

Jimmie seemed to have dropped the years from him. He was very confident of the success of his play. "It can't fail," he said, "with Ursula to make it sure—"

I wondered whether it was Ursula or Elise who had made it sure. Could he ever have written it if Elise had not kept him at it? Yet she had stolen his youth!

And now Ursula was giving his youth back to him! As I saw the cock of his head, heard the ring of his gay laughter, I felt that it might be so. And suddenly I knew that I didn't want Jimmie to be young again. Not if he had to take his youth from the hands of Ursula Simms!

There were many toasts before the supper ended—and the last one Jimmie drank "To Ursula"! As he stood up to propose it, his glasses dangled from their ribbon, his shoulders were squared. In the soft and shaded light we were spared the gray in his hair—it was the old Jimmie, gay and gallant!

"To Ursula!" he said, and the words sparkled. "To Ursula!"

I looked at Elise. She might have been the ghost of the woman who had flamed in the old house in Albemarle. In her white and pearls she was shadowy, unsubstantial, almost spectral, but she raised her glass. "To Ursula!" she said.

All the way home on the train Duncan and I talked about it. We were scared to death. "Oh, he mustn't, he must not," I kept saying, and Duncan snorted.

"He's a young fool. She's not the woman for him—"

"Neither of them is the woman," I said, "but Elise has made him—"

"No man was ever held by gratitude."

"He'd hate Ursula in a year."

"He thinks he'd live—"

"And lose his soul—"

Jimmie's play opened to a crowded house. There had been extensive advertising, and Ursula had a great following.

Elise and Duncan and I had seats in an upper box. Elise sat where she was hidden by the curtains. Jimmie came and went unseen by the audience. Between acts he was behind the scenes. Elise had little to say. Once she reached over and laid her hand on mine.

"I—I think I'm frightened," she said, with a catch of her breath.

"It can't fail, my dear—"

"No, of course. But it's very different from what I expected."

"What is different?"

"Success."

As the great scene came closer, I seemed to hold my breath. I was so afraid that the audience might not see it as we had seen it at rehearsal. But they did see it, and it was a stupendous thing to sit there and watch the crowd, and know that Jimmie's genius was making its heart beat fast and faster. When Ursula in her purple cloak and pheasant's feather spoke her lines at the end of the third act, "*I shall love you for a million years*," the house went wild. Men and women who had never loved for a moment roared for this woman who had made them think they could love until eternity. They wanted her back and they got her. They wanted Jimmie and they got him. Ursula made a speech; Jimmie made a speech. They

came out for uncounted curtain-calls, hand-in-hand. The play was a success!

The last act was, of course, an anti-climax. Before it was finished, Elise said to me, in a, stifled voice, "I've got to get back to Jimmie."

It seemed significant that Jimmie had not come to her. Surely he had not forgotten the part she had played. For fifteen years she had worked for this.

We found ourselves presently behind the scenes. The curtain was down, the audience was still shouting, everybody was excited, everybody was shaking hands. The stage-people caught at Elise as she passed, and held her to offer congratulations. I was not held and went on until I came to where Jimmie and Ursula stood, a little separate from the rest. Although I went near enough to touch them, they were so absorbed in each other that they did not see me. Ursula was looking up at Jimmie and his head was bent to her.

"Jimmie," she said, and her rich voice above the tumult was clear as a bell, "do you know how great you are?"

"Yes," he said. "I—I feel a little drunk with it, Ursula."

"Oh," she said, and now her words stumbled, "I—I love you for it. Oh, Jimmie, Jimmie, let's run away and love for a million years—"

All that he had wanted was in her words—the urge of youth, the beat of the wind, the song of the sea. My heart stood still.

He drew back a little. He had wanted this. But he did not want it now—with Ursula. I saw it and she saw it.

"What a joke it would be," he said, "but we have other things to do, my dear."

"What things?"

The roar of the crowd came louder to their ears. "Harding, Harding! Jimmie Harding!"

"Listen," he said, and the light in his eyes was not for her. "Listen, Ursula, they're calling me."

She stood alone after he had left her. I am sure that even then she did not quite believe it was the end. She did not know how, in all the years, his wife had molded him.

When he had satisfied the crowd, Jimmie fought his way to where Elise and Duncan and I stood together.

Elise was wrapped in a great cloak of silver brocade. There was a touch of silver, too, in her hair. But she had never seemed to me so small, so childish.

"Oh, Jimmie," she said, as he came up, "you've done it!"

"Yes"—he was flushed and laughing, his head held high—"you always said I could do it. And I shall do it again. Did you hear them shout, Elise?"

"Yes."

"Jove! I feel like the old woman in the nursery rhyme, 'Alack-a-daisy, do this be I?'" He was excited, eager, but it was not the old eagerness. There was an avidity, a greediness.

She laid her hand on his arm. "You've earned a rest, dearest. Let's go up in the hills."

"In the hills? Oh, we're too old, Elise."

"We'll grow young."

"To-night I've given youth to the world. That's enough for me"—the light in his eyes was not for her—"that's enough for me. We'll hang around New York for a week or two, and then we'll go back to Albemarle. I want to get to work on another play. It's a great game, Elise. It's a great game!"

She knew then what she had done. Here was a monster of her own making. She had sacrificed her lover on the altar of success. Jimmie needed her no longer.

I would not have you think this an unhappy ending. Elise has all that she had asked, and Jimmie, with fame for a mistress, is no longer an unwilling captive in the old house. The prisoner loves his prison, welcomes his chains.

But Duncan and I talk at times of the young Jimmie who came years ago into our office. The Jimmie Harding who works down in Albemarle, and who struts a little in New York when he makes his speeches, is the ghost of the boy we knew. But he loves us still.

THE HIDDEN LAND

The mystery of Nancy Greer's disappearance has never been explained. The man she was to have married has married another woman. For a long time he mourned Nancy. He has always held the theory that she was drowned while bathing, and the rest of Nancy's world agrees with him. She had left the house one morning for her usual swim. The fog was coming in, and the last person to see her was a fisherman returning from his nets. He had stopped and watched her flitting wraith-like through the mist. He reported later that Nancy wore a gray bathing suit and cap and carried a blue cloak.

"You are sure she carried a cloak?" was the question which was repeatedly asked. For no cloak had been found on the sands, and it was unlikely that she had worn it into the water. The disappearance of the blue cloak was the only point which seemed to contradict the theory of accidental drowning. There were those who held that the cloak might have been carried off by some acquisitive individual. But it was not likely; the islanders are, as a rule, honest, and it was too late in the season for "off-islanders."

I am the only one who knows the truth. And as the truth would have been harder for Anthony Peak to bear than what he believed had happened, I have always withheld it.

There was, too, the fear that if I told they might try to bring Nancy back. I think Anthony would have searched the world for her. Not, perhaps, because of any great and passionate need of her, but because he would have thought her unhappy in what she had done, and would have sought to save her.

I am twenty years older than Nancy, her parents are dead, and it was at my house that she always stayed when she came to Nantucket. She has island blood in her veins, and so has Anthony Peak. Back of them were seafaring folk, although in the foreground was a generation or two of cosmopolitan residence. Nancy had been educated in France, and Anthony in England. The Peaks and the Greers owned respectively houses in Beacon Street and in Washington Square. They came every summer to the island, and it was thus that Anthony and Nancy grew up together, and at last became engaged.

As I have said, I am twenty years older than Nancy, and I am her cousin. I live in the old Greer house on Orange Street, for it is mine by inheritance, and was to have gone to Nancy at my death. But it will not go to her now. Yet I sometimes wonder—will the ship which carried her away ever sail back into the harbor? Some day, when she is old, will she walk up the street and be sorry to find strangers in the house?

I remember distinctly the day when the yacht first anchored within the Point. It was a Sunday morning and Nancy and I had climbed to the top of the house to the Captain's Walk, the white-railed square on the roof which gave a view of the harbor and of the sea.

Nancy was twenty-five, slim and graceful. She wore that morning a short gray-velvet coat over white linen. Her thick brown hair was gathered into a low knot and her fine white skin had a touch of artificial color. Her eyes were a clear blue. She was really very lovely, but I felt that the gray coat deadened her—that if she had not worn it she would not have needed that touch of color in her cheeks.

She lighted a cigarette and stood looking off, with her hand on the rail. "It is a heavenly morning, Ducky. And you are going to church?"

I smiled at her and said, "Yes."

Nancy did not go to church. She practiced an easy tolerance. Her people had been, originally, Quakers. In later years they had turned to Unitarianism. And now in this generation, Nancy, as well as Anthony Peak, had thrown off the shackles of religious observance.

"But it is worth having the churches just for the bells," Nancy conceded on Sunday mornings when their music rang out from belfry and tower.

It was worth having the churches for more than the bells. But it was useless to argue with Nancy. Her morals and Anthony's were irreproachable. That is, from the modern point of view. They played cards for small stakes, drank when they pleased, and, as I have indicated, Nancy smoked. She was, also, not unkissed when Anthony asked her to marry him. These were not the ideals of my girlhood, but Anthony and Nancy felt that such small vices as they cultivated saved them from the narrow-mindedness of their forebears.

"Anthony and I are going for a walk," she said. "I will bring you some flowers for your bowls, Elizabeth."

It was just then that the yacht steamed into the harbor—majestically, like a slow-moving swan. I picked out the name with my sea-glasses, *The Viking*.

I handed the glasses to Nancy. "Never heard of it," she said. "Did you?"

"No," I answered. Most of the craft which came in were familiar, and I welcomed them each year.

"Some new-rich person probably," Nancy decided. "Ducky, I have a feeling that the owner of *The Viking* bought it from the proceeds of pills or headache powders."

"Or pork."

I am not sure that Nancy and I were justified in our disdain—whale-oil has perhaps no greater claim to social distinction than bacon and ham or—pills.

The church bells were ringing, and I had to go down. Nancy stayed on the roof.

"Send Anthony up if he's there," she said; "we will sit here aloft like two cherubs and look down on you, and you will wish that you were with us."

But I knew that I should not wish it; that I should be glad to walk along the shaded streets with my friends and neighbors, to pass the gardens that were yellow with sunlight, and gay with larkspur and foxglove and hollyhocks, and to sit in the pew which was mine by inheritance.

Anthony was down-stairs. He was a tall, perfectly turned out youth, and he greeted me in his perfect manner.

"Nancy is on the roof," I told him, "and she wants you to come up."

"So you are going to church? Pray for me, Elizabeth."

Yet I knew he felt that he did not need my prayers. He had Nancy, more money than he could spend, and life was before him. What more, he would ask, could the gods give?

I issued final instructions to my maids about the dinner and put on my hat. It was a rather superlative hat and had come from Fifth

Avenue. I spend the spring and fall in New York and buy my clothes at the smartest places. The ladies of Nantucket have never been provincial in their fashions. Our ancestors shopped in the marts of the world. When our captains sailed the seas they brought home to their womenfolk the treasures of loom and needle from Barcelona and Bordeaux, from Bombay and Calcutta, London and Paris and Tokio.

And perhaps because of my content in my new hat, perhaps because of the pleasant young pair of lovers which I had left behind me in the old house, perhaps because of the shade and sunshine, and the gardens, perhaps because of the bells, the world seemed more than ever good to me as I went on my way.

My pew in the church is well toward the middle. My ancestors were modest, or perhaps they assumed that virtue. They would have neither the highest nor the lowest seat in the synagogue.

It happens, therefore, that strangers who come usually sit in front of me. I have a lively curiosity, and I like to look at them. In the winter there are no strangers, and my mind is, I fancy, at such times, more receptive to the sermon.

I was early and sat almost alone in the great golden room whose restraint in decoration suggests the primitive bareness of early days. Gradually people began to come in, and my attention was caught by the somewhat unusual appearance of a man who walked up the aisle preceded by the usher.

He was rather stocky as to build, but with good, square military shoulders and small hips. He wore a blue reefer, white trousers, and carried a yachtsman's cap. His profile as he passed into his pew showed him young, his skin slightly bronzed, his features good, if a trifle heavy.

Yet as he sat down and I studied his head, what seemed most significant about him was his hair. It was reddish-gold, thick, curled, and upstanding, like the hair on the head of a lovely child, or in the painting of a Titian or a Tintoretto.

In a way he seemed out of place. Young men of his type so rarely came to church alone. Indeed, they rarely came to church at all. He seemed to belong to the out-of-doors—to wide spaces. I was puzzled, too, by a faint sense of having seen him before.

It was in the middle of the sermon that it all connected up. Years ago a ship had sailed into the harbor, and I had been taken down to see it. I had been enchanted by the freshly painted figurehead—a strong young god of some old Norse tale, with red-gold hair and a bright blue tunic. And now in the harbor was *The Viking*, and here, in the shadow of a perfectly orthodox pulpit, sat that strong young god, more glorious even than my memory of his wooden prototype.

He seemed to be absolutely at home—sat and stood at the right places, sang the hymns in a delightful barytone which was not loud, but which sounded a clear note above the feebler efforts of the rest of us.

It has always been my custom to welcome the strangers within our gates, and I must confess to a preference for those who seem to promise something more than a perfunctory interchange.

So as my young viking came down the aisle, I held out my hand. "We are so glad to have you with us."

He stopped at once, gave me his hand, and bent on me his clear gaze. "Thank you." And then, immediately: "You live here? In Nantucket?"

"Yes."

"All the year round?"

"Practically."

"That is very interesting." Again his clear gaze appraised me. "May I walk a little way with you? I have no friends here, and I want to ask a lot of questions about the island."

The thing which struck me most as we talked was his utter lack of self-consciousness. He gave himself to the subject in hand as if it were a vital matter, and as if he swept all else aside. It is a quality possessed by few New Englanders; it is, indeed, a quality possessed by few Americans. So when he offered to walk with me, it seemed perfectly natural that I should let him. Not one man in a thousand could have made such a proposition without an immediate erection on my part of the barriers of conventionality. To have erected any barrier in this instance would have been an insult, to my perception of the kind of man with whom I had to deal.

He was a gentleman, individual, and very much in earnest; and more than all, he was immensely attractive. There was charm in that

clear blue gaze of innocence. Yet it was innocence plus knowledge, plus something which as yet I could not analyze.

He left me at my doorstep. I found that he had come to the island not to play around for the summer at the country clubs and on the bathing beach, but to live in the past—see it as it had once been—when its men went down to the sea in ships. And because there was still so much that we had to say to each other, I asked him to have a cup of tea with me, "this afternoon at four."

He accepted at once, with his air of sweeping aside everything but the matter in hand. I entered the house with a sense upon me of high adventure. I could not know that I was playing fate, changing in that moment the course of Nancy's future.

Dinner was at one o'clock. It seems an impossible hour to people who always dine at night. But on the Sabbath we Nantucketers eat our principal meal when we come home from church.

Nancy and Anthony protested as usual. "Of course you can't expect us to dress."

Nancy sat down at the table with her hat on, and minus the velvet coat. She was a bit disheveled and warm from her walk. She had brought in a great bunch of blue vetch and pale mustard, and we had put it in the center of the table in a bowl of gray pottery. My dining-room is in gray and white and old mahogany, and Nancy had had an eye to its coloring when she picked the flowers. They would not have fitted in with the decorative scheme of my library, which is keyed up, or down, to an antique vase of turquoise glaze, or to the drawing-room, which is in English Chippendale with mulberry brocade.

We had an excellent dinner, served by my little Portuguese maid. Nancy praised the lobster bisque and Anthony asked for a second helping of roast duck. They had their cigarettes with their coffee.

Long before we came to the coffee, however, Anthony had asked in his pleasant way of the morning service.

"Tell us about the sermon, Elizabeth."

"And the text," said Nancy.

I am apt to forget the text, and they knew it. It was always a sort of game between us at Sunday dinner, in which they tried to prove that my attention had strayed, and that I might much better have stayed

at home, and thus have escaped the bondage of dogma and of dressing up.

I remembered the text, and then I told them about Olaf Thoresen.

Nancy lifted her eyebrows. "The pills man? Or was it—pork?"

"It was probably neither. Don't be a snob, Nancy."

She shrugged her shoulders. "It was you who said 'pork,' Elizabeth."

"He is coming to tea."

"To-day?"

"Yes."

"Sorry," said Nancy. "I'd like to see him, but I have promised to drive Bob Needham to 'Sconset for a swim."

Anthony had made the initial engagement—to play tennis with Mimi Sears, "Provided, of course, that you have no other plans for me," he had told Nancy, politely.

She had no plans, nor would she, under the circumstances, have urged them. That was their code—absolute freedom. "We'll be a lot happier if we don't tie each other up."

It was to me an amazing attitude. In my young days lovers walked out on Sunday afternoons to the old cemetery, or on the moor, or along the beach, and came back at twilight together, and sat together after supper, holding hands.

I haven't the slightest doubt that Anthony held Nancy's hands, but there was nothing fixed about the occasions. They had done away with billing and cooing in the old sense, and what they had substituted seemed to satisfy them.

Anthony left about three, and I went up to get into something thin and cool, and to rest a bit before receiving my guest. I heard Nancy at the telephone making final arrangements with the Drakes. After that I fell asleep, and knew nothing more until Anita came up to announce that Mr. Thoresen was down-stairs.

Tea was served in the garden at the back of the house, where there were some deep wicker chairs, and roses in a riot of bloom.

"This is—enchanting—" said Olaf. He did not sit down at once. He stood looking about him, at the sun-dial, and the whale's jaw lying bleached on a granite pedestal, and at the fine old houses rising up

around us. "It is enchanting. Do you know, I have been thinking myself very fortunate since you spoke to me in church this morning."

After that it was all very easy. He asked and I answered. "You see," he explained, finally, "I am hungry for anything that tells me about the sea. Three generations back we were all sailors—my great-grandfather and his fathers before him in Norway—and far back of that—the vikings." He drew a long breath. "Then my grandfather came to America. He settled in the West—in Dakota, and planted grain. He made money, but he was a thousand miles away from the sea. He starved for it, but he wanted money, and, as I have said, he made it. And my father made more money. Then I came. The money took me to school in the East—to college. My mother died and my father. And now the money is my own. I bought a yacht, and I have lived on the water. I can't get enough of it. I think that I am making up for all that my father and my grandfather denied themselves."

I can't in the least describe to you how he said it. There was a tenseness, almost a fierceness, in his brilliant blue eyes. Yet he finished up with a little laugh. "You see," he said, "I am a sort of Flying Dutchman—sailing the seas eternally, driven not by any sinister force but by my own delight in it."

"Do you go alone?"

"Oh, I have guests—at times. But I am often my own—good company—"

He stopped and rose. Nancy had appeared in the doorway. She crossed the porch and came down toward us. She was in her bathing suit and cap, gray again, with a line of green on the edges, and flung over her shoulders was a gray cloak. She was on her way to the stables—it was before the day of motor-cars on the island, those halcyon, heavenly days. The door was open and her horse harnessed and waiting for her. She could not, of course, pass us without speaking, and so I presented Olaf.

Anita had brought the tea, and Nancy stayed to eat a slice of thin bread and butter. "In this air one is always hungry," she said to Olaf, and smiled at him.

He did not smile back. He was surveying her with a sort of frowning intensity. She spoke of it afterward, "Does he always stare like that?" But I think that, in a way, she was pleased.

She drove her own horse, wrapped in her cloak and with an utter disregard to the informality of her attire. She would, I knew, gather up the Drakes and Bob Needham, likewise attired in bathing costumes, and they would all have tea on the other side of the island, naiad-like and utterly unconcerned. I did not approve of it, but Nancy did not cut her life to fit my pattern.

When she had gone, Olaf said to me, abruptly, "Why does she wear gray?"

"Oh, she has worked out a theory that repression in color is an evidence of advanced civilization. The Japanese, for example—"

"Why should civilization advance? It has gone far enough—too far—And she should wear a blue cloak—sea-blue—the color of her eyes—"

"And of yours." I smiled at him.

"Yes. Are they like hers?"

They were almost uncannily alike. I had noticed it when I saw them together. But there the resemblance stopped.

"She belongs to the island?"

"She lives in New York. But every drop of blood in her is seafaring blood."

"Good!" He sat for a moment in silence, then spoke of something else. But when he was ready to go, he included Nancy in an invitation. "If you and Miss Greer could lunch with me to-morrow on my yacht—"

I was not sure about Nancy's engagements, but I thought we might. "You can call us up in the morning."

Nancy brought the Drakes and Bob Needham back with her for supper, and Mimi Sears was with Anthony. Supper on Sunday is an informal meal—everything on the table and the servants out.

Nancy, clothed in something white and exquisite, served the salad. "So your young viking didn't stay, Elizabeth?"

"I didn't ask him."

It was then that she spoke of his frowning gaze. "Does he always stare like that?"

Anthony, breaking in, demanded, "Did he stare at Nancy?"

I nodded. "It was her eyes."

They all looked at me. "Her eyes?"

"Yes. He said that her cloak should have matched them."

Anthony flushed. He has a rather captious code for outsiders. Evidently Olaf had transgressed it.

"Is the man a dressmaker?"

"Of course not, Anthony."

"Then why should he talk of Nancy's clothes?"

"Well," Nancy remarked, "perhaps the less said about my clothes the better. I was in my bathing suit."

Anthony was irritable. "Well, why not? You had a right to wear what you pleased, but he did not have a right to make remarks about it."

I came to Olaf's defense. "You would understand better if you could see him. He is rather different, Anthony."

"I don't like different people," and in that sentence was a summary of Anthony's prejudices. He and Nancy mingled with their own kind. Anthony's friends were the men who had gone to the right schools, who lived in the right streets, belonged to the right clubs, and knew the right people. Within those limits, humanity might do as it pleased; without them, it was negligible, and not to be considered.

After supper the five of them were to go for a sail. There was a moon, and all the wonder of it.

Anthony was not keen about the plan. "Oh, look here, Nancy," he complained, "we have done enough for one day—"

"I haven't."

Of course that settled it. Anthony shrugged his shoulders and submitted. He did not share Nancy's almost idolatrous worship of the sea. It was the one fundamental thing about her. She bathed in it, swam in it, sailed on it, and she was never quite happy away from it.

I heard Anthony later in the hall, protesting. I had gone to the library for a book, and their voices reached me.

"I thought you and I might have one evening without the others."

"Oh, don't be silly, Anthony."

I think my heart lost a beat. Here was a lover asking his mistress for a moment—and she laughed at him. It did not fit in with my ideas of young romance.

Yet late that night I heard the murmur of their voices and looked out into the white night. They stood together by the sun-dial, and his arm was about her, her head on his shoulder. And it was not the first time that a pair of lovers had stood by that dial under the moon.

I went back to bed, but I could not sleep. I lighted my bedside lamp, and read *Vanity Fair*. I find Thackeray an excellent corrective when I am emotionally keyed up.

Nancy, too, was awake; I could see her light shining across the hall. She came in, finally, and sat on the foot of my bed.

"Your viking was singing as we passed his boat—"

"Singing?"

"Yes, hymns, Elizabeth. The others laughed, Anthony and Mimi, but I didn't laugh. His voice is—wonderful—"

She had on a white-crêpe *peignoir*, and there was no color in her cheeks. Her skin had the soft whiteness of a rose petal. Her eyes were like stars. As I lay there and looked at her I wondered if it was Anthony's kisses or the memory of Olaf's singing which had made her eyes shine like that.

I had heard him sing, and I said so, "in church."

Her arms clasped her knees. "Isn't it queer that he goes to church and sings hymns?"

"Why queer? I go to church."

"Yes. But you are different. You belong to another generation, Elizabeth, and he doesn't look it."

I knew what she meant. I had thought the same thing when I first saw him walking up the aisle. "He has asked us to lunch with him to-morrow on his boat."

It was the first time that I had mentioned it. Somehow I had not cared to speak of it before Anthony.

She showed her surprise. "So soon? Doesn't that sound a little—pushing?"

"It sounds as if he goes after a thing when he wants it."

"Yes, it does. I believe I should like to accept. But I can't to-morrow. There's a clambake, and I have promised the crowd."

"He will ask you again."

"Will he? You can say 'yes' for Wednesday then. And I'll keep it."

"I am not sure that we had better accept."

"Why not?"

"Well, there's Anthony."

She slid from the bed and stood looking down at me. "You think he wouldn't like it?"

"I am afraid he wouldn't. And, after all, you are engaged to him, Nancy."

"Of course I am, but he is not my jailer. He does as he pleases and I do as I please."

"In my day lovers pleased to do the same thing."

"Did they? I don't believe it. They just pretended, and there is no pretense between Anthony and me"—she stooped and kissed me—"they just pretended, Elizabeth, and the reason that I love Anthony is because we don't pretend."

After that I felt that I need fear nothing. Nancy and Anthony—freedom and self-confidence—why should I try to match their ideals with my own of yesterday? Yet, as I laid my book aside, I resolved that Olaf should know of Anthony.

I had my opportunity the next day. Olaf came over to sit in my garden and again we had tea. He was much pleased when he knew that Nancy and I would be his guests on Wednesday.

"Come early. Do you swim? We can run the launch to the beach—or, better still, dive in the deeper water near my boat."

"Nancy swims," I told him. "I don't. And I am not sure that we can come early. Nancy and Anthony usually play golf in the morning."

"Who is Anthony?"

"Anthony Peak. The man she is going to marry."

He hesitated a moment, then said, "Bring him, too." His direct gaze met mine, and his direct question followed. "Does she love him?"

"Of course."

"It is not always 'of course.'" He stopped and talked of other things, but in some subtle fashion I was aware that my news had been a shock to him, and that he was trying to adjust himself to it, and to the difference that it must make in his attitude toward Nancy.

When I told Nancy that Anthony had been invited, she demanded, "How did Olaf Thoresen know about him?"

"I told him you were engaged."

"But why, Elizabeth? Why shout it from the housetops?"

"Well, I didn't want him to be hurt."

"You are taking a lot for granted."

I shrugged my shoulders. "We won't quarrel, and a party of four is much nicer than three."

As it turned put, however, Anthony could not go. He was called back to Boston on business. That was where Fate again stepped in. It was, I am sure, those three days of Anthony's absence which turned the scale of Nancy's destiny. If he had been with us that first morning on the boat Olaf would not have dared....

Nancy wore her white linen and her gray-velvet coat, and a hat with a gull's wing. She carried her bathing suit. "He intends, evidently, to entertain us in his own way."

Olaf's yacht was modern, but there was a hint of the barbaric in its furnishings. The cabin into which we were shown and in which Nancy was to change was in strangely carved wood, and there was a wolfskin on the floor in front of the low bed. The coverlet was of a fine-woven red-silk cloth, weighed down by a border of gold and silver threads. On the wall hung a square of tapestry which showed a strange old ship with sails of blue and red and green, and with golden dragon-heads at stem and stern.

Nancy, crossing the threshold, said to Olaf, who had opened the door for us, "It is like coming into another world; as if you had set the stage, run up the curtain, and the play had begun."

"You like it? It was a fancy of mine to copy a description I found in an old book. King Olaf, the Thick-set, furnished a room like this for his bride."

Olaf, the Thick-set! The phrase fitted perfectly this strong, stocky, blue-eyed man, who smiled radiantly upon us as he shut the door and left us alone.

Nancy stood in the middle of the room looking about her. "I like it," she said, with a queer shake in her voice. "Don't you, Elizabeth?"

I liked it so much that I felt it wise to hide my pleasure in a pretense of indifference. "Well, it is original to say the least."

But it was more than original, it was poetic. It was—Melisande in the wood—one of Sinding's haunting melodies, an old Saga caught and fixed in color and carving.

In this glowing room Nancy in her white and gray was a cold and incongruous figure, and when at last she donned her dull cap, and the dull cloak that she wore over her swimming costume, she seemed a ghostly shadow of the bright bride whom that other Olaf had brought—a thousand years before—to his strange old ship.

I realize that what comes hereafter in this record must seem to the unimaginative overdrawn. Even now, as I look back upon it, it has a dream quality, as if it might never have happened, or as if, as Nancy had said, it was part of a play, which would be over when the curtain was rung down and the actors had returned to the commonplace.

But the actors in this drama have never returned to the commonplace. Or have they? Shall I ever know? I hope I may never know, if Nancy and Olaf have lost the glamour of their dreams.

Well, we found Olaf on deck waiting for us. In a sea-blue tunic, with strong white arms, and the dazzling fairness of his strong neck, he was more than ever like the figurehead on the old ship that I had seen in my childhood. He carried over his arm a cloak of the same sea-blue. It was this cloak which afterward played an important part in the mystery of Nancy's disappearance.

His quick glance swept Nancy—the ghostly Nancy in gray, with only the blue of her eyes, and that touch of artificial pink in her cheeks to redeem her from somberness. He shook his head with a gesture of impatience.

"I don't like it," he said, abruptly. "Why do you deaden your beauty with dull colors?"

Nancy's eyes challenged him. "If it is deadened, how do you know it is beauty?"

"May I show you?" Again there was that tense excitement which I had noticed in the garden.

"I don't know what you mean," yet in that moment the color ran up from her neck to her chin, the fixed pink spots were lost in a rush of lovely flaming blushes.

For with a sudden movement he had snatched off her cap, and had thrown the cloak around her. The transformation was complete. It was as if he had waved a wand. There she stood, the two long, thick braids, which she had worn pinned close under her cap, falling heavily like molten metal to her knees, the blue cloak covering her—heavenly in color, matching her eyes, matching the sea, matching the sky, matching the eyes of Olaf.

I think I must have uttered some sharp exclamation, for Olaf turned to me. "You see," he said, triumphantly, "I have known it all the time. I knew it the first time that I saw her in the garden."

Nancy had recovered herself. "But I can't stalk around the streets in a blue cloak with my hair down."

He laughed with her. "Oh, no, no. But the color is only a symbol. Modern life has robbed you of vivid things. Even your emotions. You are—afraid—" He caught himself up. "We can talk of that after our swim. I think we shall have a thousand things to talk about."

Nancy held out her hand for her cap, but he would not give it to her. "Why should you care if your hair gets wet? The wind and the sun will dry it—"

I was amazed when I saw that she was letting him have his way. Never for a moment had Anthony mastered her. For the first time in her life Nancy was dominated by a will that was stronger than her own.

I sat on deck and watched them as they swam like two young sea gods, Nancy's bronze hair bright under the sun. Olaf's red-gold crest....

The blue cloak lay across my knee. Nancy had cast it off as she had descended into the launch. I had examined it and had found it of soft, thick wool, with embroidery of a strange and primitive sort in faded colors. Yet the material of the cloak had not faded, or, if it had, there remained that clear azure, like the Virgin's cloak in old pictures.

I knew now why Olaf had wanted Nancy on board, why he had wanted to swim with her in the sea which was as blue as her eyes and

his own. It was to reveal her to himself as the match of the women of the Sagas. I found this description later in one of the old books in the ship's library:

Then Hallgerd was sent for, and came with two women. She wore a blue woven mantle ... her hair reached down to her waist on both sides, and she tucked it under her belt.

And there was, too, this account of a housewife in her "kyrtil":

The dress-train was trailing,
The skirt had a blue tint;
Her brow was brighter,
Her neck was whiter
Than pure new fallen snow.

In other words, that one glance at Nancy in the garden, when he had risen at her entrance, had disclosed to Olaf the fundamental in her. He had known her as a sea-maiden. And she had not known it, nor I, nor Anthony.

Luncheon was served on deck. We were waited on by fair-haired, but very modern Norsemen. The crew on *The Viking* were all Scandinavians. Most of them spoke English, and there seemed nothing uncommon about any of them. Yet, in the mood of the moment, I should have felt no surprise had they served us in the skins of wild animals, or had set sail like pirates with the two of us captive on board.

I will confess, also, to a feeling of exaltation which clouded my judgment. I knew that Olaf was falling in love with Nancy, and I half guessed that Nancy might be falling in love with Olaf, yet I sat there and let them do it. If Anthony should ever know! Yet how can he know? As I weigh it now, I am not sure that I have anything with which to reproach myself, for the end, at times, justifies the means, and the Jesuitical theory had its origin, perhaps, in the profound knowledge that Fate does not always use fair methods in gaining her ends.

I can't begin to tell you what we talked about. Nancy had dried her hair, and it was wound loosely, high on her head. The blue cloak was over her shoulders, and she was the loveliest thing that I ever hope to see. By the flame in her cheeks and the light in her eyes, I was made aware of an exaltation which matched my own. She, too, was

caught up into the atmosphere of excitement which Olaf created. He could not take his eyes from her. I wondered what Anthony would have said could he have visioned for the moment this blue-and-gold enchantress.

When coffee was served there were no cigarettes or cigars. Nancy had her own silver case hanging at her belt. I knew that she would smoke, and I did not try to stop her. She always smoked after her meals and she was restless without it.

It was Olaf who stopped her. "You will hate my bad manners," he said, with his gaze holding hers, "but I wish you wouldn't."

She was lighting her own little wax taper and she looked her surprise.

"My cigarette?"

He nodded. "You are too lovely."

"But surely you are not so—old-fashioned."

"No. I am perhaps so—new-fashioned that my reason might take your breath away." He laughed but did not explain.

Nancy sat undecided while the taper burned out futilely. Then she said, "Of course you are my host—"

"Don't do it for that reason. Do it because"—he stopped, laughed again, and went on—"because you are a goddess—a woman of a new race—"

With parted lips she looked at him, then tried to wrench herself back to her attitude of light indifference.

"Oh, we've grown beyond all that."

"All what?"

"Goddess-women. We are just nice and human together."

"You are nice and human. But you are more than that."

Nancy put her unlighted cigarette back in its case. "I'll keep it for next time," she said, with a touch of defiance.

"There will be no next time," was his secure response, and his eyes held hers until, with an effort, she withdrew her gaze.

Then he rose, and his men placed deep chairs for us in a sheltered corner, where we could look out across the blue to the low hills of the moor. There was a fur rug over my chair, and I sank gratefully into the warmth of it.

"With a wind like this in the old days," Olaf said, as he stood beside me looking out over the sparkling water, "how the sails would have been spread, and now there is nothing but steam and gasoline and electricity."

"Why don't you have sails then," Nancy challenged him, "instead of steam?"

"I have a ship. Shall I show you the picture of it?"

He left to get it, and Nancy said to me, "Ducky, will you pinch me?"

"You mean that it doesn't seem real?"

She nodded.

"Well, maybe it isn't. He said he was a sort of Flying Dutchman."

"I should hate to think that he wasn't real, Elizabeth. He is as alive as a—burning coal."

Olaf came back with the pictures of his ship, a clean-cut, beautiful craft, very up-to-date, except for the dragon-heads at prow and stem.

"If I could have had my way," he told us, "I should have built it like the ship on the tapestry in there—but it wasn't practical—we haven't manpower for the oars in these days."

He had other pictures—of a strange house, or, rather, of a collection of buildings set in the form of a quadrangle, and inclosed by low walls. There were great gateways of carved wood with ironwork and views of the interior—a wide hall with fireplaces—a raised platform, with carved seats that gave a throne-like effect. The house stood on a sort of high peninsula with a forest back of it, and the sea spreading out beyond.

"The house looks old," Olaf said, "but I planned it."

He had, he explained, during one of his voyages, come upon a hidden harbor. "There is only a fishing village and a few small boats at the landing place, but the people claim to be descendants of the vikings. They are utterly isolated, but a God-fearing, hardy folk.

"It is strangely cut off from the rest of the world. I call it 'The Hidden Land.' It is not on any map. I have looked and have not found it."

"But why," was Nancy's demand, "did you build there?"

It was a question, I think, for which he had waited. "Some day I may tell you, but not now, except this—that I love the sea, and I shall end my days where, when I open my gates, my eyes may rest upon it ... where its storms may beat upon my roof, and where the men about me shall sail it, and get their living from it.

"I have told your cousin," he went on, "something of the life of my grandfather and of my father. With all of their sea-blood, they were shut away for two generations from the sea. Can you grasp the meaning of that to me?—the heritage of suppressed longings? I think my father must have felt it as I did, for he drank heavily before he died. My grandfather sought an outlet in founding the family fortunes. But when I came, there was not the compelling force of poverty to make me work, and I had before me the warning of my father's excesses. But this sea-madness! It has driven me on and on, and at last it has driven me here." He stopped, then took up the theme again in his tense, excited fashion, "It will drive me on again."

"Why should it drive you on?"

When Nancy asked that question, I knew what had happened. The thrill of her voice was the answer of a bird to its mate. When I think of her, I see her always as she was then, the blue cloak falling about her, her hair blowing, her cheeks flaming with lovely color.

I saw his fingers clench the arm of his chair as if in an effort of self-control. Then he said: "Perhaps I shall tell you that, too. But not now." He rose abruptly. "It is warmer inside, and we can have some music. I am sure you must be tired of hearing me talk about myself."

He played for us, in masterly fashion, the Peer Gynt suite, and after that a composition of his own. At last he sang, with all the swing of the sea in voice and accompaniment, and the song drew our hearts out of us.

Nancy was very quiet as we drove from the pier, and it was while I was dressing for dinner that she came into my room.

"Elizabeth," she said, "I am not sure whether we have been to a Methodist revival or to a Wagner music-drama—"

"Neither," I told her. "There's nothing artificial about him. You asked me back there if he was real. I believe that he is utterly real, Nancy. It is not a pose. I am convinced that it is not a pose."

"Yes," she said, "that's the queer thing. He's not—putting it on—and he makes everybody else seem—stale and shallow—like ghosts—or—shadow-shapes—"

I read *Vanity Fair* late into the night, and the morning was coming on before I tried to sleep. I waked to find Nancy standing by my bed.

"His boat is gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes. It went an hour ago. I saw it from the roof."

"From the roof?"

"Yes. I got up—early. I—I could not sleep. And when I looked—it was gone—your glasses showed it almost out of sight."

She was wrapped in the blue cloak. Olaf had made her bring it with her. She had protested. But he had been insistent.

"I found this in the pocket," Nancy said, and held out a card on which Olaf had written, "When she lifted her arms, opening the door, a light shone on them from the sea, and the air and all the world were brightened for her."

"What does it mean, Elizabeth?"

"I think you know, my dear."

"That he cares?"

"What do you think?"

Her eyes were like stars. "But how can he? He has seen me—twice—"

"Some men are like that."

"If you only hadn't told him about Anthony."

"I am glad that I told him."

"Oh, but he might have stayed."

"Well?"

"And I might have loved him." She was still glowing with the fires that Olaf had lighted in her.

"But you are going to marry Anthony."

"Yes," she said, "I am going to marry Anthony. I am going to flirt and smoke cigarettes and let him—flirt—when I might have been a—goddess."

It was after breakfast on the same day that a letter came to me, delivered into my own hands by messenger. It was from Olaf, and he left it to me whether Nancy should see it. It covered many pages and it shook my soul, but I did not show it to Nancy.

There were nights after that when I found it hard to sleep, nights in which I thought of Olaf sailing toward the hidden land, holding in his heart a hope which it was in my power to crown with realization or dash to the ground. Yet I had Nancy's happiness to think of, and, in a sense, Anthony's. It seemed almost incredible that I must carry, too, on my heart, the burden of the happiness of Olaf Thoresen.

When Anthony came back, he and Nancy were caught in a net of engagements, and I saw very little of them. Of course they romped in now and then with their own particular crowd, and treated me, as it were, to a cross-section of modern life. Except for two things, I should have judged that Nancy had put away all thoughts of Olaf, but these two things were significant. She had stopped smoking, and she no longer touched her cheeks with artificial bloom.

Anthony's amazement, when he offered her a cigarette and she refused, had in it a touch of irritation. "But, my dear girl, why not?"

"Well, I have to think of my complexion, Tony."

I think he knew it was not that and was puzzled. "I never saw you looking better in my life."

She was wearing a girdle of blue with her clear, crisp white, and her fairness was charming. She had, indeed, the look which belongs to young Catholic girls dedicated to the Virgin who wear her colors.

It was not, however, until Anthony had been home for a week that he saw the blue cloak. We were all on the beach—Mimi Sears and Bob Needham and the Drakes, myself and Anthony. Nancy was late, having a foursome to finish on the golf grounds. She came at last, threading her way gayly through the crowd of bathers. She was without her cap, and her hair was wound in a thick braid about her head. I saw people turning to look at her as they had never turned to look when she had worn her shadowy gray.

"Great guns!" said a man back of me. "What a beauty!"

A deep flush stained Anthony's face, and I knew at once that he did not like it. It was as if, having attuned his taste to the refinement of a Japanese print, he had been called upon to admire a Fra

Angelico. He hated the obvious, and Nancy's loveliness at this moment was as definite as the loveliness of the sky, the sea, the moon, the stars. Later I was to learn that Anthony's taste was for a sophisticated Nancy, a mocking Nancy, a slim, mysterious creature, with charms which were caviar to the mob.

But Bob Needham spoke from the depths of his honest and undiscriminating soul. "Heavens! Nancy. Where did you get it?"

"Get what?"

"That cloak."

"Do you like it?"

"Like it—! I wish Tony would run away while I tell you."

Anthony, forcing a smile, asked, "Where did you get it, Nan?"

"It was given to me." She sat down on the sand and smiled at him.

Mrs. Drake, feeling the thickness and softness, exclaiming over the embroidery, said finally: "It is a splendid thing. Like a queen's robe."

"You haven't told us yet," Anthony persisted, "where you got it."

"No? Well, Elizabeth will tell you. It's rather a long story. I am going into the water. Come on, Bob."

She left the cloak with me. Anthony followed her and the others. I sat alone under a great orange umbrella and wondered if Anthony would ask me about the cloak.

He did not, and when Nancy came back finally with her hair down and blowing in the wind to dry, Anthony was with her. The cloud was gone from his face, in the battle with the wares he had forgotten his vexation.

But he remembered when he saw the cloak. "Tell me about it, Nancy."

"I got it from Elizabeth's viking."

That was the calm way in which she put it.

"He isn't my viking," I told her.

"Well, you were responsible for him."

"Do you mean to say," Anthony demanded, "that you accepted a gift like that from a man you didn't know?"

Nancy, hugging herself in the cloak, said, "I felt that I knew him very well."

"How long was he here?"

"Three days. I saw him twice."

"I don't think I quite like the—idea—" Anthony began, then broke off. "Of course you have a right to do as you please."

"Of course," said Nancy, with a flame in her cheek.

"But it would please me very much if you would send it back to him."

"If I wanted to," she told him, "I couldn't."

"Why not?"

"Can you mail parcel post packages to the—Flying Dutchman? Or express things to—to Odin?"

"I don't in the least know what you are talking about, Nancy."

"Well, he sailed in and he sailed out. He didn't leave any address. He left the cloak—and a rather intriguing memory, Anthony."

That was all the satisfaction she would give him. And I am not sure that he deserved more at her hands. The agreement between them had been—absolute freedom.

I am convinced that if it had not been for the garden party I should never have shown Olaf's letter to Nancy. The garden party is an annual event. We always hold it in August, when the "off-islanders" crowd the hotels, and when money is more plentiful than at any other time during the year.

Nancy had charge of the fish pond. I had helped her to make the fish, which were gay objects of painted paper, numbered to indicate a corresponding prize package, and to be caught with a dangling line from a lily-wreathed artificial pool.

The day of the garden party was a glorious one—with the air so clear that the flying pennants of the decorated booths, and the gowns of the women, gained brilliancy and beauty from the shining atmosphere.

Nancy wore a broad blue hat which matched her eyes, one of her clear white dresses, and a silken scarf of the same blue as her hat. She loved children, and as she stood in a circle of them all the afternoon, untiring, eager—bending down to them, hooking the fish on the dangling line—handing out the prizes, smiling into the flushed eager faces, helping the very littlest ones to achieve a catch, I

sat in a chair not far away from her and watched. I saw Anthony come and go, urging her to let some one else take her place, pressing a dozen reasons upon her for desertion of her task, and coming back, when she refused, to complain to me:

"Such things are a deadly bore."

"Not to Nancy."

"But they used to be. She's changed, Elizabeth."

"Beautifully changed."

"I am not sure. She was always such, a good sport."

"And isn't she now?"

"She is different," he caught himself up, "but of course—adorable."

Mimi Sears joined us, and she and Anthony went off together. Bob Needham hung around Nancy until she sent him away. At last the hour arrived for the open-air play which was a special attraction, and the crowds surged toward the inclosure. The booths were deserted, and only one rapturous child remained by the fish pond.

Nancy sat down and lifted the baby to her lap. She had taken off her hat, and her blue scarf fell about her. Something tugged at my heart as I looked at her. With that little head in the hollow of her arm she was the eternal mother.

I saw Anthony approaching. He stopped, and I caught his words. "You must come now, Nancy. I am saving a seat for you."

She shook her head, and looked down at the child. "I told his nurse to go and he is almost asleep."

He flung himself away from her and came over to me. "I have good seats for both of you in the enclosure. But Nancy won't go."

I rose and went with him, although I should have been content to sit there by the fish pond and feast my eyes on Nancy.

"It is perfectly silly of her to stay," Anthony fumed as we walked on together.

"But she loves the children."

"I hate children."

I am sure that he did not mean it. What he hated was the fact that the child had for the moment held Nancy from him. It was as if, looking forward into the future, he could see like moments, and set himself against the thought of any interruption of what might be

otherwise an untrammeled and independent partnership. He had, I think, little jealousy where men were concerned. He was willing to give Nancy the reins and let her go, believing that she would inevitably come back to him. He was not, perhaps, so willing to trust her with ties which might prove more absorbing than himself.

If I had not had Olaf's letter, I might not have weighed Anthony's attitude so carefully, but against those burning words and their comprehension of the divinity and beauty of my Nancy's nature, Anthony's querulous complaint struck cold.

I think it was then, as we walked toward the inclosure, that I made up my mind to let Nancy hear what Olaf had to say to her.

She stayed out late that night—there was a dinner and a dance—and Anthony brought her home. I confess that I felt like a traitor as I heard the murmur of his voice in the hall.

But when he had gone, and Nancy passed my door on her way to her room, I called her, and she came in.

I was in bed, and I had the letter in my hand. "I want you to read it," I said. "It is from Olaf Thoresen."

She looked at it, and asked, "When did it come?"

"Two months ago. The day that he left."

"Why haven't you shown it to me?"

"I couldn't make up my mind. I do not know even now that I am right in letting you see it. But I feel that you have a right to see it. It is you who must answer it. Not I."

When she had gone, I turned to the chapter in my book where Becky weeps crocodile tears over poor Rawdon Crawley on the night before Waterloo. There is no scene in modern literature to match it. But I couldn't get my mind on it. Nancy was reading Olaf's letter!

I kept a copy of it, and here it is:

"I knew when I first saw her in the garden that she was the One Woman. I had wanted sea-blood, and when she came, ready for a dip in the sea, it seemed a sign. One knows these things somehow, and I knew. I shan't attempt to explain it.

"When you told me of her lover, I felt that Fate had played a trick on me. I could not now with honor pursue the woman who was

promised to another. Yet I permitted myself that one day—the day on my boat.

"I learned in those hours that I spent with her that she had been molded by the man she is to marry and that in the years to come she will shrink to the measure of his demands upon her. She is feminine enough to be swayed by masculine will. That is at once her strength and her weakness. Loving a man who will love her for the wonder of her womanhood, she will fulfill her greatest destiny. Loving, on the other hand, one who aspires only to fit her into some attenuated social scheme, she will wither and fade. I think you know that this is true, that you will not accuse me of being unfair to any one.

"And now may I tell you what my dreams have been for her?

"I am not young. I mean I am past those hot and early years when men play—Romeo. The dream that is mine is one which has come to a man of thirty, who, having seen the world, has weighed it and wants—something more.

"I have told you of my house in that hidden land which is washed by the sea. I want to spend the rest of my days there, and I had hoped that some woman might be found whose love of life, whose love of adventure, whose love of me, might be so strong that she would see nothing strange in my demand that she forsake all others and cleave only to me.

"By forsaking all others, I mean, literally, what I say. I should want to cut her off entirely from all former ties. To let any one into our secret, to reveal that hidden land to a gaping world, would be to destroy it. We should be followed, tracked by the newspapers, written up, judged eccentric—mad. And I do not wish to be judged at all. My separation from my kind would have in it more than a selfish whim, an obsession for solitude. I want to get back to primitive civilization. I want my children to face a simpler world than the one I faced. Do you know what it means for a man to inherit money, with nothing back of it for two generations but hard work, although back of that there were, perhaps, kings? It means that I had, unaided, to fit myself into a social scheme so complex that I have not yet mastered its intricacies. I do not want to master them. I do not want my sons to master them. I want them to find life a thing of the day's work, the day's worship, the day's out-of-door delights. I want them to have time to think and to dream. And then some day they shall

come back if they wish to challenge civilization—young prophets, perhaps, out of the wilderness—seeing a new vision of God and man because of their detachment from all that might have blinded them.

"I have a feeling that your Nancy might, if she knew this, dream with me of a new race, rising to the level of the needs of a new world. She might see herself as the mother of such a race—sheltered in my hidden land, sailing the seas with me, held close to my heart. I think I am a masterful man, but I should be masterful only to keep her to her best. If she faltered I should strengthen her. And I should make her happy. I know that I could make her happy. And for me there will never be another.

"I am leaving it to you to decide whether you will show her this. I want her to see it, because it seems to me that she has a right to decide between the life that I can offer her and the life she must live if she marries Anthony Peak. But it all involves a point of honor which I feel that I am not unprejudiced enough to decide. So to-morrow I shall go away. I shall sail far in the two months that I shall give myself before I come back. And when I come, you will let me know whether I am to turn once more to the trackless seas, or stay to find my happiness."

This letter when I had first read it had stirred me profoundly, as I think it must have stirred any man or woman who has yearned amid the complexities of modern existence to find some land of dreams. Even to my island, comparatively untouched by the problems of existence in crowded centers, come the echoes of discord, of social unrest, of political upheavals, of commercial greed. In this hidden land of Olaf's would be life stripped of its sordidness, love free from the blight of cynicism and disillusion—faith, firm in its nearness to God and the wonder of His works. I envied Olaf his hidden land as I envied Nancy her opportunity. My blood is the same as Nancy's, and I love the sea. And as we grow older our souls adventure!

When Nancy came in to me, she had put on her white *peignoir*, and she had Olaf's letter in her hand.

"Ducky," she said, and her voice shook, "I have read it twice—and—I shouldn't dare to think he was in earnest."

"Why not?"

"I should want to go, Elizabeth."

"And leave the world behind you?"

"Oh, I haven't any world. It might be different if mother were alive, or daddy. There'd be only you, Ducky, my dear, dear Ducky." She caught my hand and held it.

"And Anthony—"

"Anthony would get over it"—sharply. "Wouldn't he, Elizabeth? You know he would."

"My dear, I don't know."

"But I know. If I hadn't been in his life, Mimi Sears would have been, just as Bob Needham would have been in my life if it hadn't been for Anthony. There isn't any question between Anthony and me of—one woman for one man. You know that, Elizabeth. But with Olaf—if he doesn't have me, there will be no one else—ever. He—he will go sailing on—alone—"

"My dear, how do you know?"

She flung herself down beside me, a white rose, all fragrance. "I don't know"—she began to cry. "How silly I am," she sobbed against my shoulder. "I—I don't know anything about him, do I, Elizabeth—? But it would be wonderful to be loved—like that."

All through the night she slept on my arm, with her hand curled in the hollow of my neck as she had slept as a child. But I did not sleep. My mind leaped forward into the future, and I saw my world without her.

Nancy stayed with me through September. Anthony's holiday was up the day after the garden party, and he went back to Boston, keeping touch with Nancy in the modern way by wire, special delivery, and long-distance telephone.

It was on a stormy night with wind and beating rain that Nancy told me Anthony was insisting that she marry him in December.

"But I can't, Elizabeth. I am going to write to him to-night."

"When will it be?"

"Who knows? I—I'm not ready. If he can't wait—he can let me go."

She did not stay to listen to my comment on her mutiny—she swept out of the library and sat down at the piano in the other room, making a picture of herself between the tall white candles which illumined the dark mahogany and the mulberry brocades.

I leaned back in my chair and watched her, her white fingers straying over the keys, her thin blue sleeves flowing back from her white arms. Now and then I caught a familiar melody among the chords, and once I was aware of the beat and the swing of the waves in the song which Olaf had once sung.

She did not finish it. She rose and wandered to the window, parting the curtain and looking out into the streaming night.

"It's an awful storm, Ducky."

"Yes, my dear. On nights like this I always think of the old days when the men were on the sea, and the women waited."

"I'd rather think of my man on the sea, even if I had to wait for him, Ducky, than shut up in office, stagnating."

The door-bell rang suddenly. It was a dreadful night for any one to be out, but Anita, undisturbed and crisp in her white apron and cap, came through the hall. A voice asked a question, and the blood began to pound in my body. Things were blurred for a bit, and when my vision cleared—I saw Olaf in the shine of the candles in the room beyond, with Nancy crushed to him, his bright head bent, the sheer blue of her frock infolding him—the archway of the door framing them like the figures of saints in the stained glass of a church window!

I knew then that I had lost her. But she did not yield at once.

"I love him, of course. But a woman couldn't do a thing like that," was the way she put it to me the next morning.

I felt, however, that Olaf would master her. Will was set against will, mind against mind. And at last she showed him the way. "A thousand years ago you would have carried me off."

I can see him now as he caught the idea and laughed at her. "Whether you go of your own accord or I carry you, you will be happy." He lifted her in his strong hands as if she were a feather, held her, kissed her, and flashed a glance at me. "You see how easy it would be, and there's a chaplain on board."

There is not much more to tell. Nancy went down one morning to the beach for her bath—and the fog swallowed her up. I have often wondered whether she planned it, or whether, knowing that she would be there, he had come in his launch and had borne her away struggling, but not, I am sure, unwilling. However it happened, the

cloak went with her, and I like to think that she was held in his arms, wrapped in it, when they reached the ship.

I like to think, too, of my Nancy in the glowing room with the wolfskins and the strange old tapestry—and the storms beating helpless against her happiness.

I like to think of her as safe in that hidden land, where most of us fain would follow her—the mistress of that guarded mansion, the wife of a young sea god, the mother of a new race.

But, most of all, I like to think of the children. And I have but one wish for a long life, which might otherwise weigh upon me, that the years may bring back to the world those prophets from a hidden land, those young voices crying from the wilderness—the children of Olaf and of Nancy Greer.

WHITE BIRCHES

I

A woman, who under sentence of death could plan immediately for a trip to the circus, might seem at first thought incredibly light-minded.

You had, however, to know Anne Dunbar and the ten years of her married life to understand. Her husband was fifteen years her senior, and he had few illusions. He had fallen in love with Anne because of a certain gay youth in her which had endured throughout the days of a dreadful operation and a slow convalescence. He had been her surgeon, and, propped up in bed, Anne's gray eyes had shone upon him, the red-gold curls of her cropped hair had given her a look of almost boyish beauty, and this note of boyishness had been emphasized by the straight slenderness of the figure outlined beneath the white covers.

Anne had married Ridgeley Dunbar because she loved him. And love to Anne had been all fire and flame and spirit. It did not take her long to learn that her husband looked upon love and life as matters of flesh and blood—and bones. By degrees his materialism imposed itself upon Anne. She admired Ridgeley immensely. She worshiped, in fact, the wonder of his day's work. He healed the sick, he cured the halt and blind, and he scoffed at Anne's superstitions—"I can match every one of your Bible miracles. There's nothing to it, my dear. Death is death and life is life—so make the most of it."

Anne tried to make the most of it. But she found it difficult. In the first place her husband was a very busy man. He seemed to be perfectly happy with his cutting people up, and his medical books, and the articles which he wrote about the intricate clockwork inside of us which ticks off the hours from birth to death. Now and then he went out to the theatre with his wife or to dine with friends. But, as a rule, she went alone. She had a limousine, a chauffeur, a low swung touring car—and an electric. Her red hair was still wonderful, and she dressed herself quite understanding in grays and whites and greens. If she did not wear habitually her air of gay youth, it was revived in her now and then when something pleased or excited her.

And her eyes would shine as they had shone in the hospital when Ridgeley Dunbar had first bent over her bed.

They shone on Christopher Carr when he came home from the war. He was a friend of her husband. Or rather, as a student in the medical school, he had listened to the lectures of the older man, and had made up his mind to know him personally, and had thus, by sheer persistence, linked their lives together.

Anne had never met him. He had been in India When she had married Ridgeley, and then there had been a few years in Egypt where he had studied some strange germ, of which she could never remember the name. He had plenty of money, hence he was not tied to a practice. But when the war began, he had offered his services, and had made a great record. "He is one of the big men of the future," Ridgeley Dunbar had said.

But when Christopher came back with an infected arm, which might give him trouble, it was not the time to talk of futures. He was invited to spend July at the Dunbars' country home in Connecticut, and Ridgeley brought him out at the week-end.

The Connecticut estate consisted of a rambling stone house, an old-fashioned garden, and beyond the garden a grove of white birches.

"What a heavenly place," Christopher said, toward the end of dinner; "how did you happen to find it?"

"Oh, Anne did it. She motored for weeks, and she bought it because of the birches."

Anne's eyes were shining. "I'll show them to you after dinner."

She had decided at once that she liked Christopher. He still wore his uniform, and had the look of a soldier. But it wasn't that—it was the things he had been saying ever since the soup was served. No one had talked of the war as he talked of it. There had been other doctors whose minds had been on arms and legs—amputated; on wounds and shell shock—And there had been a few who had sentimentalized. But Christopher had seemed neither to resent the frightfulness nor to care about the moral or spiritual consequences. He had found in it all a certain beauty of which he spoke with enthusiasm—"A silver dawn, and a patch of Blue Devils like smoke against it—;" ... "A blood-red sunset, and a lot of airmen streaming across—"

He painted pictures, so that Anne saw battles as if a great brush had splashed them on an invisible canvas. There were just four at the table—the two men, Anne, and her second cousin, Jeanette Ware, who lived the year round in the Connecticut house, and was sixty and slightly deaf, but who wore modern clothes and had a modern mind.

It was not yet dark, and the light of the candles in sconces and on the table met the amethyst light that came through, the wide-flung lattice. Anne's summer gown was something very thin in gray, and she wore an Indian necklace of pierced silver beads. Christopher had sent it to her as a wedding-present and she had always liked it.

When they rose from the table, Christopher said, "Now for the birches."

Somewhere in the distance the telephone rang, and a maid came in to say that Dr. Dunbar was wanted. "Don't wait for me," he said, "I'll follow you."

Jeanette Ware hated the night air, and took her book to the lamp on the screened porch, and so it happened that Anne and Christopher came alone to the grove where the white bodies of the birches shone like slender nymphs through the dusk. A little wind shook their leaves.

"No wonder," said Christopher, looking down at Anne, "that you wanted this—but tell me precisely why."

She tried to tell him, but found it difficult. "I seem to find something here that I thought I had lost."

"What things?"

"Well—guardian angels—do you believe in them?" She spoke lightly, as if it were not in the least serious, but he felt that it was serious.

"I believe in all beautiful things—"

"I used to think when I was a little girl that they were around me when I was asleep—

'Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—
Bless the bed that I lie on—'"

her laugh was a bit breathless—"but I don't believe in them any more. Ridgeley doesn't, you know. And it does seem silly—"

"Oh, no, it isn't—"

"Ridgeley feels that it is a bit morbid—and perhaps he is right. He says that we must eat and drink and—be merry," she flung out her hands with a little gesture of protest, "but he really isn't merry—"

"I see. He just eats and drinks?" He smiled at her.

"And works. And his work is—wonderful."

They sat down on a stone bench which had been hewn out of solid gray rock. "I wish Ridgeley had time to play," Anne said; "it would be nice for both of us—"

The amethyst light had gone, and the dusk descended. Anne's gray dress was merged into the gray of the rock. She seemed just voice, and phantom outline, and faint rose fragrance. Christopher recognized the scent. He had sent her a precious vial in a sandalwood box. Nothing had seemed too good for the wife of his old friend Dunbar.

"Life for you and Ridgeley," he told her, "should be something more than work or play—it should be infinite adventure."

"Yes. But Ridgeley hasn't time for adventure."

"Oh, he thinks he hasn't—"

As Christopher talked after that, Anne was not sure that he was in earnest. He complained that romance had fallen into disrepute. "With all the modern stories—you know the formula—an ounce of sordidness, a flavor of sensationalism, a dash of sex—" One had to look back for the real thing—Aucassin and Nicolette, and all the rest. "That's why I haven't married."

"Well, I have often wondered."

"If I loved a woman, I should want to make her life all glow and color—and mine—with her—"

Anne's eyes were shining. What a big pleasant boy he was. He seemed so young. He had a way of running his fingers up through his hair. She was aware of the gesture in the dark. Yes, she liked him. And she felt suddenly gay and light-hearted, as she had felt in the days when she first met Ridgeley.

They talked until the stars shone in the tips of the birch trees. Ridgeley did not come, and when they went back to the house, they

found that he had been called to New York on an urgent case. He would not return until the following Friday.

Anne and Christopher were thus left together for a week to get acquainted. With only old Jeanette Ware to play propriety.

II

It did not take Christopher long to decide that Ridgeley was no longer in love with his wife. "Of course he would call it love. But he could live just as well without her. He has made a machine of himself."

He spoke to Dunbar one night about Anne. "Do you think she is perfectly well?"

"Why not?"

"There's a touch of breathlessness when we walk. Are you sure about her heart?"

"She has never been strong—" and that had seemed to be the end of it.

But it was not the end of it for Christopher. He watched Anne closely, and once when they climbed a hill together and she gave out, he carried her to the top. He managed to get his ear against her heart, and what he heard drained the blood from his face.

As for Anne, she thought how strong he was—and how fair his hair was with the sun upon it, for he had tucked his cap in his pocket.

That night Christopher again spoke to Ridgeley. "Anne's in a bad way." He told of the walk to the top of the hill.

Ridgeley listened this time, and the next day he took Anne down into his office, and did things to her. "But I don't see why you are doing all this," she complained, as he stuck queer instruments in his ears, and made her draw long breaths while he listened.

"Christopher says you get tired when you walk."

"Well, I do. But there's nothing really the matter, is there?"

There was a great deal the matter, but there was no hint of it in his manner. If she had not been his wife, he would probably have told her the truth—that she had a few months, perhaps a few years ahead of her. He was apt to be frank with his patients. But he was not frank

with Anne. He had intended to tell Christopher at once. But Christopher was away for a week.

In the week that he was separated from her, Christopher learned that he loved Anne; that he had been in love with her from the moment that she had stood among the birches—like one of them in her white slenderness—and had talked to him of guardian angels;—"*Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John*!"

He did not believe in saints, nor in the angels whose wings seemed to enfold Anne, but he believed in beauty—and Anne's seemed lighted from within, like an alabaster lamp.

Yet she was very human—and the girl in her and the boy in him had met in the weeks that he had spent with her. They had found a lot of things to do—they had fished in shallow brown streams, they had ridden through miles of lovely country. They had gone forth in search of adventure, and they had found it; in cherries on a tree by the road, and he had climbed the tree and had dropped them down to her, and she had hung them over her ears—He had milked a cow in a pasture as they passed, and they had drunk it with their sandwiches, and had tied up a bill in Anne's fine handkerchief and had knotted it to the halter of the gentle, golden-eared Guernsey.

But they had found more than adventure—they had found romance—shining upon them everywhere. "If I were a gipsy to follow the road, and she could follow it with me," Christopher meditated as he sat in the train on his way back to Anne.

But there was Anne's husband, and Christopher's friend—and more than all there were all the specters of modern life—all the hideous wheels which must turn if Anne were ever to be his—treachery to Ridgeley—the divorce court—and then, himself and Anne, living the aftermath, of it all, facing, perhaps, disillusion—

"Oh, not *that*," Christopher told himself, "she'd never grow less—never anything less than she is—if she could once—care—"

For he did not know whether Anne cared or not. He might guess as he pleased—but there had not been a word between them.

Once more the thought flashed, "If I were a gipsy to follow the road—"

As his train sped through the countryside, he became aware of flaming bill-boards—a circus was showing in the towns—the fences

fairly blazed with golden chariots, wild beasts, cheap gods and goddesses, clowns in frilled collars and peaked hats. He remembered a glorious day that he had spent as a boy!

"I'll take Anne," was his sudden decision.

He laughed to himself, and spent the rest of the way in seeing her at it. They would drink pink lemonade, and there would be pop-corn balls—the entrancing smell of sawdust—the beat of the band. He hoped there would be a tom-tom, and some of the dark people from the Far East.

He reached his destination at seven o'clock. Dunbar met him at the station. Anne sat with her husband, and Jeanette was in the back seat. Christopher had, therefore, a side view of Anne as she turned a little that she might talk to him. The glint of her bright hair under her gray sports hat, the light of welcome in her eyes—!

"I am going to take you to the circus to-morrow. Ridgeley, you'll go too?"

Dunbar shook his head. "I've got to get back to town in the morning. And I'm not sure that the excitement will be good for Anne."

"Why not?" quickly. "Aren't you well, Anne?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Ridgeley seems to think I'm not. But the circus can't hurt me."

Nothing more was said about it. Christopher decided to ask Ridgeley later. But the opportunity did not come until Anne had gone up-stairs, and Dunbar and Christopher were smoking a final cigar on the porch.

"What's the matter with her?" Christopher asked.

Dunbar told him, "She can't get well."

III

Anne, getting ready for bed, on the evening of Christopher's arrival, felt unaccountably tired. His presence had been, perhaps, a bit over-stimulating. It was good to have him back. She scarcely dared admit to herself how good. After dinner she and Ridgeley and Christopher had walked down to the grove of birches. There had been a new moon, and she and Ridgeley had sat on the stone bench with Christopher at their feet. She had leaned her head against her husband's shoulder, and he had put his arm about her in the dark and had drawn her to him. He was rarely demonstrative, and his tenderness had to-night for some reason hurt her. She had learned to do without it.

She had talked very little, but Christopher had talked a great deal. She had been content to listen. He really told such wonderful things—he gave her to-night the full story of her silver beads, and how they had been filched from an ancient temple—and he had bought them from the thief. "Until I saw you wear them, I always had a feeling that they ought to go back to the temple—to the god who had perhaps worn them for a thousand years. If I had known which god, I might have carried them back. But the thief wouldn't tell me."

"It would have done no good to carry them back," Ridgeley had said, "and they are nice for Anne." His big hand had patted his wife's shoulder.

"Oh," Christopher had been eager, "I want you to hear those temple bells some day, Anne. Why won't you take her, Dunbar? Next winter—drop your work, and we'll all go—"

"I've a fat chance of going."

"Haven't you made money enough?"

"It isn't money. You know that. But my patients would set up a howl—"

"Let 'em howl. You've got a life of your own to live, and so has Anne."

Dunbar had hesitated for a moment—then, "Anne's better off here."

Anne, thinking of these things as she got out of her dinner dress and into a sheer negligee of lace and faint blue, wondered why Ridgeley should think she was better off. She wanted to see the things of which Christopher had told her—to hear the temple bells in the dusk—the beat of the tom-tom on white nights.

She stood at the window looking out at the moon. She decided that she could not sleep. She would go down and get a book that she had left on the table. The men were out-of-doors, on the porch; she heard the murmur of their voices.

The voices were distinct as she stood in the library, and Christopher's words came to her, "What's the matter with Anne?"

Then her husband's technical explanation, the scientific name which meant nothing to her, then the crashing climax, "She can't get well."

She gave a quick cry, and when the men got into the room, she was crumpled up on the floor.

Her husband reached her first. "My dear," he said, "you heard?"

"Yes. Do you mean that I am—going to die, Ridgeley?"

There was, of course, no way out of it. "It means, my dear, that I've got to take awfully good care of you. Your heart is bad."

Christopher interposed. "People live for years with a heart like that."

But her eyes sought her husband's. "How long do they live?"

"Many months—perhaps years—without excitement—"

This then had been the reason for his tenderness. He had known that she was going to die, and was sorry. But for ten years she had wanted what he might have given her—what he couldn't give her now—life as she had dreamed of it.

She drew a quivering breath—"It isn't quite fair—is it?"

It didn't seem fair. The two doctors had faced much unfairness of the kind of which she complained. But it was the first time that, for either of them, it had come so close.

They had little comfort to give her, although they attempted certain platitudes, and presently Ridgeley carried her to her room.

IV

She insisted the next morning on going to the circus with Christopher. She had not slept well, and there were shadows under her eyes. The physician in Christopher warred with the man. "You ought to rest," he said at breakfast. Dunbar had gone to New York in accordance with his usual schedule. There were other lives to think of; and Anne, when he had looked in upon her that morning, had seemed almost shockingly callous.

"No, I don't want to stay in bed, Ridgeley. I am going to the circus. I shall follow your prescription—to eat and drink and be merry—"

"I don't think I have put it quite that way, Anne."

"You have. Quite. 'Death is death and life is life—so make the most of it.'"

Perhaps she was cruel. But he knew, too, that she was afraid. "My dear," he said gently, "if you can get any comfort out of your own ideas, it might be better."

"But you believe they are just my own ideas—you don't believe they are true?"

"I should like to think they were true."

"You ought to rest," said Christopher at the breakfast table.

"I ought not. There are to be no more oughts—ever—"

He nodded as if he understood, leaning elbows on the table.

"I am going to pack the days full"—she went on. "Why not? I shall have only a few months—and then—annihilation—" She flung her question across the table. "You believe that, don't you?"

He evaded. "We sleep—'perchance to dream.'"

"I don't want to dream. They might be horrid dreams—"

And then Jeanette came down, and poured their coffee, and asked about the news in the morning paper.

Dressed for her trip to the circus, Anne looked like a girl in her teens—white skirt and short green coat—stout sports shoes and white hat. She wore her silver beads, and Christopher said, "I'm not sure that I would if I were you."

"Why not?"

"In such a crowd."

But she kept them on.

They motored to the circus grounds, and came in out of the white glare to the cool dimness of the tent as if they had dived from the sun-bright surface of the sea. But there the resemblance ceased. Here was no silence, but blatant noise—roar and chatter and shriek, the beat of the tom-tom, the thin piping of a flute—the crash of a band. But it was the thin piping which Christopher followed, guiding Anne with his hand on her arm.

Following the plaintive note, they came at last to the snake-charmer—an old man in a white turban. The snakes were in a covered basket. He sat with his feet under him and piped.

Christopher spoke to him in a strange tongue. The piping broke off abruptly and the man answered with eagerness. There was a quick interchange of phrases.

"I know his village," Christopher said; "he is going to show you his snakes."

A crowd gathered, but the snake-charmer saw only the big man who had spoken to his homesick heart, and the girl with the silver beads. He knew another girl who had had a string of beads like that—and they had brought her luck—a dark-skinned girl, his daughter. Her husband had bestowed the beads on her marriage night, and her first child had been a son.

He put the thin reed to his lips, and blew upon it. The snakes lifted their heads. He drew them up and out of the basket, and put them through their fantastic paces. Then he laid aside his pipe, shut them in their basket, and spoke to Christopher.

"He says that no evil can teach you while you wear the beads," Christopher told Anne.

The old man, with his eyes on her intent face, spoke again. "What you think is evil—cannot be evil," Christopher interpreted. "The gods know best."

They moved toward the inner tent.

"Are you tired?" Christopher asked. "We don't have to stay."

"I want to stay," and so they went in, and presently with a blare of trumpets the great parade began. They looked down on men and women in Roman chariots, men on horseback, women on horseback, on elephants, on camels—painted ladies in howdahs, painted ladies

in sedan chairs—Cleopatra, Pompadour—history reduced to pantomime, color imposed upon color, glitter upon glitter, the beat of the tom-tom, the crash of the band, the thin piping, as the white-turbaned snake-charmer showed in the press of the crowd.

Christopher's eyes went to Anne. She was leaning forward, one hand clasping the silver beads. He would have given much to know what was in her mind. How little she was and how young. And how he wanted to get her away from the thing which hung suspended over her like a keen-edged sword.

But to get her away—how? He could never get her away from her thoughts. Unless....

Suddenly he heard her laughing. Two clowns were performing with a lot of little dogs. One of the dogs was a poodle who played the fool. "What a darling," Anne was saying.

There was more than they could look at—each ring seemed a separate circus—one had to have more than a single pair of eyes. Christopher was blind to it all—except when Anne insisted, "Look—look!"

Six acrobats were in the ring—four men and two women. Their tights were of a clear shimmering blue, with silver trunks. One could not tell the women from the men, except by their curled heads, and their smaller stature. They were strong, wholesome, healthy. Christopher knew the quality of that health—hearts that pumped like machines—obedient muscles under satin skins. One of the women whirled in a series of handsprings, like a blue balloon—her body as fluid as quicksilver. If he could only borrow one-tenth of that endurance for Anne—he might keep her for years.

Then came Pantaloon, and Harlequin and Columbine. The old man was funny, but the youth and the girl were exquisite—he, diamond-spangled and lean as a lizard, she in tulle skirts and wreath of flowers. They did all the old tricks of masks and slapping sticks, of pursuit and retreat, but they did them so beautifully that Anne and Christopher sat spellbound—what they were seeing was not two clever actors on a sawdust stage, but love in its springtime—girl and boy—dreams, rapture, radiance.

Then, in a moment, Columbine was dead, and Harlequin wept over her—frost had killed the flower—love and life were at an end.

Christopher was drawing deep breaths. Anne was tense. But now—Columbine was on her feet, and Harlequin was blowing kisses to the audience!

"Let's get out of this," Christopher said, almost roughly, and led Anne down the steps and into the almost deserted outer tent. They looked for the snake-charmer, but he was gone. "Eating rice somewhere or saying his prayers," Christopher surmised.

"How could he know about the gods?" Anne asked, as they drove home.

"They know a great deal—these old men of the East," Christopher told her, and talked for the rest of the way about the strange people among whom he had spent so many years.

V

Ridgeley did not come home to dinner. He telephoned that he would be late. It was close and warm. Christopher, sitting with Anne and Jeanette on the porch, decided that a storm was brewing.

Anne was restless. She went down into the garden, and Christopher followed her. She wore white, and he was aware of the rose scent. He picked a rose for her as he passed through the garden. "Bend your head, and I'll put it in your hair."

"I can't wear pink."

"It is white in the dusk—" He put his hands on her shoulders, stopped her, and stuck the rose behind her ear. Then he let her go.

They came to the grove of birches, and sat down on the stone seat. It had grown dark, and the lightning flashing up from the horizon gave to the birches a spectral whiteness—Anne was a silver statue.

"It was queer," she said, "about the old man at the circus."

"About the beads?"

"Yes. I wonder what he meant, Christopher? *'What you think is evil—cannot be evil'?* Do you think he meant—Death?"

He did not answer at once, then he said, abruptly, "Anne, how did it happen that you and Ridgeley drifted apart?"

"Oh, it's hard to tell."

"But tell me."

"Well, when we were first married, I expected so much ... things that girls dream about—that he would always have me in his thoughts, and that our lives would be knit together. I think we both tried hard to have it that way. I used to ride with him on his rounds, and he would tell me about his patients. And at night I'd wait up for him, and have something to eat, and it was—heavenly. Ridgeley was so ... fine. But his practice got so big, and sometimes he wouldn't say a word when I rode with him.... And he would be so late coming in at night, and he'd telephone that I'd better go to bed.... And, well, that was the beginning. I don't think it is really his fault or mine ... it's just ... life."

"It isn't life, and you know it," passionately. "Anne, if you had married me ... do you think...?" He reached out in the dark and took her hand. "Oh, my dear, we might as well talk it out."

She withdrew her hand. "Talk what out?"

"You know. I've learned to care for you an awful lot. I had planned to go away. But I can't go now ... not and leave you to face things alone."

He heard her quick breath. "But I've got to face them."

"But not alone. Anne, do you remember what you said ... this morning? That you were going to pack the days full? And you can't do that without some one to help you. And Ridgeley won't help. Anne, let me do it. Let me take you away from here ... away from Ridgeley. We will go where we can hear the temple bells. We'll ride through the desert ... we'll set our sails for strange harbors. We'll love until we forget everything, but the day, the hour,—the moment! And when the time comes for endless dreams...."

"Christopher...."

"Anne, listen."

"You mustn't say things like that to me ... you must not...!"

"I must. I want you to have happiness. We'll crowd more in to a few short months than some people have in a lifetime. And you have a right to it."

"Would it be happiness?"

"Why not? In a way we are all pushing death ahead of us. Who knows that he will be alive to-morrow? There's this arm of mine ... there's every chance that I'll have trouble with it. And an automobile

accident may wreck a honeymoon. You've as much time as thousands who are counting on more."

The lightning flashed and showed the birches writhing.

"But afterward, Christopher, *afterward*...?"

"Well, if it is Heaven, we'll have each other. And if it is Hell ... there were Paolo and Francesca ... and if it is sleep, I'll dream eternally of you! Anne ... Anne, do you love me enough to do it?"

"Christopher, please!"

But the storm was upon them—rain and wind, and the thunder a cannonade. Christopher, brought at last to the knowledge of its menace, picked Anne up in his arms, and ran for shelter. When they reached the house, they found Ridgeley there. He was stern. "It was a bad business to keep her out. She's afraid of storms."

"Were you afraid?" Christopher asked her, as Ridgeley went to look after the awnings.

"I forgot the storm," she said, and did not meet his eyes.

VI

Lying awake in her wide bed, Anne thought it over. She was still shaken by Christopher's vehemence. She had believed him her friend, and had found him her lover—and oh, he had brought back youth to her. If he left her now, how could she stand it—the days with no one but Jeanette Ware, and the soul-shaking knowledge of what was ahead?

And Ridgeley would not care—much. In a week be swallowed up by his work....

She tried to read, but found it difficult. Across each page flamed Christopher's sentences.... "We'll ride through the desert.... We'll set our sails for strange harbors...."

Was that what the old man had meant at the circus.... "What you think is evil—cannot be evil"? Would Christopher give her all that she had hoped of Ridgeley? If she lived to be eighty, she and Ridgeley would—jog. Was Christopher right—"You'll have more happiness in a few months than some people in a lifetime?"

She heard her husband moving about in the next room, the water booming in his bath. A thin line of light showed under his door.

She shut her book and turned out her lamp. The storm had died down and the moon was up. Through the open window she could see beyond the garden to the grove of birches.

Hitherto, the thought of the little grove had been as of a sanctuary. She was aware, suddenly, that it had become a place of contending forces. Were the guardian angels driven out...?

But there weren't any guardian angels! Ridgeley had said that they were silly. And Christopher didn't believe in them. She wished that her mother might have lived to talk it over. Her mother had had no doubts.

The door of her husband's room opened, and he was silhouetted against the light. Coming up to the side of her bed, he found her wide-eyed.

"Can't you sleep, my dear?"

"No."

"I don't want to give you anything."

"I don't want anything."

He sat down by the side of the bed. He had on his blue bathrobe, and the open neck showed his strong white throat. "My dear," he said, "I've been thinking of what you said this morning—about my lack of belief and the effect it has had on yours. And—I'm sorry."

"Being sorry doesn't help any, does it, Ridgeley?"

"I should like to think that you had your old faiths to—comfort you."

She had no answer for that, and presently he said, "Are you warm enough?" and brought an extra blanket, because the air was cool after the storm, and then he bent and kissed her forehead. "Shut your eyes and sleep if you can."

But of course she couldn't sleep. She lay there for hours, weighing what he had said to her against what Christopher had said. Each man was offering her something—Christopher, life at the expense of all her scruples. Ridgeley, the resurrection of burnt-out beliefs.

She shivered a bit under the blanket. It would be heavenly to hear the temple bells—with youth beside her. To drink the wine of life from a brimming cup. But all the time she would be afraid, nothing could take away that fear.—Nothing, nothing, *nothing*.

She was glad that her husband was awake. The thin line of light still showed beneath his door. It would be dreadful to be alone—in the dark. At last she could stand it no longer. She got out of bed, wrapped herself in a robe that lay at the foot of it, and opened the door.

"May I leave it open?"

As her husband turned in his chair, she saw his hand go quickly, as if to cover the paper on which he was writing. "Of course, my dear. Are you afraid?"

"I am always afraid, Ridgeley. Always—"

She put her hands up to her face and began to cry. He came swiftly toward her and took her in his arms. "Hush," he said, "nothing can hurt you, Anne."

VII

When she waked in the morning, it was with, the remembrance of his tenderness. Well, of course he was sorry for her. Anybody would be. But Christopher was sorry, too. And Christopher had something to offer her—more than Ridgeley—yes, it was more—

She was half afraid to go down-stairs. Christopher would be at breakfast on the porch. Jeanette would be there, pouring coffee, and perhaps Ridgeley if he had no calls. And Christopher would talk in his gay young voice—and Ridgeley would read the newspaper, and she and Christopher would make their plans for the day—

She rose and began to dress, but found herself suddenly panic-stricken at the thought of the plans that Christopher might make. If they motored off together, he would talk to her as he had talked in the grove of birches—of the temple bells, and of the desert, and the strange harbors—and how could she be sure that she would be strong enough to resist—and what if she listened, and let him have his way?

She decided to eat her breakfast in bed, and rang for it. A note came up from Christopher. "Don't stay up-stairs. Ridgeley left hours ago, and I shan't enjoy my toast and bacon if you aren't opposite me. I have picked a white rose to put by your plate. And I have a thousand things to say to you—"

His words had a tonic effect. Oh, why not—? What earthly difference would it make? And hadn't Browning said something like that—"*Who knows but the world may end to-night*?"

She was not sure that was quite the way that Browning had put it, and she thought she would like to be sure—she could almost see herself saying it to Christopher.

So she went into her husband's room to get the book.

Ridgeley's books were on the shelf above his desk. They had nothing to do with his medical library—that was down-stairs in his office, and now and then he would bring up a great volume. But he had a literary side, and he had revealed some of it to Anne in the days before he had been too busy. His Browning was marked, and it was not hard to find "The Last Ride." She opened at the right page, and stood reading—an incongruous figure amid Ridgeley's masculine belongings in her sheer negligee of faint blue.

She closed the book, put it back on the shelf, and was moving away, when her eyes were caught by two words—"For Anne," at the top of a sheet of paper which lay on Ridgeley's desk. The entire page was filled with Ridgeley's neat professional script, and in a flash the gesture which he had made the night before returned to her, as if he were trying to hide something from her gaze.

She bent and read....

Oh, was this the way he had spent the hours of the night? Searching for words which might comfort her, might clear away her doubts, might bring hope to her heart?

And he had found things like this: "*My little sister, Death*," said good St. Francis; ... "*The darkness is no darkness with thee, but the night is as clear as day; the darkness and light to thee are both alike ...*" "*Yea, though I Walk through the Valley of the Shadow ...*" These and many others, truths which had once been a part of her.

She read, avidly. Oh, she had been thirsty—for this! Hungry for this! And *Ridgeley*—! The tears dripped so that she could hardly see the lines. She laid her cheek against the paper, and her tears blistered it.

She carried it into her room. Christopher's note still lay on her pillow. She read it again, but she had no ears now for its call. She rang for her maid. "I shall stay in bed and write some letters."

She wrote to Christopher, after many attempts. "We have been such good, *good* friends. And we mustn't spoil it. Perhaps if you could go away for a time, it would be best for both of us. I am going to believe that some day you will find great happiness. And you would never have found happiness with me, you would have found only—fear. And I know now what the old man meant about the beads—'What you think is evil—cannot be evil.' Christopher, death isn't evil, if it isn't the end of things. And I am going to believe that it is not the end ..."

Christopher went into town before lunch, and later Anne sat alone on the stone bench in her grove of birches. They were serene and still in the gold of the afternoon. Yet last night they had writhed in the storm. She, too, had been swept by a storm.... She missed her playmate—but she had a sense of relief in the absence of her tempestuous lover.

Ridgeley came home that night with news of Christopher's sudden departure. "He found telegrams. He told me to say 'good-bye' to you."

"I am sorry," Anne said, and meant it. Sorry that it had to be—but being sorry could not change it.

After dinner Ridgeley had a call to make, and Anne went up to bed. But she was awake when her husband came in, and the thin line of light showed. She waited until she heard the boom of water in his bath, and then she slipped out of bed and opened the door between. She was propped up in her pillows when he reappeared in his blue bathrobe.

"Hello," he called, "did you want me?"

"Yes, Ridgeley."

He came in. "Anything the matter?"

"No. I'm not sick. But I want to talk."

"About what?"

"This—" She showed him the paper with its caption, "For Anne."

"Ridgeley, did you write it because I was—afraid?" her hand went out to him.

His own went over it. "I think I wrote it because I was afraid."

"You?"

His grip almost hurt her. "My dear, my dear, I haven't believed in things. How could I ... with all the facts that men like me have to deal with? But when I faced ... losing you...! love's *got* to be eternal ..."

"Ridgeley."

"I won't ... lose you. Oh, I know. We've grown apart. I don't know how a man is going to help it ... in this darned whirlpool.... But you've always been right ... here.... I've felt I might ... have you, if I ever had time ..." his voice broke.

"And I thought you didn't care."

"I was afraid of that, and somehow I couldn't get ... back ... to where we began. I was always thinking I would.... And then this came....

"I always hated to kill the things that you believed, Anne. I thought I had to be honest ... that it would be better for you to face the truth.... But which one of us knows the Truth? Not a man among us. And I came across this ... '*Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die*....' We are all fools—the wisest of us...."

She held out her arms to him, and he gathered her close. She felt that it had been a thousand years since she had prayed, yet she heard herself speaking.... And when he laid her back upon her pillows, she was aware that together they had approached some height from which they would never again descend.

"I'll leave the door open," he said, as he left her. "I shall be reading, and you can see the light."

It seemed as if the light from his room flooded the world. The four posts of her bed once more were tipped with shining saints! She turned on her pillow—beyond the garden, the grove of white birches was steeped in celestial radiance.

"*My little sister, Death*," said good St. Francis.

With her hand under her cheek, she slept at last, as peacefully as a child.

THE EMPEROR'S GHOST

I

I had not known Tom Randolph a week before I was aware that life was not real to him. All his world was a stage, with himself as chief player. He dramatized everything—actions, emotions, income. Thus he made poverty picturesque, love a thing of the stars, the day's work a tragedy, or, if the professors proved kind, a comedy. He ate and drank, as it were, to music, combed his hair and blacked his boots in the glare of footlights; made exits and entrances of a kind unknown to men like myself who lacked his sense of the histrionic.

He was Southern and chivalric. His traditions had to do with the doffed hat and the bent knee. He put woman on a pedestal and kept her there. No man, he contended, was worthy of her—what she gave was by the grace of her own sweet charity!

It will be seen that in all this he missed the modern note. As a boy he had been fed upon Scott, and his later reading had not robbed him of his sense of life as a flamboyant spectacle.

He came to us in college with a beggarly allowance from an impoverished estate owned by his grandfather, a colonel of the Confederacy, who after the war had withdrawn with his widowed daughter to his worthless acres. In due time the daughter had died, and her child had grown up in a world of shadows. On nothing a year the colonel had managed, in some miraculous fashion, to preserve certain hospitable old customs. Distinguished guests still sat at his table and ate ducks cooked to the proper state of rareness, and terrapin in a chafing-dish, with a dash of old sherry. If between these feasts there was famine the world never knew.

It was perhaps from the colonel that Randolph had learned to make poverty picturesque. His clothes were old and his shoes were shabby. But his strength lay in the fact that he did not think of himself as poor. He had so much, you see, that the rest of us lacked. He was a Randolph. He had name, position, ancestry. He was, in short, a gentleman!

I do not think he looked upon any of us as gentlemen, not in the Old Dominion sense. He had come to our small Middle-Western

college because it was cheap and his finances would not compass education anywhere else.

In an older man his prejudices would have been insufferable, but his youth and charm made us lenient. We contented ourselves with calling him "Your Highness," and were always flattered when he asked us to his rooms.

His strong suit was hospitality. It was in his blood, of course. When his allowance came he spent it in giving the rest of us a good time. His room was as shabby as himself—a table, an ink-spotted desk, a couch with a disreputable cover, a picture of Washington, a half-dozen books, and a chafing-dish.

The chafing-dish was the hump and the hoof of his festivities. He made rarebits and deviled things with an air that had been handed down from generations of epicures. I can see him now with his black hair in a waving lock on his forehead, in worn slippers and faded corduroy coat, sitting on the edge of the table smoking a long pipe, visualizing himself as the lord of a castle—the rest of us as vassals of a rather agreeable and intelligent sort!

It was perfectly natural that he should stage his first love-affair, and when he was jilted that he should dramatize his despair. For days after Madge Ballou had declared her preference for Dicky Carson, Randolph walked with melancholy. He came to my rooms and sat, a very young and handsome Hamlet, on my fire-bench, with his chin in his hand.

"Why should she like Dicky best?"

"She has no imagination."

"But Dicky's a—beast—"

"With a fat bank-account."

"Money wouldn't count with Madge."

"I'm not so sure—"

"Women are not like that, MacDonald."

I saw, as he went on with his arguments, that she had become to him an Ophelia, weakly led. Women in his lexicon of romance might be weak but never mercenary. I think he finally overthrew her in his mind with "*Get thee to a nunnery!*" I know that he burned her picture; he showed me the ashes in a silver stamp-box.

He had, of course, his heroes—there were moments when unconsciously he aped them. It was after a debate that the boys began to call him "Bonaparte." He had defended the Little Corporal, and in defending him had personified him. With that dark lock over his forehead, his arms folded, he had flung defiance to the deputies, and for that moment he had been not Tom Randolph but the Emperor himself.

He won the debate, amid much acclaim, and when he came down to us I will confess to a feeling, which I think the others shared, of a soul within his body which did not belong there. Tom Randolph was, of course, Tom Randolph, but the voice which had spoken to us had rung with the power of that other voice which had been stilled at St. Helena!

The days that followed dispelled the illusion, but the name clung to him. I think he liked it, and emphasized the resemblance. He let his hair grow long, sunk his head between his shoulders, was quick and imperious in his speech.

Then came the war. Belgium devastated, France invaded. Randolph was fired at once.

"I'm going over."

"But, my dear fellow—"

"There's our debt to Lafayette."

With his mind made up there was no moving him. The rest of us held back. Our imaginations did not grasp at once the world's need of us.

But Randolph saw himself a Henry of Navarre—*white plumes*; a Richard of the Lion Heart—*crusades and red crosses*; a Cyrano without the nose—"*These be cadets of Gascony—*"

"You see, MacDonald," he said, flaming, "we Randolphs have always done it."

"Done what?"

"Fought. There's been a Randolph in every war over here, and before that in a long line of battles—"

He told me a great deal about the ancient Randolphs, and the way they had fought on caparisoned steeds with lances.

"War to-day is different," I warned him. "Not so pictorial."

But I knew even then that he would make it pictorial. He would wear his khaki like chain armor.

He gave us a farewell feast in his room. It was the season for young squirrels, and he made us a Brunswick stew. It was the best thing I had ever tasted, with red peppers in it and onions, and he served it with an old silver ladle which he had brought from home.

While we ate he talked of war, of why men should fight—"for your own honor and your country's."

There were pacifists among us and they challenged him. He flung them off; their protests died before his passion.

"We are men, not varlets!"

Nobody laughed at him. It showed his power over us that none of us laughed. We simply sat there and listened while he told us what he thought of us.

At last one who was braver than the rest cried out: "Go to it, Bonaparte!"

In a sudden flashing change Randolph hunched his shoulders, set his slouched hat sidewise low on his brows, wrapped the couch-cover like a cloak about him. His glance swept the room. There was no anger in it, just a sort of triumphant mockery as he gave the famous speech to Berthier.

"They send us a challenge in which our honor is at stake—a thing a Frenchman has never refused—and since a beautiful queen wishes to be a witness to the combat, let us be courteous, and in order not to keep her waiting, *let us march without sleeping as far as Saxony*—!"

I can't tell you of the effect it had on us. We were gripped by the throats, and the room was so still that we heard ourselves breathe. Four of the fellows left next day with Randolph. I think he might have taken us all if we had not been advised and held back by the protests of our professors, who spoke of war with abhorrence.

II

Three years later I saw him again, in France. Our own country had gotten into the fight by that time, and I was caught in the first draft. I had heard now and then from Randolph. He had worked for nearly three years with the Ambulance Corps, and was now fighting for democracy with his fellows.

We had been shivering in the rain for a week in one of the recaptured French towns when a group of seasoned officers were sent to lick us into shape. Among the other officers was Randolph, and when he came upon me he gave a shout of welcome.

"Good old MacDonald—at last!"

I'll confess that his "at last" carried a sting, and I remember feeling the injustice of our equal rank, as I set his years of privation and hardship against my few weeks in a training camp.

He was very glad to see me, and the very first night he made me a Brunswick stew. This time there were no squirrels, but he begged young rabbits from the old couple who had once been servants in the château where we were billeted. They had trudged back at once on the retirement of the Boches, and were making the best of the changed conditions.

There was, of course, no chafing-dish, and the stew was cooked in an iron pot which hung over an open fire in the ancient kitchen. Before they sold the rabbits the old people had made one condition:

"If we may have a bit for mademoiselle—?"

"For mademoiselle?"

"She is here with us, monsieur. She had not been well. We have been saving the rabbits for her."

Randolph made the grand gesture that I so well remembered.

"My good people—if she would dine with us—?"

The old woman shook her head. She was not sure. She would see.

Perhaps she said pleasant things of us, perhaps mademoiselle was lonely. But whatever the reason, mademoiselle consented to dine, coming out of her seclusion, very thin and dark and small, but self-possessed.

I have often wondered what she thought, in those first moments of meeting, of Randolph, as with a spoon for a sceptre, the manner of a king, he presided over the feast. She spoke very good English, but needed to have many things explained.

"Do gentlemen cook in your country?"

Randolph sketched life as he had known it on his grandfather's plantation—negroes to do it all, except when gentlemen pleased.

She drew the mantle of her distaste about her. "Black men? I shouldn't like it."

Well, I saw before the evening ended that Randolph had met his peer. For every one of his aristocratic prejudices she matched him with a dozen. And he loved her for it! At last here was a lady who would buckle on his armor, watch his shield, tie her token on his sleeve!

He sat on the edge of the table in his favorite attitude—hunched-up shoulders, folded arms. His hair was cut too short now for the dark lock, but even without it I saw her glance at him now and then in a puzzled fashion, as if she weighed some familiar memory.

But it was one of the peasants who voiced it—the old man carrying away the remains of the stew muttered among the shadows to his wife:

"C'est Napoleon."

Mademoiselle caught her breath. "Oui, Gaston." Then to me, in English: "Do you see it?"

"Yes. We called him that at school."

"Bonaparte?"

"Yes."

She was thin and dark no longer—illumined, the color staining her cheeks. "Oh, if he were here—to save France!"

I protested. "An emperor against an emperor?"

"He was a great democrat—he loved the common people. For a little while power spoiled him—but he loved the people. And the Bourbons did not love them—Louis laughed at them—and lost his head. And Napoleon never laughed. He loved France—if he had lived he would have saved us."

Out of the shadows the old woman spoke. "They say he will come again."

"Oui, Margot." Mademoiselle was standing, with her hand on her heart. Randolph's eyes devoured her. He had taken no part in the conversation. It was almost uncanny to see him sitting there, silent, arms folded, shoulders hunched, sparkling eyes missing nothing. "It is true," mademoiselle told us earnestly, "that the tra-dee-tion says he will come back—when France needs him—the soldiers talk of it."

"In almost every country," I said, "there is a story like that, of heroes who will come again."

"But Napoleon, monsieur—surely he would not fail France?"

The thing that followed was inevitable. Randolph and Mademoiselle Julie fell in love with each other. He drew her as he had drawn us at school. She was not a Madge Ballou, mundane and mercenary; she was rather a Heloise, a Nicolette, a Jeanne d'Arc, self-sacrificing, impassioned. She met Randolph on equal ground. They soared together—mixed love of country with love of lovers. They rose at dawn to worship the sun, they walked forth at twilight to adore together the crescent moon.

And all the while war was at the gates; we could hear the boom of big guns. The spring drive was on and the Germans were coming back.

I shall never forget the night that Randolph and I were ordered to the front. Mademoiselle had come in with her hands full of violets. Randolph, meeting her for the first time after a busy day, took her hands and the frail blossoms in his eager clasp. He was an almost perfect lover—Aucassin if you will—Abelard at his best.

"Violets," he said. "May I have three?"

"Why three, monsieur?"

"For love, mademoiselle, and truth and constancy."

He took his prayer-book from his pocket, and she gave him the violets. He touched them to her lips, then crushed them to his own. I saw it—sitting back in the shadows. I should never have thought of kissing a girl like that. But it was rather wonderful.

He shut the violets in the little book.

They sat very late that night by the fire. I went in and out, not disturbing them. I saw him kneel at her feet as he left her, and she bent forward and kissed his forehead.

He talked of her a great deal after that. More than I would have talked of love, but his need of an audience drove him to confidences. He felt that he must make himself worthy of her—to go back to her as anything less than a hero might seem to belittle her. I am not sure that he was braver than other men, but his feeling for effect gave him a sort of reckless courage. Applause was a part of the game—he could not do without it.

And so came that night when a small band of us were cut off from the rest. We were intrenched behind a small eminence which hid us from our enemies, with little hope of long escaping their observation. It had been wet and cold, and there had been no hot food for days. We, French and Americans, had fought long and hard; we were in no state to stand suspense, yet there was nothing to do but wait for a move on the other side, a move which could end in only one way—bayonets and bare hands, and I, for one, hated it.

I think the others hated it, too, all but Randolph. The rain had stopped and the moon flooded the world. He turned his face up to it and dreamed.

The knowledge came to us before midnight that the Huns had found us. It became only a matter of moments before they would be upon us, the thing would happen which we hated—bayonets and bare hands, with the chances in favor of the enemy!

Somewhere among our men rose a whimper of fear, and then another. You see, they were cold and hungry and some of them were wounded, and they were cut off from hope. It wasn't cowardice. I call no man a coward. They had faced death a thousand times, some of them. Yet there was danger in their fears.

Randolph was next to me. "My God, MacDonald," he said, "they've lost their nerve—"

There wasn't a second to spare. I saw him doing something to his hat.

As I have said, there was a moon. It lighted that battle-scarred world with a sort of wild beauty, and suddenly in a clear space above us on the little hill a figure showed, motionless against the still white

night—a figure small yet commanding, three-cornered hat pulled low—oh, you have seen it in pictures a thousand times—Napoleon of Marengo, of Austerlitz, of Jena, of Friedland—but over and above everything, Napoleon of France!

Of course the Germans shot him. But when they came over the top they were met by Frenchmen who had seen a ghost. "C'est l'Empereur! C'est l'Empereur!" they had gasped. "He returns to lead us."

They fought like devils, and—well, the rest of us fought, too, and all the time, throughout the bloody business, I had before me that vision of Randolph alone in the moonlight. Or was it Randolph? Who knows? Do great souls find time for such small business? And was it small?

His medals were, of course, sent to the colonel. But the violets in the little book went back to mademoiselle. And the old hat, crushed into three-cornered shape, went back. And I told her what he had done.

She wrote to me in her stiff English:

"I have loved a great man. For me, monsieur, it is enough. Their souls unite in victory!"

THE RED CANDLE

It was so cold that the world seemed as stiff and stark as a poet's hell. A little moon was frozen against a pallid sky. The old dark houses with their towers and gables wore the rigid look of iron edifices. The saint over the church door at the corner had an icicle on his nose. Even the street lights shone faint and benumbed through clouded glass.

Ostrander, with his blood like ice within his veins, yearned for a Scriptural purgatory with red fire and flame. To be warm would be heaven. It was a wise old Dante who had made hell cold!

As he crossed the threshold of his filthy tenement he felt for the first time a sense of its shelter. Within its walls there was something that approached warmth, and in his room at the top there was a bed with a blanket.

Making his way toward the bed and its promise of comfort, he was stopped on the second stairway by a voice which came out of the dark.

"Mr. Tony, you didn't see our tree."

Peering down, he answered the voice: "I was going up to get warm."

"Milly said to tell you that we had a fire."

"A real fire, Pussy? I didn't know that there was one in the world."

He came down again to the first floor. Pussy was waiting—a freckled dot of a child tied up in a man's coat.

The fire was in a small round stove. On top of the stove something was boiling. The room was neat but bare, the stove, a table, and three chairs its only furnishing. In a room beyond were two beds covered with patchwork quilts.

On the table was a tree. It was a Christmas tree—just a branch of pine and some cheap spangly things. The mother of the children sewed all day and late into the night. She had worked a little longer each night for a month that the children might have the tree.

There was no light in the room but that of a small and smoky lamp.

Milly spoke of it. "We ought to have candles."

Ostrander, shrugged close to the stove, with his hands out to its heat, knew that they ought to have electric lights, colored ones, a hundred perhaps, and a tree that touched the stars!

But he said: "When I go out I'll bring you a red candle—a long one—and we'll put it on the shelf over the table."

Milly, who was resting her tired young body in a big rocker with the baby in her arms, asked: "Can we put it in a bottle or stand it in a cup? We haven't any candlestick."

"We can do better than that," he told her, "with a saucer turned upside down and covered with salt to look like snow."

Pussy, economically anxious, asked, "Can we eat the salt afterward?"

"Of course."

"Then, may we do it, Milly?"

"Darling, yes. How nice you always fix things, Mr. Tony!"

Long before he had known them he had fixed things—things which would have turned this poor room into an Aladdin's palace. There was that Christmas Eve at the Daltons'. It had been his idea to light the great hall with a thousand candles when they brought in the Yule log, and to throw perfumed fagots on the fire.

He came back to the round stove and the tiny tree. "I like to fix things," he said. "Once upon a time—"

They leaned forward eagerly to this opening.

"Of course you know it isn't true," he prefaced.

"Of course it couldn't be true"—Pussy was reassuringly sceptical—"the things that you tell us couldn't really happen—ever—"

"Well, once upon a time, there was a tree in a great house by a great river, and it was set in a great room with squares of black-and-white marble for a floor, and with a fountain with goldfish swimming in its basin, and there were red-and-blue parrots on perches, and orange-trees in porcelain pots, and the tree itself wasn't a pine-tree or a fir or a cedar; it was a queer round, clipped thing of yew, and it had red and blue and orange balls on it, and in the place of a wax angel on top there was a golden Buddha, and there were no candles—but the light shone out and out of it, like the light shines from the moon."

"Was it a Christmas tree?" Pussy asked, as he paused.

"Yes, but the people who trimmed it and the ones who came to see it didn't believe in the Wise Men, or the Babe in the Manger, or the shepherds who watched their flocks by night—they just worshiped beauty and art—and other gods—but it was a corking tree—"

"You use such funny words," Pussy crowed ecstatically. "Who ever heard of a corking tree?"

He smiled at her indulgently. He was warmer now, and as he leaned back in his chair and unbuttoned his coat he seemed to melt suddenly into something that was quite gentlemanly in pose and outline. "Well, it really was a corking tree, Pussy."

"What's a Buddha?" Milly asked, making a young Madonna of herself as she bent over the baby.

"A gentle god that half of the world worships," Ostrander said, "but the people who put him on the tree didn't worship anything—they put him there because he was of gold and ivory and was a lovely thing to look at—"

"Oh," said Pussy, with her mouth round to say it, "oh, how funny you talk, Mr. Tony!" She laughed, with her small hands beating her knees.

She was presently, however, very serious, as she set the table. There was little formality of service. Just three plates and some bread.

Milly, having carried the baby into the other room, was hesitatingly hospitable. "Won't you have supper with us, Mr. Tony?"

He wanted it. There was a savory smell as Milly lifted the pot from the stove. But he knew there would be only three potatoes—one for Pussy and one for Milly and one for the mother who was almost due, and there would be plenty of gravy. How queer it seemed that his mind should dwell on gravy!

"Onions are so high," Milly had said, as she stirred it. "I had to put in just a very little piece."

He declined hastily and got away.

In the hall he met their mother coming in. She was a busy little mother, and she did not approve of Ostrander. She did not approve of any human being who would not work.

"A merry Christmas," he said to her, standing somewhat wistfully above her on the stairs.

She smiled at that. "Oh, Mr. Tony, Mr. Tony, they want a man in the shop. It would be a good way to begin the New Year."

"Dear lady, I have never worked in a shop—and they wouldn't want me after the first minute—"

Her puzzled eyes studied him. "Why wouldn't they want you?"

"I am not—dependable—"

"How old are you?" she asked abruptly.

"Twice your age—"

"Nonsense—"

"Not in years, perhaps—but I have lived—oh, how I have lived—!"

He straightened his shoulders and ran his fingers through his hair. She had a sudden vision of what he might be if shorn of his poverty. There was something debonair—finished—an almost youthful grace—a hint of manner—

She sighed. "Oh, the waste of it!"

"Of what?"

She flamed. "Of you!"

Then she went in and shut the door.

He stood uncertainly in the hall. Then once again he faced the cold.

Around the corner was a shop where he would buy the red candle. The ten cents which he would pay was to have gone for his breakfast. He had sacrificed his supper that he might not go hungry on Christmas morning. He had planned a brace of rolls and a bottle of milk. It had seemed to him that he could face a lean night with the promise of these.

There were no red candles in the shop. There were white ones, but a red candle was a red candle—with a special look of Christmas cheer. He would have no other.

The turn of a second corner brought him to the great square. Usually he avoided it. The blaze of gold on the west side was the club.

A row of motors lined the curb. There was Baxter's limousine and Fenton's French car. He knew them all. He remembered when his own French car had overshadowed Fenton's Ford.

There were wreaths to-night in the club windows, and when Sands opened the doors there was a mass of poinsettia against the hall mirror.

How warm it looked with all that gold and red!

In the basement was the grill. It was a night when one might order something heavy and hot. A planked steak—with deviled oysters at the start and a salad at the end.

And now another motor-car was poking its nose against the curb. And Whiting climbed out, a bear in a big fur coat.

Whiting's car was a closed one. And it would stay there for an hour. Ostrander knew the habits of the man. From the office to the club, and from the club—home. Whiting was methodical to a minute. At seven sharp the doors would open and let him out.

The clock on the post-office tower showed six!

There was a policeman on the east corner, beating his arms against the cold. Ostrander did not beat his arms. He cowered frozenly in the shadow of a big building until the policeman passed on.

Then he darted across the street and into Whiting's car!

Whiting, coming out in forty minutes, found his car gone. Sands, the door man, said that he had noticed nothing. The policeman on the corner had not noticed.

"I usually stay longer," Whiting said, "but to-night I wanted to get home. I have a lot of things for the kids."

"Were the things in your car?" the policeman asked.

"Yes. Toys and all that—"

Ostrander, with his hand on the wheel, his feet on the brakes, slipped through the crowded streets unchallenged. It had been easy to unlock the car. He had learned many things in these later years.

It was several minutes before he was aware of faint fragrances—warm tropical fragrances of flowers and fruits and spices—Christmas fragrances which sent him back to the great kitchen where his grandmother's servants had baked and brewed.

He stopped the car and touched a button. The light showed booty. He had not expected this. He had wanted the car for an hour, to feel the thrill of it under his fingers, to taste again the luxury of its

warmth and softness. He had meant to take it back unharmed—with nothing more than the restless ghost of his poor desires to haunt Whiting when again he entered it.

But now here were toys and things which Whiting, in a climax of generosity, had culled from bake-shop and grocer, from flower-shop, fruit-shop, and confectioner.

He snapped out the light and drove on. He had still a half-hour for his adventure.

It took just three of the thirty minutes to slide up to the curb in front of the tall tenement. He made three trips in and up to the top floor. He risked much, but Fate was with him and he met no one.

Fate was with him, too, when he left the car at a corner near the club, and slipped out of it like a shadow, and thence like a shadow back to the shop whence his steps had tended before his adventures.

When he returned to the tall tenement the small family on the first floor had finished supper, and the mother had gone back to work. The baby was asleep. Milly and Pussy, wrapped up to their ears, were hugging the waning warmth of the little stove.

"Mr. Tony, did you get the candle?" Pussy asked as he came in.

"Yes. But I've been thinking"—his manner was mysterious—"I don't want to put it on the shelf. I want it in the window—to shine out—"

"To shine out—why?"

"Well, you know, there's St. Nicholas."

"Oh—"

"He ought to come here, Pussy. Why shouldn't he come here? Why should he go up-town and up-town, and take all the things to children who have more than they want?"

Milly was philosophic. "St. Nicholas is fathers and mothers—"

But Pussy was not so sure. "Do you think he'd come—if we did? Do you really and truly think he would?"

"I think he might—"

The candle set in the window made a fine show from the street. They all went out to look at it. Coming in, they sat around the stove together.

Pussy drew her chair very close to Ostrander. She laid her hand on his knee. It was a little hand with short, fat fingers. In spite of lean living, Pussy had managed to keep fat. She was adorably dimpled.

Ostrander, looking down at the fat little hand, began: "Once upon a time—there was a doll—a Fluffy Ruffles doll, in a rosy gown—"

"Oh!" Pussy beat the small, fat hand upon his knee.

"And pink slippers—and it traveled miles to find some one to—love it. And at last it said to St. Nicholas, 'Oh, dear St. Nick, I want to find a little girl who hasn't any doll—'"

"Like me?" said Pussy.

"Like you—"

"And St. Nicholas said, 'Will you keep your pink slippers clean and your nice pink frock clean if I give you to a poor little girl?' and the Fluffy Ruffles doll said 'Yes,' so St. Nicholas looked and looked for a poor little girl, and at last he came to a window—with a red candle—"

The fat little hand was still and Pussy was breathing hard.

"With a red candle, and there was a little girl who—didn't have any doll—"

Pussy threw herself on him bodily. "Is it true? Is it true?" she shrieked.

Milly, a little flushed and excited by the story, tried to say sedately: "Of course it isn't true. It couldn't be—true—"

"Let's wish it to be true—" Ostrander said, "all three of us, with our eyes shut—"

With this ceremony completed the little girls were advised gravely to go to bed. "If Fluffy Ruffles and old St. Nick come by and find you up they won't stop—"

"Won't they?"

"Of course not. You must shut the door and creep under your quilt and cover up your head, and if you hear a noise you mustn't look."

Milly eyed him dubiously. "I think it is a shame to tell Pussy such—"

"Corking things?" He lifted her chin with a light finger and looked into her innocent eyes. "Oh, Milly, Milly, once upon a time there was a Princess, with eyes like yours, and she lived in a garden where black swans swam on a pool, and she wore pale-green gowns and

there were poppies in the garden. And a Fool loved her. But she shut him out of the garden. He wasn't good enough even to kneel at her feet, so she shut him out and married a Prince with a white feather in his cap."

He had a chuckling sense of Whiting as the white-feathered Prince. But Milly's eyes were clouded. "I don't like to think that she shut the poor Fool out of the garden."

For a moment he cupped her troubled face in his two hands. "You dear kiddie." Then as he turned away he found his own eyes wet.

As he started up-stairs Pussy peeped out at him.

"Wouldn't it be—corking—to see a Fluffy Ruffles doll—a-walking up the street?"

In a beautiful box up-stairs the Fluffy Ruffles doll stared at him. She was as lovely as a dream, and as expensive as they make 'em. There was another doll in blue, also as expensive, also as lovely. Ostrander could see Milly with the blue doll matching her eyes.

There were toys, too, for the baby. And there was a bunch of violets. And boxes of candy. And books. And there were things to eat. Besides the fruits a great cake, and a basket of marmalades and jellies and gold-sealed bottles and meat pastes in china jars, and imported things in glass, and biscuits in tins.

Ostrander, after some consideration, opened the tin of biscuits and, munching, he wrote a note. Having no paper, he tore a wrapper from one of the boxes. He had the stub of a pencil, and the result was a scrawl.

"My Dear Whiting:

"It was I who borrowed your car—and who ran away with your junk. I am putting my address at the head of this, so that if you want it back you can come and get it. But perhaps you won't want it back.

"I have a feeling that to you and your wife I am as good as dead. If you have any thought of me it is, I am sure, to pity me. Yet I rather fancy that you needn't. I am down and out, and living on ten dollars a month. That's all I got when the crash came—it is all I shall ever get. I pay four dollars a month for my room and twenty cents a day for food. Sometimes I pay less than twenty cents when I find myself in need of other—luxuries. Yet there's an adventure in it, Whiting. A good little woman who lives in this house begs me to work. But I

have never worked. And why begin? I've a heritage of bad habits, and one does not wish to seem superior to one's ancestors.

"The winters are the worst. I spend the summers on the open road. Ask Marion if she remembers the days when we read Stevenson together in the garden? Tell her it is like that—under the stars—Tell her that I am getting more out of it than she is—with you—

"But the winters send me back to town—and this winter Fate has brought me to an old house in a shabby street just a bit back from the Club. On the first floor there is a little family. Three kiddies and a young mother who works to keep the wolf from the door. There's a Pussy-Kiddie, and a Milly-Kiddie, and a baby, and they have adopted me as a friend.

"And this Christmas I had nothing to give them—but a red candle to light their room.

"When I got into your car it was just for the adventure. To breathe for a moment the air I once breathed—to fancy that Marion's ghost might sit beside me for one little moment, as she will sit beside you to the end of your days.

"I have played all roles but that of robber—but when I saw the things that you had bought with Marion's money for Marion's children—it went to my head—and I wanted them in the worst way for those poor kiddies—who haven't any dolls or Christmas dinners.

"I am playing Santa Claus for them to-night. I shall take the things down and leave them in their poor rooms. It will be up to you to come and take them away. It will be up to you, too, to give this note to the police and steal my freedom.

"You used to be a good sport, Whiting. I have nothing against you except that you stole Marion—perhaps this will square our accounts. And if your children are, because of me, without their dolls to-morrow, you can remember this, that the kiddies are happy below stairs—since Dick Turpin dwells aloft!

"From among the rest I have chosen for myself a squat bottle, a box of biscuits, and a tin of the little imported sausages that you taught me to like.

"Well, my dear fellow, happy days! To-morrow morning I shall breakfast at your expense, unless you shall decide that I must breakfast behind bars.

"If you should come to-night, you will find in the window a red candle shining. They have put it there to guide St. Nicholas and a certain Fluffy Ruffles doll!

"Ever yours,
"Tony."

He found an envelope, sealed, and addressed it. Then he went to work.

Four trips he made down the stairs. Four times he tiptoed into the shadowed room, where the long red candle burned. And when he turned to take a last look there on the table beside the tree stood the blue doll for Milly and the Fluffy Ruffles doll for Pussy and the rattles and rings and blocks for the baby, and on the chairs and the shelf above the tree were the other things—the great cake and the fruit and the big basket and the boxes of candy.

And for the little mother there were the violets and a note:

"The red candle winked at your window and brought me in. It is useless to search for me—for now and then a Prince passes and goes on. And he is none the less a Prince because you do not know him."

And now there was that other note to deliver. Out in the cold once more, he found the moon gone and the snow falling. As he passed the saint on the old church, it seemed to smile down at him. The towers and gables were sheeted with white. His footsteps made no sound on the padded streets.

He left the note at Whiting's door. He fancied that, as the footman held it open, he saw Marion shining on the stairs!

He was glad after that to get home and to bed, and to the warmth of his blanket. There was the warmth, too, of the wine.

In a little while he was asleep. On the table by his untidy bed was the box of biscuits and the bottle and the tin of tiny sausages.

If all went well he would feast like a lord on Christmas morning!

RETURNED GOODS

Perhaps the most humiliating moment of Dulcie Cowan's childhood had been when Mary Dean had called her Indian giver. Dulcie was a child of affluence. She had always had everything she wanted; but she had not been spoiled. She had been brought up beautifully and she had been taught to consider the rights of others. She lived in an old-fashioned part of an old city, and her family was churchly and conscientious. Indeed, so well-trained was Dulcie's conscience that it often caused her great unhappiness. It seemed to her that her life was made up largely of denying herself the things she wanted. She was tied so rigidly to the golden rule that her own rights were being constantly submerged in the consideration of the rights of others.

So it had happened that when she gave to Mary Dean a certain lovely doll, because her mother had suggested that Dulcie had so many and Mary so few, Dulcie had spent a night of agonized loneliness. Then she had gone to Mary.

"I want my Peggy back."

"You gave her to me."

"But I didn't know how much I loved her, Mary. I'll buy you a nice new doll, but I want my Peggy back."

It was then that Mary had called her Indian giver. Mary had been a sturdy little thing with tight-braided brown hair. She had worn on that historic occasion a plain blue gingham with a white collar. To the ordinary eye she seemed just an every-day freckled sort of child, but to Dulcie she had been a little dancing devil, as she had stuck out her forefinger and jeered "Indian giver!"

Dulcie had held to her point and had carried her Peggy off in triumph. Mary, with characteristic independence, had refused to accept the beautiful doll which Dulcie bought with the last cent of her allowance and brought as a peace offering. In later years they grew to be rather good friends. They might, indeed, have been intimate, if it had not been for Dulcie's money and Mary's dislike of anything which savored of patronage.

It was Mary's almost boyish independence that drew Mills Richardson to her. Mills wrote books and was the editor of a small

magazine. He came to board with Mary's mother because of the quiet neighborhood. He was rather handsome in a dark slender fashion. He had the instincts of a poet, and he was not in the least practical. He needed a prop to lean on, and Mary gradually became the prop.

She was teaching by that time, but she helped her mother with the boarders. When Mills came in late at night she would have something for him in the dining-room—oysters or a club sandwich or a pot of coffee—and she and her mother and Mills would have a cozy time of it. In due season Mills asked her to marry him, and his dreams had to do with increased snugness and with shelter from the outside world.

They had been engaged three months when Dulcie came home from college. There was nothing independent or practical about Dulcie. She was a real romantic lady, and she appealed to Mills on the æsthetic side. He saw her first in church with the light shining on her from a stained-glass window. In the middle of that same week Mrs. Cowan gave a garden party as a home-coming celebration for her daughter. Dulcie wore embroidered white and a floppy hat, and her eyes when she talked to Mills were worshipful.

He found himself swayed at last by a grand passion. He thought of Dulcie by day and dreamed of her by night. Then he met her by accident one afternoon on Connecticut Avenue, and they walked down together to the Speedway, where the willows were blowing in the wind and the water was ruffled; and there with the shining city back of them and the Virginia hills ahead, Mills, flaming, declared his passion, and Dulcie, trembling, confessed that she too cared.

Mills grew tragic: "Oh, my beloved, have you come too late?"

Dulcie had not heard of his engagement to Mary. Mills told her, and that settled it. She had very decided ideas on such matters. A man had no right to fall in love with two women. If such a thing happened, there was only one way out of it. He had given his promise and he must keep it. He begged, but could not shake her. She cared a great deal, but she would not take him away from Mary.

Mary knew nothing of what had occurred; she thought that Mills was working too hard. She was working hard herself, but she was very happy. She had a hope chest and sat up sewing late o' nights.

Before Mary and Mills were married Dulcie's mother died, and Dulcie went abroad to live with an aunt. Five years later she married an American living in Paris. He was much older than she, and it was rumored that she was not happy. Ten years after her marriage she returned to Washington a widow.

It was at once apparent that she had changed. She wore charming but sophisticated clothes, made on youthful lines so that she seemed nearer twenty-five than thirty-five. Her hair was still soft and shining. She had been a pretty girl, she was a beautiful woman. But the greatest change was in her attitude toward life. In Paris her golden-rule philosophy had been turned topsy-turvy.

Hence when she met Mills and found the old flames lighted in his eyes, she stirred the ashes of her dead romance and discovered a spark. It was pleasant after that to talk with him in dim corners at people's houses. Now and then she invited him and Mary to her own big house with plenty of other guests, so that she was not missed if she walked with Mills in the garden. She meant no harm and she was really fond of Mary.

The years had not been so kind to Mills as to Dulcie. They had stolen some of his slenderness, and his hair was thin at the back. But he wrote better books, and it was Mary who had helped him write them. She had made of his house a home. She was still the same sturdy soul. Her bright color had faded and her hair was gray. Life with Mills had not been an easy road to travel. She had traveled it with loss of youth, perhaps, but with no loss of self-respect. She knew that her husband was in some measure what he was because of her. She had kept the children away from his study door; she had seen that he was nourished and sustained. She had prodded him at times to increased activities. He had resented the prodding, but it had resulted in a continuity of effort which had added to his income.

Dulcie came into Mary's life as something very fresh and stimulating. She spoke of it to Mills.

"It is almost as if I had been abroad to hear her talk. She has had such interesting experiences."

It was not Dulcie's experiences which interested Mills; it was the loveliness of her profile, the glint of her hair, the youth in her, the renewed urge of youth in himself.

Priscilla Dodd saw what had happened. Priscilla was the aunt with whom Dulcie had lived in Paris; and she was a wise, if worldly, old woman. She saw rocks ahead for Dulcie.

"He's in love with you, my dear."

Dulcie, in a rose satin house coat which shone richly in the flame of Aunt Priscilla's open fire, was not disconcerted.

"I know. Mary doesn't satisfy him, Aunt Cilla."

"And you do?"

"Yes."

"The less you see of him the better."

"I'm not sure of that."

"Why not?"

"I can inspire him, be the torch to illumine his path."

"So that's the way you are putting it to yourself! But how will Mary like that?"

"Oh, Mary"—Dulcie moved restlessly—"I don't want to hurt Mary. I don't want to hurt Mary," she said again, out of a long silence, "but after all I have a right to save Mills' soul for him, haven't I, Aunt Cilla?"

"Saving souls had better be left to those who make a business of it."

"I mean his poetic soul." Dulcie studied the toes of her rosy slippers. "A man can't live by bread alone."

Yet Mills had thrived rather well on the bread that Mary had given him, and there was this to say for Mills, he was very fond of his wife. She was not the love of his life, but she had been a helpmate for many years. He felt that he owed many things to her affection and strength. Like Dulcie, he shrank from making her unhappy.

It was because of Mary, therefore, that the lovers dallied. Otherwise, they said to each other, Mills would cast off his shackles, ask for his freedom, and then he and Dulcie would fly to Paris, where nobody probed into pasts and where they could make their dreams come true.

They found many ways in which to see each other. Dulcie had a little town car, and she picked Mills up at all hours and took him on

long and lovely rides, from which he returned ecstatic, with wild flowers in his coat and a knowledge of work left undone.

Gossip began to fly about. Aunt Priscilla warned Dulcie.

"It is a dangerous thing to do, my dear. People will talk."

"What do Mills and I care for people? Oh, if it were not for Mary—" She had just come in from a ride with Mills, and her eyes were shining.

"I wish we were not dining there to-night," said Aunt Priscilla. "I wonder how Mary manages a dinner of eight with only one servant."

"She is so splendid and competent, Aunt Cilla. Mills says so. Everybody says it. Things are easy for her that would be hard for other people."

"I wonder what she thinks of you?"

Dulcie, drawing off her gloves, meditated.

"I fancy she likes me. I know I love her, but not so much as I love Mills."

Fifteen years ago Dulcie would have died rather than admit her love for a married man. But since then she had seen life through the eyes of a worldly-minded old husband, and it had made a difference.

At dinner that night Dulcie was exquisite in orchid tulle with a string of pearls that hung to her knees. Her hair was like ripe corn, waved and parted on the side with a girlish knot behind. Her skin was as fresh as a baby's. Mary was in black net. She had been very busy helping the cook, and she had had little time to spend on her hair. She looked ten years older than Dulcie, and her mind was absolutely on the dinner. The dinner was really very good. Mills had been extremely anxious about it. He had called up Mary from down-town to tell her that he was bringing home fresh asparagus. He wanted it served as an extra course with Hollandaise sauce. Mary protested, but gave in. It was the Hollandaise sauce that had kept her from curling her hair.

There were orchids for a centerpiece—in harmony with Dulcie's gown. In fact, the whole dinner seemed keyed up to Dulcie. The guests were for the most part literary folk, to whom Mills wanted to display his Egeria. After dinner Dulcie sang for them. She had set to music the words of one of Mills' poems, and she was much applauded.

After everybody had gone Mary went to bed with a headache. She was glad that it was Saturday, for Sunday promised a rest. She decided to send the children over to her mother and to have a quiet day with Mills. She wouldn't even go to church in the morning. There was an afternoon service; perhaps she and Mills might go together.

But Mills had other plans. He walked as far as the church door with Mary, and left her there. Mary wasn't sorry to be left; her headache had returned, and she was glad to sit alone in the peaceful dimness. But the pain proved finally too much for her, so she slipped out quietly and went home.

Clouds had risen, and she hurried before the shower. It was a real April shower, wind with a rush and a silver downpour. Mary, coming into the dark living-room, threw herself on the couch in a far corner and drew a rug over her. The couch was backed up against a table which held a lamp and a row of books. Mary had a certain feeling of content in the way the furniture seemed to shut her in. There was no sound but the splashing of rain against the windows.

She fell asleep at last, and waked to find that Mills and Dulcie had come in. No lights were on; the room was in twilight dimness.

Mills had met Dulcie at her front door. "How dear of you to come," she had told him.

He had spoken of his desertion of Mary. "But this day was made for you, Dulcie."

They had walked on together, not heeding where they went, and when the storm had caught them they were nearer Mills' house than Dulcie's and so he had taken her there. They had entered the apparently empty room.

"Mary is still at church. Come and dry your little feet by my fire, Dulcie." Mills knelt and fanned the flame.

Mary, coming slowly back from her dreams, heard this and other things, and at last Dulcie's voice in protest:

"Dear, we must think of Mary."

"Poor Mary!"

Now the thing that Mary hated more than anything else in the whole world was pity. Through all the shock of the astounding revelation that Mills and Dulcie cared for each other came the sting of their sympathy. She sat up, a shadow among the shadows.

"I mustn't stay, Mills," Dulcie was declaring.

"Why not?"

"I feel like a—thief—"

"Nonsense, we are only taking our own, Dulcie. We should have taken it years ago. Loving you I should never have married Mary."

"I had a conscience then, Mills, and you had promised."

"But now you see it differently, Dulcie?"

"Perhaps."

Mills was on his knees beside Dulcie's chair, kissing her hands. The fire lighted them. It was like a play, with Mary a forlorn spectator in the blackness of the pit.

"Let me go now, Mills."

"Wait till Mary comes—we'll tell her."

"No, oh, poor Mary!"

Poor Mary indeed!

"Anyhow you've got to stay, Dulcie, and sing for me, and when Mary comes back she'll get us some supper and I'll read you my new verses."

Among the shadows Mary had a moment of tragic mirth. Then she set her feet on the floor and spoke:

"I'm sorry, Mills, but I couldn't cook supper to-night if I died for it—"

From their bright circle of light they peered at her.

"Oh, my poor dear!" Dulcie said.

"I'm not poor," Mary told her, "but I'm tired, dead tired, and my head aches dreadfully, and if you want Mills you can have him."

"Have him?" Dulcie whispered.

"Yes. I don't want him."

Mills exploded.

"What?"

"I don't want you, Mills. I'm tired of being a prop; I'm tired of planning your meals, I'm tired of deciding whether you shall have mushrooms with your steak or—onions. You can have him, Dulcie. I know you think I've lost my mind." She came forward within the radius of the light. "But I haven't. As long as I thought Mills cared I

could stick it out. But I have learned to-night that he loved you before he married me. You gave him to me, Dulcie, and now you want him back."

Indian giver! Like a flash Dulcie's mind went to the little Mary of the pigtails and pointing forefinger.

"You want him and you can have him. Perhaps if you had taken him years ago he might have been different. I don't know. Perhaps even now he can live up to all the lovely, lovely things that you and he are always talking about. But I've had to talk to Mills about what he likes to eat and what we have to pay for things; I've had to push him and prod him and praise him, and it has been hard work. If you want him you can have him, Dulcie."

Mills had a stunned look.

"Don't you love me, Mary?"

"I think I've proved it," she said quietly; "but I couldn't possibly go on loving you now. You have Dulcie to love you, and one woman is enough for any man. I don't know what you are planning to do, but you needn't run away or do anything spectacular. I'll make it as easy for you as possible. And now if you don't mind I'll go up and take a headache powder; my head is splitting."

Left alone, they tried to regain their air of high romance.

"Poor Mary!"

But the words rang hollow. One couldn't possibly call a woman poor who had given away so much with a single gesture.

They tried to talk it over but found nothing to say. At last Mills took Dulcie home. She asked him in and he went. Aunt Priscilla was out, and tea was served for the two of them from a lacquered tea cart—Orange Pekoe and Japanese wafers. It was delicious but unsubstantial. Dulcie with her coat off was like a wood sprite in leaf green. Her hair was gold, her eyes wet violets; but Mills missed something. He had a feeling that he wanted to get home and talk things over with Mary.

At last he rose, and it was then that Dulcie laid her hand on his arm.

"Mills, I can't."

"Can't what?"

"Let you leave Mary."

"Why not?"

"It wouldn't be right."

"It would be as right as it has ever been, Dulcie."

"I know how it must look to you, but—but I knew all the time that wrong is wrong. I thought I was a different Dulcie from the girl of long ago, but I'm not. I still have a conscience; I can't take you away from Mary."

"You're not taking me away. You heard what she said—she doesn't want me."

And Dulcie didn't want him! He saw it in that moment! The things that Mary had said had scared her. She didn't want to prod and push and praise. She didn't want to decide what he should have for dinner. She didn't want to weigh the merits of beefsteak and mushrooms or beefsteak and onions—onions!

He felt suddenly old, fat, bald-headed! The glow had faded from everything. He did not protest or attempt to persuade her. He took his hat, kissed her hand and got away.

Aunt Priscilla coming in found Dulcie in tears by the fire.

"I've given him up, Aunt Cilla."

"Why?"

"Well, it wouldn't be right."

She came into Aunt Priscilla's bedroom later to talk it over. She had on the rosy house coat. She spoke of going back to Paris.

"It will be better for both of us. After all, Aunt Cilla, we are what we are fundamentally, and we Puritans can't get away from our consciences, can we?"

"Some of us," said Aunt Priscilla, "can't."

The old woman lay awake a long time that night, thinking it out. She was glad that Dulcie had stopped the thing in time. But she had a feeling that the solution of the situation could not be laid to an awakened conscience. She hoped that some day Dulcie would tell her the truth.

It was still raining when Mills reached home. The house was dark, the fire had died down. He went up-stairs. The boys were in bed.

There was a light in Mary's room. He opened the door. Mary was propped up on her pillows reading a book.

He stopped, uncertain, on the threshold.

"Come in," she said, "my head's better."

He crossed the room and stood beside her.

"Oh, Mary," he said, and his face worked. He dropped on his knees by the bed and cried like a child.

She laid her hand on his head and smoothed his thin hair.

"Poor Mills!" she said softly; "poor old Mills!" Then after a moment, brightly: "It will do us both good to have some coffee. Run along, Mills, and start the percolator; I'll be down in a minute to get the supper."

BURNED TOAST

I

Perry Cunningham and I had been friends for years. I was older than he, and I had taught him in his senior year at college. After that we had traveled abroad, frugally, as befitted our means. The one quarrel I had with fate was that Perry was poor. Money would have given him the background that belonged to him—he was a princely chap, with a high-held head. He had Southern blood in his veins, which accounted perhaps for an almost old-fashioned charm of manner, as if he carried on a gentlemanly tradition.

We went through the art galleries together. There could have been nothing better than those days with him—the Louvre, the Uffizi, the Pitti Palace. Perry's search for beauty was almost breathless. We swept from Filippo Lippi to Botticelli and Bellini, then on to Ghirlandajo, Guido Reni, Correggio, Del Sarto—the incomparable Leonardo.

"If I had lived then," Perry would say, glowing, "in Florence or in Venice!"

And I, smiling at his enthusiasm, had a vision of him among those golden painters, his own young beauty enhanced by robes of clear color, his thirst for loveliness appeased by the sumptuous settings of that age of romance.

Then when the great moderns confronted us—Sorolla and the rest—Perry complained, "Why did I study law, Roger, when I might be doing things like this?"

"It is not too late," I told him.

I felt that he must not be curbed, that his impassioned interest might blossom and bloom into genius if it were given a proper outlet.

So it came about that he decided to paint. He would stay in Paris a year or two in a studio, and test his talent.

But his people would not hear of it. There had been lawyers in his family for generations. Since the Civil War they had followed more or less successful careers. Perry's own father had made no money, but Perry's mother was obsessed by the idea that the fortunes of the

family were bound up in her son's continuance of his father's practice.

So Perry went home and opened an office. His heart was not in it, but he made enough to live on, and at last he made money enough to marry a wife. He would have married her whether he had enough to live on or not. She was an artist, and she was twenty when Perry met her. We had been spending a month in Maine, on an island as charming as it was cheap. Rosalie was there with a great-aunt and uncle. She was painting the sea on the day that Perry first saw her, and she wore a jade-green smock. Her hair was red, drawn back rather tightly from her forehead, but breaking into waves over her ears. With the red of her cheeks and the red of her lips she had something of the look of Lorenzo Lotto's lovely ladies, except for a certain sharp slenderness, a slenderness which came, I was to learn later, from an utter indifference to the claims of appetite. She was one of those who sell bread to buy hyacinths.

I speak of this here because Rosalie's almost ascetic indifference to material matters, in direct contrast to Perry's vivid enjoyment of the good things of life, came to have a tragic significance in later days. Perry loved a warm hearth in winter, a cool porch in summer. He had the Southerner's epicurean appreciation of the fine art of feasting. The groaning board had been his inheritance from a rollicking, rackety set of English ancestors, to whom dining was a rather splendid ceremony. On his mother's table had been fish and game from Chesapeake, fruits and vegetables in season and out—roast lamb when prices soared high in the spring, strawberries as soon as they came up from Florida. There had always been money for these in the Cunningham exchequer, when there had been money for nothing else.

Rosalie, on the other hand, ate an orange in the morning, a square of toast at noon, a chop and perhaps a salad for dinner. One felt that she might have fared equally well on dew and nectar. She had absolutely no interest in what was set before her, and after she married Perry this attitude of mind remained unchanged.

She was a wretched cook, and made no effort to acquire expertness. She and Perry lived in a small but well-built bungalow some miles out from town, and they could not afford a maid. When I dined with them I made up afterward for the deficiencies of their

menu by a square meal at the club. There was no chance for Perry to make up, and I wondered as the years went on how he stood it.

He seemed to stand it rather well, except that in time he came to have that same sharpened look of delicacy which added a spiritual note to Rosalie's rich bloom. He always lighted up when he spoke of his wife, and he was always urging me to come and see them. I must admit that except for the meals I liked to go. Rosalie's success at painting had been negligible, but her love of beauty was expressed in the atmosphere she gave to her little home; she had achieved rather triumphant results in backgrounds and in furnishing.

I remember one spring twilight. I was out for the week-end, and we dined late. The little house was on a hill, and with the French windows wide open we seemed to hang above an abyss of purple sky, cut by a thin crescent. White candles lighted the table, and there were white lilacs. There was a silver band about Rosalie's red hair.

There was not much to eat, and Perry apologized, "Rose hates to fuss with food in hot weather."

Rosalie, as mysterious in that light as the young moon, smiled dreamily.

"Why should one think about such things—when there is so much else in the world?"

Perry removed the plates and made the coffee. Rosalie did not drink coffee. She wandered out into the garden, and came back with three violets, which she kissed and stuck in Perry's coat.

The next morning when I came down Rosalie was cutting bread for toast. She was always exquisitely neat, and in her white linen and in her white-tiled kitchen she seemed indubitably domestic. I was hungry and had hopes of her efforts.

"Peer is setting the table", she told me.

She always called him "Peer". She had her own way of finding names for people. I was never "Roger", but "Jim Crow". When questioned as to her reason for the appellation she decided vaguely that it might be some connection of ideas—dances—Sir Roger de Coverley—and didn't somebody "dance Jim Crow"?

"You don't mind, do you?" she had asked, and I had replied that I did not.

I did not confess how much I liked it. I had always been treated in a distinctly distant and dignified fashion by my family and friends, so that Rosalie's easy assumption of intimacy was delightful.

Well, I went out on the porch and left Rosalie to her culinary devices. I found the morning paper, and fifteen minutes later there came up across the lawn a radiant figure.

Rosalie, hearing the garden call, had chucked responsibility—and her arms were full of daffodils!

We had burned toast for breakfast! Rosalie had forgotten it and Perry had not rescued it until it was well charred. There was no bread to make more, so we had to eat it.

For the rest we had coffee and fruit. It was an expensive season for eggs, and Rosalie had her eye on a bit of old brocade which was to light a corner of her studio. She breakfasted contentedly on grapefruit, but Perry was rather silent, and I saw for the first time a shadow on his countenance. I wondered if for the moment his mind had wandered to the past, and to his mother's table, with Sunday waffles, omelet, broiled bacon. Yet—there had been no bits of gay brocade to light the mid-Victorian dullness of his mother's dining-room, no daffodils on a radiant morning, no white lilacs on a purple twilight, no slender goddess, mysterious as the moon.

It was in the middle of the following winter that I began to realize that Perry was not well. He had come home on a snowy night, tired and chilled to the bone. He was late and Rosalie had kept dinner waiting for him. It was a rather sorry affair when it was served. Perry pushed his chair back and did not eat. I had as little appetite for it as he, but I did my best. I had arrived on an earlier train, with some old prints that I wanted to show him. Rosalie and I looked at them after dinner, but Perry crouched over the fire and coughed at intervals.

At last I couldn't stand it any longer.

"He needs some hot milk, a foot bath, and to be tucked up in bed."

Rosalie stared at me above the prints. "Perry?"

"Yes. He isn't well."

"Don't croak, Jim Crow."

But I knew what I was talking about. "I am going to get him to bed. You can have the milk ready when I come down."

It developed that there was no milk. I walked half a mile to a road house and brought back oysters and a bottle of cream. I cooked them myself in the white-tiled kitchen, and served them piping hot in a bowl with crackers.

Perry, propped up in bed, ate like a starved bird.

"I've never tasted anything better," he said; and, warmed and fed, he slept after a bit as soundly as a satisfied baby.

It was while he was eating the oysters that Rosalie came to the door and looked at him. He was not an æsthetic object—I must admit that no sick man is—and I saw distaste in her glance, as if some dainty instinct in her shrank from the spectacle.

When I went down I found her sitting in front of the fire, wrapped in a Chinese robe of black and gold. You can imagine the effect of that with the red of her hair and the red of her cheeks and lips. Her feet, in black satin slippers, were on a jade-green cushion, and back of her head was the strip of brocade that she had bought with her housekeeping money. It was a gorgeous bit, repeating the color of the cushion, and with a touch of blue which matched her eyes.

She wanted me to show her the rest of the prints. I tried to talk to her of Perry's health, but she wouldn't.

"Don't croak, Jim Crow," she said again.

As I look back at the two of us by the fire that night I feel as one might who had been accessory to a crime. Rosalie's charm was undoubted. Her quickness of mind, her gayety of spirit, her passion for all that was lovely in art and Nature—made her indescribably interesting. I stayed late. And not once, after my first attempt, did we speak of Perry.

II

It was in March that I made Perry see a doctor. "Nothing organic," was Perry's report. Beyond that he was silent. So I went to the doctor myself.

"What's the matter with him?"

"He is not getting the proper nourishment," the doctor told me. "He must have plenty of milk and eggs, and good red meat."

It sounded easy enough, but it wasn't. Rosalie couldn't grasp the fact that diet in Perry's case was important. For the first time I saw a queer sort of obstinacy in her.

"Oh, my poor Peer!" And she laughed lightly. "Do they want to make a stuffed pig of you?"

Well, you simply couldn't get it into her head that Perry needed the bread that she sold for hyacinths. She cooked steaks and chops for him, and served them with an air of protest that took away his appetite.

Of course there remained the eggs and milk, but he didn't like them. What Perry really needed was three good meals a day according to the tradition of his mother's home.

But he couldn't have them. His mother was dead, and the home broken up. The little bungalow, with its old brocades, its Venetian glass, its Florentine carvings, its sun-dial and its garden, was the best that life could offer him. And I must confess that he seemed to think it very good. He adored Rosalie. When in moments of rebellion against her seeming indifference I hinted that she lacked housewifely qualities he smiled and shifted the subject abruptly.

Once he said, "She feeds—my soul."

Of course she loved him. But love to her meant what it had meant in those first days on the Maine coast when she had seen him, slender and strong, his brown hair blowing back from his sun-tanned skin; it meant those first days in their new home when, handsome and debonair in the velvet coat which she had made him wear, he had added a high light to the picture she had made of her home.

This new Perry, pale and coughing—shivering in the warmth of the fire—did not fit into the picture. Her dreams of the future had not included a tired man who worked for his living, and who was dying for lack of intelligent care.

To put it into cold words makes it sound ghoulish. But of course Rosalie was not really that. She was merely absorbed in her own exalted theories and she was not maternal. I think when I compared her, unthinking, to the young moon, that I was subconsciously aware of her likeness to the "orbed maiden" whose white fire warms no one.

She tried to do her best, and I am quite sure that Perry never knew the truth—that he might have been saved if she could have left her heights for a moment and had become womanly and wifely. If she had mothered him a bit—poured out her tenderness upon him—oh, my poor Perry. He loved her too much to ask it, but I knew what it would have meant to him.

All through his last illness Rosalie clung to me. I think it grew to be a horror to her to see him, gaunt and exhausted, in the west room. He had a good nurse, toward the last, and good food. I had had a small fortune left to me, too late, by a distant relative. I paid for the cook and the nurse, and I sent flowers to Rosalie that she might take them to Perry and let his hungry eyes feed upon her.

It was in the winter that he died, and after all was over Rosalie and I went out and stood together on the little porch. There was snow on the ground and the bright stars seemed caught in the branches of the pines.

Rosalie shook and sobbed.

"I hate—death," she said. "Oh, Jim Crow, why did God let my poor Peer die?" She was completely unstrung. "Death is so—ugly."

I said, "It is not ugly. Peer will live again—like the daffodils in the spring."

"Do you believe that, Jim Crow?"

I did believe it, and I told her so—that even now her Peer was strong and well; and I think it comforted her. It gave her lover back to her, as it were, in the glory of his youth.

She did not wear mourning, or, rather, she wore mourning which was like that worn by no other woman. Her robes were of purple. She kept Perry's picture on the table, and out of the frame his young eyes laughed at us, so that gradually the vision of that ravaged figure in the west room faded.

I went to see her once a week. It seemed the only thing to do. She was utterly alone, with no family but the great-aunt and uncle who had been with her when she met Perry. She was a child in business matters, and Perry had left it to me to administer the affairs of his little estate. Rosalie had her small bungalow, Perry's insurance, and she turned her knowledge of painting to practical account. She made

rather special things in lamp-shades and screens, and was well paid for them.

I went, as I have said, once a week. A woman friend shared part of her house, but was apt to be out, and so I saw Rosalie usually alone. I lived now at the club and kept a car. Rosalie often dined with me, but I rarely ate at the bungalow. Now and then in the afternoon she made me a cup of tea, rather more, I am sure, for the picturesque service with her treasured Sheffield than for any desire to contribute to my own cheer or comfort.

And so, gradually, I grew into her life and she grew into mine. I was forty-five, she twenty-five. In the back of my mind was always a sense of the enormity of her offense against Perry. In my hottest moments I said to myself that she had sacrificed his life to her selfishness; she might have been a Borgia or a Medici.

Yet when I was with her my resentment faded; one could as little hold rancor against a child.

Thus the months passed, and it was in the autumn, I remember, that a conversation occurred which opened new vistas. She had been showing me a parchment lamp-shade which she had painted. There was a peacock with a spreading tail, and as she held the shade over the lamp the light shone through and turned every feathered eye into a glittering jewel. Rosalie wore one of her purple robes, and I can see her now as I shut my eyes, as glowing and gorgeous as some of those unrivaled masterpieces in the Pitti Palace.

"Jim Crow," she said, "I shall do a parrot next—all red and blue, with white rings round his eyes."

"You will never do anything better than that peacock."

"Shan't I?" She left the shade over the lamp and sat down. "Do you think I shall paint peacocks and parrots for the rest of my life, Jim Crow?"

"What would you like to do?" I asked her.

"Travel." She was eager. "Do you know, I have never been to Europe? Perry used to tell me about it—Botticelli and Raphael—and Michaelangelo—"

"We had a great time," I said, remembering it all—that breathless search for beauty.

"He promised that some day he and I would go—together."

"Poor Perry!"

She rose restlessly.

"Oh, take me out somewhere, Jim Crow! I feel as if this little house would stifle me."

We motored to the country club. She wore the color which she now affected, a close little hat and a straight frock. People stared at her. I think she was aware of their admiration and liked it.

She smiled at me as she sat down at the table. "I always love to come with you, Jim Crow."

"Why?"

"You do things so well, and you're such a darling."

I do not believe that it was intended as flattery. I am sure that she meant it. She was happy because of the lights and the lovely old room with its cavernous fireplace and its English chintzes; and out of her happiness she spoke.

She could not, of course, know the effect of her words on me. No one had ever called me a darling or had thought that I did things well.

She used, too, to tell me things about my looks. "You'd be like one of those distinguished gentlemen of Vandyke's if you'd wear a ruff and leave off your eye-glasses."

I wonder if you know how it seemed to have a child like that saying such things. For she was more than a child, she was a beautiful woman, and everything surrounding her was beautiful. And there had been a great many gray years before I met Perry and before the money came which made pleasant living possible.

"I like you because you are strong," was another of her tributes.

"How do you know I am strong?"

"Well, you look it. And not many men could have carried me so easily up-stairs."

She had sprained her ankle in getting out of my car on the night that we had dined at the country club. She had worn high-heeled slippers and had stepped on a pebble.

It was on that night that I first faced the fact that I cared for her. In my arms she had clung to me like a child, her hair had swept my cheek, there had been the fragrance of violets.

I did not want to care for her. I remembered Perry—the burned toast which had seemed to mark the beginning of their tragedy—those last dreadful days. I knew that Perry's fate would not be mine; there would be no need to sell bread to buy hyacinths. There was money enough and to spare, money to let her live in the enjoyment of the things she craved; money enough to—travel.

The more I thought of it the more I was held by the thought of what such a trip would mean to me. It would be like that pilgrimage with young Perry. There would be the same impassioned interest—there would be more than that—there would be youth and loveliness—all mine.

I felt that I was mad to think of it. Yet she made me think of it. It was what she wanted. She was not in the least unwomanly, but she was very modern in her frank expression of the pleasure she felt in my companionship.

"Oh, what would I do without you, Jim Crow?" was the way she put it.

I grew young in my months of association with her. I had danced a little in my college days, but I had given it up. She taught me the new steps—and we would set the phonograph going and take up the rugs.

When I grew expert we danced together at the country club and at some of the smart places down-town. It was all very delightful. I made up my mind that I should marry her.

I planned to ask her on Christmas Eve. I had a present for her, an emerald set in antique silver with seed pearls. It was hung on a black ribbon, and I could fancy it shining against the background of her velvet smock. I carried flowers, too, and a book. I was keen with anticipation. The years seemed to drop from me. I was a boy of twenty going to meet the lady of my first romance.

When I arrived at the bungalow I found that Rosalie had with her the old great-aunt and uncle who had been with her when we first met in Maine. They had come on for Christmas unexpectedly, anticipating an eager welcome, happy in their sense of surprise.

Rosalie, when we had a moment alone, expressed her dismay.

"They are going to stay until to-morrow night, Jim Crow. And I haven't planned any Christmas dinner."

"We'll take them to the country club."

"How heavenly of you to think of it!"

I gave her the flowers and the book. But I kept the jewel for the high moment when I should ask her for a greater gift in exchange.

But the high moment did not come that night. The old uncle and aunt sat up with us. They had much to talk about. They were a comfortable pair—silver-haired and happy in each other—going toward the end of the journey hand in hand.

The old man went to the door with me when I left, and we stood for a moment under the stars.

"Mother and I miss hanging up the stockings for the kiddies," he said.

"Were there many kiddies?"

"Three. Two dead and one married and out West. Rosalie seemed the nearest that we had, and that's why we came. I thought mother might be lonely in our big old house."

The next day at the country club the old gentleman was genial but slightly garrulous. The old lady talked about her children and her Christmas memories. I saw that Rosalie was frankly bored.

As for myself, I was impatient for my high moment.

But I think I gave the old folks a good time and that they missed nothing in my manner. And, indeed, I think that they missed nothing in Rosalie's. They had the gentle complacency of the aged who bask in their own content.

It was toward the end of dinner that I caught a look in Rosalie's eyes which almost made my heart stop beating. I had not seen it since Perry's death. I had seen it first when she had stood in the door of his room on the night that I tucked him up in bed and gave him the hot oysters. It was that look of distaste—that delicate shrinking from an unpleasant spectacle.

Following her gaze I saw that the old gentleman had sunk in his chair and was gently nodding. His wife leaned toward me.

"Milton always takes a cat nap after meals," she said, smiling. And I smiled back, she was so rosy and round and altogether comfortable.

Rosalie and I went with them to the train, and it was as we drove back that I spoke of them.

"They are rather great dears, aren't they?"

Rosalie was vehement. "I hate old people!"

A chill struck to my bones. "You hate them? Why?"

"They're—ugly, Jim Crow. Did you see how they had shrunk since I last saw them—and the veins in their hands—and the skull showing through his forehead?"

She was twenty-five, and I was almost twice her age. When I was old she would still be young—young enough to see my shrunken body and the skull showing through!

The look that had been in her eyes for Perry would some day be in her eyes for me. And I knew that if I ever saw it it would strike me dead. It might not kill me physically, but it would wither like a flame all joy and hope forever.

When we reached the bungalow I built up a fire, and Rosalie, leaving me for a little, came back in something sheer and lovely in green. It was the first time since Perry's death that she had discarded her purple robes. She sank into a big chair opposite me and put her silver-slippered feet on the green cushion.

"Isn't it heavenly to be alone, Jim Crow?"

It was the high moment which I had planned, but I could not grasp it. Between me and happiness stood the shadow of that other Rosalie, shrinking from me when I was old as she had shrunk from Perry.

"My dear," I said, and I did not look at her, "I've been thinking a lot about you."

Her chin was in her hand. "I know."

But she didn't know.

"I've been thinking, Rosalie; and I want to give you something for Christmas which will make you happy throughout the year."

"You are such a darling, Jim Crow."

"And I have thought of this—a trip to Europe. You'll let me do it, won't you? There'll be the art galleries, and you can stay as long as you like."

I could see that she was puzzled. "Do you mean that I am to go—alone?" she asked slowly.

"There may be some one going. I'll find out."

There was dead silence.

"You will let me do it?" I asked finally.

She came over to my chair and stood looking down at me.

"Why are you sending me alone, Jim Crow?"

I think, then, that she saw the anguish in my eyes. She sank on her knees beside my chair.

"I don't want to go alone, Jim Crow. I want to stay—with—you."

Well, the jewel is on her breast and a ring to match is on her finger. And when the spring comes we are to sail for Italy, for France.

Perhaps we shall never come back. And I am going to give Rosalie all the loveliness that life can hold for her. Now and then she whispers that she never knew love until I taught it to her. That what she felt for Perry was but the echo of his own need of her.

"But I'd tramp the muddy roads with you, Jim Crow."

I wonder if she really means it. I wish with all my heart that I might know it true. I have never told her of my fears and I believe that I can make her happy. I shall try not to look too far beyond the days we shall have in the Louvre and the Uffizi and the Pitti Palace. We shall search for beauty, and perhaps I can teach her to find it, before it is too late, in the things that count.

PETRONELLA

"If you loved a man, and knew that he loved you, and he wouldn't ask you to marry him, what would you do?"

The Admiral surveyed his grand-niece thoughtfully. "What do you expect to do, my dear?"

Petronella stopped on the snowy top step and looked down at him. "Who said I had anything to do with it?" she demanded.

The Admiral's old eyes twinkled. "Let me come in, and tell me about it."

Petronella smiled at him over her big muff. "If you'll promise not to stay after five, I'll give you a cup of tea."

"Who's coming at five?"

The color flamed into Petronella's cheeks. In her white coat and white furs, with her wind-blown brown hair, her beauty satisfied even the Admiral's critical survey, and he hastened to follow his question by the assertion, "Of course I'll come in."

Petronella, with her coat off, showed a slenderness which was enhanced by the straight lines of her white wool gown, with the long sleeves fur-edged, and with fur at the top of the high, transparent collar. She wore her hair curled over her ears and low on her forehead, which made of her face a small and delicate oval. In the big hall, with a roaring fire in the wide fireplace, she dispensed comforting hospitality to the adoring Admiral. And when she had given him his tea she sat on a stool at his feet. "Oh, wise great-uncle," she said, "I am going to tell you about the Man!"

"Have I ever seen him?"

"No. I met him in London last year, and—well, you know what a trip home on shipboard means, with all the women shut up in their cabins, and with moonlight nights, and nobody on deck—"

"So it was an affair of moonlight and propinquity?"

After a pause: "No, it was an affair of the only man in the world for me."

"My dear child—!"

Out of a long silence she went on: "He thought I was poor. You know how quietly I traveled with Miss Danvers. And he didn't

associate Nell Hewlett with Petronella Hewlett of New York and Great Rock. And so—well, you know, uncle, he let himself go, and I let myself go, and then—"

She drew a long breath. "When we landed, things stopped. He had found out who I was, and he wrote me a little note, and said he would never forget our friendship—and that's—all."

She finished drearily, and the bluff old Admiral cleared his throat. There was something wrong with the scheme of things when his Petronella couldn't have the moon if she wanted it!

"And what can I do—what can any woman do?" Petronella demanded, turning on him. "I can't go to him and say, 'Please marry me.' I can't even think it"; her cheeks burned. "And he'd die before *he'd* say another word, and I suppose that now we'll go on growing old, and I'll get thinner and thinner, and he'll get fatter and fatter, and I'll be an old maid, and he'll marry some woman who's poor enough to satisfy his pride, and—well, that will be the end of it, uncle."

"The end of it?" said the gentleman who had once commanded a squadron. "Well, I guess not, Petronella, if you want him. Oh, the man's a fool!"

"He's not a fool, uncle." The sparks in Petronella's eyes matched the sparks in the Admiral's.

"Well, if he's worthy of you—"

Petronella laid her cheek against his hand. "The question is not," she said, faintly, "of his worthiness, but of mine, dear uncle."

Dumbly the Admiral gazed down at that drooping head. Could this be Petronella—confident, imperious, the daughter of a confident and imperious race?

He took refuge in the question, "But who is coming at five?"

"He is coming. He is passing through Boston on his way to visit his mother in Maine. I asked him to come. I told him I was down here by the sea, and intended to spend Christmas at Great Rock because you were here, and because this was the house I lived in when I was a little girl, and that I wanted him to see it; and—I told him the truth, uncle."

"The truth?"

"That I missed him. That was all I dared say, and I wish you had read his note of assent. Such a stiff little thing. It threw me back upon myself, and I wished that I hadn't written him—I wished that he wouldn't come. Oh, uncle, if I were a man, I'd give a woman the right to choose. That's the reason there are so many unhappy marriages. Nine wrong men ask a woman, and the tenth right one *won't*. And finally she gets tired of waiting for the tenth right one, and marries one of the nine wrong ones."

"There are women to-day," said the Admiral, "who are preaching a woman's right to propose."

Petronella gazed at him, thoughtfully. "I could preach a doctrine like that—but I couldn't practice it. It's easy enough to say to some other woman, 'Ask him,' but it's different when you are the woman."

"Yet if he asked you," suggested the Admiral, "the world might say that he wanted your money."

"Why should we care what the world would say?" Petronella was on her feet now, defending her cause vigorously. "Why should we care? Why, it's our love against the world, uncle! Why should we care?"

The Admiral stood up, too, and paced the rug as in former days he had paced the decks. "There must be some way out," he said at last, and stopped short. "Suppose I speak to him—"

"And spoil it all! Oh, uncle!" Petronella shook him by the lapels of his blue coat. "A man never knows how a woman feels about such things. Even you don't, you old darling. And now will you please go; and take this because I love you," and she kissed him on one cheek, "and this because it is a quarter to five and you'll have to hurry," and she kissed him on the other cheek.

The Admiral, being helped into his big cape in the hall, called back, "I forgot to give you your Christmas present," and he produced a small package.

"Come here and let me open it," Petronella insisted. And the Admiral, without a glance at the accusing clock, went back. And thus it happened that he was there to meet the Man.

It must be confessed that the Admiral suffered a distinct shock as he was presented to the hero of Petronella's romance. Here was no courtly youth of the type of the military male line of Petronella's

family, but a muscular young giant of masterful bearing. The Hewlett men had commanded men; one could see at a glance that Justin Hare had also commanded women. This, the wise old Admiral decided at once, was the thing which had attracted Petronella—Petronella, who had held her own against all masculine encroachments, and who was heart-free at twenty-five!

"Look what this dearest dear of an uncle has given me," said Petronella, and held up for the young surgeon's admiration a string of pearls with a sapphire clasp. "They belonged to my great-aunt. I was named for her, and uncle says I look like her."

"You have her eyes, my dear, and some of her ways. But she was less independent. In her time women leaned more, as it were, on man's strength."

Justin Hare looked at them with interest—at the slender girl in her white gown, at the tall, straight old man with his air of command.

"Women in these days do not lean," he said, with decision; "they lead."

A spark came into Petronella's eyes. "And do you like the modern type best?" she challenged.

He answered with smiling directness, "I like you."

The Admiral was pleased with that, though he was still troubled by this man's difference from the men of his own race. Yet if back of that honest bluntness there was a heart which would enshrine her—well, that was all he would ask for this dearest of girls.

He glanced at the clock, and spoke hurriedly: "I must be going, my dear; it is long after five."

"Must you really go?" asked the mendacious Petronella.

An hour later she was alone. The visit had been a failure. She admitted that, as she gazed with a sort of agonized dismay through the wide window to where the sea was churned by the wildness of the northeast gale. Snow had come with the wind, shutting out the view of the great empty hotels on the Point, shutting out, too, the golden star of hope which gleamed from the top of the lighthouse.

Petronella turned away from the blank scene with a little shudder. Thus had Justin Hare shut her out of his life. He had talked of his mother in Maine, of his hospital plans for the winter, but not a word

had he said of those moonlight nights when he had masterfully swayed her by the force of his own passion, had wooed her, won her.

And now there was nothing that she could do. There was never anything that a woman could do! And so she must bear it. Oh, if she could bear it!

A little later, when a maid slipped in to light the candles, Petronella said out of the shadows, "When Jenkins goes to the post-office, I have a parcel for the mail."

"He's been, miss, and there won't be any train out to-night; the snow has stopped the trains."

"Not any train!" At first the remark held little significance, but finally the fact beat against her brain. If the one evening train could not leave, then Justin Hare must stay in town, and he would have to stay until Christmas morning!

Petronella went at once to the telephone, and called up the only hotel which was open at that season. Presently she had Hare at the other end of the line.

"You must come to my house to dinner," she said. "Jenkins has told me about your train. Please don't dress—there'll be only Miss Danvers and uncle; and you shall help me trim my little tree."

Although she told him not to dress, she changed her gown for one of dull green velvet, built on the simple lines of the white wool she had worn in the afternoon. The square neck was framed by a collar of Venetian point, and there was a queer old pin of pearls.

The Admiral, arriving early, demanded: "My dear, what is this? I was just sitting down to bread and milk and a handful of raisins, and now I must dine in six courses, and drink coffee, which will keep me awake."

She laid her cheek against his arm. "Mr. Hare's train couldn't get out of town on account of the snow."

"And he's coming?"

"Yes."

"But what of this afternoon, my dear?"

She slipped her hand into his, and they stood gazing into the fire. "It was dreadful, uncle. I had a feeling that I had compelled him to come—against his will."

"Yet you have asked him to come again to-night?"

She shivered a little, and her hand was cold. "Perhaps I shall regret it—but oh, uncle, can't I have for this one evening the joy of his presence? And if to-morrow my heart dies—"

"Nella, my dear child—"

The Admiral's own Petronella had never drawn in this way upon his emotions. She had been gentle, perhaps a little cold. But then he had always worshiped at her shrine. Perhaps a woman denied the lore she yearns for learns the value of it. At any rate, here in his arms was the dearest thing in his lonely life, sobbing as if her heart would break.

When Justin came, a half-hour later, he found them still in front of the fire in the great hall, and as she rose to welcome him he saw that Petronella had been sitting on a stool at her uncle's feet.

"When I was a little girl," she explained, when Hare had taken a chair on the hearth and she had chosen another with, a high, carved back, in which she sat with her silken ankles crossed and the tips of her slipper toes resting on a leopard-skin which the Admiral had brought back from India—"when I was a little girl we always spent Christmas Eve in this house by the sea instead of in town. We were all here then—mother and dad and dear Aunt Pet, and we hung our stockings at this very fireplace—and now there is no one but Miss Danvers and me, and uncle, who lives up aloft in his big house across the way, where he has a lookout tower. I always feel like calling up to him when I go there, 'Oh, Anne, Sister Anne, do you see anybody coming?'"

She was talking nervously, with her cheeks as white as a lily, but with her eyes shining. The Admiral glanced at Hare. The young man was drinking in her beauty. But suddenly he frowned and turned away his eyes.

"It was very good of you to ask me over," he said, formally.

That steadied Petronella. Her nervous self-consciousness fled, and she was at once the gracious, impersonal hostess.

The Admiral glowed with pride of her. "She'll carry it off," he said to himself; "it's in her blood."

"Dinner is served," announced Jenkins from the doorway, and then Miss Danvers came down and greeted Justin, and they all went out together.

There was holly for a centerpiece, and four red candles in silver holders. The table was of richly carved mahogany, and the Admiral, following an old custom, served the soup from a silver tureen, upheld by four fat cupids. From the wide arch which led into the great hall was hung a bunch of mistletoe; beyond the arch, the roaring fire made a background of gleaming, golden light.

To the young surgeon it seemed a fairy scene flaming with the color and glow of a life which he had never known. He had lived so long surrounded by the bare, blank walls of a hospital. Even Petronella's soft green gown seemed made of some mystical stuff which had nothing in common with the cool white or blue starchiness of the uniforms of nurses.

They talked of many things, covering with, their commonplaces the tenseness of the situation. Then suddenly the conversation took a significant turn.

"I love these stormy nights," Petronella had said, "with the snow blowing, and the wind, and the house all warm and bright."

"Think of the poor sailors at sea," Hare had reminded her.

"Please—I don't want to think of them. We have done our best for them, uncle and I. We have opened a reading-room down by the docks, so that all who are ashore can have soup and coffee and sandwiches, and there's a big stove, and newspapers and magazines."

"You dispense charity?"

"Why not?" she asked him, confidently. "We have plenty—why shouldn't we give?"

"Because it takes away from their manhood to receive."

The Admiral spoke bluntly. "The men don't feel it that way. This charity, as you call it, is a memorial to my wife. The grandfathers of these boys used to see her light in the window of the old house on stormy nights, and they knew that it was an invitation to good cheer. More than one crew coming in half frozen were glad of the soup and coffee which were sent down to them in cans with baskets of bread. And this little coffee-room has been the outgrowth of just such

hospitality. There are too many of the men to have in my house. I simply entertain them elsewhere, and I like to go and talk to them, and sometimes Petronella goes."

"There's a picture of dear Aunt Pet hanging there," said Petronella, "and you can't imagine how it softens the manners of the men. It is as if her spirit brooded over the place. They have made it into a sort of shrine, and they bring shells and queer carved things to put on the shelf below it."

"In the city we are beginning to think that such methods weaken self-respect."

"That's because," said the wise old Admiral, "in the city there isn't any real democracy. You give your friend a cup of coffee and think nothing of it, yet when I give a cup of coffee to a sailor whose grandfather and mine fished together on the banks, you warn me that my methods tend to pauperize. In the city the poor are never your friends—in this little town no man would admit that he is less than I. They like my coffee and they drink it."

Petronella, seeing her chance, took it. "I think people are horrid to let money make a difference."

"You say that," said Hare, "because you have never had to accept favors—you have, in other words, never been on the other side."

The Admiral, taking up cudgels for his niece, answered, "If she had been on the other side, she would have taken life as she takes it now—like a gentleman and a soldier," and he smiled at Petronella.

Hare had a baffled sense that the Admiral was right—that Petronella's fineness and delicacy would never go down in defeat or despair. She would hold her head high though the heavens fell. But could any man make such demands upon her? For himself, he would not.

So he answered, doggedly, "We shall hope she need never be tested." And Petronella's heart sank like lead.

But presently she began to talk about the little tree. "We have always had it in uncle's lookout tower. That was another of dear Aunt Pet's thoughts for the sailors. On clear nights they looked through their glasses for the little colored lights, and on stormy nights they knew that back of all the snow was the Christmas brightness."

"I never had a tree," said Justin. "When I was a kiddie we had pretty hard times, and the best Christmas I remember was one when mother made us boys put up a shelf for our books, and she started our collection with 'Treasure Island' and 'Huckleberry Finn.'"

In the adjoining room, volumes reached from floor to ceiling, from end to end. Petronella had a vision of this vivid young giant gloating over his two books on a rude shelf. And all her life she had had the things she wanted! Somehow the thought took the bitterness out of her attitude toward him. How strong he must be to deny himself now the one great thing that he craved when his life had held so little.

"How lovely to begin with just those two books," she said, softly, and the radiance of her smile was dazzling.

When she showed him her presents she was still radiant. There was a queer opera-bag of Chinese needlework, with handles of jade, a Damascus bowl of pierced brass, a tea-caddy in quaint Dutch *repoussé*; there was a silver-embroidered altar-cloth for a cushion, a bit of Copenhagen faience, all the sophisticated artistry which is sent to those who have no need for the commonplace. There were jewels, too: a bracelet of topazes surrounded by brilliants, a pair of slipper buckles of turquoises set in silver, a sapphire circlet for her little finger, a pendant of seed pearls.

As she opened the parcels and displayed her riches Justin felt bewildered. His gifts to his mother had included usually gloves and a generous check; if he had ventured to choose anything for Petronella he would not have dared go beyond a box of candy or a book; he had given his nurses pocketbooks and handkerchiefs. And the men of Petronella's world bestowed on her brass bowls and tea-caddies!

Miss Danvers vanished up-stairs. The Admiral, having admired, slipped away to the library, encouraged by Petronella's whispered: "Oh, uncle dear, leave us alone for just a little minute. I've found a way!"

Then Petronella, with that radiance still upon her, sat down on her little stool in front of the fire, and looked at Justin on the other side of the hearth.

"You haven't given me anything," she began, reproachfully.

"What could I give that would compare with these?" His hand swept toward the exquisite display. "What could I give—"

"There's one thing," softly.

"What?"

"That copy of 'Treasure Island' that your mother gave you long ago."

Dead silence. Then, unsteadily: "Why should you want that?"

"Because your mother—loved you."

Again dead silence. Hare did not look at her. His hand clenched the arm of his chair. His face was white. Then, very low, "Why do you—make it hard for me?"

"Because I want—the book"; she was smiling at him with her eyes like stars. "I want to read it with the eyes of the little boy—with the eyes of the little boy who looked into the future and saw life as a great adventure; who looked into the future—and dreamed."

He had a vision, too, of that little boy, reading, in the old house in the Maine woods, by the light of an oil-lamp, on Christmas Eve, with the snow blowing outside as it blew to-night.

"And your mother loved you because she loved your father," the girl's voice went on, "and you were all very happy up there in the forest. Do you remember that you told me about it on the ship?—you were happy, although you were poor, and hadn't any books but 'Treasure Island' and 'Huckleberry Finn.' But your mother was happy—because she—loved your father."

As she repeated it, she leaned forward. "Could you think of your mother as having been happy with any one else but your father?" she asked. "Could you think of her as having never married him, of having gone through the rest of her days a half-woman, because he would not—take her—into his life? Can you think that all the money in the world—all the money in the whole world—would—would have made up—"

The room seemed to darken. Hare was conscious that her face was hidden in her hands, that he stumbled toward her, that he knelt beside her—that she was in his arms.

"Hush," he was saying in that beating darkness of emotion. "Hush, don't cry—I—I will never let you go—"

When the storm had spent itself and when at last she met his long gaze, he whispered, "I'm not sure now that it is right—"

"You will be sure as the years go on," she whispered back; then, tremulously: "but I—I could never have—talked that way if I had thought of you as the man. I had to think of you as the little boy—who dreamed."

THE CANOPY BED

"My great-grandfather slept in it," Van Alen told the caretaker, as she ushered him into the big stuffy bedroom.

The old woman set her candlestick down on the quaint dresser. "He must have been a little man," she said; "none of my sons could sleep in it. Their feet would hang over."

Van Alen eyed the big bed curiously. All his life he had heard of it, and now he had traveled far to see it. It was a lumbering structure of great width and of strangely disproportionate length. And the coverlet and the canopy were of rose-colored chintz.

"I think I shall fit it," he said slowly.

Mrs. Brand's critical glance weighed his smallness, his immaculateness, his difference from her own great sons.

"Yes," she said, with the open rudeness of the country-bred; "yes, you ain't very big."

Van Alen winced. Even from the lips of this uncouth woman the truth struck hard. But he carried the topic forward with the light ease of a man of the world.

"My grandfather had the bed sawed to his own length," he explained; "did you ever hear the story?"

"No," she said; "I ain't been here long. They kept the house shut up till this year."

"Well, I'll tell you when I come down," and Van Alen opened his bag with a finality that sent the old woman to the door.

"Supper's ready," she told him, "whenever you are."

At the supper table the four big sons towered above Van Alen. They ate with appetites like giants, and they had big ways and hearty laughs that seemed to dwarf their guest into insignificance.

But the insignificance was that of body only, for Van Alen, fresh from the outside world and a good talker at all times, dominated the table conversationally.

To what he had to say the men listened eagerly, and the girl who waited on the table listened.

She was a vivid personality, with burnished hair, flaming cheeks, eyes like the sea. Her hands, as she passed the biscuits, were white, and the fingers went down delicately to little points. Van Alen, noting these things keenly, knew that she was out of her place, and wondered how she came there.

At the end of the meal he told the story of the Canopy Bed.

"My great-grandfather was a little man, and very sensitive about his height. In the days of his early manhood he spent much time in devising ways to deceive people into thinking him taller. He surrounded himself with big things, had a big bed made, wore high-heeled boots, and the crown of his hat was so tall that he was almost overbalanced.

"But for all that, he was a little man among the sturdy men of his generation, and if it had not been for the Revolution I think he would have died railing at fate. But the war brought him opportunity. My little great-grandfather fought in it, and won great honors, and straight back home he came and had the bed sawed off! He wanted future generations to see what a little man could do, and his will provided that this house should not be sold, and that, when his sons and grandsons had proved themselves worthy of it by some achievement, they should come here and sleep. I think he swaggered a little when he wrote that will, and he has put his descendants in an embarrassing position. We can never sleep in the canopy bed without taking more upon ourselves than modesty permits!"

He laughed, and instinctively his eyes sought those of the girl who waited on the table. Somehow he felt that she was the only one who could understand.

She came back at him with a question: "What have you done?"

"I have written a book," he told her.

She shook her head, and there were little sparks of light in her eyes. "I don't believe that was what your grandfather meant," she said, slowly.

They stared at her—three of the brothers with their knives and forks uplifted, the fourth, a blond Titanic youngster, with his elbows on the table, his face turned up to her, as to the sun.

"I don't believe he meant something done with your brains, but something fine, heroic—" There was a hint of scorn in her voice.

Van Alen flushed. He was fresh from the adulation of his bookish world.

"I should not have come," he explained, uncomfortably, "if my mother had not desired that I preserve the tradition of the family."

"It is a great thing to write a book"—she was leaning forward, aflame with interest—"but I don't believe he meant just that—"

He laughed. "Then I am not to sleep in the canopy bed?"

The girl laughed too. "Not unless you want to be haunted by his ghost."

With a backward flashing glance, she went into the kitchen, and Van Alen, lighting a cigarette, started to explore the old house.

Except for the wing, occupied by the caretaker, nothing had been disturbed since the family, seeking new fortunes in the city, had left the old homestead to decay among the desolate fields that yielded now a meagre living for Mrs. Brand and her four strapping sons.

In the old parlor, where the ancient furniture showed ghostlike shapes in the dimness, and the dead air was like a tomb, Van Alen found a picture of his great-grandfather.

The little man had been painted without flattery. There he sat—Lilliputian on the great charger! At that moment Van Alen hated him—that Hop-o'-my-Thumb of another age, founder of a pigmy race, who, by his braggart will, had that night brought upon this one of his descendants the scorn of a woman.

And even as he thought of her, she came in, with the yellow flare of a candle lighting her vivid face.

"I thought you might need a light," she said; "it grows dark so soon."

As he took the candle from her, he said abruptly: "I shall not sleep in the canopy bed; there is a couch in the room."

"Oh," her tone was startled, "you shouldn't have taken all that I said in earnest."

"But you meant it?"

"In a way, yes. I have been in here so often and have looked at your grandfather's picture. He was a great little man—you can tell from his eyes—they seem to speak at times."

"To you?"

"Yes. Of how he hated to be little, and how he triumphed when fame came at last."

"I hate to be little—"

It was the first time that he had ever owned it. Even as a tiny boy he had brazened it out, boasting of his mental achievements and slurring the weakness of his stunted body.

"I know," she had shut the kitchen door behind her, and they were standing in the hallway alone, "I know. Every man must want to be big."

She was only the girl who had waited on the table, but as she stood there, looking at him with luminous eyes, he burned with dull resentment, envying the blond boy who had sprawled at the head of the supper table. After all, it was to such a man as Otto Brand that this woman would some day turn.

He spoke almost roughly: "Size isn't everything." She flushed. "How rude you must think me," she said; "but I have been so interested in dissecting your grandfather that I forgot—you—"

Van Alen was moved by an impulse that he could not control, a primitive impulse that was not in line with his usual repression.

"I am tempted to make you remember me," he said slowly, and after that there was a startled silence. And then she went away.

As he passed the sitting-room on his way up-stairs, he looked in, and spoke to Otto Brand.

More than any of the other brothers, Otto typified strength and beauty, but in his eyes was never a dream, his brain had mastered nothing. He was playing idly with the yellow cat, but he stopped at Van Alen's question.

"Her great-grandfather and yours were neighbors," the boy said, with his cheeks flushing; "they own the next farm."

"The Wetherells?" Van Alen inquired.

The boy nodded. "They ain't got a cent. They're land poor. That's why she's here. But she don't need to work."

"Why not?"

"There's plenty that wants to marry her round about," was the boy's self-conscious summing up.

With a sense of revolt, Van Alen left him, and, undressing in the room with the canopy bed, he called up vaguely the vision of a little girl who had visited them in the city. She had had green eyes and freckles and red hair. Beyond that she had made no impression on his callowness. And her name was Mazie Wetherell.

He threw himself on the couch, and the night winds, coming in through the open window, stirred the curtains of the canopy bed with the light touch of a ghostly hand.

Then dreams came, and through them ran the thread of his hope of seeing Mazie Wetherell in the morning.

But even with such preparation, her beauty seemed to come upon him unawares when he saw her at breakfast. And again at noon, and again at night. But it was the third day before he saw her alone.

All that day he had explored the length and breadth of the family estate, finding it barren, finding that the population of the little village at its edge had decreased to a mere handful of laggards, finding that there was no lawyer within miles and but one doctor; gaining a final impression that back here in the hills men would come no more where once men had thronged.

It was almost evening when he followed a furrowed brown road that led westward. Above the bleak line of the horizon the sun hung, a red gold disk. There were other reds, too, along the way—the sumac flaming scarlet against the gray fence-rails; the sweetbrier, crimson-spotted with berries; the creeper, clinging with ruddy fingers to dead tree-trunks; the maple leaves rosy with first frosts.

And into this vividness came the girl who had waited on the table, and her flaming cheeks and copper hair seemed to challenge the glow of the autumn landscape.

She would have passed him with a nod, but he stopped her.

"You must not run away, Mazie Wetherell," he said; "you used to treat me better than that when you were a little girl."

She laughed. "Do you remember my freckles and red hair?"

"I remember your lovely manners."

"I had to have nice manners. It is only pretty children who can afford to be bad."

"And pretty women?" he asked, with his eyes on the color that came and went.

She flung out her hands in a gesture of protest "I have seen so few."

His lips were opened to tell her of her own beauty, but something restrained him, some perception of maidenly dignity that enfolded her and made her more than the girl who had waited on the table.

"You were a polite little boy," she recalled, filling the breach made by his silence. "I remember that you carried me across the street, to save my slippers from the wet. I thought you were wonderful. I have never forgotten."

Neither had Van Alen forgotten. It had been a great feat for his little strength. There had been other boys there, bigger boys, but he had offered, and had been saved humiliation by her girlish slimness and feather weight.

"I was a strong little fellow then," was his comment: "I am a strong little fellow now."

She turned on him reproachful eyes. "Why do you always harp on it?" she demanded.

"On what?"

"Your size. You twist everything, turn everything, so that we come back to it."

He tried to answer lightly, but his voice shook. "Perhaps it is because in your presence I desire more than ever the full stature of a man."

He was in deadly earnest. Hitherto he had been willing to match his brain, his worldly knowledge, his ancestry, against the charms of the women he had met; but here with this girl, standing like a young goddess under the wide, sunset sky, he felt that only for strength and beauty should she choose her mate.

He wondered what he must seem in her eyes; with his shoulder on a level with hers, with his stocky build that saved him from effeminacy, his carefulness of attire—which is at once the burden and the salvation of the small man.

As for his face, he knew that its homeliness was redeemed by a certain strength of chin, by keen gray eyes, and by a shock of dark hair that showed a little white at the temples. There were worse-looking men, he knew, but that, at the present moment, gave little comfort.

She chose to receive his remark in silence, and, as they came to a path that branched from the road, she said:

"I am going to help take care of a child who is sick. You see I am mistress of all trades—nurse, waitress, charwoman, when there is nothing else."

He glanced at her hands. "I cannot believe that you scrub," he said.

"I sit up at night to care for my hands"—there was a note of bitterness in her tone—"and I wear gloves when I work. There are some things that one desires to hold on to, and my mother and my grandmother were ladies of leisure."

"Would you like that—to be a lady of leisure?"

She turned and smiled at him. "How can I tell?" she asked; "I have never tried it."

She started to leave him as she said it, but he held her with a question: "Shall you sit up all night?"

She nodded. "His mother has had no sleep for two nights."

"Is he very ill?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders. "Who knows? There is no doctor near, and his mother is poor. We are fighting it out together."

There was something heroic in her cool acceptance of her hard life. He was silent for a moment, and then he said: "Would you have time to read my book to-night?"

"Oh, if I might," she said eagerly, "but you haven't it with you."

"I will bring it," he told her, "after supper."

"But," she protested.

"There are no 'buts,'" he said, smiling; "if you will read it, I will get it to you."

The sky had darkened, and, as he went toward home, he faced clouds in the southeast.

"It is going to rain," Otto Brand prophesied as they sat down to supper.

The other three men hoped that it would not. Already the ground was soaked, making the cutting of corn impossible, and another rain with a frost on top of it would spoil all chance of filling the silo.

Van Alen could not enter into their technical objections. He hoped it would not rain, because he wanted to take a book to Mazie Wetherell, and he had not brought a rain-coat.

But it did rain, and he went without a rain-coat!

The house, as he neared it, showed no light, and under the thick canopy of the trees there was no sound but the drip, drip of the rain. By feeling and instinct he found the front door, and knocked.

There was a movement inside, and then Mazie Wetherell asked softly: "Who's there?"

"I have brought the book."

The bolt was withdrawn, and in the hall, scarcely lighted by the shaded lamp in the room beyond, stood the girl, in a loose gray gown, with braided shining hair—a shadowy being, half-merged into the shadows.

"I thought you would not come," in a hushed tone, "in such a storm."

"I said I should come. The book may help you through the long night."

She caught her breath quickly. "The child is awfully ill."

"Are you afraid? Let me stay."

"Oh, no, no. His mother is sleeping, and I shall have your book."

She did not ask him in, and so he went away at once, beating his way back in the wind and rain, fording a little stream where the low foot-bridge was covered, reaching home soaking wet, but afire with dreams.

Otto Brand was waiting for him, a little curious as to what had taken him out so late, but, getting no satisfaction, he followed Van Alen up-stairs, and built a fire for him in the big bedroom. And presently, in the light of the leaping flames, the roses on the canopy of the bed glowed pink.

"Ain't you goin' to sleep in the bed?" Otto asked, as he watched Van Alen arrange the covers on the couch.

"No," said Van Alen shortly, "the honor is too great. It might keep me awake."

"My feet would hang over," Otto said. "Funny thing, wasn't it, for a man to make a will like that?"

"I suppose every man has a right to do as he pleases," Van Alen responded coldly. He was not inclined to discuss the eccentricities of his little old ancestor with this young giant.

"Of course," Otto agreed, and his next remark was called forth by Van Alen's pale blue pajamas.

"Well, those are new on me."

Van Alen explained that in the city they were worn, and that silk was cool, but while he talked he was possessed by a kind of fury. For the first time the delicate garments, the luxurious toilet articles packed in his bag, seemed foppish, unnecessary, things for a woman. With all of them, he could not compete with this fair young god, who used a rough towel and a tin basin on the kitchen bench.

"Maybe I'd better go," the boy offered. "You'll want to go to bed."

But Van Alen held him. "I always smoke first," he said, and, wrapped in his dressing-gown, he flung himself into a chair on the opposite side of the fireplace.

And after a time he brought the conversation around to Mazie Wetherell.

He found the boy rather sure of his success with her.

"All women are alike," he said; "you've just got to keep after them long enough."

To Van Alen the idea of this hulking youngster as a suitor for such a woman seemed preposterous. He was not fit to touch the hem of her garment. He was unmannerly, uneducated; he was not of her class—and even as he analyzed, the boy stood up, perfect in his strong young manhood.

"I've never had much trouble making women like me," he said; "and I ain't goin' to give up, just because she thinks she's better than the rest round about here."

He went away, and Van Alen stared long into the fire, until the flames left a heart of opal among the ashes.

He had not been unsuccessful with women himself. Many of them had liked him, and might have loved him if he had cared to make them. But until he met Mazie Wetherell he had not cared.

Desperately he wished for some trial of courage where he might be matched against Otto Brand. He grew melodramatic in his

imaginings, and saw himself at a fire, fighting the flames to reach Mazie, while Otto Brand shrank back. He stood in the path of runaway horses, and Otto showed the white feather. He nursed her through the plague, and Otto fled fearfully from the disease.

And then having reached the end of impossibilities, he stood up and shook himself.

"I'm a fool," he said to the flames, shortly, and went to bed, to lie awake, wondering whether Mazie Wetherell had reached that chapter of his book where he had written of love, deeply, reverently, with a foreknowledge of what it might mean to him some day. It was that chapter which had assured the success of his novel. Would it move her, as it had moved him when he reread it? That was what love ought to be—a thing fine, tender, touching the stars! That was what love might be to him, to Mazie Wetherell, what it could never be to Otto Brand.

At breakfast the next morning he found Mrs. Brand worrying about her waitress.

"I guess she couldn't get back, and I've got a big day's work."

"I'll go and look her up," Van Alen offered; but he found that he was not to go alone, for Otto was waiting for him at the gate.

"I ain't got nothin' else to do," the boy said; "everything is held up by the rain."

It was when they came to the little stream that Van Alen had forded the night before that they saw Mazie Wetherell.

"I can't get across," she called from the other side.

The bridge, which had been covered when Van Alen passed, was now washed away, and the foaming brown waters overflowed the banks.

"I'll carry you over," Otto called, and straightway he waded through the stream, and the water came above his high boots to his hips.

He lifted her in his strong arms and brought her back, with her bright hair fluttering against his lips, and Van Alen, raging impotently, stood and watched him.

It seemed to him that Otto's air was almost insultingly triumphant as he set the girl on her feet and smiled down at her. And as she smiled back, Van Alen turned on his heel and left them.

Presently he heard her running after him lightly over the sodden ground.

And when she reached his side she said: "Your book was wonderful."

"But he carried you over the stream."

Her eyes flashed a question, then blazed. "There, you've come back to it," she said. "What makes you?"

"Because I wanted to carry you myself."

"Silly," she said; "any man could carry me across the stream—but only you could write that chapter in the middle of the book."

"You liked it?" he cried, radiantly.

"Like it?" she asked. "I read it once, and then I read it again—on my knees."

Her voice seemed to drop away breathless. Behind them Otto Brand tramped, whistling; but he might have been a tree, or the sky, or the distant hills, for all the thought they took of him.

"I wanted to beg your pardon," the girl went on, "for what I said the other day—it is a great thing to write a book like that—greater than fighting a battle or saving a life, for it saves people's ideals; perhaps in that way it saves their souls."

"Then I may sleep in the canopy bed?" His voice was calm, but inwardly he was much shaken by her emotion.

Her eyes, as she turned to him, had in them the dawn of that for which he had hoped.

"Why not?" she said, quickly. "You are greater than your grandfather—you are—" She stopped and laughed a little, and, in this moment of her surrender, her beauty shone like a star.

"Oh, little great man," she said, tremulously, "your head touches the skies!"

SANDWICH JANE

I

"No man," said O-liver Lee, "should earn more than fifteen dollars a week. After that he gets—soft."

"Soft nothing!"

O-liver sat on a box in front of the post-office. He was lean and young and without a hat. His bare head was one of the things that made him unique. The other men within doors and without wore hats—broad hats that shielded them from the California sun; or, as in the case of Atwood Jones, who came from the city, a Panama of an up-to-the-minute model.

But O-liver's blond mane waved in every passing breeze. It was only when he rode forth on his mysterious journeys that he crowned himself with a Chinese straw helmet.

Because he wore no hat his skin was tanned. He had blue eyes that twinkled and, as I have said, a blond mane.

"Fifteen dollars a week," he reaffirmed, "is enough."

Fifteen dollars was all that O-liver earned. He was secretary to an incipient oil king. As the oil king's monarchy was largely on paper he found it hard at times to compass even the fifteen dollars that went to his secretary.

The other men scorned O-liver's point of view and told him so. They were a rather prosperous bunch, all except Tommy Drew, who dealt in a dilettante fashion in insurance, and who sat at O-liver's feet and worshiped him.

It was Saturday and some of the men had drifted in from the surrounding ranches; others from the cities, from the mountains, from the valleys, from the desert, from the sea. Tinkersfield had assumed a sudden importance as an oil town. All of the men had business connected in some way with Tinkersfield. And all of them earned more than fifteen dollars a week.

Therefore they disputed O-liver's statement. "If you had a wife—" said one.

"Ah," said O-liver, "if I had—"

"Ain't you got any ambition?" Henry Bittinger demanded. Henry was pumping out oil in prodigious quantities. He had bought a motor car and a fur coat. It was too hot most of the time for the coat, but the car stood now at rest across the road—long and lovely—much more of an aristocrat than the man who owned it.

"Ambition for what?" O-liver demanded.

Henry's eyes went to the pride of his heart.

"Well, I should think you'd want a car."

"I'd give," said O-liver, "my kingdom for a horse, but not for a car."

O-liver's little mare stood quite happily in the shade; she was slim as to leg, shining as to coat, and with the eyes of a loving woman.

"I should think you'd want to get ahead," said Atwood Jones, who sold shoes up and down the coast. He was a junior member of the firm, but still liked to go on the road. He liked to lounge like this in front of the post-office and smoke in the golden air with a lot of men sitting round. Atwood had been raised on a ranch. He had listened to the call of the city, but he was still a small-town man.

"Ahead of what?" asked O-liver.

Atwood was vague. He felt himself a rising citizen. Some day he expected to marry and set his wife up in a mansion in San Francisco, with seasons of rest and recreation at Del Monte and Coronado and the East. If the shoe business kept to the present rate of prosperity he would probably have millions to squander in his old age.

He tried to say something of this to O-liver.

"Well, will you be any happier?" asked the young man with the bare head. "I'll wager my horse against your car that when you're drunk with dollars you'll look back to a day like this and envy yourself. It's happiness I'm talking about."

"Well, are you happy?" Atwood challenged.

"Why not?" asked the young man lightly. "I have enough to eat, money for tobacco, a book or two—an audience." He waved his hand to include the listening group and smiled.

It was O-liver's lightness which gave him the whip hand in an argument. They were most of them serious men; not serious in a Puritan sense of taking thought of their souls' salvation and the world's redemption, but serious in their pursuit of wealth. They had

to be rich. If they weren't they couldn't marry, or if they were married they had to be rich so that their wives could keep up with the wives of the other fellows who were getting rich. They had to have cars and money to spend at big hotels and for travel, money for diamonds and furs, money for everything.

But here was O-liver Lee, who said lightly that money weighed upon him. He didn't want it. He'd be darned if he wanted it. Money brought burdens. As for himself, he'd read and ride Mary Pick.

"Anyhow," said Henry, with his hands folded across his stomach—Henry had grown fat riding in his car—"anyhow, when you get old you'll be sorry."

"I shall never grow old," said O-liver, and stood up. "I shall be young—till I—die."

They laughed at him outwardly, but in their hearts they did not laugh. They could not think of him as old. They felt that in a hundred years he would still be strong and sure, his blond mane untouched by gray, his clear blue eyes unblurred.

Atwood rounding them all up for a drink found that O-liver wouldn't drink.

"Drank too much, once upon a time," he confessed frankly. "But I'll give you a toast."

He gave it, poised on his box like a young god on the edge of the world.

"Here's to poverty! May we learn to love her for the favors she denies!"

"Queer chap," said Atwood to Henry later.

Henry nodded. "He's queer, but he's great company. Always has a crowd round him. But no ambition."

"Pity," said Atwood. "How'd he get that name—O-liver?"

"One of the fellows got gay and called him 'Ollie.' Lee stopped him. 'My name is Oliver Lee. If you want a nickname you can say "O-liver." But I'm not "Ollie" from this time on, understand?' And I'm darned if the fellow didn't back down. There was something about O-liver that would have made anybody back down. He didn't have a gun; it was just something in his voice."

"Say, he's wasted," said Atwood. "A man with his line of talk might be President of the United States."

"Sure he might," Henry agreed. "I've told him a lot of times he's throwing away his chance."

II

The office of the incipient oil king was on the main street of the straggling town. At the back there was a window which gave a view of a hill or two and a mountain beyond. The mountain stuck its nose into the clouds and was whitecapped.

It was this view at the back which O-liver faced when he sat at his machine. When he rested he liked to fix his eyes on that white mountain. O-liver had acquired of late a fashion of looking up. There had been a time when he had kept his eyes on the ground. He did not care to remember that time. The work that he did was intermittent, and between his industrious spasms he read a book. He had a shelf at hand where he kept certain volumes—Walt Whitman, Vanity Fair, Austin Dobson, Landor's Imaginary Conversations, and a rather choice collection of Old Mission literature. He had had it in mind that he might some day write a play with Santa Barbara as a background, but he had stopped after the first act. He had ridden down one night and had reached the mission at dawn. The gold cross had flamed as the sun rose over the mountain. After that it had seemed somehow a desecration to put it in a painted scene. O-liver had rather queer ideas as to the sacredness of certain things.

Tommy Drew, who had a desk in the same office, read Vanity Fair and wanted to talk about it. "Say, I don't like that girl, O-liver."

"What girl?"

"Becky."

"Why not?"

"Well, she's a grafter. And her husband was a poor nut."

"I'm afraid he was," said O-liver.

"He oughta of dragged her round by the hair of her head."

"They don't do it, Tommy," O-liver was thoughtful. "After all a woman's a woman. It's easier to let her go."

An astute observer might have found O-liver cynical about women. If he said nothing against them he certainly never said anything for them. And he kept strictly away from everything feminine in Tinkersfield, in spite of the fact that his good looks won him more than one glance from sparkling eyes.

"He acts afraid of skirts," Henry had said to Tommy on one occasion.

"He?" Tommy was scornful. "He ain't afraid of anything!"

Henry knew it. "Maybe it's because you can't do much with women on fifteen a week."

"Well, I guess that's so," said Tommy, who made twenty and who had a hopeless passion.

His hopeless passion was Jane. Jane lived with her mother in a small rose-bowered bungalow at the edge of the town. She and her mother owned the bungalow, which was fortunate; they hadn't a penny for rent. Jane's father had died of a weak lung and the failure of his oil well. He had left the two women without an income. Jane's mother was delicate and Jane couldn't leave her to go out to work. So Jane dug in the little garden, and they lived largely on vegetables. She sewed for the neighbors, and bought medicine and now and then a bit of meat. She was young and strong and she had wonderful red hair. Tommy thought it was the most beautiful hair in the world. Jane was for him a sort of goddess woman. She was, he felt, infinitely above him. She knew a great deal that he didn't, about books and things—like O-liver. She sewed for his mother, and that was the way he had met her. He would go over and sit on her front steps and talk. He felt that she treated him like a little dog that she wouldn't harm, but wouldn't miss if it went away. He told her of Vanity Fair and of how he felt about Becky.

"If she had been content to earn an honest living," Jane stated severely, "the story would have had a different ending."

"Well, she wanted things," Tommy said.

"Most women do." Jane jabbed her needle into a length of pink gingham which, when finished, would be rompers for a youngster across the street. "I do; and I intend to have them."

"How?" asked the interested Tommy.

"Work for them."

"O-liver says that fifteen dollars a week is enough for anybody to earn."

Jane had heard of O-liver. Tommy sang his constant praises.

"Why fifteen?"

"After that you get soft."

Jane laid down the length of pink gingham and looked at him. She hated to sew on pink; it clashed dreadfully with her hair.

"I should say," she stated with scorn, "that your O-liver's lazy."

"No, he isn't. He only wants enough to eat and enough to smoke and enough to read."

"That sounds all right, but it isn't. What's he going to do when he's old?"

"He ain't ever going to grow old. He said so, and if you'd see him you'd know."

Jane felt within her the stirring of curiosity. But she put it down sternly. She had no time for it.

"Tommy," she said, "I've been thinking. I've got to earn more money, and I want your help."

Tommy's faithful eyes held a look of doglike affection.

"Oh, if I can—" he quavered.

"I've got to get ahead." Jane was breathless. Her eyes shone.

"I've got to get ahead, Tommy. I can't live all my life like this." She held up the pink strip. "Even if I am a woman, there ought to be something more than making rompers for the rest of my days."

"You might," said the infatuated Tommy, "marry."

"Marry? Marry whom?"

Tommy wished that he might shout "Me!" from the housetops. But he knew the futility of it.

"I shall never marry," she said, "until I find somebody different from anything I've ever seen."

Jane's ideas of men were bounded largely by the weakness of her father and the crudeness of men like Henry Bittinger, Atwood Jones and others of their kind. She didn't consider Tommy at all. He was a nice boy and a faithful friend. His mother, too, was a faithful friend. She classed them together.

Her plan, told with much coming and going of lovely color, was this: She had read that the way to make money was to find the thing that a community lacked and supply it. Considering it seriously she had decided that in Tinkersfield there was need of good food.

"There's just one horrid little eating house," she told Tommy, "when the men come in from out of town."

"Nothing fit to eat either," Tommy agreed; "and they make up on booze."

She nodded. "Tommy," she said, and leaned toward him, "I had thought of sandwiches—home-made bread and slices of ham—wrapped in waxed paper; and of taking them down and selling them in front of the post-office on Saturday nights."

Tommy's eyes bulged. "You take them down?"

"Why not? Any work is honorable, Tommy."

Tommy felt that it wouldn't be a goddess role.

"I can't see it." The red crept up into his honest freckled face. "You know the kind of women that's round on Saturday nights."

"I am not that kind of woman." She was suddenly austere.

He found himself stammering. "I didn't mean—"

"Of course you didn't. But it's a good plan, Tommy. Say you think it's a good plan."

He would have said anything to please her. "Well, you might try."

The next day he found himself talking it over with O-liver. "She wants to sell them on Saturday nights."

"Tell her," said O-liver, "to stay at home."

"But she's got to have some money."

"Money," said O-liver, "is the root of evil. You say she has a garden. Let her live on leeks and lettuce."

"Leeks and lettuce?" said poor Tommy, who had never heard of leeks.

"Her complexion will be better," said O-liver, "and her peace of mind great."

"Her complexion is perfect," Tommy told him, "and she isn't the peaceful kind. Her hair is red."

"Red-haired women"—O-liver had his eye on Vanity Fair—"red-haired women always flaunt themselves."

Tommy, softening O-liver's words a bit, gave them in the form of advice to Jane: "He thinks you'd better live on leeks and lettuce than go down-town like that."

Jane gasped. "Leeks and lettuce? Me? He doesn't know what he's talking about! And anyhow, what can you expect of a man like that?"

III

A week later Jane in a white shirt-waist and white apron came down with her white-covered basket into the glare of the town's white lights. The night was warm and she wore no hat. Her red hair was swept back from her forehead with a droop over the ears. She had white skin and strong white teeth. Her eyes were as gray as the sea on stormy days. Tommy came after her with a wooden box, which he set on end, and she placed her basket on it. The principal stores of the small town, the one hotel and the post-office were connected by a covered walk which formed a sort of arcade, so that the men lounging against doorways or tip-tilted in chairs seemed in a sort of gallery from which they surveyed the Saturday-night crowd which paraded the street.

Jane folded up the cloth which covered her basket and displayed her wares. "Don't stick round, Tommy," she said. "I shall do better alone."

But as she raised her head and saw the eyes of the men upon her a rich color surged into her cheeks.

She put out her little sign bravely:

HOME-MADE SANDWICHES—TWENTY CENTS

With a sense of adventure upon them the men flocked down at once. They bought at first because the wares were offered by a pretty girl. They came back to buy because never had there been such sandwiches.

Jane had improved upon her first idea. There were not only ham sandwiches; there were baked beans between brown bread, thin slices of broiled bacon in hot baking-powder biscuit. Henry Bittinger said to Atwood Jones afterward: "The food was so good that if she had been as ugly as sin she'd have got away with it."

"She isn't ugly," said Atwood, and had a fleeting moment of speculation as to whether Jane with her red hair would fit into his plutocratic future.

Jane had made fifty sandwiches. She sold them all, and took ten dollars home with her.

"I shall make a hundred next time," she said to Tommy, whom she picked up on the way back. "And—it wasn't so dreadful, Tommy."

But that night as she lay in bed looking out toward the mountain, silver-tipped in the moonlight, she had a shivering sense of the eyes of some of the men—of Tillotson, who kept the hotel, and of others of his kind.

O-liver had stayed at home that Saturday night to write a certain weekly letter. He had stayed at home also because he didn't approve of Jane.

"But you haven't seen her," Tommy protested.

"I know the type."

On Sunday morning Tommy brought him a baked-bean sandwich. "It isn't as fresh as it might be. But you can see what she's giving us."

There were months of O-liver's life which had been spent with a grandmother in Boston. His grandmother had made brown bread and she had baked beans. And now as he ate his sandwich there was the savor of all the gastronomic memories of a healthy and happy childhood.

"It's delicious," he said, "but she'd better not mix with that crowd."

"She doesn't mix," said Tommy.

"She'll have to." O-liver had in mind a red-haired woman, raw-boned, with come-hither eyes. Her kind was not uncommon. Tommy's infatuation would of course elevate her to a pedestal.

"She's going to make a hundred sandwiches next week," Tommy vouchsafed.

O-liver's mind could scarcely compass one hundred sandwiches. "She'd better stick to her leeks and lettuce."

He rode away the next Saturday night. It was his protest against the interest roused in the community by this Jane who sold sandwiches. He heard of her everywhere. Some of the men were

respectful and some were not. It depended largely on the nature of the particular male.

O-liver rode Mary Pick and wore his straw helmet. His way led down into the valley and up again and down, until at last he came to the sea. Then he followed the water's edge, letting Mary Pick dance now and then on the hard beach, with the waves curling up like cream, and beyond the waves a stretch of pale azure to the horizon.

He reached finally a fantastic settlement. Against the sky towered walls which might have inclosed an ancient city—walls built of cloth and wood instead of stone. Beyond these walls were thatched cottages which had no occupants; a quaint church which had no congregation; a Greek temple which had no vestals, no sacred fire, no altar; hedges which had no roots. O-liver weighing the hollowness of it all had thought whimsically of an old nursery rime:

The first sent a goose without a bone;
The second sent a cherry without a stone;
The third sent a blanket without a thread;
The fourth sent a book that no man could read.

At the end of the settlement was a vast studio lighted by a glass roof. Entering, O-liver was transported at once to the dance hall on the Barbary Coast—a great room with a bar at one end, the musicians on a platform at the other, a stairway leading upward. Groups of people waited for a signal to dance, to drink, to act whatever part had been assigned them—people with unearthly pink complexions. The heat was intense.

With her face upturned to the director, who was mounted on a chair, stood a childish creature who was pinker, if possible, than the rest. She had fluffy hair of pale gold. She ran up the stairway presently, and the light was turned on her. It made of her fluffy hair a halo. In the strong glare everything about her was overemphasized, but O-liver knew that when she showed up on the screen she would be entrancing.

He had first seen her on the screen. He had met her afterward at her hotel. She had seemed as ingenuous as the parts she played. Perhaps she was. He could never be quite sure. Perhaps the money she had made afterward had spoiled her. She had jumped from fifty dollars a week to a thousand.

After that O-liver could give her nothing. He had an allowance from his mother of three thousand a year. Fluffy Hair made as much as that in three weeks. Where he had been king of his own domain he became a sort of gentleman footman, carrying her sables and her satchels. But that was not the worst of it. He found that they had not a taste in common. She laughed at his books, at his love of sea and sky. She even laughed at his Mary Pick, whose name suggested a hated rival.

And so he left her—laughing.

A certain sense of responsibility, however, took him to her once a month, and a letter went to her every week. She was his wife. He continued in a sense to watch over her. Yet she resented his watching.

From her stairway she had seen him, and when a rest was granted she came down to him.

"I'll be through presently," she said. "We can go to my hotel."

Her rooms in the hotel overlooked the sea. There was a balcony, and they sat on it in long lazy chairs and had iced things to drink.

O-liver drank lemonade. His wife had something stronger.

"I have not been well," she said; "it's a part of the doctor's prescription."

She had removed the pink from her face, and he saw that she was pale.

"You are working too hard," he told her. "You'd better take a month in the desert, out of doors."

She shivered. She hated the out-of-doors that he raved about. They had spent their honeymoon in a tent. She had been wild to get back to civilization. It had been their first moment of disillusion.

She showed him before he went some of the things she had acquired since his last visit—an ermine coat, a string of pearls.

"I saw them in your last picture," he told her. "You really visit me by proxy. I find your name on the boards, and walk in with a lot of other men and look at you. And not one of them dreams that I've ever seen the woman on the screen."

"Well, they wouldn't of course." She had never taken his name. Her own was too valuable.

When he told her good-bye he asked a question: "Are you happy?"

For a moment her face clouded. "I'm not quite sure. Is anybody? But I like the way I am living, Ollie."

He had a sense of relief. "So do I," he said. "I earn fifteen dollars a week. The papers say that you earn fifteen hundred—and you're not quite twenty."

"There isn't a man in this hotel that makes so much," she told him complacently. "The women try to snub me, but they can't. Money talks."

It seemed to him that in her case it shouted. As he rode back on Mary Pick he thought seriously of his fifteen dollars a week and her fifteen hundred; and of how little either weighed in the balance of happiness.

IV

It was not until the following Saturday that he saw Jane. She had made two hundred sandwiches. She had got Tommy's mother to help her. She had invented new combinations, always holding to the idea of satisfying the substantial appetites of men.

There would be no use, she argued, in offering five-o'clock-tea combinations.

She was very busy and very happy and very hopeful.

"If this keeps up," she told her mother, "I shall rent a little shop and sell them over the counter."

Her mother had an invalid's pessimism. "They may tire of them."

They were not yet tired. They gave Jane and her basket vociferous greeting, crowding round her and buying eagerly. Atwood and Henry having placed orders hung back, content to wait for a later moment when she might have leisure to talk to them.

Tommy helped Jane to hand out sandwiches and make change. He felt like the faithful squire of a great lady. He had read much romantic literature, and he served as well if not as picturesquely as a page in doublet and hose.

So O-liver saw them. He had been riding all the afternoon on Mary Pick. He had gone up into the Cañon of the Honey Pots. No one knew it by that name but O-liver, but at all the houses one could

buy honey. Up and down the road were little stands on which were set forth glasses and jars of amber sweet. The bees flashed like motes in the sunlight, the air was heavy with the fragrance of the flowers which yielded their largess to the marauders.

It was dark when he rode down toward the town. It lay before him, all twinkling lights. Above it hung a thin moon and countless stars. It might have been a fairy town under the kindly cover of the night.

But when he reached the central square the illusion ceased. It was what men had made it—sordid, cheap. He stopped Mary Pick under a pepper tree and surveyed the scene.

Jane and her basket were the center of an excited group. She had almost reached the end of her supplies, and some one had suggested auctioning off the remainder. Jane had protested, but her protests had not availed. She had turned to Tommy for help, to Henry, to Atwood. They had done their best. But the man who led the crowd had an object in his leadership. It was Tillotson of the little hotel—red-faced, whisky-soaked.

"Sandwich Jane, Sandwich Jane!" he shouted. "That's the name for her, boys."

And they took it up and shouted "Sandwich Jane!"

It was at this moment that O-liver stopped under the pepper tree. The bright light fell directly on Jane's distressed face. He saw the swept-back brightness of her hair, her clear-cut profile, her white skin, her white teeth. But he saw more than this. "By Jove," he said, "she's a lady!"

If he had been talking to the men he would have said "Gosh!" It was only when he was alone that he permitted himself the indulgence of more formal language.

That Jane was harried he could see. And suddenly he rode forward on Mary Pick.

The crowd made way for him expectantly. There were always interesting developments when O-liver was on the scene.

"Gentlemen," he said, "let the lady speak for herself. I am not sure what you are trying to do, but it is evidently something she doesn't want done."

Jane flashed a grateful glance up at him. He was the unknown knight throwing down the gauntlet in her defense. He was different from the others—his voice was different.

"They want to auction off my sandwiches," she explained, "and they won't listen."

"I'm sure they will listen." O-liver on Mary Pick, with his hat off and his mane tossed back, might have been Henry of the white plumes. "Of course they'll listen."

And they did!

Jane stood on her box and addressed them.

"I don't want to get any more for my sandwiches than they are worth," she said earnestly. "I make good ones, and I sell them for twenty cents because they are the best of their kind. I am glad you like them. I want to earn my living and my mother's. She is sick, and I have to stay at home with her. And I don't mind being called 'Sandwich Jane.' It's a good name and I shall use it in my business. But I don't like being treated as you have treated me to-night. If it happens again I shall have to stop selling sandwiches; and I'd be sorry to have that happen, and I hope you'd be sorry too."

Her little speech was over. She stepped down composedly from the box, folded her cloth and picked up her basket. She said "Thank you" to O-liver, "Come on" to Tommy, and walked from among them with her light step and free carriage; and they stared after her.

O-liver sitting later in front of the post-office with his satellites round him found himself compelled to listen to praise of Jane.

"She's made a hit," Atwood said earnestly. "When a woman talks like that it's the straight goods."

Henry agreed. "She's got grit. It's her kind that get ahead. But it's a pity that she's got to work to make a living."

Atwood, too, thought it was a pity. And presently he and Henry fell into silence as they fitted Jane into various dreams. Atwood's dream had to do with a mansion high on Frisco's hills. But Henry saw her beside him in his long and lovely car. He saw her, too, in a fur coat.

V

"I feel," said Jane, "like a murderer." Tommy and O-liver had stopped at her front gate to leave her some books.

"Why?" It was O-liver who asked it.

"Come and see." She led them round the house. Death and destruction reigned.

"I poured gasoline into the ants' nests and set them on fire—and now look at them!"

There were a few survivors toiling among the ruins.

"They are taking out the dead bodies," Jane explained. "It's so human that it's tragic. I'll never do it again."

"You can't let them eat you up."

"I know. It's one of the puzzles." She sat looking down at them. "How busy they are!"

"Too busy," O-liver stated. "They are worse than bees. There are at least some drones in the hive."

"Poor drones," said Jane.

"Why?" quickly.

"To miss the best."

"Is work the best?"

She said "Yes," adding after a little: "I don't just mean making sandwiches. That's just a beginning. There's everything ahead."

She said it as if the world were hers. O-liver, in spite of himself, was thrilled. "How do you know that everything is ahead?"

"I shall make it come"—securely.

They sat in silence for a while; then O-liver said: "I have brought you a book."

It was an old copy of Punch.

"I shall like it," she said. "Sometimes the evenings are dull when my work is over."

"Dullness comes for me when work begins."

Her straight gaze met his. "You say that with your lips; you don't mean it."

"How do you know?"

"I'm not sure how I know. But you haven't found the thing yet that you like—the incentive."

"Tommy wants me to go into politics. He and Henry Bittinger. Henry says I ought to be President." O-liver chuckled.

But she took it seriously. "Why not? You've the brains and the magnetism. Can't you see how the crowd draws to you on Saturday nights?"

"Like bees round a honey pot? Yes." His face grew suddenly stern. "But so will mosquitoes buzz round a stagnant pool."

"You're not a stagnant pool and you know it."

"What am I?"

She made a sudden gesture as if she gave him up. "Sometimes I think you are like the sea—on a lazy day—with a storm brewing."

He wondered as he went home—what storm?

He had seen a good deal of Jane since that Saturday night when he had championed her cause. It had been fall then, with the hills brown and the berries red on the pepper trees. It was spring now, with all the world green and growing.

She had spoken of him to Tommy, and Tommy had been a faithful go-between. He had played upon their mutual love of books. At first O-liver had sent her books, then he had taken them. He had met her mother, had seen her in her home doing feminine things, sewing on lengths of pink and blue—filling the vases with the flowers that he brought.

And as they had met and talked his veins had been filled with new wine. He had never known intimately such a woman. His mother transplanted from the East by her marriage to a Western man had turned her eyes always backward. Her son had been born in the East, he had spent his holidays and vacations with his Eastern relatives. He had gone to an Eastern school to prepare for an Eastern college. Except for this one obsession with regard to her son's education his mother was self-centered. She was an idolized wife, a discontented woman—- she had shown O-liver no heights to which to aspire.

And so he had not aspired. He had spent his days in what might be termed, biblically, riotous living. His mother had hoped for an aristocratic and Eastern marriage. When he married Fluffy Hair she had allowed him three thousand a year and had asked him not to

bring his wife to see her. His father had refused to give him a penny. O-liver's wild oats and wilfulness cut him off, he ruled, from parental consideration. "You are not my son," he had said sternly. "If the time ever comes when you can say you are sorry, I'll see you."

O-liver having married Fluffy Hair had found her also self-centered—not a lady like his mother, but fundamentally of the same type. Neither of them had made him feel that he might be more than he was. They had always shrunk him to their own somewhat small patterns.

Jane's philosophy came to him therefore like a long-withheld stimulant. "You might be President of the United States."

When Henry or Atwood or Tommy had said it to him he had laughed. When Jane said it he did not laugh.

VI

And so it came about that one day he rose and went to his father. And he said: "Dad, will you kill the fatted calf?"

His father lived in a great Tudor house which gave the effect of age but was not old. It had a minstrels' gallery, a big hall and a little hall, mullioned windows and all the rest of it. It had been built because of a whim of his wife's. But O-liver's father in the ten years he had lived in it had learned to love it. But more than he loved the house he loved the hills that sloped away from it, the mountains that towered above it, the sea that lay at the foot of the cliff.

"It is God's country," he would say with long-drawn breath. He had been born and bred in this golden West. All the passion he might have given to his alien wife and alien son was lavished on this land which was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

And now his son had ridden up to him over those low hills at the foot of the mountain and had said: "Father, I have sinned."

O-liver had not put it scripturally. He had said: "I'm sorry, dad. You said I needn't come back until I admitted the husks and swine."

There was a light on the fine face of the older man. "Oliver, I never hoped to hear you say it." His hand dropped lightly on the boy's shoulders. "My son which was dead is alive again?"

"Yes, dad."

"What brought you to life?"

"A woman."

The hand dropped. "Not—"

"Not my wife. Put your hand back, dad. Another woman."

He sat down beside his father on the terrace. The sea far below them was sapphire, the cliffs pink with moss—gorgeous color. Orange umbrellas dotted the distant beach.

"Your mother is down there," Jason Lee said. "Sun baths and all that. You said there was another woman, Oliver."

"Yes." Quite simply and honestly he told him about Sandwich Jane. "She's made me see things."

"What things?"

"Well, she thinks I've got it in me to get anywhere. She insists that if I'd put my heart into it I might be—President."

One saw their likeness to each other in their twinkling eyes!

"She says that men follow me; and they do. I've found that out since I went to Tinkersfield. She wants me to go into politics—there's a gang down there that rules the town—rotten crowd. It would be some fight if I did."

His father was interested at once. "It was what I wanted—when I was young—politics—clean politics, with a chance at statesmanship. Yes, I wanted it. But your mother wanted—money."

"Money hasn't any meaning to me now, dad. If I slaved until I dropped I couldn't make fifteen hundred a week."

"Does—your wife make that now?"

"Yes. She's making it and spending it, I fancy."

Silence. Then: "What of this—other woman. What are you going to do about her?"

O-liver leaned forward, speaking earnestly. "I love her. But I'm not free. It's all a muddle."

"Does she know you're married?"

"No. I've got to tell her. But I'll lose her if I do. Her comradeship, I mean. And I don't want to give it up."

"There is of course a solution."

"What solution?"

"Divorce."

"It wouldn't be a solution for Jane. She's not that kind. Marriage with her means till death parts. I'll have to lose her. But it hurts."

VII

It was when Jane rented an empty room fronting on the arcade and set up a sandwich shop that Tillotson saw how serious the thing was going to be.

He had had all the restaurant and hotel trade. Men coming up in motors or on horseback, dusty and tired, had eaten and drunk at his squalid tables, swearing at the food but unable to get anything better. And now here was a woman who covered her counters with snowy oilcloth—who had shining urns of coffees, delectable pots of baked beans, who put up in neat boxes lunches that made men rush back for more and more and more—and whose sandwiches were the talk of the coast!

It had to be stopped.

The only way to stop it was to make it uncomfortable for Jane. There were many ways in which the thing could be done—by small and subtle persecutions, by insinuations, by words bandied from one man's evil mouth to another. Tillotson had done the thing before. But he found as the days went on that he had not before had a Jane to deal with. She was linked in the minds of most of the men with a whiteness like that of her own spotless shop.

Gradually Jane became aware of a sinister undercurrent. She found herself dealing with forces that threatened her. There were men who came into her shop to buy, and who stayed to say things that set her cheeks flaming. She mentioned none of these things to Henry or Atwood or Tommy. But she spoke once to O-liver.

"Tillotson must be at the bottom of it. Two drunken loafers stumbled in the other day, straight from the hotel. And when I telephoned to Tillotson to come and get them he laughed at me."

Tillotson was the sheriff. It was an office which he did not honor. In a month or two his term would be up. O-liver riding alone into the mountains stated the solution: "I've got to beat Tillotson."

But first he had things to say to Jane. Since his talk with his father he had known that it must come. He had stayed away from her as much as possible. It had not been a conspicuous withdrawal, for she was very busy and had little time for him. Tommy's mother kept her little home in order and looked after the invalid, so that Jane could give undivided attention to her growing business. O-liver saw her most often at the shop, when he stopped in for a pot of beans—eating them on the spot and discoursing on many things.

"My Boston grandmother baked beans like this," he told her on one occasion. "She was a great little woman, Jane, as essentially of the East as you are of the West. She held to the traditions of the past; you are blazing new ways for women, selling sandwiches in the market-place. By Jove, it was superb the way you did it, Jane!"

She was always in a glow when he left her. Here was a man different from her father, different from Henry Bittinger and Atwood Jones. She smiled a little as she thought of Atwood. He had asked her to marry him. He had told her of the things he had ahead of him that he wanted her to share. And he had been much downcast when she had refused him. She had, he felt, smudged the brightness of his splendid future. He couldn't understand a woman throwing away a thing like that.

But he bore her no grudge and was still her friend. Henry, too, was her friend. He had not yet tried his fate with Jane, but he still dreamed of her as lovely in his long car and a fur coat. And he hoped to make his dreams come true.

Tommy had set aside all selfish hopes. He had a feeling that Jane liked O-liver. He loved them both. If he could not have Jane he wanted O-liver to have her. He kept a wary eye therefore on Henry and Atwood.

It was Tommy who found out first about Fluffy Hair. She had never cared to have the world know of her marriage. She had felt that those who loved her on the screen would prefer her fancy free. But it was known at the studio, and some one drifting up to Tinkersfield recognized O-liver and told Tommy.

Tommy for once in his life was stern. "He oughta of told Jane. Somebody's got to tell her."

So the next day he took it on himself—feeling a traitor to his friend.

"Jane," he said, sitting on a high stool in her little sandwich shop—"Jane, O-liver's married."

Jane on the other side of the spotless counter gave him her earnest glance. "Yes," she said; "he told me."

"He did? Well, I'm glad. It wasn't a thing to keep, was it?"

"No," said Jane; "it wasn't. But you mustn't blame him, Tommy, and now that we both know, everything is all right, isn't it?"

"Yes," Tommy agreed; "if Tillotson doesn't get hold of it."

For it had been decided that O-liver was to run against Tillotson in the next election, and beat him if he could.

O-liver had told Jane about his marriage on the night before Tommy came to her. He had asked her to ride with him. "If you'll go this afternoon at four you shall have Mary Pick, and I'll take Tommy's horse."

They had carried their lunch with them and had eaten it at sunset in a lovely spot where the cañon opened out to show a shining yellow stretch of sea, with the hills like black serpents running into it.

Yet it was dark, with the stars above them and the sea a faint gray below, before O-liver said to her what he had brought her there to say.

He told her of his father and mother. Of Fluffy Hair.

"I waked up at last to the fact that I was letting two women support me. So I came here and began to work at fifteen dollars a week. And for the first time in my life I respected myself—and was content. And then I met you and saw things ahead. You made me see them."

He turned toward her in the dark. "Jane, I'm finding that I love you—mightily." He tried to speak lightly. "And I'm not free. And because I love you I've got to keep away. But I want you to understand that my friendship is the same—that it will always be the same. But I've got to keep away."

She was very honest about it. "I didn't dream that you felt like that—about me."

"No, you wouldn't. That's a part of your splendidness. Never taking anything to yourself. Jane, will you believe this—that what I may be hereafter will be because of you? If I ever do a big thing or a fine thing it will be because I came upon you that night with your head high and that rabble round you. You were light shining into the darkness of Tinkersfield. Jove, I wish I were a painter to put you on canvas as you were that night!"

They had ridden down later under the stars, and as they had stood for a moment overlooking the lights of the little town O-liver had said: "I make my big speech to-morrow night to beat Tillotson. I want you to be there. Will you? If I know you are there somewhere in the dark I shall pour out my soul—to you."

Was it any wonder that Jane, talking to Tommy the next morning about O-liver, felt her pulses pounding, her cheeks burning? She had lain awake all night thinking of the things he had said to her. It seemed a very big and wonderful thing that a man could love her like that. As toward morning the moonlight streamed in and she still lay awake she permitted herself to let her mind dwell for a moment on what her future might mean if he were in it. She was too busy and healthy to indulge in useless regrets. But she knew in that moment in the moonlight if he was not to be in her future no other man would ever be.

VIII

O-liver's speech was made in the open. There was a baseball park in Tinkersfield, bounded at the west end by a grove of eucalyptus. With this grove as a background a platform had been erected. From the platform the rival candidates would speak. At this time of the year it would be daylight when the meeting opened. Tillotson was not to speak for himself. He had brought a man down from San Francisco, a big politician with an oily tongue. O-liver would of course present his own case. The thing, as Atwood told Henry, promised to be exciting.

Jane came with Tommy. There was a sort of rude grand stand opposite the platform, and she had a seat well up toward the top. She wore a white skirt, a gray sweater and a white hat. She had a friendly

smile for the people about her. And they smiled back. They liked Jane.

O-liver spoke first. Bare-headed, slender, with his air of eternal youth, he was silhouetted against the rose red of the afterglow.

When he began he led them lightly along paths of easy thought. He got their attention as he had so often got it in front of the post-office. He made them smile, he made them laugh, he led them indeed finally into roaring laughter. And when he had brought them thus into sympathy he began with earnestness to speak of Tinkersfield.

Jane, leaning forward, not missing a word, felt his magnetism. He spoke of the future of Tinkersfield. Of what must be done if it was to fulfill its destiny as a decent town. He did not mince his words.

"It will be just what you make up your minds now to have it—good and honest and clean, a place that the right kind of people will want to live in, or the place that will attract loungers and loafers."

He laid upon them the burden of individual responsibility. If a town was honest, he said, it was because the men in it were honest; if it was clean it was because its men were clean. It was for each man to decide at this election whether Tinkersfield should have a future of darkness or of light. There were men in that crowd who squared their shoulders to meet the blows of his eloquence, who kept them squared as they made their decision to do their part in the upbuilding of Tinkersfield.

Yet it was not perhaps so much the things that O-liver said as the way he said them. He had the qualities of leadership—a sincerity of the kind that sways men level with their leaders—the sincerity of a Lincoln, a Roosevelt. For him a democracy meant all the people. Not merely plain people, not indeed selected classes. Rich man, poor man, one, working together for the common good.

Back of his sincerity there was fire—and gradually his audience was lighted by his flame. They listened in a tense silence, which broke now and then into cheers. To Jane sitting high up on the benches he was a prophet—the John the Baptist of Tinkersfield.

"And he's mine, he's mine!" she exulted. This fineness of spirit, the fire and flame were hers. "If I know you are there somewhere in the dark I shall pour out my soul—to you—"

The darkness had not yet fallen, but the dusk had come. The platform was illumined by little lights like stars. Back of the platform the eucalyptus trees were now pale spectres, their leaves hanging nerveless in the still air.

O-liver sitting down amid thunders of applause let his eyes go for the moment to Jane. A lamp hung almost directly over her head. She had taken off her wide hat and her hair was glorious. She was leaning forward a little, her lips parted, her hands clasped, as if he still spoke to her.

As Tillotson's sponsor rose Jane straightened up, smiled at Tommy, and again set herself to listen.

The unctuous voice of the speaker was a contrast to O-liver's crisp tones. There were other contrasts not so apparent. This man was in the game for what he could get out of it. He wanted Tillotson to win because Tillotson's winning would strengthen his own position politically. He meant indeed that Tillotson should win. He was not particular as to methods.

He said the usual things: Tinkersfield was no Sunday school; and they weren't slaves to have their liberty taken from them by a lot of impractical reformers. And Lee was that kind. What had he ever done to prove that he'd make good? They knew Tillotson. They didn't know Lee. Who was Lee anyhow?

He flung the interrogation at them. "What do you know about Lee?"

The pebble that he threw had widening circles. People began to ask themselves what, after all, they knew of O-liver. From somewhere in the darkness went up the words of an evil chant:

What's the matter with O-liver, O-liver,
White-livered O-liver?
Ask Jane, Sandwich Jane,
O-liver, white liver,
Jane, Jane, Jane.

Jane felt her heart stand still. Back of her she heard Tommy swearing: "It's all their damned wickedness!" She saw O-liver start from his chair and sink back, helpless against the insidiousness of this attack.

The speaker went on. It would seem, he said, from what he could learn, that Tillotson's honorable opponent was sailing under false colors. He was a married man. He had deserted his wife. He sat among them as a saint, when he was really a sinner.

"A sinner, gentlemen." The speaker paused for the effect, then proceeded with his argument. Of course they were all sinners, but they weren't hypocrites. Tillotson wasn't a hypocrite. He was a good fellow. He didn't want Tinkersfield to be a Sunday school. He wanted it to be a town. You know—a town that every fellow would want to hit on Saturday night.

There were those in the crowd who began to feel that a weak spot had been found in O-liver's armor. Secrecy! They didn't like it. There were signs of wavering among some who had squared their shoulders. After all, they didn't want to make a Sunday school of Tinkersfield. They wondered, too, if there wasn't some truth in the things that were being hinted by that low chant in the darkness:

Ask Jane, Sandwich Jane,
O-liver, white liver,
Jane, Jane, Jane.

O-liver was restless, his hands clenched at his sides. Atwood and Henry were restless. Tommy was restless. They couldn't let such insults go unnoticed. Somebody had to fight for Jane!

Tillotson's supporters kept the thing stirring. If the meeting could end in a brawl the odds would be in favor of Tillotson. The effect of O-liver's uplift would be lost. Even his friends couldn't sway a fighting crowd back to him.

But they had forgotten to reckon with Jane!

She had seen in a sudden crystal flash the thing which might happen. A fight would end it all for O-liver. She had seen his efforts at self-control. She knew his agony of soul. She knew that at any moment he might knock somebody down—Tillotson or Tillotson's sponsor. And it would all be in the morning papers. There would be innuendo—the hint of scandalous things. And O-liver's reputation would pay the price. It was characteristic that she did not at the moment think of her own reputation. It was O-liver who must be saved!

And so when Tillotson's backer sat down Jane stood up.

"Please, listen!" she said; and the crowd turned toward her. "Please, listen, and stop singing that silly song. I never heard anything so silly as that song in my life!"

Before her scorn the chant died away in a gasp!

"The thing you've got to think about," she went on, "isn't Tillotson or O-liver Lee. It's Tinkersfield. You want an honest man. And O-liver Lee's honest. He doesn't want your money. He's got enough of his own. His father's the richest man in his part of the state and his wife's a movie actress and makes as much as the President. It sounds like a fairy tale, but it isn't. If O-liver Lee wanted to live on his father or his wife he could hold out his hand and let things drop into it. But he'd rather earn fifteen dollars a week and own his soul. And he isn't a hypocrite. His friends knew about his marriage. Tommy Drew knew, and I knew. And there wasn't any particular reason why he should tell the rest of you, was there? There wasn't any particular reason why he should tell Tillotson?"

A murmur of laughter followed her questions. There was a feeling in the crowd that the joke was on Tillotson.

"I wonder how many of you have told your pasts to Tinkersfield! How many of you have made Tillotson your father confessor?

"As for me"—her head was high—"I sell sandwiches. I am very busy. I hardly have time to think. But when I do think it is of something besides village gossip."

She grew suddenly earnest; leaned down to them. "You haven't time to think of it either," she told them; "have you, men of Tinkersfield?"

Her appeal was direct, and the answer came back to her in a roar from the men who knew courage when they saw it; who knew, indeed, innocence!

"No!"

And it was that "No" which beat Tillotson.

"The way she put it over," Atwood exulted afterward, "to a packed crowd like this!"

"The thing about Jane"—Henry was very seriously trying to say the thing as he saw it—"the thing about Jane is that she sees things straight. And she makes other people see."

IX

Well, Tillotson was beaten, and the men who supported O-liver came out of the fight feeling as if they had killed something unclean.

And the morning after the election O-liver had a little note from Jane.

"I've got to go away. I didn't want to worry you with it before this. I have saved enough money to start in at some college where I can work for a part of my tuition. I have had experience in my little lunch room that ought to be a help somewhere.

"When I finish college I'm going into some sort of occupation that will provide a pleasant home for mother and me. I want books, and lovely things, and a garden; and I'd like to speak a language or two and have cultured friends. Then some day when you are made President you can say to yourself: 'I am proud of my friend, Jane.' And I'll come to your inauguration and watch you ride to the White House, and I'll say to myself as I see you ride, 'I've loved him all these years.'

"But I shan't let myself say it now. And that's why I'm going away. And I'm going without saying good-bye because I think it will be easier for both of us. You and I can't be friends. What we feel is too big. I found that out about myself that night when you sat there on the platform, and I wanted to save you from Tillotson. If I'm going to work and be happy in my work I've got to get away. And you will work better because I am gone. I mustn't be here—O-liver."

Jane had indeed seen straight. O-liver laid the note down on his desk and looked up at the mountain. He needed to look up. If he had looked down for a moment he would have followed Jane.

X

And now there was no sandwich stand in Tinkersfield. But there was a good hotel. O-liver saw to that. He got Henry Bittinger to put up the money, with Tommy and his mother in charge. O-liver lived in the hotel in a suite of small rooms, and when Atwood Jones passed that way the four men dined together as O-liver's guests.

"Some day we'll eat with you in Washington," was Atwood's continued prophecy.

They always drank "To Jane." Now and then Atwood brought news of her. First from the college, and then as the years passed from the beach resort where she had opened a tea room. She was more beautiful than ever, more wonderful. Her tea room and shop were most exclusive and artistic.

"Sandwich Jane!" said O-liver. "How long ago it seems!"

It was five years now and he had not seen her. And next month he was to go to Washington. Not as President, but representing his district in Congress. Tommy's hotel had outgrown the original modest building and was now modern and fireproof. Henry was married, he had had several new cars, and his wife wore sables and seal.

The old arcade was no more; nor the old post-office. But O-liver still talked to admiring circles in the hotel lobby or to greater crowds in the town hall.

He still would take no money from his father, but he saw much of him, for Mrs. Lee was dead. The Tudor house was without a mistress. It seemed a pity that O-liver had no wife to grace its halls.

The newspapers stated that Fluffy Hair's income had doubled. Whether this was true or not it sounded well, and Fluffy Hair still seemed young on the screen. Jane would go now and then and look at her and wonder what sort of woman this was who had laughed at O-liver.

Then one day a telegram came to O-liver in his suite of rooms. And that day and for two nights he rode Mary Pick over the hills and through the cañon and down to the sea, and came to a place where Jane's tea room was met in the center of a Japanese garden—a low lovely building, with its porches open to the wide Pacific.

He had not seen her for so long that he was not quite prepared for the change. She was thinner and paler and more beautiful, with an air of distinction that was new. It was as if in visualizing his future she had pictured herself in it—as first lady of the land. Such a silly dream for Sandwich Jane!

They were quite alone when he came to her. It was morning, and the porches were empty of guests. Jane was in a long wicker chair,

with her pot of coffee on an hour-glass table. Far down on the terrace two Jap gardeners clipped and cut and watered and saw nothing.

"You are younger than ever," Jane said when they had clasped hands. "Will you ever grow old, O-liver?"

"The men say not." He seated himself opposite her. "Jane, Jane, it's heavenly to see you. I've been—starved!"

She had hungered and thirsted for him. Her hand shook a little as she poured him a cup of coffee.

"I told you not to come, O-liver."

He laid the telegram before her. Fluffy Hair was dead!

The yellow sheet lay between, defying them to speak so soon of happiness.

"To-morrow," O-liver said, "I go to Washington. When will you come to me, Jane?"

Her hand went out to him. Her breath was quick. "In time to hear your first speech, O-liver. I'll sit in the gallery, and lean over and listen and say to myself, 'He's mine, he's mine!'"

She heard many speeches in the months that followed, and sometimes Tommy or Atwood or Henry, traveling across the continent, came and sat beside her. And Atwood always clung to his prophecy: "He'll be governor next; and then it'll be the White House. Why not?"

And Jane, dreaming, asked herself "Why?"

The East had had its share. Had the time not come for a nation to seek its leader in the golden West?

LADY CRUSOE

Billy and I came down from the North and opened a grocery store at Jefferson Corners. It is a little store and there aren't many houses near it—just the railroad station and a big shed or two. Beyond the sheds a few cabins straggle along the road, and then begin the great plantations, which really aren't plantations any more, because nobody around here raises much of anything in these days. They just sit and sigh over the things that are different since the war.

That's what Billy says about them. Billy is up-to-date and he has a motor-cycle. He made up his mind when he came that he was going to put some ginger into the neighborhood. So he rides miles every morning on his motor-cycle to get orders, and he delivers the things himself unless it is barrels of flour or cans of kerosene or other heavy articles, and then he hires somebody to help him. At first he had William Watters and his mule. William is black and his mule is gray, and they are both old. It took them hours to get anywhere, and I used to feel sorry for them. But when I found out that compared to Billy and me they lived on flowery beds of ease, I stopped sympathizing. They both have enough, to eat, and they work only when they want to. Billy and I work all the time. We have our way to make in the world, and we feel that it all depends on ourselves. We started out with nothing ahead of us but my ambitions and Billy's energy, and a few hundred dollars which my guardian turned over to me when I married Billy on my twenty-first birthday.

As soon as we were married, we came to Virginia. Billy and I had an idea that everything south of the Mason and Dixon line was just waiting for us, and we wanted to earn the eternal gratitude of the community by helping it along. But after we had lived at Jefferson Corners for a little while, we began to feel that there wasn't any community. There didn't seem to be any towns like our nice New England ones, with sociable trolley-cars connecting them and farmhouses in a lovely line between. You can ride for miles through this country and never pass anything but gates. Then way up in the hills you will see a clump of trees, and in the clump you can be pretty sure there is a house. In the winter when the leaves are off the trees you can see the house, but in the summer there is no sign of it. In the

old days they seemed to feel that they were lacking somewhat in delicacy if they exposed their mansions to the rude gaze of the public.

There was one mansion that Billy took me to now and then. It was empty, and that was why we went. The big houses which were occupied were not open to us, except in a trades-person sort of fashion, and Billy and I are not to be condescended to—we had a pair of grandfathers in the *Mayflower*. But that doesn't count down here, where everybody goes back to William the Conqueror.

That great big empty house was a fine place for our Sunday afternoon outings. We always went to church in the morning, and people were very kind, but it was kindness with a question-mark. You see Billy and I live over the store, and none of them had ever lived on anything but ancestral acres.

So our Sunday mornings were a bit stiff and disappointing, but our afternoons were heavenly. We discovered the Empty House in the spring, and there was laurel on the mountains and the grass was young and green on the slopes, and the sky was a faint warm blue with the sailing buzzards black against it. Billy and I used to stop at the second gate, which was at the top of the hill, and look off over the other hills where the pink sheep were pastured. I am perfectly sure that there are no other sheep in the whole wide world like those Albemarle sheep. The spring rains turn the red clay into a mud which sticks like paint, and the sheep are colored a lovely terra-cotta which fades gradually to pink.

The effect is impressionistic, like purple cows. Billy doesn't care for it, but I do. And I adore the brilliant red of the roads. Billy says he'll take good brown earth and white flocks. He might be reconciled to black sheep but never to pink ones.

We used to eat our supper on the porch of the Empty House. It had great pillars, and it was rather awe-inspiring to sit on the front steps and look up the whole length, of those Corinthian columns. Billy and I felt dwarfed and insignificant, but we forgot it when we turned our eyes to the hills.

The big door behind us and the blank windows were shut and shuttered close. There were flying squirrels on the roof and little blue-tailed lizards on the stone flagging in front of the house; and

there was an old toad who used to keep us company. I called him Prince Charming, and I am sure he was as old as Methuselah, and lived under that stone in some prehistoric age.

We just loved our little suppers. We had coffee in our thermos bottle, and cold fried chicken and bread and butter sandwiches and chocolate cake. We never changed, because we were always afraid that we shouldn't like anything else so well, and we were sure of the chicken and the chocolate cake.

And after we had eaten our suppers we would talk about what kind of house we would build when our ship came in. Billy and I both have nice tastes, and we know what we want; and we feel that the grocery store is just a stepping-stone to better things.

The sunsets were late in those spring days, and there would be pink and green and pale amethyst in the western sky, and after that deep sapphire and a silver moon. And as it grew darker the silver would turn to gold, and there would be a star—and then more stars until the night came on.

I can't tell you how we used to feel. You see we were young and in love, and life was a pretty good thing to us. There was one perfect night when the hills were flooded with moonlight. We seemed all alone in a lovely world and I whispered:

"Oh, Billy, Billy, and some folks think that there isn't any God—"

And Billy put his arm around me and patted my cheek, and we didn't say anything for a long time.

It was just a week later that Lady Crusoe came. I knew that some one was in the house as soon as we passed the second gate. The door was still closed, and the shutters were not opened, but I heard a clock strike—a ship's clock—with bells.

I clutched Billy. "Listen," I said.

He heard it, too; "Who in the dickens?" he demanded.

"There's somebody in the house—"

"Nonsense—"

"Billy, there must be, and we can't sit on the porch."

"You stay here, and I'll go around to the back."

But I wouldn't let him go alone. At the back of the house a window was open, and then we were sure.

"We'd better leave," I said, but Billy insisted that we stay. "If they are new people, I'll find out their names, and come up to-morrow and get their orders."

We went around to the front door and knocked and knocked, but nobody answered. So we sat down on the front step and presently Billy said that we might as well eat our supper, for very evidently nobody was at home.

I didn't feel a bit comfortable about it, but I opened our basket and got out our cups and plates, and Billy poured the coffee and passed the chicken and the bread and butter sandwiches. And just then the door creaked and the knob turned!

My first impulse was to gather up the lunch and tumble it into the basket; but I didn't. I just sat there looking up as calmly as if I were serving tea at my own table, and Billy sat there too looking up.

The door opened and a voice said, "Oh, if you are eating supper, may I have some?"

It was a lovely voice, and Billy jumped to his feet. A lovely head came after the voice. Just the head, peeping around—the body was hidden by the door. On the head was a lace cap with a gold rose, and the hair under the cap was gold.

"You see, I just got up," said the voice, "and I haven't had any breakfast—"

Billy and I gasped. It was seven P.M., and the meal that we were serving was supper!

"Do you mind my coming out?" said the voice. "I am not exactly clothed and in my right mind, but perhaps I'll do."

She opened the door wider and stepped down. I saw that her slippers had gold roses and that they were pale pink like the sunset. She wore a motor coat of tan cloth which covered her up, but I had a glimpse of a pink silk negligee underneath.

She sat quite sociably on the steps with us. "I am famished," she said. "I haven't had a thing to eat for twenty-four hours."

We gasped again. "How did it happen?"

"I was—shipwrecked," she said, "in a motor-car—I am the only survivor—"

Her eyes twinkled. "I'll tell you all about it presently." Then she broke off and laughed.

"But first will you feed a starving castaway?"

Yet she didn't really tell us anything. She ate and ate, and it was the prettiest thing to see her. She was dainty and young and eager like a child at a party.

"How good everything is!" she said, at last with a sigh. "I don't think I was ever so hungry in my life."

Billy and I didn't eat much. You see we were too interested, and besides we had had our dinner.

As I have said, she didn't really tell us anything. "It was an accident, and I came up here. And the old clock that you heard strike belonged to my grandfather. He was an admiral, and it was his clock. I used to listen to it as a child."

"What happened to the rest—?" Billy asked, bluntly. He was more concerned about the automobile accident than about her ancestors.

"Oh, do you mean the others in the car?" she came reluctantly back from the admiral and his ship's clock. "I am sure I don't know. And I am very sure that I don't care."

"But were any of them killed?"

"No—they are all alive—but you see—it was a shipwreck—and I floated away—by myself—and this is my island, and you are the nice friendly savages—" she touched Billy on the arm. He drew away a bit. I knew that he was afraid she had lost her mind, but I had seen her twinkling eyes. "Oh, it's all a joke!" I said.

She shook her head. "It isn't exactly a joke, but it might look like that to other people."

"Are you going to stay?"

"Yes."

"I'll come up in the morning for orders," said Billy promptly. "I keep the grocery store at Jefferson Corners."

"Oh," she said, and seemed to hesitate; "there won't be any orders."

Billy stared at her. "But there isn't any other store."

"Robinson Crusoe didn't have stores, did he? He found things and lived on the land. And I am Lady Crusoe."

"Really?" I asked her.

"I've another name—but—if people around here question you—you won't tell them, will you, that I am here—?"

She said it in such a pretty pleading fashion that of course we promised. It was late when we had to go. I insisted that we should leave what remained of the supper, and she seemed glad to get it. "You are nice friendly savages," she said, with that twinkle in her eyes, "and I am very grateful. Come into the house and let me show you my clock—"

She showed us more than the clock. I hadn't dreamed in those days when Billy and I sat alone on the steps of the treasures that were shut up behind us. The old furniture was dusty, but all the dust in the world couldn't hide its beauty. The dining-room was hung with cobwebs, but when the candles were lighted we saw the Sheffield on the old sideboard, the Chinese porcelains, the Heppelwhite chairs, the painted sheepskin screen—

She picked out a lovely little pitcher and gave it to me. I did not learn until afterward that it was pink lustre and worth a pretty penny. She paid in that way, you see, for her supper, and something in her manner made me feel that I must not refuse it.

She did not ask us to come again, yet I was sure that she liked us. I felt that perhaps it was the grocery store which had made her hesitate. But whatever it was, I must confess that I was a little lonely as I went away. You see we had come to look forward to our welcome at the Empty House. We had known that we were the honored guests of the flying squirrels and the lizards and of old Prince Charming. But now that the house was no longer empty, we would not be welcome. I was sorry that I had accepted the pink pitcher. I should have preferred to feel that I owed no favor to the lady with the twinkling eyes.

It wasn't long after our adventure at the Empty House that Billy asked William Watters to take a big load to a customer two miles out. But William couldn't. He was working, he said, at a regular place. We couldn't imagine William as being regular about anything. He and his mule were so irregular in their habits. They came and went as they pleased, and they would take naps whenever the spirit moved them. But now, as William said, he was "wukin' regular," and

he refused to say for whom he worked. But we found out one day when he drove Lady Crusoe down in a queer old carriage with his mule as a prancing steed.

He helped her descend as if she had been a queen, and she came in and talked to Billy. "You see, I've hunted up my friendly savages," she said. "I've reached the end of my resources." She gave a small order, and told Billy that she wasn't at all sure when she could pay her bill, but that there were a lot of things in her old house which he could have for security.

Billy said gallantly that he didn't need any security, and that her account could run as long as she wished and that he was glad to serve her. And he got out his pad and pencil and stood in that nice way of his at attention.

I listened and looked through a window at the back. I had seen her drive up, and she was stunning in the same tan motor-coat that she had worn when we first saw her. But she had on a brown hat and veil and brown shoes instead of the lace cap and rosy slippers.

She asked about me, and Billy told her that I was in the garden. And I was in the garden when she came out; but I had to run. She sat down in a chair on the other side of my little sewing-table and talked to me. It is such a scrap of a garden that there is only room for a tiny table and two chairs, but a screen of old cedars hides it from the road, and there's a twisted apple-tree, and the fields beyond and a glimpse of the mountains.

"How is the island?" Billy asked her.

She twinkled. "I have a man Friday."

"William Watters?"

She nodded. "The Watters negroes have been our servants for generations. And William thinks that he belongs to me. He cooks for me and forages. He shot two squirrels one morning and made me a Brunswick stew. But I couldn't stand that. You see the squirrels are my friends."

I thought of the flying squirrels and the blue-tailed lizards and the old toad, and I knew how she felt. And I said so. She looked at me sharply, and then she laid her hand over mine: "Are you lonely, my dear?"

I said that I was—a little. Billy had gone in to wait on a customer, so I dared say it. I told her that nobody had called.

"But why not?" she demanded.

"I think," I said slowly, "it is because we live—over the store."

"I see." And she did see; it was in her blood as well as in the blood of the rest of them.

Presently she stood up and said that she must go, and it was then that she noticed the work that was in my basket on the table. She lifted out a little garment and the red came into her cheeks. "Oh, oh!" she said, and stood looking at it. When she laid it down, she came around the table and kissed me. "What a dear you are!" she said, and then she went away.

William Watters came in very often after that; but he said very little about Lady Crusoe. He was a faithful old thing, and he had evidently had instructions. But one morning he brought a fine old Sheffield tray to Billy and asked him to take his pay out of it, and let Lady Crusoe have the rest in cash. William Watters didn't call her "Lady Crusoe," he called her "Miss Lily," which didn't give us the key to the situation in the least. Billy didn't know how to value the tray, so he asked me. I knew more than he did, but I wasn't sure. I told him to advance what he thought was best, and to send it to the city and have it appraised, or whatever they call it, so he did; and when the check from the antique shop came it was a big one.

It wasn't long after that that Lady Crusoe called on me. It was a real call, and she left a card. And she said as she laid it on the table: "As I told you, I'd rather the rest of the natives didn't know—they haven't seen me since I was a child, and they think that I am just some stranger who rents the old place and who wants to be alone."

After she had gone I picked up the card, and what I read there nearly took my breath away. There are certain names which mean so much that we get to look upon them as having special significance. The name that was on Lady Crusoe's card had always stood in my mind for money—oceans of it. I simply couldn't believe my eyes, and I took it down to Billy.

"Look at that," I said, and laid it before him, "and she has asked us to supper for next Sunday!"

Well, we couldn't make anything of it. Why was a woman with a name like that down here with nothing to eat but the things that William Watters could forage for, and that Billy could supply from his little store, and that she paid for with Sheffield trays?

We had supper that Sunday night in the great dining-room. There was a five-branched candlestick with tall white candles in the center of the shining mahogany table and William Watters acted as butler. You never would have believed how well he did it. And after supper we had coffee on the front porch and looked out over the hills at the sunset, and the silver moon and the old toad came out from under his stone and sat with us.

Lady Crusoe was in a thin white dress which she had made for herself, and she talked of the old place and of her childhood there. But not a word did she say of why she had come back to live alone on the Davenant ancestral acres.

It was her mother, we learned, who was a Davenant, and it was her mother's father who was the old admiral. She said nothing of the man whose name was on her card. It was as if she stopped short when she came to that part of her life, or as if it had never been.

She took me up-stairs after a while and left Billy to smoke on the porch. She said that she had something that she wanted me to see. Her room was a huge square one at the southwest corner of the house. There was a massive four-poster bed with faded blue satin curtains, and there was a fireplace with fire-dogs and an Adam screen. Lady Crusoe carried a candle, and as she stood in the center of the room she seemed to gather all of the light to her, like the saints in the old pictures. She was so perfectly lovely that I almost wanted to cry. I can't explain it, but there was something pathetic about her beauty.

She set the candle down and opened an old brass-bound chest. She took out a roll of cloth and brought it over and laid it on the table beside the candle.

"I bought it with some of the money that your Billy got for my Sheffield tray," she said. Then she turned to me with a quick motion and laid her hands on my shoulders. "Oh, you very dear—when I saw you making those little things—I knew that—that the good Lord had led me. Will you—will you—show me—how?"

I told Billy about it on the way home.

"She doesn't know anything about sewing, and she hasn't any patterns, and I am to go up every day, and William Watters will come for me with his mule—"

Then I cried about her a little, because it seemed so dreadful that she should be there all alone, without any one to sustain her and cherish her as Billy did me.

"Oh, Billy, Billy," I said to him, "I'd rather live over a grocery store with you than live in a palace with anybody else—"

And Billy said, "Don't cry, lady love, you are not going to live with anybody else."

And he put his arm around me, and as we walked along together in the April night it was like the days when we had been young lovers, only our joy in each other was deeper and finer, for then we had only guessed at happiness, and now we knew—

Well, I went up every day. William Watters came for me, and I carried my patterns and we sat in the big west room, and right under the window a pair of robins were building a nest.

We watched them as they worked, and it seemed to us that no matter how hard we toiled those two birds kept ahead. "I never dreamed," Lady Crusoe remarked one morning, "that they were at it all the time like this."

"You wait until they begin to feed their young," I told her. "People talk about being as free as a bird. But I can tell you that they slave from dawn until dark. I have seen a mother bird at dusk giving a last bite to one squalling baby while the father fed another."

Lady Crusoe laid down her work and looked out over the hills. "The father," she said, and that was all for a long time, and we stitched and stitched, but at last she spoke straight from her thoughts: "How dear your husband is to you!"

"That's what husbands are made for."

"Some of them are not, dear," her voice was hard, "some of them expect so much and give so little—"

I kept still and presently she began again. "They give money—and they think that is—enough. They give jewels—and think we ought to be profoundly grateful."

"Well, my experience," I told her, "is that the men give as much love as the women—"

She looked at me. "What do you mean?"

"Love costs them a lot."

"In what way?"

"They work for us. Now there's Billy's grocery store. If Billy didn't have me, he'd be doing things that he likes better. You wouldn't believe it, but Billy wanted to study law, but it meant years of hard work before he could make a cent, and he and I would have wasted our youth in waiting—and so he went into business—and that's a big thing for a man to do for a woman—to give up a future that he has hoped for—and that's why I feel that I can't do enough for Billy—"

"I don't see why you should look at it in that way," she said, and her eyes were big and bright. "Women are queens, and they honor men when they marry them—"

"If women are queens," I told her, "men are kings—Billy honored me—"

She smiled at me. "Oh, you blessed dear—" she said, and all of a sudden she came over and knelt beside me. "What would you think of a man who married a woman whom the world called beautiful and brilliant, and whom—whom princes wanted to marry—And he was a very plain man, except that he had a lot of money—millions and millions—and after he married the woman whom he had said that he worshiped, he wanted to make just an every-day wife of her. He wanted her to stay at home and look after his house. He told her one night that it would be a great happiness for him if he could come in and find her warming—his slippers. And he said that his ideal of a woman was one who—who—held a child in her arms—"

I looked down at her. "Well, right in the beginning," I said, "I should like to know if the woman loved the man—"

She stared at me and then she stood up. "If she did, what then? She had not married to be—his slave—"

I pointed to the mother robin on the branch below. "I wonder if she calls it slavery! You see—she is so busy—building her nest she hasn't time to think whether Cock Robin is singing fewer love songs than he sang early in the spring."

She laughed and was down on her knees beside me again. "Oh, you funny little practical thing! But it wasn't because I missed the love songs. He sang them. But because I couldn't be an every-day wife—"

"What kind of wife did you want to be?"

"I wanted to travel with him alone—I planned a honeymoon in the desert, and we had it—and I planned after that to sail the seas to the land of Nowhere—and we sailed—and then—I wanted to go to the high plains—and ride and camp—and into the forests to hunt and fish—but he wouldn't. He said that we had wandered enough. He wanted to build a house—and have me warm—his slippers—"

"And so you quarreled?"

"We quarreled—great hot heavy quarrels—and we said things—horrid things—that we can't forgive—"

She was sobbing on my shoulder and I said softly: "Things that *you* can't forgive?"

"Yes. And that *he* can't. That's why I ran away from him."

I waited.

"I couldn't stand it to see him going around with his face stern and set and not like my lover's. And he didn't speak to me except to be polite. And he asked people to go with us—everywhere. And we were never alone—"

"What had you said to make him—like that?"

She raised her head. "I told him that I—hated him—"

"Oh, oh—"

She knelt back on her heels.

"It was a dreadful thing to say, wasn't it? That's why I ran away. I couldn't stand it. I knew it was a thing no man—could—forgive—"

I smoothed her hair and rocked her back and forth while she cried. It was strange how much of a child she seemed to me. And I was only the wife of a country grocer and lived over the store, and she was the wife of a man whose name was known from east to west, and all around the world. But you see she hadn't learned to live. Neither have I, really. But Billy has taught me a lot.

I think it was a comfort for her to feel that she had confided in me. But she made me promise that whatever happened I wouldn't let him know.

"Unless I—die," she said, and she was as white as a lily, "unless I die, and then you can—set him—free—"

Billy was sorry that I had promised. "Somehow I feel responsible, sweetheart, and I'll bet her poor husband is almost crazy."

"Would you be, Billy?"

He caught me to him so quickly that he almost shook the breath out of me. "Don't ask a thing like that," he said, and his voice didn't sound like his own. "If anything should happen to you—if anything should happen—I should—I should—oh, why will women ask things like that—?"

In the days that followed, Billy didn't want me out of his sight. He even hated to have me go up to the Davenant house with William Watters. "Take care of her, William," he would say, and stand looking after us.

William and I got to be very good friends. He was a wise old darky, and he was devoted to Lady Crusoe. He usually served tea for us out under the trees, unless it was a rainy day, and then we had it in the library.

It was on a rainy day that Lady Crusoe said: "I wonder what has become of William. I haven't seen him since you came. I have hunted and called, and I can't find him."

He appeared at tea time, however, with a plate of hot waffles with powdered sugar between. When his mistress asked him about his mysterious disappearance, he said that he had cleaned the attic.

"But, William, on such a day?"

"I kain't wuk out in the rain, Miss Lily, so I wuks in—"

That was all he would say about it, and after we had had our tea, she said to me, "There are a lot of interesting things in the attic. Let's go up and see what Willie has been doing—"

The dim old place was as shining as soap and water could make it, and there was the damp smell of suds. There was the beat of the rain on the roof, and the splash of it against the round east window. Through the west window came a pale green light, and there was a view over the hills. As we became accustomed to the dimness our

eyes picked out the various objects—an old loom like a huge spider under a peaked gable, a chest of drawers which would have set a collector crazy, Chippendale chairs with the seats out, Windsor chairs with the backs broken, gilt mirror frames with no glass in them—boxes—books—bottles—all the flotsam and jetsam of such old establishments. Most of the things had been set back against the wall, but right in the middle of the floor was an object which I took at first for a small trunk.

Lady Crusoe reached it first, and knelt beside it. She gave a little cry. "My dear, come here!" and I went to her, and in another moment, I, too, was on my knees. For the dark object was a cradle—a lovely hooded thing of mahogany, in which the Davenants had been rocked for generations.

"William got it out," Lady Crusoe said, "ready to be carried down. Oh, my good old man Friday! Do you mind if I cry a little, you very dear?"

It rained a great deal that summer, and it was hot and humid. Billy and I longed for the cold winds that sweep across the sea on the North Shore, but we didn't complain, for we had each other, and I wouldn't exchange Billy for any breeze that blows.

Lady Crusoe suffered less than I, for she was on her native heath, and in the afternoon when we sewed together William Watters made lemonade, and in the evening when Billy came up for me we sat out under the stars until whispers of wind stirred the trees, and then we went away and left our dear lady alone.

As the time went on we hated more and more to leave her, but she was very brave about it. "I have my good man Friday," she told us, "to protect me, and my grandfather's revolver."

So the summer passed, and the fall came, and the busy robin and all of her red-breasted family started for the South, and there was rain and more rain, so that when October rolled around the roads were perfect rivers of red mud, and the swollen streams swept under the bridges in raging torrents of terra-cotta, and the sheep on the hills were pinker than ever. There was no lack of color in those gray days, for the trees burst through the curtain of mist in great splashes of red and green and gold. But now I did not go abroad with William

Watters behind his old gray mule, for things had happened which kept me at home.

It was on a rainy November night that I came down to the store to call Billy to supper. I had brought a saucer for old Tid, the store cat, and when he had finished Billy had cut him a bit of cheese and he was begging for it. We had taught Tid to sit up and ask, and he looked so funny, for he is fat and black and he hates to beg, but he loves cheese. We were laughing at him when a great flash of light seemed to sweep through the store, and a motor stopped.

Billy went forward at once. The front door opened, and a man in a rain-coat was blown in by the storm.

"Jove, it's a wet night!" I heard him say, and I knew it wasn't any of Billy's customers from around that part of the country. This was no drawling Virginia voice. It was crisp and clear-cut and commanding.

He took off his hat, and even at that distance I could see his shining blond head. He towered above Billy, and Billy isn't short. "I wonder if you could help me," he began, and then he hesitated, "it is a rather personal matter."

"If you'll come up-stairs," Billy told him, "there'll be only my wife and me, and I can shut up the store for the night."

"Good!" he said, and I went ahead of them with old Tid following, and presently the men arrived and Billy presented the stranger to me.

He told us at once what he wanted. "I thought that as you kept the store, you might hear the neighborhood news. I have lost—my wife—"

"Dead?" Billy inquired solicitously.

"No. Several months ago we motored down into this part of the country. Some miles from here I had trouble with my engine, and I had to walk to town for help. When I came back my wife was gone—"

I pinched Billy under the table. "Gone?" I echoed.

"Yes. She left a note. She said that she could catch a train at the station and that she would take it. Some one evidently gave her a lift, for she had her traveling bag with her. She said that she would sail at once for France, and that I must not try to follow her. Of course I did follow her, and I searched through Europe, but I found no trace, and

then it occurred to me that after all she might still be in this part of the country—"

I held on to Billy. "Had you quarreled or anything?"

He ran his fingers through his hair. "Things had gone wrong somehow," he said, uncertainly, "I don't know why. I love her."

If you could have heard him say it! If *she* could have heard him! There was a silence out of which I said: "Did you ask her to warm your slippers?"

He stared at me, then he reached out his hands across the table and caught hold of mine in such a strong grip that it hurt. "You've seen her," he said, "*you've seen her*—?"

Then I remembered. "I can't say any more. You see—I've promised—"

"That you wouldn't tell me?"

"Yes."

He threw back his head and laughed. "If she's in this part of the country, I'll find her." And I knew that he would. He was the kind of man you felt wouldn't know there were obstacles in the way when he went after the thing he wanted.

I made him stay to supper. It was a drizzly cold night and he looked very tired.

"Jove," he said, "you're comfortable here, with your fire and your pussy-cat, and your teakettle on the hearth! This is the sort of thing I like—"

"You wouldn't like living over a grocery store," I told him.

"Why not?"

"Oh, nobody around here ever has, and they are all descended from signers of the Declaration of Independence and back of that from William the Conqueror, and they stick their noses in the air."

"Shades of Jefferson!—why should they?"

"They shouldn't. But they do—"

He came back to the subject of his wife. "I didn't want her to warm my slippers. It was only that I wanted her to feel like warming them," he appealed to Billy, and Billy nodded. Billy positively purrs when I make him comfortable after his day's work. He says that it is the homing instinct in men and that women ought to encourage it.

"Does she warm yours?" he asked Billy.

"Not now, she's too busy—" and then as if the stage were set for it, there came from the next room a little, little cry.

I went in and brought out—Junior! He was only a month old, but you know how heavenly sweet they are with their rose-leaf skins, and their little crumpled hands and their downy heads—Junior's down was brown, for Billy and I are both dark.

"You see he keeps me busy," I said.

I was so proud I am perfectly sure it stuck out all over me, and as for Billy he beamed on us in a funny fatherly fashion that he had adopted from the moment that he first called me "Little Mother."

"Do you wonder that she hasn't time to warm my slippers?" was his question.

The stranger held out his arms—"Let me hold the little chap." And he sat there, without a smile, looking down at my baby. When he raised his head he said in a dry sort of fashion, "I thought the pussy-cat and the teakettle were enough—but this seems almost too good to be true—"

I can't tell you how much I liked him. He seemed so big and fine—and tender. I came across a poem the other day, and he made me think of it:

" ... the strong"
The Master whispered, "are the tenderest!"

Before he went away, he took my hand in his. "I want you to play a game with me. Do you remember when we were children that we used to hide things, and then guide the ones who hunted by saying 'warmer' when we were near them, and 'colder' when they wandered away? Will you say 'warm' and 'cold' to me? That won't be breaking your promise, will it?"

"No."

"Then let's begin now. To-morrow morning I shall go to the north and east—"

"Cold!"

"To the south and west—"

"Warmer."

"Up a hill?"

"Very warm. But you mustn't ask me any more."

"All right. But I am coming again, and we will play the game."

Billy went down with him, and when he came back we stood looking into the fire, and he said, "You didn't tell him?"

"Of course not. That's the lovely, lovely thing that he must find out for himself—"

The next day I went to see Lady Crusoe. William Watters took me. "They's a man been hangin' round this mawnin'," he complained, "an' a dawg—"

"What kind of man, William?"

"He's huntin', and Miss Lily she doan' like things killed—"

Half-way up, we passed the man. His hat came off when he saw me. "It's cold weather we're having," he said pleasantly.

"It's getting warmer," I flung back at him, and William drove on with a grunt.

I had Junior with me, and when I reached the house I went straight up-stairs. In the very center of the room in the hooded mahogany cradle was another crumpled rose-leaf of a child. But this was not a "Junior."

"Robin-son," Lady Crusoe had whispered, when I had first bent over her and had asked the baby's name.

"Because of the robins?" I had asked.

She shook her head. "I couldn't call him Crusoe, could I?"

So there he lay, little Robinson Crusoe, in a desert expanse of polished floor, and there he crowed a welcome to my own beautiful baby!

Lady Crusoe was in a big chair. She was not strong, and William Watters had brought his sister Mandy to wait on her. She was very pale, this lovely lady, and there were shadows under her eyes. As I sat down beside her, she said: "I shall have to have your Billy sell some more things for me. You see the servants must be paid, and my Robin must be comfy. There's a console-table that ought to bring a lot from a city dealer."

"I wish that you needn't be worried," I said. "I wish—I wish—that you'd let me send for Robin's father—"

"Robin's father!" she drew a quick breath, "how funny it sounds!—*Robin's father*—"

I waited for that to sink in, and then I said: "I know how you feel. When I think of Billy as Junior's father it is different from thinking of him as my husband, and it makes a funny sensation in my throat as if I wanted to cry—"

"You've nothing to cry about," she told me fiercely, "nothing, but I sometimes feel as if I could weep rivers of tears!"

I realized that I must be careful, so I changed the subject. "William," I said after a pause, "is worrying about a man who is hunting over the grounds."

"He told me. I can't understand why any one should trespass when the place is posted. I sent William to tell him, but it didn't seem to have any effect. I haven't heard him shoot. When I do, I shall go out and speak to him myself."

I wondered if Fate were going to settle it in that way, and I wondered too if it would be breaking my promise to tell him to shoot! We sewed in silence for a while, but Lady Crusoe was restless. At last she wandered to the window. It was a long French window which opened on a balcony. She parted the velvet curtains and looked out. "There he is again," she said, with irritation, "by the gate with his gun and dog—"

I rose and joined her. The man stood by the gate-post, and the dog sat at his feet. They might have been a pair of statues planted on the round top of the hill, with the valleys rolling away beneath them and the mountain peaks and the golden sky beyond. Lady Crusoe was much stirred up over it.

"I'll send William again, when he comes with our tea. I won't have my wild things shot. There was a covey of partridges on the lawn this morning, and my squirrels come up to the porch to be fed. Men are cruel creatures with their guns and their traps."

"Women are cruel, too," I told her, and now I took my courage in my hands. "Suppose, oh, suppose, that the mother robin had stolen her nest and had never let the father robin share her happiness, wouldn't you call that cruel?"

"What do you mean?" her voice shook.

"You have stolen your—nest—"

"Why shouldn't I steal it? I had always felt that when I wanted a real home it would be here. And the time had come when I wanted a—home. So I planned to come—with him. It was to be my surprise—he doesn't even know that the old place belongs to me. He thought it was just another of my restless demands, but he let me have my way. We had friends with us when we started; they left us at Washington. It was after we were alone that—we quarreled—and I ran away. I left a note and told him that I had gone to France. I suppose he followed and didn't find me. I am not even sure that he wants to find me."

"Do you want to be found?"

"I don't know. I'd rather not talk about it."

William came in with the tea and was told to send the intruder off.

"I done sent him, Miss Lily," he said, with dignity, "but he ain't gwine to go. He say he ain't, and I kain't make him."

She went again to the window, and this time she drew back the faded hangings and stepped out on the balcony.

I heard her utter a cry; then the whole room seemed to whirl about me as she came in, dragging the curtains together behind her. Every drop of blood was drained from her face.

"William," she said, sharply, "that man—is coming toward the house! If he asks for me—I am not—at home."

"Nawm," and William went down to answer the blows of the brass knocker.

We heard him open the door, we heard the crisp, quick voice. We heard William's stately response. Then the quick voice said: "Will you tell your mistress that I shall wait?"

William came up with the message. "He's settin' on the po'ch, an' he looks like he was makin' out to set there all night."

"Let him sit," said Lady Crusoe inelegantly. "Lock all of the doors, William, and serve the tea."

She sat there and drank a cup of it scalding hot, with her head in the air and her foot tapping the floor. But I couldn't drink a drop. I was just sick with the thought of how he loved her, and of how she had hardened her heart.

At last I couldn't stand it any longer. The tears rolled down my cheeks. Lady Crusoe set her cup on the tray and stared at me in amazement. "What's the matter?"

"Oh, how can you—when he loves you?"

I don't know how I dared say it, for her eyes were blazing in her white face, and my heart was thumping, but there was Robinson Crusoe crowing in his hooded cradle, and Robin's father was on the front step, with the old oak door shut and barred against him.

She leaned forward, and I knew what was coming. "How did you know it was—my husband?"

My eyes met hers squarely. "He came to the store. He was looking for you."

"And you told him that I was here?"

"No. I wanted to. But I had promised."

For a little while neither of us spoke. The silence was broken by a thud, as if a flying squirrel had dropped from the roof to the balcony. A stick of wood fell apart in the grate, and the crow of the baby in the hooded cradle was answered by the baby on my lap.

Lady Crusoe hugged her knees with her white arms as if she were cold, although the room was hot with the blazing fire. "I think you might have told me. It would have been the friendly thing to have told me—"

"Billy thought it wasn't best."

"What had Billy to do with it?"

"Billy has everything to do with me. I talked it over with him—and—and Billy's such a darling to talk things over—"

I broke down and sobbed and sobbed, and the tears dripped on Junior's precious head. And at last she said, her face softened, "You silly little thing, what do you want me to do?"

"If it were Billy, I should ask him in—and show him—the baby—"

"If it were Billy, you would set your heart under his heel for him to step on. I am not like that—"

Another squirrel dropped to the balcony. The sun was setting, and between the velvet curtains I could see it blood-red behind the hills.

Lady Crusoe rose, pacing the room restlessly. The wind rising rattled the long windows. A shadow blotted out the sun.

"I suppose if you were I," she said at last, "you'd take your baby in your arms, and go down and say to that man on the steps, 'Come in and be lord of the manor and the ruler of your wife and child.'"

I held Junior close and my voice trembled. "I should never say a thing like that to—Billy—"

"What would you say?"

"I should say"—I choked over it, and broke down at the end—"oh, lover, lover, this is your son—and I am his happy mother—"

She stopped in front of me and stood looking down, with the anger all gone from her eyes. Then, before she could turn or cry out, the long windows were struck open by something that was stronger than the wind. There had been no flying squirrels on the balcony, and the shadow which had hidden the sun was the breadth and height of the big man who stood between the velvet curtains! He crossed the room at a stride.

"Did you think that bolts and bars could keep me from you?" he asked, and took Lady Crusoe's hands in a tight grip and drew her toward him. She resisted for a moment. Then her white slenderness was crushed in his hungry arms.

Well, as soon as I could gather up Junior and his belongings, I went down to wait for Billy. But before I went I saw her drop on her knees beside the hooded cradle and lift out little Robin, and, still kneeling, hold him up toward his father, as the nun holds up Galahad in the Holy Grail.

And what do you think I heard her say?

"Oh, lover, lover, this is your son—and I am his happy mother!"

Billy came in glowing from his walk in the sharp air, and I can't tell you how good it seemed to feel his cold cheek against my cheek, and his warm lips on mine. We were a rapturous trio in front of the library fire, and there we were joined presently by the rapturous trio from above stairs. They treated Billy and me as if we were a pair of guardian angels. Then we had dinner together, with Mandy and William in the background beaming.

And that night I told Billy all about it. "Isn't it beautiful, Billy? They are going to live on the old Davenant place, and it is to be their home."

Everybody calls on us now. You see, Lady Crusoe's family is older than any of the others, and then there's her husband's money. And I shine in her reflected light, for our friendship, as she says, is founded on a rock. But Billy says it is founded on a wreck. Yet while he jokes about it, I know that he is proud of his friendship with Robin's father. And when the spring comes, we are to take old Tid and our blessed Junior and our family effects to an adorable cottage with a garden on all four sides of it and set well back from the road. You see, we feel that we can afford it, for we have the exclusive business of supplying the needs of the Davenant estate, and we are thus financially on our feet.

A REBELLIOUS GRANDMOTHER

Mrs. Cissy Beale and her daughter Cecily sat together in the latter's bedroom—a bewitching apartment, in which pale-gray paper and pale-gray draperies formed an effective background for the rosewood furniture and the French mirrors and tapestried screens.

Between the two women was a bassinet and a baby.

"You act," said Cecily, "as if you were sorry about—the baby."

Her mother, who lay stretched at ease on a pillowed couch, shook her head.

"I'm not sorry about the baby—she's a darling—but you needn't think I'm going to be called 'grandmother,' Cecily. A grandmother is a person who settles down. I don't expect to settle down. My life has been hard. I struggled and strove through all those awful years after your father—left me. I educated you and Bob. And now you've both married well, and I've a bit of money ahead from my little book. For the first time in my life I can have leisure and pretty clothes; for the first time in my life I feel young; and then, absolutely without warning, you come back from Europe with your beautiful Surprise, and expect me to live up to it—"

"Oh, no!" Cecily protested.

"Yes, you do," insisted little Mrs. Beale. She sat up and gazed at her daughter accusingly. With the lace of her boudoir cap framing her small, fair face, she looked really young—as young almost as the demure Cecily, who, in less coquettish garb, was taking her new motherhood very seriously.

"Yes, you do," Mrs. Beale repeated. "I know just what you expect of me. You expect me to put on black velvet and old lace and diamonds. I shan't dare to show you my new afternoon frock—it's *red*, Cecily, geranium *red*; I shan't dare to wear even the tiniest slit in my skirts; I shan't dare to wear a Bulgarian sash or a Russian blouse, or a low neck—without expecting to hear some one say, disapprovingly, 'And she's a *grandmother*!'" She paused, and Cecily broke in tumultuously:

"I should think you'd be proud of—the baby."

"No, I'm not proud." Mrs. Beale thrust her toes into a pair of silver-embroidered Turkish slippers and stood up. "I'm not proud just at this moment, Cecily. You see—there's Valentine Landry."

"Mother—!"

"Now please don't say it that way, Cecily. He's half in love with me, and I'm beginning to like him, awfully. I've never had a bit of romance in my life. I married your father when I was too young to know my own mind, and he was much older than I. Then came the years of struggle after he went away.... I was a good wife and a good mother. I worshiped you and Bob, and I gave my youth for you. I never thought of any other man while your father lived, even though he did not belong to me. And now he is dead. You'll never know—I hope you may *never* know—what drudgery means as I have known it. I've written my poor little screeds when I was half-dead with fatigue; I've been out in cold and rain to get news; I've interviewed all sorts of people when I've hated them and hated the work. And if now I want to have my little fling, why not? Everybody effervesces some time. This is my moment—and you can't expect me to spoil it by playing the devoted grandmother."

The baby was wailing, a little hungry call, which made her mother take her up and say, hastily: "It's time to feed her. You won't mind, mother?"

"Yes, I *do* mind," said the little lady. "I don't like that Madonna effect, with the baby in your arms. It makes me feel horribly frivolous and worldly, Cecily. But it doesn't change my mind a bit."

After a pause, the Madonna-creature asked, "Who is Valentine Landry?"

Mrs. Beale had her saucy little cap off, and was brushing out her thin, light locks in which the gray showed slightly. But she stopped long enough to explain. "He isn't half as sentimental as his name. I met him in Chicago at the Warburtons', just before I made a success of my book. I was very tired, and he cheered me a lot. He's from Denver, and he made his money in mines. He hasn't married, because he hasn't had time. We're awfully good friends, but he doesn't know my age. He knows that I have a daughter, but not a grand-daughter. He thinks of me as a young woman—not as a grandmother-creature in black silk and mitts—"

"*Mother*! nobody expects you to wear black silk and mitts—"

"Well, you expect me to have a black-silk-and-mitt mind. You know you are thinking this very minute that there is no idiot like an old one—Cecily—"

The girl flushed. "I don't think you are quite kind, mother."

Mrs. Beale laughed and forgot to be cynical. "I know what you'd like to have me, dearie, but this is my moment of emancipation." She crossed the room and looked down at the tiny bit of humanity curled like a kitten in the curve of her daughter's arm. "I'm not going to be your grandmother, yet, midget," she announced, with decision. Then, "Cecily, I think when she's old enough I shall have her call me—Cupid—"

And laughing in the face of her daughter's horrified protest, the mutinous grandparent retired precipitately to her own room.

Three hours later, Mrs. Cissy Beale went forth to conquer, gowned in a restaurant frock of shadow lace topped by a black tulle hat.

Valentine Landry, greeting her in Cecily's white-and-gold drawing-room, was breezy and radiant. "You're as lovely as ever," he said, as he took her hand; "perhaps a bit lovelier because you are glad to see me."

"I am glad," she assured him; "and it is so nice to have you come before the summer is at an end. We can have a ride out into Westchester, and come back by daylight to dinner."

"And no chaperons?"

"No." She was looking up at him a little wistfully. "We know each other too well to have to drag in a lot of people, don't we? It is the men whom women trust with whom they go alone."

He met her glance gravely. "Do you know," he said, "that you have the sweetest way of putting things? A man simply has to come up to your expectations. He'd as soon think of disappointing a baby as of disappointing you."

His selection of a simile was unfortunate. Mrs. Beale's eyes became fixed upon a refractory button of her glove.

"Please help me," she said; "your fingers are stronger," and as he bent above her hand she forgot the baby, forgot her new estate, forgot everything except the joy she felt at having his smooth gray head so close to her own.

When he had her safely beside him in his big car he asked, "What made you run away from me in Chicago?"

"My daughter came home from Europe."

"I can't quite think of you with a grown daughter."

"Cecily's a darling." Mrs. Beale's voice held no enthusiasm.

Landry, noting her tone, looked faintly surprised. "You and she must have great good times together."

"Oh, yes—"

Mrs. Beale wished that he wouldn't talk about Cecily. Cecily had married before good times were possible. They had never played together—she and the little daughter for whom she had toiled and sacrificed.

Landry's voice broke in upon her meditations: "I should like to meet Cecily."

Mrs. Beale switched him away from the topic expeditiously. He should not see her as yet in the bosom of her family. *He should not.* He should not see Cecily with her air of mature motherliness. He should not see Victor, Cecily's husband, who was ten years older than Cecily and only ten years younger than herself. He should not hear her big son Bob call her "Grandma." He should not gaze upon the pretty deference of Bob's little wife toward the queen-dowager!

Dining later opposite Landry in a great golden palace, Cissy seemed like some gay tropical bird. In her new and lovely clothes she was very pretty, very witty, almost girlishly charming. Yet Landry was conscious of a vague feeling of disappointment. She had been more serenely satisfying in Chicago—not so brilliantly hard, not so persistently vivacious. How could he know that the change was one of desperation? Cissy, as grandmother, felt that she must prove, even to herself, that she was not yet a back number.

With this rift in the lute of their budding romance, they ate and drank and went to the play and had what might otherwise have been an enchanted ride home in the moonlight. But when Landry said "Good-night" Cissy felt the loss of something in his manner. His greeting that afternoon had had in it something almost of tenderness; his farewell was commonplace and slightly constrained.

As Mrs. Beale went through the dimly lighted hall to her room, she met Cecily in a flowing garment, pacing back and forth with the baby in her arms.

"She isn't well," Cecily whispered, as the little lady in the lace frock questioned her. "I don't know whether I ought to call a doctor or not."

Mrs. Beale poked the tiny mite with an expert finger. "I'll give her a drink of hot water with a drop of peppermint in it," she said, "as soon as I get my hat off, and you'd better go back to bed, Cecily; you aren't well enough to worry with her."

Cecily looked relieved. "I was worried," she confessed. "It's nurse's night out and Victor had to go to a board meeting unexpectedly—and with you away—I lost my nerve. It seemed dreadful to be alone, mother."

Mrs. Beale knew how dreadful it was. She had carried the wailing Cecily in her arms night after night in the weeks which followed the crushing knowledge of her husband's infidelity. But she had carried a heavier burden than the child—the burden of poverty, of desertion, of an unknown future.

But these things were not to be voiced. "You go to bed, Cecily," she said. "I'll look after her."

Walking the floor later with the baby in her arms, Mrs. Beale's mind was on Landry. "Heavens! if he could see me now!" was her shocked thought, as she stopped in front of a mirror to survey the picture she made.

Her hair was down and the grayest lock of all showed plainly. She had discarded frills and furbelows and wore a warm gray wrapper. She looked nice and middle-aged, yet carried, withal, a subtle air of girlishness—would carry it, in spite of storm or stress, until the end, as the sign and seal of her undaunted spirit.

The baby stirred in her arms, and again Mrs. Beale went back and forth, crooning the lullaby with which she had once put her own babies to bed.

In the morning the baby was much better, but Mrs. Beale was haggard. She stayed in bed until eleven o'clock, however. Cecily, coming in at twelve, found her ready to go out. In response to an

inquiry, Mrs. Beale spoke of a luncheon engagement with Valentine Landry.

"Mother—are you going to marry him?"

Cissy, studying the adjustment of her veil, confessed, "He hasn't asked me."

"But he will—"

Mrs. Beale shrugged her shoulders. "Who knows?"

In the weeks which followed, the little lady was conscious that things were not drawing to a comfortable climax. By all the rules of the game, Landry should long ago have declared himself. But he seemed to be slipping more and more into the fatal role of good friend and comrade.

Cissy's pride would not let her admit, even to herself, that she had failed to attract at the final moment. But there was something deeper than her pride involved, and she found her days restless and her nights sleepless. One night in the dense darkness she faced the truth relentlessly. "You're in love, Cissy Beale," she told herself, scornfully. "You're in love for the first time in your life—and you a—grandmother!"

Then she turned over on her pillow, hid her face in its white warmth, and cried as if her heart would break.

In the meantime the baby drooped. Cecily, worried, consulted her mother continually. Thus it came about that Mrs. Beale lived a double life. From noon until midnight she was of to-day—smartly gowned, girlish; from midnight until dawn she was of yesterday—waking from her fitful slumbers at the first wailing note, presiding in gray gown and slippers over strange brews of catnip and of elderflower.

Cecily's doctor, being up-to-date, remonstrated at this return to the primitive, but was forced to admit, after the baby had come triumphantly through a half-dozen critical attacks, that Cissy's back-to-grandma methods were effective.

It was on a morning following one of these struggles that Cissy said to her daughter, wearily, "I can't escape it—"

"Escape what?" demanded Cecily, who, in the pale-gray bedroom was endeavoring to observe the doctor's injunction to let the wailing baby stay in her bassinet, instead of walking the floor with her.

"The black-silk-and-mitt destiny," said the depressed lady.

"What has happened?" Cecily demanded.

"Nothing has happened," responded her weary little mother, and refused to discuss the matter further.

But to herself she was beginning to admit that she had lost Landry. An hour later she had a telephone message from him.

"I want you to go with me for a last ride together," he said. "I leave to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" Her voice showed her dismay.

"But why this sudden decision—"

"I have played long enough," he said; "business calls—"

As Mrs. Beale made ready for the ride she surveyed herself wistfully in her mirror. There were shadows under her eyes, and faint little lines toward the corners of her lips—it even seemed to her that her chin sagged. She had a sudden sense of revolt. "If I were young, *really* young," she thought, "he would not be going away—"

With this idea firmly fixed in her mind, she exerted herself to please him; and her little laugh made artificial music in his ears, her fixed smile wore upon his nerves, her staccato questions irritated him.

Again they had dinner together, and as she sat opposite him, gorgeous and gay in her gown of geranium red, he began to talk with her of her daughter.

"I've never met her. It has seemed to me that you might have let me see her—"

Cissy flushed. "She's such a great grown-up," she said. "Somehow when I'm with her I feel—old—"

"You will never seem old," he said, with the nearest approach to tenderness that had softened his voice for days. "You have in you the spirit of eternal youth—"

Then he floundered on. "But a mother and a daughter—when you used to speak of her in Chicago, it seemed to me that I could see you together, and I liked the sweetness and womanliness of the thought; but I have never seen you together."

With a sense of recklessness upon her, Cissy suddenly determined to tell him the truth. "Cecily hasn't been going out much. You see, there's the baby—"

He stared. "The baby—?"

"Her baby—Cecily's—"

"*Then you're a grandmother*?"

It seemed to Cissy that the whole restaurant rang with the emphasis of the words. Yet he had not spoken loudly; not a head was turned in their direction; even the waiter stood unmoved.

When she came to herself Landry was laughing softly. "When are you going to let me see—the baby—?"

"Never—"

"Why not?"

Cissy went on to her doom. "Because you'll want to put me on the shelf like all the rest of them. You'll want to see me with—my hair—parted—and spectacles. And my eyes are perfectly good—and my hair is my own—"

She stopped. Landry was surveying her with hard eyes.

"Don't you love—the baby—?"

Cissy shrugged. "Perhaps. I don't know yet. Some day I may when I haven't anything to do but sit in a chimney-corner."

Thus spoke Cissy Beale, making of herself a heartless creature, flinging back into the face of Valentine Landry his most cherished ideals.

But what did it matter? She had known from the moment of her confession that he would be repelled. What man could stand up in the face of the world and marry a grandmother!—the idea was preposterous.

She finished dinner with her head in the air; she was hypocritically lively during the drive home; she said "Good-night" and "Good-bye" without feeling, and went up-stairs with her heart like lead to find the nurse weeping wildly on the first landing.

The baby, it appeared, was very ill. And the baby's father and mother, having left the little cherub sleeping peacefully, were motoring somewhere in the wide spaces of the world. The family

doctor was out. She had called up another doctor, and he would come as soon as he could. But in the meantime the baby was dying—

"Nonsense, Kate," said Cissy Beale, and pulling off her gloves as she ran, she made for the pale-gray room.

Now, as it happened, Valentine Landry, driving away in a priggish state of mind, was suddenly overwhelmed by miserable remorse. Reviewing the evening, he seemed to see, for the first time, the unhappiness in the eyes of the little woman who had borne herself so bravely. In a sudden moment of illumination he realized all that she must have been feeling. Perhaps it had not been heartlessness; perhaps it had been—heart hunger.

Leaning forward, he spoke to his chauffeur. They stopped at the first drug-store, and Landry called up Cissy. Her voice from the other end answered, sharply, then broke as he gave his name.

"I thought it was the doctor," she said. "Can you come back, please? The baby, oh, the baby is very ill!"

Five minutes later the nurse let him into the house. He followed her up the stairs and into the nursery. Cissy sat with the baby in her arms. The baby was in a blanket and Cissy was in her gray wrapper. She had donned it while the nurse held the baby in the hot bath which saved its life. Cissy's hair was out of curl and the color was out of her cheeks. But to Valentine Landry she was beautiful.

"It was a convulsion," she told him, simply. "I am afraid she will have another. We haven't been able to get a doctor—will you get one for us?"

Out he went on his mission for the lady of his heart, and the lady of his heart, sitting wet and worried in the pale-gray bedroom, was saying to herself, monotonously, "It's all over now—no man could see me like this and love me—"

Cecily and her husband and the doctor and Landry came in out of the darkness together. They went up-stairs together, then stopped on the threshold as Cissy held up a warning hand.

She continued to croon softly the lullaby which had belonged to her own babies: "Hushaby, sweet, my own—"

It was Cecily and the doctor who went in to her, and Landry, standing back in the shadows, waited. He spoke to Cissy as she came out.

"I am going so early in the morning," he said, "will you give me just one little minute now?"

In that minute he told her that he loved her.

And Cissy, standing in the library in all the disorder of uncurled locks and gray kimono, demanded, after a rapturous pause, "But why didn't you tell me before?"

He found it hard to explain. "I didn't quite realize it—until I saw you there so tender and sweet, with the baby in your arms—"

"A Madonna-creature," murmured Cissy Beale.

But he did not understand. "It isn't because I want you to sit in a chimney-corner—it wasn't fair of you to say that—"

Then in just one short speech Cissy Beale showed him her heart. She told of the years of devotion, always unrewarded by the affection she craved. "And here was the baby," she finished, "to grow up—and find somebody else, and forget me—"

As he gathered her into his protecting embrace, his big laugh comforted her.

"I'm yours till the end of the world, little grandmother," he whispered. "I shall never find any one else—and I shall never forget."

WAIT—FOR PRINCE CHARMING

Kingdon Knox was not conscious of any special meanness of spirit. He was a lawyer and a good one. He was fifty, and wore his years with an effect of youth. He exercised persistently and kept his boyish figure. He had keen, dark eyes, and silver in his hair. He was always well groomed and well dressed, and his income provided him with the proper settings. His home in the suburb was spacious and handsome and presided over by a handsome and socially successful wife. His office was presided over by Mary Barker, who was his private secretary. She was thirty-five and had been in his office for fifteen years. She had come to him an unformed girl of twenty; she was now a perfect adjunct to his other office appointments. She wore tailored frocks, her hair was exquisitely dressed in shining waves, her hands were white and her nails polished, her slender feet shod in unexceptional shoes.

Nannie Ashburner, who was also in the office and who now and then took Knox's dictation, had an immense admiration for Mary. "I wish I could wear my clothes as you do," she would say as they walked home together.

"Clothes aren't everything."

"Well, they are a lot."

"I would give them all to be as young as you are."

"You don't look old, Mary."

"Of course I take care of myself," said Mary, "but if I were as young as you I'd begin over again."

"How do you mean 'begin,' Mary?"

But Mary was not communicative. "Oh, well, I'd have some things that I might have had and can't get now," was all the satisfaction that she gave Nannie.

It was through Mary that Nannie had obtained her position in Kingdon Knox's office. Mary had boarded with Nannie's mother for five years. Nannie was fourteen when Mary came. She had finished high school and had had a year in a business college, and then Mrs. Ashburner had asked Mary if there was any chance for her in Kingdon Knox's office.

Mary had considered it, but had seemed to hesitate. "We need another typist, but I am not sure it is the place for her."

"Why not?"

Mary did not say why. "I wish she didn't have to work at all. She ought to get married."

"Dick McDonald wants her. But she's too young, Mary."

"You were married at nineteen."

"Yes, and a lot I got out of it." Mrs. Ashburner was sallow and cynical. "I kept boarders to make a living for my husband, Mary; and since he died I've kept boarders to make a living for Nannie and me."

"But Dick gets good wages."

"Well, he can wait till he saves something."

"Don't make him wait too long."

It was against her better judgment that Mary Barker spoke to her employer about Nannie. "I should want her to help me. She is not expert enough to take your dictation, but she could relieve me of a lot of detail."

"Well, let me have a look at her," Kingdon Knox had said.

So Nannie had come to be looked over, and she had blushed a little and had been rather breathless as she had talked to Mr. Kingdon, and he had been aware of the vividness of her young beauty; for Nannie had red hair that curled over her ears, and her skin was warm ivory, and her eyes were gray.

Her clothes were not quite up to the office standard, but Knox, having hired her, referred the matter to Mary. "You might suggest that she cut out thin waists and high heels," he had said; "you know what I like."

Mary knew, and Nannie's first month's salary had been spent in the purchase of a serge one-piece frock.

Mrs. Ashburner had rebelled at the expense. But Mary had been firm. "Mr. Knox won't have anybody around the office who looks slouchy or sloppy. It will pay in the end."

Nannie thought Mr. Knox wonderful. "He says that he wants me to work hard so that I can handle some of his letters."

"When did he tell you that?"

"Last night, while you were taking testimony in the library."

The office library was lined with law books. There were a handsome long mahogany table, green covered, and six handsome mahogany chairs. Mary, shut in with three of Knox's clients and a consulting partner, had had a sense of uneasiness. It was after hours. Nannie was waiting for her in the outer office. Everybody else had gone home except Knox, who was waiting for his clients.

Mary remembered how, when she was Nannie's age, she had often sat in that outer office after hours, and Knox had talked to her. He had been thirty-five and she, twenty. He had a wife and a handsome home; she had nothing but a hall room. And he had made her feel that she was very necessary to him. "I don't know how we should ever get along without you," he had said.

He had said other things.

It was because he had spoken of her lovely hair that she had kept it brushed and shining. It was because his eyes had followed her pencil that she had rubbed cold cream on her hands at night and had looked well after her nails. It was because she had learned his taste that she wore simple but expensive frocks. It was because of her knowledge that nothing escaped him that she shod her pretty feet in expensive shoes.

He had set standards for her, and she had followed them. And now he would set standards for Nannie!

She spoke abruptly. "Is Dick McDonald coming to-night?"

"Yes. He has had a raise, Mary. He telephoned—"

The two girls were in Mary's room. Dinner was over and Mary had slipped on a Chinese coat of dull blue and had settled down for an evening with her books. Mary's room was charming. In fifteen years she had had gifts of various kinds from Knox. They had always been well chosen and appropriate. Nothing could have been in better taste as an offering from an employer to an employee than the embossed leather book ends and desk set, the mahogany reading lamp with its painted parchment shade, the bronze Buddha, the antique candlesticks, the Chelsea teacups, the Sheffield tea caddy. Mary's comfortable salary had permitted her to buy the book shelves and the tea table and the mahogany day bed. There was a lovely rug which Mrs. Knox had sent her on the tenth anniversary of her

association with the office. Mrs. Knox looked upon Mary as a valuable business asset. She invited her once a year to dinner.

Nannie wore her blue serge one-piece frock and a new winter hat. The hat was a black velvet tam.

"You need something to brighten you up," Mary said; "take my beads."

The beads were jade ones which Mr. Knox had brought to Mary when he came back from a six months' sojourn in the Orient. Mary had looked after the office while he was away. He had clasped the beads about her neck. "Bend your head while I put them on, Mary," he had commanded. He had been at his desk in his private office while she sat beside him with her note-book. And when he had clasped the beads and she had lifted her head, he had said with a quick intake of his breath: "I've been a long time away from you, Mary."

Nannie with the jade beads and her red hair and her velvet tam was rather rare and wonderful. "Dick is going to take me to the show to celebrate. He's got tickets to Jack Barrymore."

"Dick is such a nice boy," said Mary. "I'm glad you are going to marry him, Nannie."

"Who said I was going to marry him?"

"That's what he wants, Nannie, and you know it."

"Mr. Knox says it is a pity for a girl like me to get married."

Mary's heart seemed to stop beating. She knew just how Knox had said it.

She spoke quietly. "I think it would be a pity for you not to marry, Nannie."

"I don't see why. You aren't married, Mary."

"No."

"And Mr. Knox says that unless a girl can marry a man who can lift her up she had better stay single."

The same old arguments! "What does he mean by 'lift her up,' Nannie?"

"Well"—Nannie laughed self-consciously—"he says that any one as pretty and refined as I might marry anybody; that I must be careful not to throw myself away."

"Would it be throwing yourself away to marry Dick?"

"It might be. He looked all right to me before I went into the office. But after you've seen men like Mr. Knox—well, our kind seem—common."

Mrs. Ashburner was calling that Dick McDonald was down-stairs. Nannie, powdering her nose with Mary's puff, was held by the earnestness of the other woman's words.

"Let Dick love you, Nannie. He's such a dear."

Dick was, Nannie decided before the evening was over, a dear and a darling. He had brought her a box of candy and something else in a box. Mrs. Ashburner had shown him into the dining-room, which she and Nannie used as a sitting-room when the meals were over. The boarders occupied the parlor and were always in the way.

"Say, girlie, see here," Dick said as he brought out the box; and Nannie had gazed upon a ring which sparkled and shone and which looked, as Dick said proudly, "like a million dollars."

"I wanted you to have the best." His arm went suddenly around her. "I always want you to have the best, sweetheart."

He kissed her in his honest, boyish fashion, and she took the ring and wore it; and they went to the play in a rosy haze of happiness, and when they came home he kissed her again.

"The sooner you get out of that office the better," he said. "We'll get a little flat, and I've saved enough to furnish it."

Nannie was lighting the lamp under the percolator. Mrs. Ashburner had left a plate of sandwiches on one end of the dining-room table. Nannie was young and Mrs. Ashburner was old-fashioned. Her daughter was not permitted to eat after-the-theatre suppers in restaurants. "You can always have something here."

"Don't let's settle down yet," Nannie said, standing beside the percolator like a young priestess beside an altar. "There's plenty of time—-"

"Plenty of time for what?" asked her lover. "We've no reason to wait, Nannie."

So Dick kissed her, and she let him kiss her. She loved him, but she would make no promises as to the important day. Dick went

away a bit puzzled by her attitude. He wanted her at once in his home. It hurt him that she did not seem to care to come to him.

It was a cold night, with white flakes falling, and the policeman on the beat greeted Dick as he passed him. "It is a nice time in the morning for you to be getting home."

"Oh, hello, Tommy! I'm going to be married. How's that?"

"Who's the girl?"

"Nannie Ashburner."

"That little redhead?"

"You're jealous, Tommy."

"I am; she'll cook sausages for you when you come home on cold nights, and kiss you at your front door, and set the talking machine going, with John McCormack shouting love songs as you come in."

Dick laughed. "Some picture, Tommy. And a lot you know about it. Why don't you get married and try it out?"

Tommy, who was tall and ruddy and forty, plus a year or two, gave a short laugh. "I might find somebody to cook the sausages, but there's only one that I'd care to kiss."

"So that's it. She turned you down, Tommy?"

"She did, and we won't talk about it."

"Oh, very well. Good-night, Tommy."

"Good-night."

So Dick passed on, and Tommy Jackson beat his hands against his breast as he made his way through the whirling snow, his footsteps deadened by the frozen carpet which the storm had spread.

Mary Barker was delighted when Nannie told of her engagement to Dick. She talked it over with Mrs. Ashburner. "It will be the best thing for her."

Mrs. Ashburner was not sure. "I've drudged all my life and I hate to see her drudge."

"She won't have it as hard as you have had it," Mary said. "Dick will always make a good income."

"She will have a harder time than you've had, Mary," said Mrs. Ashburner, and her eyes swept the pretty room wistfully. "Many a time when I've been down in my steaming old kitchen I have thought

of you up here in your blue coat and your pretty slippers, with your hair shining, and I've wished to heaven that I had never married."

"Things haven't been easy for you," said Mary gently.

"They have been harder than nails, Mary. You've escaped all that."

"Yes." Mary's eyes did not meet Mrs. Ashburner's. "I have escaped—that."

Nannie and her mother slept in the back parlor of the boarding-house. They had single beds and it was in the middle of the night that Mrs. Ashburner said: "Are you awake, Nannie?"

"Yes, I am."

"Well, I can't seem to get to sleep. Maybe it's the coffee and maybe it's because I have you on my mind. I keep thinking that I hate to have you get married, honey."

"Oh, mother, don't you like Dick?"

"Yes. It ain't that. But it's nice for you in the office and you don't have to slave."

Nannie sat up in bed, and the light from the street lamp shone in and showed her wide-eyed, with her hair in a red glory. "I shan't slave," she said. "I told Dick."

"Men don't know." Mrs. Ashburner spoke with a sort of weary bitterness. "They'll promise anything."

"And I am not going to be married in a hurry, mother. Dick's got to wait for me if he wants me."

It sounded very worldly-minded and decisive and Mrs. Ashburner gained an envious comfort in her daughter's declaration. She had never set herself against a man's will in that way. Perhaps, after all, Nannie would make a success of marriage.

But Nannie was not so resolute as her words might have seemed to imply. Long after her mother slept she lay awake in the dark and thought of Dick, of the break in his voice when he had made his plea, the light in his eyes when he had won a response, his flaming youth, his fine boy's reverence for her own youth and innocence. It would be—rather wonderful, she whispered to her heart, and fell asleep, dreaming.

The next morning was very cold, and Nannie, coming early into Kingdon Knox's office to take his letters, was in a glow after her walk

through the snowy streets. Her cheeks were red, her eyes sparkled, and the ring on her finger sparkled.

Knox at once noticed the ring. "So that's it," he said, and leaned back in his chair. "Let's talk about it a little."

They talked about it more than a little, and the burden of Kingdon Knox's argument was that it was a pity. She was too young and pretty to marry a poor man and live in a funny little flat and do her own work and spoil her nails with dishwashing. "Personally, I think it's rather dreadful. A waste of you, if you want the truth."

Poor Nannie, listening, saw her castles falling. It would be rather dreadful—dishwashing and a gas stove and getting meals.

"He is awfully in love with me," she managed to say at last.

"And you?" He leaned forward a little. Nannie was aware of the feeling of excitement which he could always rouse in her. When he spoke like that she saw herself as something rather perfect and princesslike.

"Wait—for Prince Charming," he said.

Nannie was sure that when Prince Charming came he would be like Mr. Knox; younger perhaps, but with that same lovely manner.

"Of course," Mr. Knox said gently, "I suppose I ought not to advise, but if I were you"—he touched the sparkling ring—"I should give it back to him."

So after several absorbing talks with her employer on the subject, Nannie gave the ring back, and when poor Dick passed his friend the policeman on his way home he stopped and told his story.

"They are all like that," Tommy said, "but if I were you I wouldn't take 'no' for an answer."

Dick brightened. "Wouldn't you?"

"Not if I had to carry her off under my arm," said Tommy between his teeth.

"But I can't carry her off, Tommy—and she won't go."

"She'll go if you ain't afraid of her," Tommy told him with solemn emphasis. "I was afraid."

They were under the street lamp, and Dick stared at him in astonishment. "I didn't know you were afraid of anything."

"I didn't know it either," was Tommy's grim response, "until I met her. But I've known it ever since."

"Well, it's hard luck."

"It is hardest at Christmas time," said Tommy, "and my beat ain't the best one to make me cheerful. There are too many stores. And dolls in the windows. And drums. And horns. And Santa Claus handing out things to kids. And I've got to see it, with money just burning in my pocket to buy things and to have a tree of my own and a turkey in my oven and a table with some one who cares at the other end. And all I'll get out of the merry season is a table d'hôte at Nitti's and a box of cigars from the boys."

"Ain't women the limit, Tommy?"

"Well"—Tommy's tone held a note of forced cheerfulness—"that little redhead must have had some reason for not wanting you, Dick. Maybe we men ain't worth it."

"Worth what?"

"Marrying. A woman's got a square deal coming to her, and she doesn't always get it."

"She'd get it with you, and she'd get it with me; you know that, Tommy."

"She might," said Tommy pessimistically, "if the good Lord helped us."

Nannie on the day after her break with Dick was blushingly aware of the bareness of her third finger as she took Kingdon Knox's dictation. When he had finished his letters, Knox smiled at her. "So you gave it back," he said.

"Yes."

"Good little girl. You'll find something much better if you wait. And I don't want you wasted." He opened a drawer and took out a long box. He opened it and lifted a string of beads. They were of carved ivory, and matched the cream of Nannie's complexion. They were strung strongly on a thick thread of scarlet silk, and there was a scarlet tassel at the end.

"They are for you," he said. "It is my first Christmas present to you; but I hope it won't be the last."

Nannie's heart beat so that she could almost hear it. "Oh, thank you," she said breathlessly; "they're so beautiful."

But she did not know how rare they were, nor how expensive until she wore them in Mary's room that night.

"Where did you get them, Nannie?"

"Mr. Knox gave them to me."

There was dead silence, then Mary said: "Nannie, you ought not to take them."

"Why not?"

"They cost such an awful lot, Nannie. They look simple, but they aren't. The carving is exquisite."

"Well, he gave you beads, Mary."

Mary's face was turned away. "It was different. I have been such a long time in the office."

"I don't think it is much different, and I don't see how I can give them back, Mary."

Mary did not argue, but when a little later Nannie told of her broken engagement, Mary said sharply: "But, Nannie—why?"

"Well, mother doesn't care much for the idea. She—she thinks a girl is much better off to keep on at the office."

Mary was lying in her long chair under the lamp. She had a cushion under her head, and her hand shaded her eyes. "Did—Mr. Knox have anything to do with it?"

"What makes you ask that, Mary?"

"Did he?"

"Well, yes. You know what I told you; he thinks I'd be—wasted."

"On Dick?"

"Yes."

Mary lay for a long time with her hand over her eyes; then she said: "If you don't marry Dick, what about your future, Nannie?"

"There's time enough to think about that. And—and I can wait."

"For what?"

Nannie blushed and laughed a little. "Prince Charming."

After that there was a silence, out of which Nannie asked: "Does your head ache, Mary?"

"A little."

"Can't I get you something?"

"No. After I've rested a bit I'll take a walk."

Mary's walk led her by the lighted shop windows. The air was keen and cold and helped her head. But it did not help her heart. She had a sense of suffocation when she thought of Nannie.

She stopped in front of one of the shops. There were dolls in the window, charming, round-eyed, ringleted. One of them was especially captivating, with fat blond curls, fat legs, blue silk socks and slippers, crisp frills and a broad blue hat.

"How I should have loved her when I was a little girl," was Mary's thought as she stood looking in. Then: "How a child of my own would have loved her."

She made up her mind that she would buy the doll—in the morning when the shop opened. It was a whimsical thing to do, to give herself a doll at her time of life. But it would be in a sense symbolic. She had no child to which to give it; she would give it to the child who was once herself.

She came home with a lighter heart and with the knowledge of what she had to do. She put on her blue house coat and sat down to her desk with its embossed leather fittings, and there under the lovely, lamp which Kingdon Knox had given her she wrote to Nannie.

She gave the letter to Nannie the next morning. "I want you to read it when you are all alone. Then tear it up. It must always be just between you and me, Nannie."

Nannie read the letter in the lunch hour. She got her lunch at a cafeteria and there was a rest room. It was very quiet and she had a corner to herself. She wondered what Mary had to say to her, and why she didn't talk it out instead of writing about it.

But Mary had felt that she could not trust herself to speak. There would have been Nannie's eyes to meet, questions to answer; and this meant so much. Paper and pen were impersonal.

"It isn't easy to talk such things out, Nannie. I should never have written this if I had not realized last night that your feet were following the path which my own have followed for fifteen years. And I knew that you were envying me and wanting to be like me; and

I am saying what I shall say in this letter so that I may save you, Nannie.

"When I first came into Mr. Knox's office I was young like you, and I had a lover, young and fine like Dick, and he satisfied me. We had our plans—of a home and the happiness we should have together. If I had married him, I should now have sons and daughters growing up about me, and when Christmas came there would be a tree and young faces smiling, and my husband, smiling.

"But Mr. Knox talked to me as he talked to you. He told me, too, to wait—for Prince Charming. He told me I was too fine to be wasted. He hinted that the man I was planning to marry was a plain fellow, not good enough for me. He talked and I listened. He opened vistas. I saw myself raised to a different sphere by some man like Mr. Knox—just as well groomed, just as distinguished, just as rich and wonderful.

"But such men don't come often into the lives of girls like you and me, Nannie. I know that now. I did not know it then. But Mr. Knox should have known it. Yet he held out the hope; and at last he robbed me of my future, of the little home, my fine, strong husband. He robbed me of my woman's heritage of a child in my arms.

"And in return he gave me—nothing. I have found in the years that I have been with him that he likes to be admired and looked up to by pretty women. He likes to mold us into something exquisite and ornamental, he likes to feel that he has molded us. He likes to see our blushes. All these years that I have been with him, he has liked to feel that I looked upon him as the ideal toward which all my girlish dreams tended.

"He is not in love with me, and I am not in love with him. But he has always known that if he had been free and had wooed me, I should have felt that King Cophetua had come to the beggar maid. Yet, too late, I can see that if he had been free he would never have wooed me. His ambition would have carried him up and beyond anything I can ever hope to be, and he would have sought some woman of his own circle who would have contributed to his material success.

"And now he is trying to spoil your life, Nannie—to make you discontented with your future with Dick. You look at him and see in

your life some day a Prince Charming. But I tell you this, Nannie, that Prince Charming will never come. And after a time all you will have to show for the years that you have spent in the office will be just a pretty room, a few bits of wood and leather and bronze in exchange for warm, human happiness, clinging hands, a husband like Dick, who adores you, who comes home at night, eager—for you!

"You can have all this—and I have lost it. And there isn't much ahead of me. I shan't always be ornamental, and then Mr. Knox will let me drop out of his life, as he has let others drop out. And there'll be loneliness and old age and—nothing else.

"Oh, Nannie, I want you to marry Dick. I want you to know that all the rest is dust and ashes. I feel tired and old; and when I think of your youth, and beauty, I want Dick to have it, not Mr. Knox, who will flatter and—forget.

"Tear this letter up, Nannie. It hasn't been easy to write. I don't want anybody but you to read it."

But Nannie did not tear it up.

She tucked it in her bag and went to telephone to Dick.

And would he meet her on the corner under the street lamp that night when she came home from the office? She had something to tell him.

Dick met Nannie, and presently they pursued their rapturous way. A little later Tommy Jackson passed by. Something caught his eye.

A bit of white paper.

He stooped and picked it up. It was Mary's letter to Nannie. Nannie had cried into her little handkerchief while she talked to Dick, and in getting the handkerchief out of the bag the letter had come with it and had dropped unnoticed to the ground.

It had been years since Tommy had seen any of Mary's writing. A sentence caught his eye, and he read straight through. After all, there are things permitted an officer of the law which might be unseemly in the average citizen.

And when he had read, Tommy began to say things beneath his breath. And the chances are that had Kingdon Knox appeared at that moment things would have fared badly with him.

But it was Mary Barker who came. She had under her arm in a paper parcel the fat doll with the blond curls and the blue socks. She did not see Tommy until she was almost upon him.

Then she said: "What are you doing here, Tommy?"

"Why shouldn't I be here?"

"This isn't your beat."

"It has been my beat since two weeks ago. I've seen you go by every night, Mary."

She stood looking up at him. And he looked down at her; and so, of course, their gaze met, and something that she saw in Tommy's eyes made Mary's overflow.

"Mary, darling," said Tommy tenderly.

"You said you wouldn't forgive me."

"That was fifteen years ago."

"Tommy, I'm sorry."

Tommy stood very straight as became an officer of the law with, the eyes of the world upon him.

"May," he said, "I just read your letter to Nannie. She dropped it. If I'd known the things in that letter fifteen years ago I'd have stayed on my job until I got you. But I thought you didn't care."

"I thought so too," said Mary.

"But the letter told me that you wanted a husband's loving heart and a strong arm," said Tommy, "and, please God, you are going to have them, Mary. And now you run along, girl, dear. I can't be making love when I'm on duty. But I'll come and kiss you at nine."

So Mary ran along, and her heart sang. And when she got home she unwrapped the fat doll and kissed every curl of her, and she set her under the lovely lamp; and then she got a long box and put something in it and wrapped it and addressed it to Kingdon Knox.

And after that she went to the window and stood there, watching until she saw Tommy coming.

And the next morning when Kingdon Knox found the long box on his desk, addressed in Mary's handwriting, he thought it was a Christmas present, and he opened it, smiling.

But his smile died as he read the note which lay on top of a string of jade beads:

"I am sending them back, Mr. Knox, with my resignation. I should never have taken them. But somehow you made me feel that I was a sort of fairy princess, and that jade beads belonged to me, and everything beautiful, and that some day life would bring them. But life isn't that, and you knew it and I didn't. Life is just warm human happiness, and a home, and work for those we love. And so, after all, I am going to marry Tommy. And Nannie is going to marry Dick. In a way it is a happy ending, and in a way it isn't, because I've grown away from the kind of life I must live with Tommy, and I am afraid that in some ways I am not fitted for it. But Tommy says that I am silly to be afraid. And in the future I am going to trust Tommy."

And so Mary went out of Kingdon Knox's life. And on Christmas Day at the head of a great table, with servants to the right of him and servants to the left, he carved a mammoth turkey; and there was silver shining, and glass sparkling and lovely women smiling, all in honor of the merry season.

But Kingdon Knox was not merry as he thought of the jade beads and of Mary's empty desk.

BEGGARS ON HORSEBACK

I

With the Merryman girls economy was a fine art. Money was spent by them to preserve the family traditions. Nothing else counted. Everything was sacrificed to the gods of yesterday.

Little Anne Merryman had shivered all her short life in the bleakness of this domestic ideal.

"Why can't I have butter on my bread?" she had demanded in her long-legged schoolgirl days, when she had worn her fair hair in a fat braid down her back.

The answers had never been satisfying. Well-bred people might, Amy indicated, go without butter. Their income was not elastic, and there were things more important.

"What things? Amy, I'm so hungry I could eat a house."

It was these expressions of Anne's about food which shocked Amy and Ethel.

"I'd sell my soul for a slice of roast beef."

"Anne!"

"Well, I would!"

"I—I don't see how you can be so ordinary, Anne."

"Ordinary" in the lexicon of Amy and Ethel meant "plebeian." No one in the Merryman family had ever been so ordinary as Anne. Hitherto the Merrymans had been content to warm themselves by the fires of their own complacency, to feed themselves on past splendors; for the Merrymans were as old as Norman rule in England. They had come to America with grants from the king, they had family portraits and family silver and family diamonds, and now in this generation of orphaned girls, two of them at least were fighting the last battles of family pride. The fortunes of the Merrymans had declined, and Amy and Ethel, with their backs, as it were, to the wall, were making a final stand.

"We must have evening clothes, we must entertain our friends, we must pay for the family pew"; this was their nervous litany. The Merrymans had always dressed and entertained and worshiped

properly; hence it was for lace or tulle or velvet, as the case might be, that their money went. It went, too, for the very elegant and exclusive little dinners to which, on rare occasions, their friends were bidden; and it went for the high place in the synagogue from which they prayed their pharisaical prayers.

"We thank thee, Lord, that we are not as others," prayed Amy and Ethel fervently.

But Anne prayed no such prayers. She wanted to be like other people. She wanted to eat and drink with the multitude, she wanted a warm, warm heart, a groaning board. She wanted snugness and coziness and comfort. And she grew up loving these things, and hating the pale walls of their old house in Georgetown, the family portraits, the made-over dinner gowns that her sisters wore, her own made-over party frocks.

"Can't I have a new one, Amy?"

"It's Ethel's turn."

So it was when Anne went to a certain diplomatic reception in a made-over satin slip, hidden by a cloud of snowy tulle, that Murray Flint first waked to the fact of her loveliness.

He had waked ten years earlier to the loveliness of Amy, and five years later to the beauty of Ethel.

And now here was Anne!

"She's different though," he told old Molly Winchell; "more spiritual than the others."

It was Anne's thinness which deceived him. It was an attractive thinness. She was pale, with red lips, and the fat fair braids had given way to a shining knot. She wore the family pearls, and the effect was, as Murray had said, spiritual. Anne had the look, indeed, of one who sees heavenly visions.

Amy had never had that look. She was dark and vivid. If at thirty the vividness was emphasized by artificial means the fault lay in Amy's sacrifice to her social ideals, She needed the butter which she denied herself. She needed cream, and eggs, and her doctor had told her so. And Amy had kept the knowledge to herself.

Ethel, eating as little as Amy—or even less—had escaped, miraculously, attenuation. At twenty she had been a plump little beauty. She was still plump. Her neck in her low-cut gown was

lovely. Her figure was not fashionable, and she lacked Amy's look of race.

"They are all charming," Molly Winchell said. "Why don't you marry one of them, Murray?"

"Marriage," said Murray, "would spoil it."

"Spoil what?"

Murray turned on her his fine dark eyes. "They are such darlings—the three of them."

"You Turk!" Molly surveyed him over the top of her sapphire feather fan. "So that's it, is it? You want them all."

Murray thought vaguely it was something like that. For ten years he had had Amy and Ethel—Amy at twenty, fire and flame, Ethel at fifteen, with bronze locks and lovely color. In those years Anne had promised little in the way of beauty or charm. She had read voraciously, curled up in chairs or on rugs, and had waked now and then to his presence and a hot argument.

"Why don't you like Dickens, Murray?"

"Oh, his people, Anne—clowns."

"They're not!"

"Boors; beggars." He made a gesture of distaste.

"They're darlings—Mark Tapley and Ruth Pinch. Murray, if I had a beefsteak I'd make a beefsteak pie."

There was more of pathos in this than Murray imagined. There had been no beef on the Merryman table for many moons.

"Murray, did you ever eat tripe?"

"My dear child—-"

"It sounds dee-licious when Toby Veck has it on a cold morning. And there's the cricket on the hearth and the teakettle singing. I'd love to hear a kettle sing like that, Murray; wouldn't you?"

But Murray wouldn't. He had the same kind of mind as Amy and Ethel. He did not like robust and hearty things or robust and hearty people. He wore a corset to keep his hips small, and stood up at teas and receptions with an almost military carriage. Of course he had to sit down at dinners, but he sat very straight. He, too, had family portraits and family silver, and he lived scrupulously up to them. His fortunes, unlike the Merrymans', had not declined. He had money

enough and to spare. He could have made Amy or Ethel very comfortable if he had married either of them. But he had not wanted to marry. There had been a time when he had liked to think of Amy as presiding over his table. She would have fitted in perfectly with the old portraits and old silver and the family diamonds. Then Ethel had come along. She had not fitted in with the diamonds and portraits and silver, but she had stirred his pulses.

"Anywhere else but in Georgetown," old Molly Winchell was saying, "those girls would have been snapped up long ago. It's a poor matrimonial market."

Murray was complacently aware that he was geographically the only eligible man on the Merryman horizon. Unless Amy and Ethel could marry with distinction they would not marry at all. It was not lack of attraction which kept them single, but lack of suitors in their own set.

And now here was Anne, with Ethel's loveliness and Amy's look of race. There was also that look of angelic detachment from the things of earth.

So Murray's eyes rested on Anne with great content as she came and sat beside Molly Winchell.

Other eyes rested on her—Amy's with quick jealousy. "So now it's Anne," she said to herself as she perceived Murray's preoccupation. Five years ago she had said, "Now it's Ethel," as she had seen him turn to the fresher beauty. Before that she had dreamed of herself as loving and beloved. It had been hard to shut her eyes to that vision.

Yet—better Anne than an outsider. Amy had a fierce sense of proprietorship in Murray. If she gave him to Ethel, to Anne, he would be still in a sense hers. With Anne or Ethel she would share his future, partake of his present.

A third pair of eyes surveyed Anne with interest as she sat by Molly.

"Corking kid," said the owner of the eyes to himself.

His name was Maxwell Sears. He was not in the least like Murray Flint. He was from the Middle West, he was red-blooded, and he cared nothing for the past. He held it as a rather negligible honor that he had a Declaration-signing ancestor. The important things to Maxwell were that he was representing his district in Congress; that

he was still young enough to carry his college ideals into politics, and that he had just invested a small portion of the fortune which his father had left him in a model stock farm in Illinois.

For the rest, he was big, broad-shouldered, clean-minded. Now and then he looked up at the stars, and what he saw there swayed him level with the men about him. Because of the stars he called no man a fool, except such as deemed himself wiser than the rest. Because he believed in the people they believed in him. It was that which had elected him. It was that which would elect him again.

"Corking kid," said Maxwell Sears, with his smiling eyes on Anne.

II

In the course of the evening Maxwell managed an introduction. He found Anne quaint and charming. That she was reading Dickens amused him. He had thought that no one read Dickens in these days. How did it happen?

She said that she had discovered him for herself—many years ago.

How many years?

Well, to be explicit, ten. She had been eleven when she had found a new world in the fat little books. They had a lot of old books. She loved them all. But Dickens more than any. Didn't he?

He did. "His heart beat with the heart of the common people. It was that which made him great."

"Murray hates him."

"Who is Murray?"

Anne pondered. "Well, he's a family friend. We girls were brought up on him."

"Brought up on him?"

"Yes. Anything Murray likes we are expected to like. If he doesn't like things we don't."

"Oh."

"He's over there by Mrs. Winchell."

Maxwell looked and knew the type. "But you don't agree about Dickens?"

"No. And Amy says that Murray's wiser than I. But I'm not sure. Amy thinks that all men are wiser than women."

Maxwell chuckled. Anne was refreshing. She was far from modern in her modes of thought. She was—he hunted for the word and found it—mid-Victorian in her attitude of mind.

He wondered what Winifred Reed would think of her. Winifred lived in Chicago. She was athletic and intellectual. She wrote tabloid dramas, drove her own car, dressed smartly, and took a great interest in Maxwell's career. She wrote to him once a week, and he always answered her letters. Now and then she failed to write, and he missed her letters and told her so. It was altogether a pleasant friendship.

She hated the idea of Maxwell's farm. She thought it a backward step. "Are you going to spend the precious years ahead of you in the company of cows?"

"There'll be pigs too, Winifred; and chickens. And, of course, my horses."

"You belong in a world of men. It's the secret of your success that men like you."

"My cows like me—and there's great comfort after the stress of a stormy session in the reposefulness of a pig."

"I wish you'd be serious."

"I am serious. Perhaps it's a throwback, Winifred. There is farmer blood in my veins."

It was something deeper than that. It was his virile joy in fundamentals. He loved his golden-eared Guernseys and his black Berkshires and his White Wyandottes—not because of their choiceness but because they were cows and pigs and chickens; and he kept a pair of pussy cats, half a dozen dogs, and as many horses, because man primitively had made friends of the dumb brutes upon whom the ease and safety of his life depended.

There was, rather strangely, something about Anne which fitted in with this atavistic idea. She was, more than Winifred, a hearthstone woman. A man might carry her over his threshold and find her when he came home o' nights. It was hard to visualize Winifred as waiting or watching or welcoming. She was always going somewhere with an air of having important things to do, and coming back with an air of

having done them. Maxwell felt that these important things were not connected in any way with domestic matters. One did not, indeed, expect domesticity of Winifred.

Thus Anne, drawing upon him by mysterious forces, drew him also by her beauty and a certain wistfulness in her eyes. He had once had a dog, Amber Witch, whose eyes had held always a wistful question. He had tried to answer it. She had grown old on his hearth, yet always to the end of her eyes had asked. He hoped now that in some celestial hunting ground she had found an answer to that subtle need.

He told Anne about Amber Witch. "I have one of her puppies on my farm."

She was much interested. "I've never had a dog; or a cat."

He had, he said, a big pair of tabbies who slept in the hay and came up to the dairy when the milk was strained. There were two blue porcelain dishes for their sacred use. There was, he said, milk and to spare. He grew eloquent as he told of the number of quarts daily. He bragged of his butter. His cheeses had won prizes at county fairs. As for chickens—they had fresh eggs and broilers without end. He had his own hives, too, white-clover honey. And his housekeeper made hot biscuit. In a month or two there'd be asparagus and strawberries. Say! Yes, he was eloquent.

Anne was hungry. There had been a meagre dinner that evening. The other girls had not seemed to care. But Anne had cared.

"I'm starved," she had said as she had surveyed the table. "Let's pawn the spoons and have one square meal."

"Anne!"

"Oh, we're beggars on horseback"—bitterly—"and I hate it."

It was her moment of rebellion against the tyranny of tradition. Amy had had such a moment years ago when her mother had taken her away from school. Amy had a brilliant mind, and she had loved study, but her mother had brought her to see that there was no money for college. "You'd better have a year or two in society, Amy. And this craze for higher education is rather middle-class."

Ethel's rebellion had come when she had wanted to marry a round-faced chap who lived across the street. They had played together from childhood. His people were pleasant folks but lacked

social background. So Ethel's romance had been nipped in the bud. The round-faced chap had married another girl. And now Amy at thirty and Ethel at twenty-five were crystallizing into something rather hard and brilliant, as Anne would perhaps crystallize if something didn't happen.

The something which happened was Maxwell Sears. Anne listened to the things he said about his farm and felt that they couldn't be true.

"It sounds like a fairy tale."

"It isn't. And it's all tremendously interesting."

He looked very much alive as he said it, and Anne felt the thrill of his energy and enthusiasm. Murray was never enthusiastic; neither were Amy and Ethel. They were all indeed a bit petrified.

Before he left her Maxwell asked Anne if he could call. He came promptly two nights later and brought with him a bunch of violets and a box of chocolates. Anne pinned the violets in the front of the gray frock that gave her the look of a cloistered nun, and ate up the chocolates.

Amy was shocked. "Anne, you positively gobbled—"

"I didn't."

"Well, you ate a pound at least."

Anne protested. Maxwell had eaten a lot, and Ethel and Amy had eaten a few, and Murray had come in.

"You remember, Amy, Murray came in."

"He didn't touch one, Anne. He never eats chocolates."

"He's afraid of getting fat."

"Anne!"

"He is. When he takes me out to lunch he thinks of himself, not of me. The last time we had grapefruit and broiled mushrooms and lettuce; and I wanted chops."

Maxwell had been glad to see Anne eat the chocolates. She had seemed as happy as a child, and he had liked that. There was nothing childish about Winifred. She had been always grown-up and competent and helpful. He felt that he owed Winifred a great deal. They were not engaged, but he rather hoped that some day they might marry. Of course that would depend upon Winifred. She

would probably make him give up the farm and he would hate that. But a man might give up a farm for a woman like Winifred and still have more than he deserved.

It will be seen that Maxwell was modest, especially where women were concerned. The complacency of Murray Flint, weighing Amy against Ethel and Ethel against Amy and Anne against both, would have seemed infamous to Maxwell. He felt that it was only by the grace of God that any woman gave herself to any man. He had a sense of honor which was founded on decency rather than on convention. He had also a sense of high romance which belonged more fittingly to the fifteenth than to the twentieth century. He was not, however, aware of it. He looked upon himself as a plain and practical chap who had a few things to work out politically before he settled down to the serious business of farming. Of course if he married Winifred he wouldn't settle down to the farm, but he would settle down to something.

In the meantime here was Anne, reading Dickens, eating chocolates, and leaning over the rail of the House Gallery to listen to his speeches.

It was rather wonderful to have her there. She wore a gray cape with a chinchilla collar made out of Amy's old muff. A straight sailor hat of rough straw came well down over her forehead and showed fluffs of shining hair at the sides. Her little gray-gloved hands clasped the violets he had given her. Above the violets her eyes were a deeper blue.

She came always alone. "Amy doesn't know," she had told him frankly; "she wouldn't let me, come if she did."

"Why not?"

"I am supposed to be chaperoned."

"My dear child, I told you to bring either or both of your sisters."

"I don't want them. They would spoil it."

"How?"

She tried to explain. He and she could see things in the old Capitol that Amy and Ethel couldn't.

He laughed, but knew it true. Anne's imagination met his in a rather remarkable fashion. When they walked through Statuary Hall they saw not Fulton and Père Marquette and Carroll of Carrollton;

they saw, rather, a thousand ships issuing forth on the steam of a teakettle; they saw civilization following a black-frocked prophet; they saw aristocracy raising its voice in the interest of democracy.

As for the mysterious whispering echo, they repudiated all talk of acoustics. It was for them an eerie thing, like the laughter of elves or the shriek of a banshee.

"Don't say every-day things to me," Anne had instructed Maxwell when he had first placed her behind a mottled marble pillar before leaving for the spot where he could speak to her by this unique wireless.

There came to her, therefore, a part of a famous speech; the murmured words flung back by that strange sounding board rang like a bell:

"Give me liberty or give me death!"

She emerged from her corner, starry-eyed. "It was as if I heard him say it."

"Perhaps it was he, and I was only a mouthpiece."

"I should think they'd like to come back. Will you come?"

He laughed. "Who knows? I'll come if you are here."

To have brought a third into these adventures would have robbed them of charm. Knowing this he argued that the child was safe with him. Why worry?

They always lunched together before he took her up to the Members' Gallery, and went himself to the floor of the House. He let her order what she pleased and liked The definite way in which she did it. They had usually, chops and peas, or steak, and ice-cream at the end.

III

Then suddenly; things stopped. The reason that they stopped was Murray. He saw Anne one day in the House Gallery and asked Amy about it.

"How did she happen to be up there alone?"

Amy asked Anne. Anne told the truth.

"I've had lunch three times with Mr. Sears, and I've listened to his speeches. It's something about the League of Nations. He believes in it, but thinks we've got to be careful about tying ourselves up."

Amy did not care in the least what Maxwell Sears believed. The thing that worried her was Murray. She wanted him to approve of Anne. If Amy had thought in a less limited circle she might have worked the thing out that if Maxwell married Anne it would narrow Murray's choice down to herself and Ethel. But there was always that vague fear of some outside siren who would capture Murray. If he had Anne, he would then be safely in the family.

She realized, in the days following the revelation of the clandestine meetings with Maxwell, that Murray was depending upon her to see that Anne's affections did not stray into forbidden paths. He said as much one afternoon when he found Amy alone in an atmosphere of old portraits, old books, old bronzes. She sat in a Jacobean chair and poured tea for him. The massive lines of the chair made her proportions seem wraithlike. Her white face with its fixed spots of red was a high light among the shadows.

"Where's Anne?"

"She and Ethel have gone to the matinée with Molly Winchell."

"Why didn't you go?"

"Molly never takes but two of us and, of course, this is Anne's first winter out. I have to step back—and let her have her chance."

He chose to be gallant. "You are always lovely, Amy."

His compliment fell cold. Amy felt old and tired. She had a pain in her side. It had been getting very bad of late, and she coughed at night. She had been to her doctor, and again he had emphasized the need of a change of climate and of nourishing food. Amy had come away unconvinced.

She would have a chance in July when she and her sisters would go to the Eastern Shore for their annual visit to their Aunt Elizabeth. As for different food, she ate enough—all the doctors in the world couldn't make her spend any more money on the table.

Murray stood up very straight by the mantelpiece, under the portrait of one of the Merryman great-grandfathers in a bag wig, and talked of Anne:

"I believe I am falling in love with her, Amy."

Amy's heart said, "It has come at last." Her brain said, "He has discovered it because of Maxwell Sears." Her lips said, "I don't wonder. She's a dear child, Murray."

"She's beautiful."

Murray swayed up a little on his toes. It made him seem thinner and taller. He could see himself reflected in the long mirror on the opposite wall. He liked the reflection of the thin tall man.

"She's beautiful, Amy. I am going to ask her to marry me. I can't have some other fellow running off with her. She belongs to Georgetown."

He seemed to think that settled it. The pain in Amy's side was sharper. She felt that she couldn't quite stand seeing Murray happy with Anne. "She's—she's such a child." Her voice shook.

"Well," said Murray, glancing at the tall thin man in the mirror, "of course she is young. But Maxwell Sears is coming here a lot. Is he in love with her?"

"I'm not sure. She amuses him. She isn't in love with him or with anybody."

"Not even with me?" Murray laughed a little. "But we can remedy that, can't we, Amy? But you might hint at what I'm expecting of her. I don't want to startle her." He came and sat down beside her. "You are always a great dear about doing things for me."

The pain stabbed her like a knife. "I'll do my best."

She had a nervous feeling that she must keep Murray from talking to her like that. She rang for hot water, and their one maid, Charlotte, brought it in a Sheffield jug. Then Ethel and Anne and Molly Winchell arrived, and once more Murray stood up, tall and self-conscious as he stole side glances at himself in the mirror.

Maxwell Sears had brought the three women home. He had a fashion of following up Anne's engagements and putting his car at her disposal. When Amy had vetoed any more adventures at the Capitol he had conceded good-naturedly that she was right. After that he had always included Amy or Ethel in his invitations.

"They are very pretty dragons," he had written to Winifred, "and little Anne is like a princess shut in a tower."

Winifred, reading the letter, had brooded upon it. "He's falling in love. A child like that—she'll spoil his future."

Congress was having night sessions. "If I could only have you up there," Maxwell had said to Anne as he had driven her home from the matinée, with old Molly and Ethel on the back seat. "I should steal you if I dared."

"Please dare."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes. To-night. Ethel and Amy are going to a Colonial Dames meeting with Molly Winchell. I never go. I hate ancestors."

"I shouldn't let you do it," he hesitated, "but ghosts walk after dark in the Capitol corridors."

"I know," she nodded. "Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln."

"Yes. Then you'll come?"

"Of course."

It was the thought of her rendezvous with him that lighted her eyes when she talked to Murray. But Murray did not know. So he swayed up on his toes and glanced in the glass and was glad of his thinness and tallness.

Maxwell came for Anne promptly. "You must get me back by ten," she told him. "I have a key, and Charlotte's out."

It was a night of nights, never to be forgotten. Maxwell did not take Anne into the Gallery. He had not brought her there to hear speeches or to be conspicuous in the glare of lights. He led her through shadowy corridors—up wide dim stairways.

At one turn he touched her arm. "Look!" he whispered.

"What?"

"Lafayette passed us—on the stairs."

It was a great game! On the east front Columbus spoke to them of ships that sailed toward the sunset; in the Rotunda they kept a tryst with William Penn; from the west-front portico they saw a city beautiful—the streets under the moon were rivers of light—the great monument reached like the soul of Washington toward the stars!

Out there in the moonlight Maxwell spoke of another great soul, gone of late to join a glorious company.

"It was he who taught me that life is an adventure."

"Greatheart?"

"Yes."

"You loved him too?"

"Yes."

Anne caught her breath. "To think of him dead—to think of them all—dead."

Maxwell looked down at her. "They live somewhere. You believe that, don't you?"

"Yes."

He was silent for a moment; then he laid his hand lightly on her shoulder. "I feel to-night as if they pressed close."

Oh, it was a rare game to meet great souls in odd corners! They could scarcely tear themselves away. But he got her home before her sisters arrived, and Anne went to bed soberly, and lay long awake, thinking it out. She had never before had such a playmate. In all these years she had starved for other things than food.

IV

In due time Congress adjourned, but Maxwell did not go home. He continued to see Anne. Amy was at last driven to her duty by Murray. She could not forbid Maxwell the house. There was nothing to do but talk to Anne.

Having made up her mind she sought Anne's room at once. Anne, in a cheap cotton kimono, was braiding her hair for the night. The sleeves of the kimono were short and showed her thin white arms. Amy had on a blanket wrapper. Her hair was in metal curlers. She looked old and tired, and now and then she coughed.

Anne got into bed and drew the covers up to her chin. "I'm so cold, I believe there are icicles on my eyebrows. Amy, my idea of heaven is a place where it is as hot as—Hades."

"I don't see where you get such ideas. Ethel and I don't talk that way. We don't even think that way, Anne."

"Maybe when I am as old as you—-" Anne began, and was startled at the look on Amy's face.

"I'm not old!" Amy said passionately. "Anne, I haven't lived at all, and I'm only thirty."

Anne stared at her. "Oh, my darling, I didn't mean—-"

"Of course you didn't. And it was silly of me to say such a thing. Anne, I'm cold. I'm going to sit on the foot of your bed and wrap up while I talk to you."

Anne's bed had four pineapple posts and a pink canopy. The governor of a state had slept in that bed for years. He was one of the Merryman grandfathers. Amy could have bought mountains of food for the price of that bed. But she would have starved rather than sell it.

Anne under the pink canopy was like a rose—a white rose with a faint flush. The color in Amy's cheeks was fixed and hard. Yet even with her oldness and tiredness and metal curlers she had the look of race which attracted Murray.

"Anne," she said, "Murray and I had a long talk about you the other day."

"Murray always talks—long." Anne was yawning.

"Please be serious, Anne. He wants to marry you."

"Marry me!" incredulously. "I thought it was you; or Ethel."

"Well, it isn't," wearily. "And it's a great opportunity—for you, Anne."

"Opportunity for what?"

Amy had a sense of the futility of trying to explain.

"There aren't many men like him."

"Fortunately."

"Anne, how can you? He's really paying you a great compliment."

"Why didn't he ask me himself?"

"He didn't want to startle you. You're so young. Murray has extreme fineness of feeling."

Anne tilted her chin. "I don't see what he finds in me."

"You're young"—with a tinge of bitterness—"and he says you are beautiful."

Anne threw off the covers and set her bare feet on the floor. "Beautiful!" she scoffed, but went to the mirror. "I'm thin," she meditated, "but I've got nice hair."

"We all have nice hair," said Amy; "but you've got Ethel's complexion and my figure."

"I don't think I want to be loved for my complexion." Anne turned suddenly and faced her sister. "Or my figure. I'd rather be loved for my mind."

"Men don't love women for their minds," said Amy wearily. "You'll learn that when you have lived as long as I have. Get back into bed, Anne. You'll freeze."

But Anne, shivering in the cotton kimono, argued the question hotly: "I should think Murray would want to marry someone with congenial tastes. He hates everything that I like."

"He'll make an excellent husband. You ought to be happy to know that he—cares."

She began to cough—a racking cough that left her exhausted.

Anne, bending over her, said, "Why, Amy, are you sick?"

"I'm—I'm rather wretched, Anne."

"Are you taking anything for your cough?"

"Yes."

"You ought to have a doctor."

"I have had one."

"What did he say?"

Amy put her off. "I'll feel better in the morning, Anne. Don't worry." Again the cough tore her. Anne flew to Ethel.

"See what you can do for her. There is blood on her handkerchief! I am going to call a doctor."

The doctor, arriving, checked the cough. Later he told Anne that Amy must have a change and strengthening food.

"At once. She's in a very serious state. I've told her, but she won't listen."

In the days that followed Anne arraigned herself hotly. "I've been a selfish pig—eating up everything—and Amy needed it."

In this state of mind she fasted—and was famished.

Maxwell, noting her paleness, demanded, "What's the matter? Aren't you well?"

She wanted to cry out, "I'm hungry." But she, too, had her pride.

"Amy's ill."

He got it out of her finally. "The doctor is much worried about her. He says she needs a change."

"You need it too."

She needed food, but she couldn't tell him that. The state of their exchequer was alarming. It had been revealed to her since Amy's illness that there was really nothing coming in until the next quarter.

"Why didn't you let Charlotte go, Ethel?"

"We've always had a maid. What would people think?"

"And because of what people think, Amy is to starve?"

"Anne, how can you?"

"Well, it comes to that. She needs things; and we don't need Charlotte."

But when they spoke to Amy of sending Charlotte away she was feverishly excited. "There's nobody to do the work."

"I can do it," said Anne.

"We Merrymans have never worked," Amy began to cry. "I'd rather die," she said, "than have people think we are—poor."

V

Maxwell was a man of action. When he saw Anne pale he sought a remedy. "Look here, why can't you and your sisters come out to my farm?"

Anne, remembering certain things—broilers and fresh eggs—was thrilled by the invitation. "I'd love it! But Amy won't accept."

"Why not?"

"She's terribly stiff."

He laughed. "Perhaps I can talk her over."

Amy, lying on her couch, very weary, facing a shadowy future, felt his magnetism as he talked to her. It was as if life spoke through his lips. Murray had sat there beside her only an hour before. He had brought her roses but he had brought no hope.

Fear had for weeks kept Amy company. Through her nights and days it had stalked, a pale spectre. And now Maxwell was saying: "You'll be well in a month. Of course you'll come! There's room for half a dozen. You three won't half fill the house."

It was decided, however, that Ethel must stay in town. Amy had a nervous feeling that with the house closed Murray might slip away from them.

Old Molly Winchell, summing up the situation, said to Murray: "Of course Anne will marry Maxwell Sears. There's nothing like propinquity."

Murray, startled, admitted the danger. "It would be an awful thing for Anne."

"Why?"

"He's rather a bounder."

Old Molly Winchell hit him on the arm with her fan. Her eyes twinkled maliciously. "He's nothing of the sort, and you know it. You're jealous, Murray."

Murray's jealousy was, quite uniquely, not founded on any great depth of love for Anne. His appropriation of the three sisters had been a pretty and pleasant pastime. When he had finally decided upon Anne as the pivotal center of his universe he had contemplated a future in which the other sisters also figured—especially Amy. He had, indeed, not thought of a world without Amy.

Her illness had troubled him, but not greatly. Things had always come to him as he had wanted them, and he was quite sure that if Anne was to be the flame to light his future, Providence would permit Amy to be, as it were, the keeper of the light.

He felt it necessary to warn Anne: "Don't fall in love with Sears."

"Don't be silly, Murray."

"Is it silly to say that I love you, Anne?"

They were alone in the old library, with its books and bronzes and bag-wigged ancestors. And Murray sat down beside Anne and took her hand in his and said, "I love you, Anne."

It was a proposal which was not to be treated lightly. In spite of herself, Anne was flattered. Murray had always loomed on her horizon as something of a bore but none the less a person of importance.

She caught her breath quickly. "Please, Murray"—her blushes were bewitching—"I'm too young to think about such things. And I'm not in love with anybody."

Murray raised her hand to his lips. "Keep yourself for me, little Anne." He rose and stood looking down at her. "You're a very charming child," he said. "Do you know it?"

Anne, gazing at herself in the glass later, wondered if it were true. It was nice of Murray to say it. But she was not in the least in love with Murray. He was too old. And Maxwell was too old. Anne's dreams of romance had to do with glorified youth. She wanted a young Romeo shouting his passion to the stars!

She packed her bag, however, in high anticipation. Maxwell was a splendid playmate, and she thought of his farm as flowing with milk and honey!

Maxwell wrote to Winifred that he was coming home and bringing guests.

"Run down and meet them. Anne's a corking kid."

Winifred knew what had happened. Some girl had got hold of Maxwell. It was always the way with men like that—big men; they were credulous creatures where women were concerned, and it would make such a difference to Maxwell's future if he married the wrong woman.

She decided to go down as soon as she could. She felt that she ought to hurry, but there were things that held her. And so it happened that before she reached the farm Maxwell had asked Anne to marry him. There had been a cool evening when the scent of lilacs had washed in great waves through the open windows. Amy had gone to bed and he and Anne had dined alone with the flare of candles between them, and the rest of the room in pleasant shadow. And then their coffee had been served, and Aunt Mittie, his housekeeper, had asked if there was anything else, and had withdrawn, and he had risen and had walked round to Anne's place and had laid his hands on her shoulders.

"Little Anne," he had said, "I should like to see you here always."

"Here?"

"As my wife."

"Oh!"

She had had a rapturous week at the farm. She had never known anything like it. Aunt Elizabeth, of the Eastern Shore, lived in a sleepy town, and Anne's other brief vacations had been spent in

more or less fashionable resorts. But here was a paradise of plenty; the big wide house, the spreading barns, the opulent garden, the rolling fields, the enchanting creatures who were sheltered by the barns and fed by the fields, and who in return gave payment of yellow cream and warm white eggs, and who lowed at night and cackled in the morning, and whose days were measured by the rising and the setting of the sun.

She loved it all—the purring pussies, the companionable pups, the steady, faithful older dogs, the lambs in the pasture, the good things to eat.

She was glowing with gratitude, and Maxwell was asking insistently, "Won't you, Anne?"

She had never been so happy, and he was the source of her happiness. Against this background of vivid life the thought of Murray was a pale memory.

So her wistful eyes met Maxwell's. "It would be lovely—to live here—always."

Later, when she had started up-stairs with her candle, he had kissed her, leaning over the rail to watch her as she went up, and Anne had gone to sleep tremulous with the thought that her future would lie here in this great house with this fine and kindly man.

Winifred, coming down at last, found that she had come too late. Maxwell told her as they motored up from the station.

"Wish me happiness, Win. I am going to marry little Anne."

It did not enter his head for a moment that the woman by his side loved him. He had thought that if she ever married him it would be a sort of concession on her part, a sacrifice to her interest in his future. He had a feeling that she would be glad if such a sacrifice were not demanded.

But Winifred was not glad. "You are sure you are making no mistake, Max?"

"Wait till you see her."

Winifred waited and saw. "She's not in the least in love with him. She likes the warm nest she has fallen into. And she'll spoil his future. He'll settle down here, and he belongs to the world."

He belonged at least to his constituency.

"I've got to make a speech," he told the three women one morning, "in a town twenty miles away. If you girls would like the ride you can motor over with me. You needn't listen to my speech if you don't want to."

Amy and Winifred said that of course they wanted to listen. Anne smiled happily and said nothing. She was, of course, glad to go, but Maxwell's speeches were to her the abstract things of life; the concrete things at this moment were the delicious dinner which was before her and the fact that in the barn, curled up in the hay, was a new family of kittens—little tabbies like their adoring mother.

"Isn't it a lovely world?" she had said to her lover as she had sat in the loft with the cuddly cats in her lap.

"Yes."

He knew that it was not all lovely, that somewhere there were lean and hungry kittens and lean and hungry folks—but why remind her at such a moment?

VI

On the way over Anne sat with Winifred. She had insisted that Amy should have the front seat with Max. Amy was much better. Life had begun to flow into her veins like wine. She had written to Murray: "It is as if a miracle had happened."

Winifred, on the back seat, talked to Anne. She had a great deal to say about Maxwell's future. "I am sorry he bought the farm."

"Oh, not really." Anne's attention strayed. She had one of the puppies in her lap. He kept peeping out from between the folds of her cape with his bright eyes. "Isn't he a darling, Winifred?"

"He ought to sell it." Winifred liked dogs, but at this moment she wanted Anne's attention. "He ought to sell the farm. He has a great future before him. Everybody says it. He simply must not settle down."

"Oh, well, he won't," said Anne easily.

"He will if you let him."

"If I let him?"

"If he thinks you like it."

There was a deep flush on Winifred's cheeks. She was really a very handsome girl, with bright brown hair and brown eyes. She wore a small brown hat and a sable collar. The collar was open and showed her strong white throat.

"If he thinks you like it," she repeated, "he will stay; and he belongs to the world; nobody must hold him back. He's the biggest man in his party to-day. There is no limit to his powers."

Anne stared at her. "Of course there isn't." She wondered why Winifred seemed so terribly in earnest about it. She pulled the puppy's ears. "But I should hate to have him sell the farm."

Winifred settled back with a sharp sigh and gazed at the long gray road ahead of her. She gazed indeed into a rather blank future. Her talents would be, she felt, to some extent wasted. If Max rose to greater heights of fame it would be because of his own unaided efforts. This child would be no help to him.

The speech Max made to his constituents was not cool and clear-cut like the speeches which Anne had heard him make to his colleagues in the House. He spoke now with warmth and persuasiveness. Anne, sitting in the big car on the edge of the crowd, found herself listening intently. She was aware, as he went on, of a new Max. The mass of men who had gathered were largely foreigners who knew little of the real meanings of democracy. Max was telling them what it meant to be a good American. He told it simply, but he was in dead earnest. Anne felt that this earnestness was the secret of his power. He wanted men to be good Americans, he wanted them to know the privileges they might enjoy in a free country, and he was telling them how to keep it free-not by violence and mob rule but by remembering their obligations as citizens. He told them that they must be always on the side of law and order, that they must fight injustice not with the bomb and the red flag but with their votes.

"Vote for the man you trust, and not for the man who inflames your passions. Your vote is a sacred thing; when you sell it you dishonor yourself. Respect yourself, and you'll respect the country that has made a man of you."

The response was immediate, the applause tumultuous. After his speech they crowded about him. They knew him for their friend. But

they knew him for more than that. He asked nothing of their manhood but the best. He preached honesty and practiced it.

Yet as he climbed into the car Anne had little to say to him. Winifred, leaning forward, was emphatic in her praise:

"You have no right to bury yourself, Max."

"My dear girl, I'm not dead yet." He was a bit impatient. He had hoped for a word from Anne. But she sat silent, pulling the puppy's ears.

"He's asleep," she said finally as she caught the inquiry in her lover's eyes. "He's tired out, poor darling."

She seemed indifferent, but she was not. She had been much stirred. She had a strange feeling that something had happened to her while she had listened to Maxwell's speech. Some string had broken and her romance was out of tune.

She lay awake for a long time that night, thinking it over. She grew hot with the thought of the limitations of her previous conception of her lover. She had considered him a sort of background for the pleasant things he could do for her. She had fitted him to the measure of the boxes of candy that he had brought her, the luncheons in the House restaurant, the bountiful hospitality of the farm. How lightly she had looked down on him as he had stood below her on the stairs with her candle in his hand. How casually she had accepted his kiss. She had a sudden feeling that she must not let him kiss her again!

Early in the morning she went into Amy's room. "Amy," she said, "how soon do you think we can go to Aunt Elizabeth's?"

"Aunt Elizabeth's? Why, Anne?"

"I want to leave here."

"To leave here?" Amy sat up. Even in the bright light of the morning her face looked young. Good food and fresh air had done much for her. It had been quite heavenly, too, to let care slip away, to have no thought of what she should eat or what she should drink or what she should wear. "To leave here? I thought you loved it, Anne."

"I've got to get away. I'm not going to marry Maxwell, Amy."

"Anne! What made you change your mind?"

"I can't tell you. Please don't ask me. But I wish you would write to Aunt Elizabeth."

"I had a letter from her yesterday. She says we can come at any time. But—have you told Max?"

"Not yet."

"Has he done anything?"

"No. It's just—that I can't marry him. Don't ask me, Amy." She broke down in a storm of tears.

Amy, soothing her, wondered if after all Anne cared for Murray Flint. It was, she felt, the only solution possible. Surely a girl would not throw away a chance to marry a man like Maxwell Sears for nothing.

For Amy had learned in the days that she had spent at the farm that Maxwell Sears was a man to reckon with. She was very grateful for what he had done for her, and she had been glad of Anne's engagement. Murray would perhaps be disappointed, but there would still be herself and Ethel.

It was not easy to explain things to Maxwell.

"Why are you going now?" he demanded, and was impatient when they told him that Aunt Elizabeth expected them. "I don't understand it at all. It upsets all of my plans for you, Anne."

That night when he brought Anne's candle she was not on the stairs. Winifred and Amy had gone up.

"Anne! Anne!" he called softly.

She came to the top rail and leaned over. "I'm going to bed in the dark. There's a wonderful moon."

"Come down—for a minute."

"No."

"Then I'll come up," masterfully.

He mounted the stairs two at a time; but when he reached the landing the door was shut!

In the morning he asked her about it. "Why, dearest?"

"Max dear, I can't marry you."

"Nonsense!" His voice was sharp. He laid his hands heavily on her shoulders. "Why not? Look at me, Anne. Why not?"

"I'm not going to marry—anybody."

That was all he could get out of her. He pleaded, raged, and grew at last white and still with anger. "You might at least tell me your reasons."

She said that she would write. Perhaps she could say it better on paper. And she was very, very sorry, but she couldn't.

Winifred knew that something was up, but made no comment. Amy, carrying out their program of departure, had a sense of regret.

After all, it had been a lovely life, and there were worse things than being a sister to Maxwell Sears. Her voice broke a little as she tried to thank him on their last morning.

He wrung her hand. "Say a good word for me with Anne. I don't know what's the matter with her."

Neither did Amy. And if she was Maxwell's advocate how could she be Murray's? She flushed a little.

"Anne's such a child."

He remembered how he had called her a corking kid. She was more than that to him now. She stood in the doorway in her gray sailor hat and gray cape.

"Anne," he said, "you must have a last bunch of pansies from the garden. Come out and help me pick them."

In the garden he asked, "Are you going to kiss me good-bye?"

"No, Max. Please—"

"Then it's 'God bless you, dearest.'"

He forgot the pansies and they went back to where the car waited.

VII

Anne's letter, written from the Eastern Shore, was a long and childish screed. "We have always been beggars on horseback," she said. "Of course you couldn't know that, Max. We have gone without bread so that we could be grand and elegant. We have gone without fire so that we could buy our satin gowns for fashionable functions. We went without butter for a year so that Amy could entertain the Strangeways, whom she had met years ago in Europe. I wouldn't dare tell you what that dinner cost us, but we had a cabinet member or two, and the British Ambassador.

"You wondered why I liked Dickens. Well, I read him so that I could get a good meal by proxy. I used to gloat over the feasts at Wardle's, and Mr. Stiggins' hot toast. And when I met you you gave me—everything. Murray Flint thinks that because I am thin and pale I am all spirit, and I'm afraid you have the same idea. You didn't dream, did you, that I was pale because I hadn't had enough to eat? And when you told me that you wanted me to be your wife I looked ahead and saw the good food and the roaring fires, and I didn't think of anything else. I honestly didn't think of you for a moment, Max.

"There were days, though, when you meant more to me than just that. When we played at the Capitol—that night when we met Lafayette on the stairs! Nobody had ever played with me. But after we went to the farm I was smothered in ease. And I loved it. And I didn't love you. You were just—the man who gave me things. Do you see what I mean? And when you kissed me on the stairs it was as if I were being kissed by a nice old Santa Claus.

"Everybody saw it but you. I am sure Amy knew—and Winifred Reed. You—you ought to marry Winifred, Max. Perhaps you will. You won't want me after you read this letter. And Winifred is splendid.

"It was your speech to the men that waked me. I saw how big you were, and I just—shriveled up.

"And you mustn't worry about me. I am not hungry any more. I feel as if I should never want anything to eat. Perhaps it is because I am older and haven't a growing appetite. And I am not any of the things you thought me. And of course you would be disappointed, and it wouldn't be fair."

Having posted this, Anne had other things to do. She wrote mysterious letters, and finally came into a room where her sisters and Aunt Elizabeth were sewing, with an important-looking paper in her hand.

"I am going to work, Amy."

"To work!"

"Yes."

Amy and Ethel and Aunt Elizabeth wore white frocks, and looked very cool and feminine and high-bred. Aunt Elizabeth had a nose like Amy's and the same look of race.

It was Aunt Elizabeth who said in her commanding voice: "What are you talking about, Anne?"

"I am going to work in the War Risk Bureau, Aunt Elizabeth. I wrote to two senators, and they helped me."

No woman of the Merryman family had ever worked in an office.

Anne faced a storm of disapproval, but she stood there slim and defiant, and stated her reasons.

"We need money. I don't see how we can get through a winter like the last. I can't keep my self-respect if we go on living as we did last winter."

"Haven't you any pride, Anne?"

"I have self-respect."

She left the room a conqueror. After she had gone the three women talked about her. They did not say it openly, but they felt that there was really an ordinary streak in Anne. Otherwise she would not have wanted to work in an office.

There was, however, nothing to be done. Anne was twenty-one. She was to get a hundred dollars a month. In spite of herself, Amy felt a throb of the heart as she thought of what that hundred dollars would mean to them.

Murray Flint was much perturbed when he heard of Anne's decision. He wrote to her that of course she knew that there was no reason why she should go into an office—his home and hearthstone were hers. She wrote back that she should never marry! After that, Murray felt, with Amy and Ethel and Aunt Elizabeth, that there was an ordinary streak in Anne!

When he arrived in August at Aunt Elizabeth's he was astonished at the change in Amy. She looked really very young as she came to meet him, and Aunt Elizabeth's house was a perfect setting for her charms. Murray was very fond of Aunt Elizabeth's house. It was an ancient, stately edifice, and within there were the gold-framed portraits of men and women with noses like Amy's and Aunt Elizabeth's.

Murray had missed Amy very much and he told her so.

"It was a point of honor for me to ask Anne again. But when I thought I was going to lose you I learned that my life would be empty without you."

He really believed what he was telling her. If Amy did not believe it she made no sign. She was getting much more than she expected, and she accepted him graciously and elegantly, as became a daughter of the Merrymans.

It was when he told Anne of his engagement to Amy that Murray again offered her a home. "There will always be a place for Amy's sisters, Anne."

"You are very good, Murray—but I can't."

She had said the same thing to Maxwell, who had come hot-footed to tell her that her letter had made no difference in his feeling for her.

"How could you think it, Anne? My darling, you are making a mountain of a molehill!"

She had been tremulous but firm. "I've got to have my—self-respect, Max."

Because he understood men he understood her. And when he had left her he had said to himself with long-drawn breath, "She's a corking kid."

And this time there had been no laughter in his eyes.

All that winter Anne worked, a little striving creature, with her head held high!

Maxwell was in town, for Congress had convened. But he had not come to see her. Now and then when there was a night session she went up to the House and sat far back in the Gallery, where, unperceived, she could listen to her lover's voice. Then she would steal away, a little ghost, down the shadowy stairway; but there were no games now with Lafayette!

Amy and Murray were to be married in June. They had enjoyed a dignified and leisurely engagement, and Amy had bloomed in the sunshine of Murray's approbation. Anne's salary had helped a great deal in getting the trousseau together. Most of the salary, indeed, had been spent for that. The table was, as usual, meagre, but Anne had not seemed to care.

She was therefore rather white and thin when, on the day that Congress adjourned, Maxwell came out to Georgetown to see her. It had been a long session, and it was spring.

There were white lilacs in a great blue jar in the Merryman library, and through the long window a glimpse of a thin little moon in a faint green sky.

As he looked at Anne, Maxwell felt a lump in his throat. She had given him her hand and had smiled at him. "How are the kittens?" she had asked in an effort to be gay.

He did not answer her question. He went, rather, directly to the point. "Anne, why wouldn't you kiss me on that last night?"

She flushed to the roots of her hair. "It—it was because I loved you, Max."

"I thought so. But you had to prove it to yourself?"

"Yes."

"Anne, that's why I've let you alone all winter—so that you might prove it. But—I can't go on. It has been an awful winter for me, Anne."

It had been an awful winter for her. But she had come out of it knowing herself. And even when at last his arms were about her and he was telling her that he would never let her go, she had a plea to make:

"Don't let me live too softly, Max. Life isn't a feather bed—You belong to the world. I must go with you toward the big things. But now and then we'll run back to the farm."

"What do I care where we run, so that we run—together!"

THE END

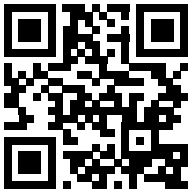
The Gay Cockade

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