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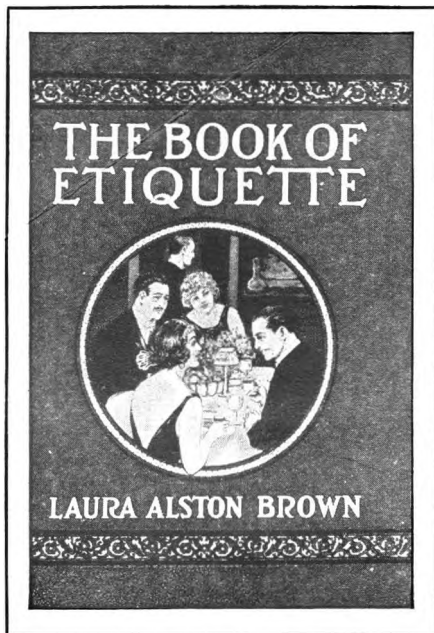
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Love Story Magazine

PUBLISHED EVERY SATURDAY

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Would You Be Beautiful?

Hidden Fire

By MARGARET GIBBONS MACGILL

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Will begin soon in
Love Story Magazine*

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Perhaps after you married John and you found he didn't exactly approve of your munching gumdrops while you talked to him or read—you stopped munching them. Perhaps when you found that he didn't think it was quite

IS LOVE WORTH WHILE?" Ruby Ayres' wonderful serial, will be continued, and Vivian Grey will give you the second part of her new story, "A Waif's Wooing." If you missed the first installment of either of these, better send for it before they're all gone.

* * *

IT was a little old inn, and a girl had inherited it—a very lonely girl and a very inexperienced girl. And before she



necessary that you belong to that little club you used to enjoy so much, you dropped it.

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was long alone she discovered that there are many kinds of men—those who are gallant and those who are not. Edith Sessions Tupper will tell you the story of the girl and the strange old inn in *LOVE STORY MAGAZINE* next week. Don't miss this wonderful story. It is entitled "The Secret of the Old Inn."

* * *

THERE will be also "Moonflowers and Morning Glories," by Ethel Donoher; "Where Beauty Lies," by Mary Frances Doner, and a chat with Mary Morris, as well as several other short stories.

LOVE STORY MAGAZINE

PUBLISHED WEEKLY

Vol. XXXI

September 12, 1925

No. 6

Flower of the Night



*By
Edith
Sessions
Tupper*

CHAPTER I.

ROSE MARIE came out of Mademoiselle Felicie Giraud's glove shop in the outskirts of San Francisco, and, standing in the full glare of a semi-tropical sun, shaded her dark eyes with her slim hand and looked up the street toward the bustling city.

Rose Marie was the most beautiful girl in that section of the town, famed for its pretty women. She was like an exquisite white rose, fragrant and sweet. Her skin resembled the soft petals of her namesake; fair and pure with just a suggestion of pink flushing it underneath.

Her eyes were black velvet, with wonderful curling lashes that kissed her cheeks. Her lips were as a bud just opening. Her hair was golden satin, coiled upon a haughty little head set upon a throat like ivory. Rose Marie was a perfect type of the Spanish blonde.

Merely the assistant of her protectress, Mademoiselle Felicie, she yet had the air of a queen in a tale of old fairy days. When she walked it seemed that she spurned the ground under her. One instinctively looked for the cavalier to spread his ermine-lined cloak before her dainty feet.

In the quarter where she lived Rose Marie had always been a fascinating mystery. No one, save Mademoiselle Felicie, really knew who she was. The latter had brought her as an infant to her shop and little home, and reared her carefully and tenderly. The beautiful little child bore no name save Rose Marie. Felicie's black eyes snapped when neighbors became too inquisitive.

"*Ca ne fait rien,*" she exploded, whenever questioned as to Rose Marie's antecedents. "It is of my affair, this child! I bring her up. *C'est assez.*"

But speculation was always rife in this quarter about the antecedents of Rose Marie. Old Mere Cassard, the most inveterate gossip of that section, was wont to whisper with many shrugs of the shoulders and much uplifting of hands toward heaven:

"You remember, is it not so, that Felicie had a younger sister, Angelique, who disappeared of a suddenness? There was a handsome Spaniard—Felicie says that she went into a convent." Here the old scandalmonger shook with ribald laughter. "Convent! Eh? Yes. Oh, *mon Dieu!*"

How mysterious is fate! Upon what fragile trifles turn the wheels of life. Had Rose Marie remained in the little glove shop that noon instead of going out to gaze wistfully at the towers of the city, longing to know the life that was throbbing in the big cosmopolitan town, this chronicle might have been very different.

But as she stood there, the soft tendrils of her blond hair playing about her exquisite face, her dark eyes filled with desire and wonder, a carriage drawn by a superb span of horses passed, with a coachman in livery on the box.

Sitting in the carriage, with a bored expression upon his world-weary face, was a man nearly sixty, of aristocratic presence and cynical, cold eyes. These eyes finally rested upon Rose Marie, standing there at the door of the little

glove shop, the springlike embodiment of youth.

The man in the carriage started and gazed at the beautiful girl as if electrified. Rose Marie caught that steady survey and coquettishly dropped her long lashes. Turning quickly, she ran back into the glove shop. The man hastily made a note of the address, and the next morning his carriage stopped before the door and he alighted.

Rose Marie was busy about household duties that morning, and Felicie herself, in a tremendous flutter, received the distinguished caller. Never before had so smart an equipage stopped before her humble shop.

The caller looked over her stock of gloves and bought several pairs. His secretive eyes under their heavy lids roved furtively about the tiny shop, seeking the charming vision he had beheld the day before. Meantime he studied the crafty face the other side of the counter.

He saw in Felicie's dark face a commingling of guile and greed. Man of the world as he was, he quickly recognized her type.

"And what else can I show monsieur?" Felicie asked, as her customer laid aside the gloves he had selected.

M. Victor Renier hesitated a moment, then bending across the counter, he muttered in the woman's ear:

"You can show me, mademoiselle, the exquisite girl I beheld at your door but yesterday."

The eyes of the two met. Then Felicie tossed her head and drew a long breath.

"*Ma foi!*" she cried. "Is it possible that my little assistant has pleased the eye of so distinguished a gentleman?"

"She does indeed, mademoiselle," gallantly replied her visitor. "I must say that I have never before seen so beautiful a girl."

"M'sieu well says," she insinuated. "Rose Marie is only seventeen."

"She——" The visitor hesitated a little. "She is not your child?"

Felicie scraped her throat.

"No, m'sieu," she replied volubly. "The child of a dear old friend, whom I have reared from babyhood."

"Are her parents living?" M. Renier questioned.

"No, m'sieu," the woman answered. "Rose Marie is of a verity alone in the world. Quite unprotected, as you see, m'sieu, save by myself." She was baiting him.

M. Renier hesitated only a moment, then bending still closer to the alert, thievish face on the other side of the counter, he whispered something that made the woman start.

"Do you really mean that?" she demanded tensely.

"Indeed, yes," the man replied, twisting his mustache with an air. "La petite is enchanting. An exquisite flower. She intrigues me."

CHAPTER II.

Thereafter M. Renier came almost daily. His splendid carriage stopped at the door, and its owner, immaculately garbed, with a gardenia in his coat, would descend and enter the tiny shop. Rose Marie dreaded these visits. She did not like this pasty-faced old man who paid her fulsome compliments. She tried to hide away at this hour of coming, but Felicie always sought her and ordered her to wait upon m'sieu. The child at last rebelled.

"Felicie," she protested, "do not force me to wait upon this old monster. It is of a loathing I regard him. He is like some crawling thing. I cannot bear him."

Felicie whirled upon her with flashing eyes.

"Thou art ungrateful, petite," she cried. "This M. Renier is a great man. He has very much of wealth, and it is of a condescension that he becomes my patron. Figure to yourself, Rose Marie,

how much of money he has poured into my shop, and you would drive him away because he does not please your eye.

"Have I not fed and clothed you all these years? Have I not given you a home? Did I not have you educated at the Sacred Heart like a lady—embroidery, dancing, music? Have I given you hard tasks? Regard those little hands. How soft, how white.

"Have I ever forced you to scrub floors, or cleanse the pots? No, I have realized your beauty and have not wished to spoil it; and now, just Heaven, you, foolish little one, would drive away my very best customer?"

Rose Marie flung her arms around Felicie's neck.

"No, no, dear Felicie," she begged, "do not call me an ingrate. You have been everything to me—father, mother, family. Where should I have been without your loving care?" I realize it. Forgive thy silly one, dear Felicie. I will say no more. Let this old cabbage come. I will show him every courtesy for the sake of my dear benefactress. and now embrace me, Felicie. I cannot bear to have you angry with me."

"It is a loving heart," replied Felicie, affecting to brush a tear from her beady black eyes. "And now, little one, make me no more scenes. Nay, petite, do not weep. Those beautiful eyes were not made for tears, but for joy and laughter. Thine is to be a merry life, *mon angel*, full of pleasure."

Rose Marie after that paid very little attention to the visits of M. Renier.

"This ancient bore," she reflected, "does not concern me. Possibly he makes court to Felicie," and with that thought she shook with silent laughter. But Rose Marie was diverted by one detail. She loved to stand at the door and look at the superb carriage and horses.

"How would it seem," she asked herself, "to ride in so magnificent an equi-

page? To loll back against velvet cushions, to have the stately footman open the door for me, touch his hat respectfully, and carry my shopping parcels? It would be fine," she thought.

But would she care to have M. Renier at her side? At that a shudder of nausea seized her. No, never could she endure that. She conjured up a vision of a Prince Charming, young and handsome, with tender eyes and a caressing manner.

He was to come from somewhere. Her hero, her husband. At that word she always blushed divinely, and ran away by herself to cool her burning cheeks. The dreams of a young girl are as fragile as the exquisite cobwebs clinging to the grass on a dewy summer morning.

Fantastic and filmy, they lie sparkling in the morning sun, only to be crushed by the first ruthless foot that passes. And so Rose Marie built her dainty, airy castle the while demons laughed sardonically, and plotted the destruction of her exquisite dreams.

But even as she visioned a great and ideal romance, Rose Marie pondered on luxury and ease. From her childhood Felicie had taught her the absolute desirability of money.

"There is nothing that money will not buy," she declared. "It is the only lever of this world—there is nothing, petite, but money. It brings position, jewels, finery, friends—yes, even love. You are of a wonderful beauty, my angel. It is all you have whereby to make your fortune. Remember that beauty will secure you everything your heart may desire."

Constantly the wily woman instilled this insidious poison in Rose Marie's soul. Drop by drop the venom of greed entered the girl's consciousness.

"I cannot grow old and ugly like Felicie," she would say as she gazed at her radiant beauty in her mirror. "Felicie has always worked like a slave.

She has had no luxury, no pleasure in life. She is only a drudge. Must I become that, with my face? No, no, no, I shall have all there is in life; of that I am determined."

The next afternoon, after M. Renier's visit, during which he and Felicie conversed in low tones, the latter dressed herself and went into the town. Rose Marie remained in the little shop. It was quite unusual for Felicie to go into the city, and the girl wondered somewhat over her absence. But at nightfall Felicie returned in a great flurry of excitement.

"Ah, *mignonne*," she cried, "I have news, news of the greatest importance—and something besides."

She drew from her bag a package which she hastily untied, displaying a Russia-leather jewel case. On opening this there was displayed to the astonished eyes of Rose Marie a string of lustrous pearls, gleaming like tears against its bed of white velvet.

The girl uttered a cry of delight, clapping and unclapping her hands in a nervous ecstasy.

"Oh, Felicie," she breathed, "how beautiful! Where did you get them? What are you going to do with them?"

Felicie, smiling craftily, extended the leather box.

"It is for thee, petite," she purred.

"For me! Oh, Felicie, you mock at me!"

"No, little one, it is a gift for thee."

"A gift?" The girl stared blankly at Felicie. "You should not buy me such an expensive gift," she objected. "It is of an extravagance, dear Felicie."

"Oh, la, la!" laughed the woman. "I did not buy these, my angel—I could not afford to purchase one of these pearls. They are a gift from an admirer."

Rose Marie was lifting the milky globes from their velvet bed, but suddenly paused, the color coming and going in her sweet young face.

"A gift?" she echoed. "Who, then, is this admirer, Felicie?"

As in a dream she caught a fleeting vision of the handsome young Prince Charming coming toward her, a caressing smile on his lips.

Felicie swallowed hard.

"These jewels, little one," she murmured, "are from M. Renier."

Rose Marie instantly dropped the pearls back into their receptacle, staring with wide, frightened eyes at Felicie.

"Why should that old beast send me pearls?" she demanded furiously. "I will not have them."

Felicie set the case on the table, her thin lips resembling a steel trap. Turning, she placed her hands on her hips and regarded the rebellious girl with a glance that chilled Rose Marie.

"Listen to me," she said grimly. "I took you from the street, Rose Marie. Your father had deserted your mother, and she lay dead in a hovel, while you, a helpless babe, wailed beside her. I gave your mother burial and brought you to my home and reared you like my own child.

"And now, when I bring you the greatest possible good fortune, you defy me—is it not so?"

"But, Felicie, I do not defy you," cried the girl, alarmed at the woman's face and manner. "I do not wish to accept jewels from a strange old man. You who have always taught me to be prudent! Why should you wish that I take this gift from M. Renier, who is nothing to me?"

Felicie took a step toward the girl.

"But he desires to be something to you—he wishes to marry you, Rose Marie."

CHAPTER III.

Rose Marie's face was as white as her gown.

"To—to marry me," she panted, "that—that old, miserable——"

"Take care," Felicie snapped, "how you speak of m'sieu—your future husband."

"Never, never!" cried the girl passionately. "I will die first!" She moved to leave the room, but Felicie caught her by the wrist and held her, despite Rose Marie's struggles to free herself from the viselike grip.

"It is of a necessity that you mark well my words," said the woman. "M. Renier is a man highly distinguished and of great wealth. He lives in a palace. He will bestow jewels upon you. You will be dressed in silks and velvets. Every wish of your heart will be gratified. Who are you—a nameless one, to mock at such an alliance? I will not permit you to refuse. Of a truth you shall marry him."

"He is old enough to be my father,"

sobbed the girl. "I can never love him."

"*Mon Dieu*, who speaks of love?" ejaculated Felicie. "We talk of marriage, not moonshine. Love? Bah! Can love house you in a grand mansion like a château? Can love dress you like a queen? What is love? A passing fancy, like the idle wind—pouf, it is gone!

"But marriage? Just Heaven! That a grand gentleman like m'sieu should stoop to a girl of your position—it is a tale of the fairies. He is like a king—and you a beggar, picked up by the wayside. You shall marry him and at once. I will not permit you to ruin your life as your mother before you."

With every subtle wile Felicie set before the distressed girl the advantages of a marriage with M. Renier. She skillfully battered down every objection Rose Marie put forth. It was a hard contest, but Felicie won. Amid a storm of cajolery and threats Rose Marie at last capitulated.

The child had actually no knowledge of the mysteries of marriage. Felicie had never vouchsafed any information on this subject, and while at school Rose

Marie had avoided groups of whispering, tittering girls who giggled in corners over their love affairs.

She dreaded and loathed M. Renier's companionship, but was solaced with the prospect of a magnificent home and luxurious surroundings. She looked no further ahead than the day of her marriage.

M. Renier was discretion itself. He came every day to visit his childish fiancée, always bringing some beautiful gift to tempt and allure her fancy. Never, in the slightest way, did he encroach upon her innocence. Gradually, Rose Marie's horror of him wore away. He came to be simply "Papa" Renier to her. She really looked upon him as a devoted and indulgent father.

And so, late one afternoon, Rose Marie became the wife of Victor Renier, the most notorious roué in San Francisco.

The marriage was privately solemnized with only Felicie and Renier's housekeeper, Madame Dupont, as witnesses. The latter, a shrewd and astute Frenchwoman, narrowed her worldly-wise eyes, scanning the beautiful girl before her. She marked the flowerlike face, the perfect little body, the air of mingled timidity and curiosity. She noted also the cupidity in Felicie's eyes.

"*Pauvre petite,*" she thought, "this woman has sold her! *Eh, bien!* It is no affair of mine."

She spoke conventionally to the young bride, wishing her every happiness in her new life.

They went directly from the church to M. Renier's home, and soon afterward Felicie took her leave. Rose Marie clung to her at the last.

"Oh, Felicie," she whispered, "I am frightened at all this grandeur. Take me back home with you."

"Foolish little one—*c'est impossible!*" muttered Felicie, giving her a hasty embrace. Her part in the transaction was finished, and she wished to get away.

Rose Marie was indeed overwhelmed by the magnificence of the house in which she found herself.

"But it is a palace," she thought, as she noted the elegance of the appointments and belongings. There were rugs in which one's feet sank; satin and velvet hangings; mahogany, ormolu, and satinwood furniture; marvelous vases from the Orient, and cabinets of china and lacquer work.

Many of the immense paintings on the walls startled her. She had never before seen the nude so lavishly displayed, and she blushed whenever her eyes strayed in the direction of these pictures.

"But she is a baby," reflected Madame Dupont, as she noticed these manifest signs of embarrassment. "Of what does m'sieu think? This infant will never love him. *Mon Dieu!* What a fool is an old fool!"

Rose Marie dined in state with her husband, waited upon by two magnificent flunkies in livery, whose haughty presence overawed the girl. She was served with strange and delicious food, the like of which she had never tasted. M. Renier urged her to partake.

"It will do you good, petite," he advised. "You are weary; it will give you strength."

The strong, rich coffee sent a glow through the girl's body. She experienced an inexplicable sensation. She began to respond to her surroundings. She was filled with an emotion of exaltation, as if she were lifted up and floating on clouds. The beautiful room, the haughty flunkies, M. Renier's smiling face, were wreathed in a delicious haze. The latter saw the effect on his bride and he murmured solicitously: "You are growing excited, *mignonne*, you are not used—one sees, ah, yes, one sees you are not used to this life."

Dinner over, he led Rose Marie into the drawing-room, and seating her at his side on the divan, he said gently:

"Felicie has told me that you sing very sweetly. I should like to hear you. I will send for Madame Dupont, who plays very well, to accompany you."

He summoned a servant and directed him to ask Madame Dupont to join them. When she appeared, at his request she seated herself at the grand piano, and Rose Marie sang a pathetic little song about a rose that grew in a humble garden. While it was yet in bud a bitter wind came up from the sea and chilled it. The bud withered, drooped and died. Her sweet young voice sank away in mournful cadence.

"Ah, *mon Dieu*, but that is too sad!" cried M. Renier. "Have you no gay little chansons of love and joy?"

Rose Marie admitted that the good sisters had never taught her such songs.

"One must change all that," he said. "You are too young for the sadness, and now, *mon enfant*, dance for me."

Madame Dupont began to play a dreamy, voluptuous waltz. The girl swayed her lithe young body to the enticing strains, and, loving dancing as she did, was soon lost to everything but her own enjoyment. In her soft, white frock, as she drifted about the great room, daintily lifting her pretty skirts, she was like a flower blown by the breeze, or a white butterfly flitting through space.

The man with the tired, cynical face and covetous eyes, peered through heavy, half-closed lids at the girl. He greedily marked every curve of her lissome young body, her golden hair, her wonderful grace and charm. An expression of fierce impatience flashed in his evil eyes.

The dance over, the girl returned to her seat by M. Renier's side.

"You dance exquisitely, *chérie*," he said. "But you must have some new gowns. What is your favorite color?"

"I do not care for colors, *m'sieu*," replied Rose Marie. "I should love always to wear white."

"That would be of a distinction," responded her husband. "And would carry out the symbol of your name. You would then be a little white rose. Is it not so?"

"I love white roses," shyly admitted the girl. "If I could I would have them always about me. I would wear them on my breast or carry them in my hand."

"A ravishing idea," cried the man. "You are well named, little Rose Marie. And now, child, I see that you are weary. You have had enough excitement for one evening. Madame Dupont will have a maid take you to your chamber."

The maid summoned by Madame Dupont conducted Rose Marie up a stately staircase, and led her through many corridors into an enchanting room done entirely in white and silver. The draperies were of white satin-embroidered silver. White rugs covered the floor, and on the snowy dressing table were all requisite silver toilet accessories.

There was a strange, rich, heavy perfume in the room, which ever after Rose Marie associated with that night. A perfume she came to loathe and detest. It drifted from powders and lotions in a tiny bathroom opening out of her chamber.

On the lace-draped bed lay a cobwebby negligee, garnished with lace. Other exquisite articles lay there, and Rose Marie examined them with girlishly delighted eyes. Never had she seen anything so fine. The maid smiled at her enthusiasm and said:

"If madame will permit me to disrobe her, we will try on some of these garments."

Rose Marie had always dressed herself, and shrank a little from the touch of this stranger. But the maid deftly removed her frock and other belongings, and put upon her the filmy negligee adorned with lace and ribbons, and leading her to the mirror, cried delightfully:

"Regard yourself, then, madame. *Ma foi!* How you are beautiful!"

Rose Marie gazed in the depths of the mirror before her and saw her white shoulders and rounded bosom rising from the laces like Venus from the foam of the sea. She blushed at the charming picture she made. At the same time she realized her marvelous beauty to the full. The maid braided the wonderful hair that hung in two long plaits nearly to the floor, and then smilingly bade her new mistress good night.

As Rose Marie had taken leave of Madame Dupont the latter had said:

"I will try to run up later, madame, and see if you are comfortable."

The girl stood, still admiring herself in the mirror, wondering how soon Madame Dupont would appear. The luxurious open bed attracted her. She was very weary, and longed to snuggle in it and drift away into dreamland. But, she asked herself, ought she to retire before the housekeeper's visit?

She stood hesitating for some little time. From afar came the dull, muffled roar of street traffic. The great mansion was very still. The silence smote upon Rose Marie. She felt alone and somewhat terrified. Some unknown peril seemed to menace her.

"I will say my prayers," she thought, "and perhaps by that time Madame Dupont will come."

She turned from the dressing table to search for her little book of devotions. At that moment a gentle knock sounded on her door.

"Come in," she called, believing it to be the housekeeper.

The door opened, and M. Victor Renier entered the room.

CHAPTER V.

Two years later, the queen of that rapid world that lies between fashionable society and the realm of battered souls, was the famous beauty Madame Victor Renier.

At balls, at the theater, driving in Golden Gate Park, making a veritable sensation wherever she appeared, with her patrician air and haughty, frozen, little face, was the girl of the glove shop, called by many *La Rose Blanche*.

She had received this title because she always dressed in white and never carried or wore any flower save white roses. Her elderly husband displayed his prize everywhere, and whenever she entered her box at the theater, wrapped in her wonderful ermine cloak, and adorned with her priceless pearls, it was like the passing of royalty.

And what of the soul of Rose Marie? In those two years of nightmare, which had been spent as the wife of this aged Lothario, Rose Marie had passed through every stage of gayety, humiliation, and despair. She had found that luxurious surroundings did not necessarily bring peace of mind. She had grown to loathe her life, now fast becoming intolerable.

"I will make you the most famous beauty on the continent," M. Renier had told her repeatedly. "After you have reigned a while in San Francisco, I will take you to New York, and you will have the world at your feet. Is not that better than selling gloves, and leading a poverty-stricken life?"

Sometimes the girl begged to be allowed to go back to Felicie. M. Renier merely laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"For what?" he demanded. "I have given you everything; you live like a princess. What more can you ask? Be content."

Rose Marie had many admirers. The gilded youth of the town toasted her at their revels. The bohemians, artists, and journalists lauded her beauty and pitied her.

"Oh, it is unspeakable," cried Ralph Wallworth, a famous light of a famous club, "that such a dainty blossom should be the property of a battered old rake

like Renier. Consider it—a girl of twenty in the clutch of sixty-two. It is too horrible. Why doesn't some one kill him and put her out of her misery?"

Barry Monroe, the dramatic critic of a San Francisco paper, first saw Rose Marie at a great ball given by the bohemian world of that city. With a crowd of other newspaper men he stood watching the fantastic pageant, when suddenly through the crowd ran a perceptible movement of expectancy, as down the long ballroom came M. Renier, a wonderful beauty leaning on his arm.

Rose Marie was gowned in white velvet, cut very low to display her exquisite neck and shoulders. Around her white throat hung the famous string of pearls for which her husband had paid a fortune. She carried her customary bouquet of white roses. Her flowerlike face was icy in its immobility; she was like a marble statue come to life and going aimlessly about, taking absolutely no interest in her surroundings.

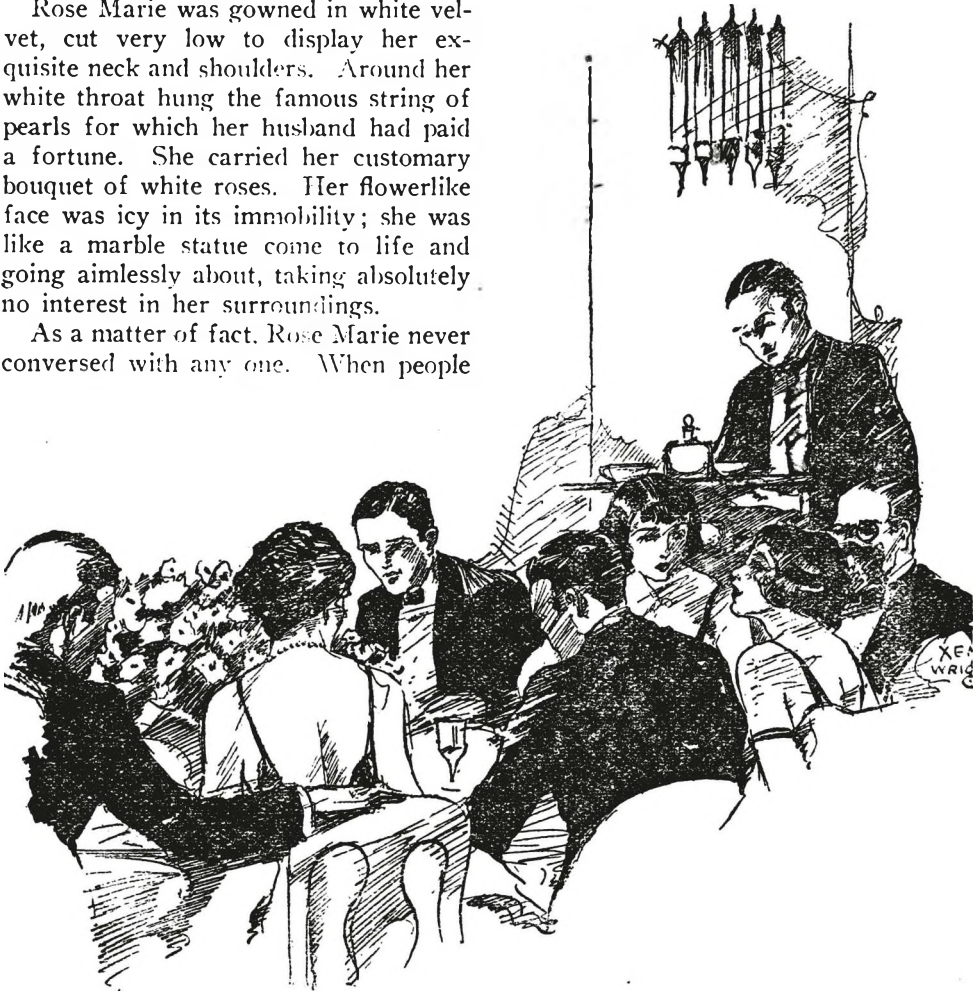
As a matter of fact, Rose Marie never conversed with any one. When people

were presented to her she received them courteously, with a faint smile, but uttered no words save to answer a question if directly addressed to her.

"She is an ice maiden," said one man. "not a woman."

"That's all right," responded another, "but even ice will melt under proper conditions. Wait until she really loves."

Barry Monroe had heard of this glorious and unhappy girl, but beheld her for the first time. A great wave of compassion swept over his chivalrous



Rose Marie had many admirers. The gilded youth of the town toasted her at their revels. The bohemians, artists and journalists lauded her beauty and pitied her.

soul as he marked her progress through the throng, like that of a dethroned queen going to the scaffold.

"Poor girl," he thought, "what a dreadful fate. How did she ever become the wife of that old scoundrel? She is like a flower, blooming amid gloom and darkness of the night. How apart, how aloof she is from this blatant rabble. Her soul is far away; her heart is not here. Her heart? I wonder has she a heart?"

When a virile young man pities a lonely, wretched woman and wonders if she has a heart, it is obvious what will happen. Barry Monroe fell desperately in love with the "White Rose." Before the evening was over he was presented to her. He bowed low over her hand, then lifted his eyes to her face, shot her a message of tender sympathy. She gave a little start as she received it.

For a moment the air was surcharged as with electricity. Instead of the bold, insolent surveys to which she had been accustomed, Rose Marie met a look of genuine, respectful admiration. It was as refreshing to her as a pool of water under palm trees to a weary traveler crossing a desert.

Barry Monroe could not sleep that night. He walked the floor of his room, living over and over the scene of the evening. Once more he saw that cold, proud beauty coming down the vast ballroom, with every one gazing, whispering, and pointing. Once more he bent over her hand, which, when he touched it, sent a thrill through his whole being; once more he gazed into those unfathomable eyes full of unshed tears, and the mystery of woman.

Should he ever know her better, he asked himself. How would it be possible for a man in his position ever to come in closer contact with the wife of Victor Renier? The idea was simply preposterous, he assured himself. And yet he could not banish the impression

that Rose Marie was to be some influence in his life. A vague, sweet pre-sciense filled his generous heart.

He occasionally saw her after that, driving in the park when he was taking his customary daily horseback ride. To his salutation she returned a grave little bow, with the fleeting ghost of a smile. At the theater when she entered her box, Monroe experienced once more that same wild, sweet thrill.

Oh, to be near her! To touch her—to draw her into his sheltering arms, and hold her against all the world!

"I am a fool!" he would savagely mutter to himself, and, rising, leave the theater and try to write. But between him and his work there drifted a proud, unhappy face, a face that sometimes lifted appealing eyes, as if to say: "Save me!"

There came to town a famous dancer, Teresa Bondi, fresh from her laurels in New York, to dazzle the eyes of San Francisco. Her dancing became a feature in the night life of the town. Every one flocked to the theater to witness her marvelous art.

The lady was very amenable to interviews, and was soon on excellent terms with all the journalists. The clubmen and *flaneurs* of the city were all at her feet. Among others came M. Renier. He and the dancer were soon on the best of terms. Gossip soon began to be rife about them, and, of course, it drifted to the ears of the public.

Toward the close of her engagement, Bondi demanded of M. Renier that he give a big supper in her honor at a famous restaurant. She desired to have certain members of what she considered the really great world, as well as bohemians.

"And you shall bring your wife," she drawled to her admirer. "But she shall not, for once, be queen of the revel—that is for me. And she shall take second place. Understand that, *mon ami*."

To this M. Renier gallantly assented.

and preparations for a banquet which was indeed to startle all San Francisco went merrily forward.

CHAPTER V.

Teresa Bondi well knew the value of eccentricity as an advertising agent. During her cyclonic career, in every capital in Europe, she had sought ways and means by which to startle the most jaded and bored of her admirers. Sending for her personal representative she issued her directions, thereby giving him the shock of his life. Being a healthy young American, he had never heard of so morbid an entertainment.

When her guests were ushered into the large private room of a famous restaurant, which had been set apart for the banquet, they stared with amazed eyes. The walls were hung with black cambric. The table also was draped with the same sable color. Instead of a basket of flowers in the center of the board stood a toy skeleton.

At each cover was a miniature skull containing a light. The waiters were dressed in mourning, handing the food about on tiny coffin lids in their black-gloved hands. The effect was gruesome in the extreme.

Teresa herself received her guests dressed in a shroud, in which she performed a grotesque dance, at the last throwing off the habiliments of the grave, and revealing her supple body clothed in vivid scarlet.

M. Renier seemed carried away by the dancer and her fascinations, leaving Rose Marie quite to herself. She had rebelled against appearing at this entertainment, but her husband had insisted on her presence.

White as her gown, perturbed and sickened at the outrageous affair, the girl sat apart, listless and more wretched than usual. Her magnificent ermine coat was thrown over the back of her chair. She leaned against it as chill after chill shook her slender frame.

She could not eat. She could not touch the viands before her. As she sat there so absolutely aloof from the pleasure-loving throng, she prayed for death!

The fun waxed fast and furious. Flowers were torn down and the china was thrown recklessly about, and the whole affair was approaching a carouse.

Barry Monroe sat nearly opposite Rose Marie. Covertly he had watched the distressed girl all the evening. He marked the untasted food, and noted the positive agony in her eyes.

"Poor little flower of the night," he said to himself, "she has no business to be here among these flaunting poppies and tulips. Dear little white rose, if I could only pluck her and wear her over my heart."

The climax of this insane revel came about one o'clock in the morning. Teresa Bondi had leaped upon the table and executed a fantastic pas seul, twisting dexterously among the remaining dishes on the board. She finished by thrusting her dainty scarlet-slippered foot straight in the center of M. Renier's immaculate shirt front.

The old roué caught her slipper in his hand, pulled it off, and filling it, drank to her, his latest flare. Then placing his hands under her arms, he gallantly lifted her down from the table. Seizing him by the hand, she drew him into the center of the room.

"Dance with me, old dear," she cried.

Whereupon M. Renier, remembering the balls of his youth, broke into wild, bizarre steps, to the immense delight of the rest of the company. Nearly every one, save perhaps Rose Marie and Barry Monroe, applauded the two, shrieking with ribald laughter.

The dance finished, all again raised their cups, and M. Renier, lifting his high in the air, cried out:

"Bondi has given us a wonderful evening! She has shown us how attractive the trappings of the grave can be made.

Therefore I give you this toast: *Vive la mort!*"

The cup toppled in his trembling, upstretched hand and crashed to the floor. With the other he clutched the top of the table. A livid, gray shadow crept across his withered face, and as all the revelers, shocked into sudden silence, stared aghast at him, he staggered and fell face down upon the table—dead.

There were shrieks from the women, frenzied shouts from the men, while the crash from overturning chairs and the rush of hurrying feet combined to form absolute pandemonium. All was indescribable confusion.

After the first shock, Barry Monroe leaped to his feet and rushed to the side of Rose Marie. The terrified girl clung to his arm with trembling hands.

"Oh, help me!" she faintly implored.

Monroe raised the girl to her feet, wrapped her ermine coat about her, and, picking her up in his arms, moved unnoticed in the confusion through the dressing room, down a side stairway. Gaining an outer door, he hurried into the street. Fortunately a cab stood there, in which he placed the fainting girl, and after giving the driver an address, he took his place by her side. The cab instantly rattled away.

Dazed and almost unconscious, Rose Marie realized only that a pair of strong arms were about her, protecting and sheltering her, taking her away from that inferno—from that ghastly fantasy and horrible reality of death—from the frightful clamor and uproar.

The cab stopped before an imposing mansion on Nob Hill. Rousing from the lethargy which had stolen over her dazed consciousness, Rose Marie suddenly realized the horror of the fresh ordeal awaiting her. Once more in a frenzy of terror, she clung to the arm of her rescuer.

"No, no," she cried, "don't leave me here! I will never enter that house again!"

"But, Madame Renier," protested Monroe, "where shall I take you? You cannot go to a hotel in these evening things. And then the publicity—the town will ring with this affair."

"I know, I know!" she cried wildly. "I can't face it—take me away—hide me—somewhere—anywhere!"

For a moment Monroe sat in troubled amazement. Then, suddenly, his fine young face stiffened into lines of grim resolution. Leaning forward, he gave the driver another address.

Again the cab stopped, this time before the door of a plain, old-fashioned house in a less fashionable street. Monroe leaped out, paid the driver, then lifting Rose Marie from the cab, he carried her up the steps, and inserting his pass-key, opened the door and brought her into the house.

He half led, half carried her, into a large, comfortably furnished drawing-room, and placed her in a capacious chair before an open grate. The fire was nearly out, but he at once replenished it and soon had a cheerful blaze going. He went to a little cabinet and, unlocking it, took out a bottle, and pouring a small quantity into a glass, brought it to Rose Marie.

"Drink this," he ordered. "It will do you good; you need it."

The medicine, coursing through her chilled veins, set her blood once more in circulation. She began to feel again that she was alive. She glanced up timidly at the handsome virile figure towering above her.

"Thank you," she murmured faintly, as she handed him the glass. "How kind—how good you are."

Monroe restored the bottle and glass to the cabinet, and coming back to the fire drew up a chair. Sitting down, he remained for some time in profound silence, gazing at the dancing flames, trying to realize that his wildest dreams had come true.

The girl that he had so madly, so

desperately loved was actually sitting there at his fireside. The man who had tortured her for so long was dead. There was no reason why he should not pluck this little flower of the night and wear it on his heart.

"Is he really—dead?" Rose Marie asked in a strange, dull voice.

"Yes," replied Monroe tensely.

Rose Marie leaned forward and, gripping the arm of her chair, said breathlessly:

"Are you sure—that he is dead?"

"Yes," rejoined Monroe. "A stroke, I think. Too much excitement. You are safe, madam. This is my home, and my housekeeper will care for you until I can remove you to my little place in the country, where you will be in absolute seclusion."

"Why," she faltered, "should you do all this for me?"

Leaning forward, Monroe took her little, cold hands between his big, warm palms, his eyes gravely searching her face.

"Because I love you, Rose Marie," he said simply, "and I want nothing so much as to serve you."

CHAPTER VI.

On the outskirts of the village of Monterey is a small adobe cottage, its door opening on the narrow, crooked street. Its walls and roof are entirely covered with Gold of Ophir roses. There is a pretty story concerning this rose tree, famous up and down the entire Pacific coast.

Many, many years ago, a young officer at the Presidio brought from San José a small slip, and planted it in his sweetheart's garden at the rear of the cottage. The rose bush grew and flourished. It climbed the walls, and its great, glorious blossoms thrust their golden heads into the chamber window.

Then it lovingly stretched its arms and embraced the roof, while the beautiful Spanish girl waited longingly, year

after year, for the man who had loved and ridden away, to come back to her. But he never came. The señorita grew old, living only in the past. At last she died, and her little home passed into other hands.

Barry Monroe had rented this cottage for the purpose of retiring there to write a play, on which he was staking his entire future.

To this quaint little abode he took Rose Marie. He furnished her with an elderly housekeeper who watched over her like a mother. The terrified, exhausted girl was quite ill for some time, but at last recovered her strength sufficiently to be carried down into the secluded little garden, where in a flood of sunshine she improved day by day.

The disappearance of the famous beauty immediately after the sensational death of her husband had caused a great hue and cry in San Francisco. Scouts from all classes had vied with each other in trying to find the wife. But she lay hidden in Monroe's town house under the care of his housekeeper until the nine-day wonder had subsided, when he took her to Monterey.

During all this time Monroe had preserved the strictest delicacy toward his charge. He was the chivalrous, devoted friend, and never spoke again to her of love, although each day when he went to see her his marvelously caressing eyes told their own tale.

Every morning he brought her a cluster of white roses. From these she would select a half-opened bud and pin it in the lapel of his coat. And so, in the dusty, noisy newspaper office, like a knight at a tournament of old, he wore his lady's colors.

Monroe could not go daily to see Rose Marie at Monterey, but every morning came his regular letter. These missives Rose Marie devoured with avidity. Although Monroe in his letters restrained his passion, it would occasionally reveal itself in some caressing word or phrase.

Rose Marie had never received love letters before. In spite of the terrific experience she had passed through, she was still a girl at heart, and these letters, with their tone of tender devotion and chivalrous protection, were emblazoned on her heart. Each day she grew more beautiful. The faint pink flush of her childhood began to creep back into her white face.

At last the unfortunate girl tasted happiness.

The little garden behind the adobe cottage was crowded with graceful, feathery pepper trees, and in one corner stood a cluster of fig and orange trees. There were gay, yellow poppies and scarlet poinsettias, guarded by a tall hedge of pink geranium. Sweeter than all manufactured scents, was that of the climbing heliotrope, perfuming the air.

A tiny fountain in the center of this garden of delight shot a shower of silver spray in the air, and by its lily-flecked pool, Rose Marie, wrapped in a white negligee, awaited one balmy evening the coming of Barry Monroe.

The letter she had received from him that morning, notifying her of this event, was tucked among the laces over her heart. It rose and fell with the delicious beating in her breast.

"Barry is coming—Barry is coming." each throb seemed to repeat.

At last she heard the whistle of the incoming train, and listened breathlessly for the well-known step. She heard the door of the house open and the quick tread in the hall. The servant's slow reply to his hasty question, and then he came running down the steps into the garden, and was at her side.

Tall, debonair, commanding, he bent over her, piercing her very soul with his searching glance.

"Rose Marie," he whispered, "Rose Marie, are you glad to see me?"

She smiled sweetly up at him.

"*Oui*, m'sieur," she murmured. "All day since I received your letter, I have

had of the great joy that you were coming."

"Oh, Rose Marie," he begged, "do not call me m'sieur."

"What then?" she shyly asked.

He took her little hands in his and kissed the pink finger tips, one by one.

"Call me Barry," he whispered tensely.

"*Très bien*, M'sieur Barry." Her long lashes quivered over her cheeks.

"No, no," he insisted, "not M'sieur Barry. Just plain, everyday Barry."

"But you are not plain everyday Barry." Rose Marie responded. "You are a wonderful fairy-tale Barry. There is not such another man on earth. You have been my savior. You have given me protection, home, health, and life itself. What more could you do?"

It was quite dusk, and a great golden moon was swinging up into the sky. Its shafts shot through the drooping boughs of a pepper tree, and gleamed across the rippling fountain's spray. The soft splash of the water in the pool was like the chime of silver bells.

A gentle breeze stirred the leaves of the fig and orange trees, and borne on its breath came the perfume of heliotrope and roses. It was a night for love.

Monroe leaned forward and took the girl in both his strong arms. She lay passively in his embrace as he bent his lips to hers in one long, lingering kiss.

"All I can give you now, sweetheart," he murmured, "is myself—my love—my adoration—my name. Ah, my little flower of the night, can you, will you love me?"

She lifted her glorious dark eyes to his with a look he never forgot to his dying day.

"My Barry," she murmured, in a voice like the sighing of a lute. "I have loved you since that night when you took me out of that inferno. I shall love you all my life."

For hours the lovers sat in this en-

chanted garden, wrapped in each other's arms, whispering the sweet, foolish language known to lovers of all time.

The moon smiled through the trees at them. The fountain shook its silver bells in joy. The heliotrope wafted its sweetness like a blessing to them, and the Gold of Ophir roses dropped down a shower of perfumed petals upon them.

CHAPTER VII.

For months the lovers dwelt in their paradise. As Rose Marie regained her health the two took long walks and drives about the country. Under the sunlight of Monroe's love the girl bloomed like a flower. She became cheerful and joyous, putting behind her the ugly past, thinking not of what the future might bring forth, but seizing only the blissful present.

Monroe came down usually on Friday and remained two or three days with her. He had his table in a corner of the garden and worked upon his play, while Rose Marie sat near him employed with a bit of embroidery which she was always ready to lay aside when he wished to read to her from his work.

Rose Marie would never consent to go up to San Francisco.

"I cannot bear to think of going there, my friend," she would say. "I never wish to see the place again. Let me stay here in my dear garden with my books, my flowers, and you. I am satisfied."

To this idyllic life, one Friday, when Barry Monroe came down he brought with him a guest from New York, a millionaire and an old college chum.

Vickery was the typical, blasé Broadway product—the sort of man who believes that money will buy anything. His reputation as a hunter of women was international. He was a tall, well-set-up chap, with cold, gray eyes that had an unpleasant trick of narrowing, whenever he appraisingly scrutinized a beautiful woman.

His manners were charmingly affable. He thought he understood the situation perfectly, and although he conducted himself with an air of outward respect, in his heart, he at once marked Rose Marie for his prey.

"She is the most exquisite thing I ever saw," he reflected. "Of course, she has no heart, these women never have. After a little, she will get tired of old Barry, and then I will take her. Gad! What a sensation she would make on Broadway."

Vickery took up his quarters at the great hotel near by; ordered his car sent down, and the three drove for miles



"Rose Marie," he whispered, "Rose Marie, are you glad to see me?"

about the beautiful country—the golden heart of California.

It pleased Vickery to throw his money lavishly about, intending thereby to impress Rose Marie with his vast fortune; but the girl, although gently courteous to him at all times, showed no interest in him or his wealth. Vickery could not comprehend this.

"Here is something new," he thought. "I wonder if she does not really care for money, or if she is so cleverly designing as to appear indifferent, and therefore increase my desire for her."

His jaded soul was absolutely incapable of grasping the idea of a pure, unselfish devotion such as the girl felt for Barry Monroe.

One Friday, Vickery brought down a party of his boon companions from San Francisco. He asked Rose Marie's permission to bring his friends over for the evening, and she somewhat reluctantly consented. In her heart she did not care to have them, but knowing Monroe's friendship for Vickery she disliked to refuse his request.

On Monroe's arrival at the cottage she at once told him of the plan and, although Monroe was rather dubious, not knowing Vickery's friends, he realized it was too late to object.

"Well, sweetheart," he said, "I would much prefer to spend the evening alone with you—but, after all, Rose Marie, I really think you ought to have some friends of your own sex. I fear you are lonely at times."

Rose Marie went over to him, and putting both arms around his neck, clung lovingly to him.

"For myself I wish no one but my Barry," she said sweetly. "These people may be very amusing, yes, but not for me. I am content with thee, my dearest. I care not for any other friends."

Her voice was very soft.

Monroe crushed her against his breast.

"Rose Marie," he whispered brokenly, "my little flower of the night. You are an angel."

He kissed her hair.

She lifted her pretty head from his breast, tilting it coquettishly to one side.

"*Non, non*, my Barry," she smiled. "I am not an angel, dear—only a woman."

The party drove over from the hotel about nine o'clock, in Vickery's car.

Tom Meredith, big special writer on one of the San Francisco dailies, a jolly, red-faced chap, was the devoted cavalier of Mrs. Blanche Marsden, a dashing blond widow.

Dolly Carew, a birdlike little creature, was the friend of Dick Ball, a well-known man of letters, and author of two or three successful plays.

The house was soon filled with joyous laughter and repartee. All exclaimed over the beauty of Rose Marie's garden, and after some refreshments, when hilarity had grown rather wild, Dolly Carew pulled off her dainty, high-heeled slippers and silk stockings and waded in the fountain.

As the fun grew fast and furious, Monroe became more and more uneasy over the situation. He had been quick to recognize that the women were not the type of friends he wished for Rose Marie, and he was enraged at Vickery for bringing them there.

"However," he reflected, "it will soon be over, and I will see that it does not occur again."

As for Rose Marie, the unhappy memories of her married life, awakened by the free conduct of these visitors, were heightened by a disagreeable episode. Coming down the steps into the garden, her French heel caught in her flimsy skirt; she stumbled, and would have fallen had not Vickery caught her.

For one instant he held her in a relentless grasp. The girl felt his hot hands on her arms, and with a shudder

of repugnance she broke from his hold.

She was relieved that Barry had not noticed the occurrence. She had instinctively hated Vickery, and some way to-night she feared him. Contrasted with her tender, chivalrous lover, he appeared like something satanic, and brought frightful memories of an almost forgotten bondage.

It was nearly midnight when they sat down to a delicious supper in the tiny dining room of the cottage. The table was gay with flowers, and Juana, the Spanish cook, had prepared the most wonderful dishes to whet the appetites of the guests.

Blanche Marsden was arrayed in a gorgeous gown of Nile green, and Dolly Carew was chic and charming in rose-colored silk. Rose Marie was dressed, as usual, in a simple gown of white. She wore no ornaments.

The gorgeous pearl necklace, which M. Renier had given her, had been long since returned anonymously to the dead man's lawyer; as had also the magnificent ermine cloak, and all other articles of value which she had worn on the night of her flight.

Only her customary white rose was tucked in the bosom of her frock. Her beautiful golden hair piled high, gave her a somewhat haughty carriage of the head, and with her innate refinement and gentle dignity, as well as her marvelous beauty, she presented a wonderful picture.

The supper sped with the customary jests and toasts. Vickery declaring he was not in it, and bitterly lamenting that there was no one to whom he could make love, from his narrowing eyes watched, like a tiger about to spring, their hostess, the beautiful creature presiding at the head of the table.

"She is a thoroughbred," he said to himself, "and deserves a different setting. Oh, well, I have only to wait.

She'll get tired of this mud hut. I'll take her back to New York with me some day."

Supper was nearly over when the sound of wheels was heard approaching the house. No one paid the slightest attention until the brass knocker on the outer door sent an imperative summons through the cottage, silencing the clamor and raucous laughter of the noisiest of the guests.

Juana, with muttered Spanish profanity, set down the articles she had just brought from the ice box, and rushed to the door to intercept any intruder.

There was a low murmur in the hall, and presently Juana appeared with a somewhat frightened look.

"A lady," she said, "who demands to see Señor Monroe."

Vickery looked up.

"A lady," said Barry, getting very red in the face. "I don't expect any ladies." He half rose from his chair as he spoke. "But Juana, let her come in."

He turned toward Vickery.

"Now, Vickery," he said, "you are no longer the solitary member of the party—fate has sent some one to whom you can make love—show in this lady, Juana."

The stout, red-faced servant went back into the hall and presently footsteps were heard approaching through the tiny passage. Every one at the table leaned forward expectantly. A perceptible silence again fell on the room. Through the doorway came a little gray-haired old lady.

She paused abruptly on the threshold and gazed with amazed disapproval at the scene before her—the two women in their startling gowns, the slim, sweet-faced girl in her simple white frock, the men fit in their evening things, the table with its wilting flowers and empty dishes—and then held out her hands to Barry Monroe, who, white as death,

stood staring at her as if he had seen a ghost.

"My God, mother!" he ejaculated.

CHAPTER VIII.

The little old lady clung tearfully to her stalwart son.

"My boy, my boy," she murmured brokenly, again and again.

Monroe held her in his strong embrace, gently soothing her agitation.

"There, there, mother," he said. "Don't give way. I'm overjoyed to see you. But where have you come from?"

"My dear, I left Syracuse five days ago," his mother responded. "I got into San Francisco this morning, and drove directly to your house, where the servant told me you had gone to Monterey, so I lost no time, but followed you down here."

"But, mother dear," Monroe expostulated, "why didn't you let me know you were coming? I would have met you."

"I wanted to surprise you, Barry," cried Mrs. Monroe.

"Well, mother, you certainly have succeeded," her son replied with a whimsically uneasy smile. "Have you had any supper?"

"No, my dear," answered the old lady. "And I really want a cup of tea badly."

"That you shall have at once, mother," Monroe responded. "But first let me present my friends."

Turning, he led his mother to a seat at the table and introduced his subdued visitors to her.

The little old lady seemed quite overwhelmed at the grandeur of her son's friends, and she eyed the startling gowns of the two women and the disordered table with equal suspicion.

Rose Marie at once made room for a cover to be laid for the unexpected guest, and summoning Juana, gave her directions to bring tea for Mrs. Monroe.

A strange embarrassment had fallen upon the entire company. All the life

and sparkle of the revelry had departed. The men smoked their cigarettes in silence, avoiding each other's glances. Blanche Marsden and Dolly Carew left the table and went out into the moonlit garden.

"Isn't this the fiercest kind of a deal you ever struck?" asked the latter of her friend, as they stood by the fountain, dancing and playing under the rays of the moon. "What had we better do?"

"Get away as quickly as possible," rejoined Blanche Marsden. "Vickery must drive us over to the hotel at once. Certainly this supper has wound up as a beastly fluke. Dolly, call Tom out and tell him what to do."

Dolly Carew obeyed; going back to the door, she beckoned to Tom Meredith and Dick Hall, and making an excuse to their host, the two men at once joined the girls.

"Get us away from here, quick," said Dolly Carew. "I can't stand having that old lady looking me over. She makes me think of my own old mother."

The girl choked back a sob in her throat as she spoke.

George Vickery was also summoned and agreed with the others that they must depart immediately, and in a short time the ladies, wrapped in their beautiful evening cloaks, bade Monroe and Rose Marie good night.

"What a situation for a play," muttered Dick Hall to Tom Meredith as they motored away. "And Rose Marie—poor girl! How is Monroe going to explain this to his mother?"

"Devil take me if I know," responded Tom Meredith. "It's a bad piece of business any way you look at it."

Mrs. Monroe sipped her tea with great relish, but ate very sparingly of Juana's highly seasoned Spanish dishes. The old lady was so exhausted with her long journey that she scarcely sensed the fact that Rose Marie had not departed with the other guests.

Monroe insisted that she should go at once to her room, and she made no objection. She mechanically bade Rose Marie good night, and followed her son up the stairs.

"Your friends are very grand, my dear," Mrs. Monroe said to her son, as he led her into a low-ceilinged, white-washed chamber, through whose open lattice windows the great, gay roses thrust their yellow heads.

"I did not notice the gentlemen so much, but those two women were like queens! Is it customary to dress so much for a small party like yours, Barry?"

"Oh, yes, mother," Monroe replied in a strange voice. "California ladies are very fond of dress."

"And who is that beautiful girl in the plain white frock who remained behind?" his mother asked, as she laid her bonnet with its old-fashioned widow's veil primly on the dressing table.

Her son hesitated a moment.

"That, mother," he said in a low, thoughtful voice, "is an old friend of mine, Rose Marie."

"Rose Marie?" echoed his mother. "What a poetical name! Marie is then her family name?"

Monroe did not reply. He affected to busy himself unstrapping his mother's bag, and directly after bade her a hasty good night and went downstairs.

Rose Marie was not in the dining room. He knew that he should find her in the garden. Running lightly down the steps, he saw her in her accustomed chair by the fountain. Her head was buried in her hands. As he approached her she lifted her face, and by the moonlight he saw great tears running down her cheeks.

"Oh, Barry," she whispered. "What are we to do?"

"God only knows," Monroe replied moodily. "Whoever could have foreseen that this would happen?"

He sat down upon the arm of Rose Marie's chair, and drew her to him.

"Don't cry, sweetheart," he said tenderly. "We will find a way out of this muddle."

"But, Barry," protested the girl, "when she knows who I am, she will not want you to marry me."

"No use crossing bridges before we come to them, darling," Monroe rejoined. "I shall make no explanation unless mother asks it, then I shall tell her the truth."

"Ah, my Barry," moaned the girl, "me, I foresee that I am to bring trouble upon you. How I am unfortunate!"

Monroe drew the girl's beautiful head back against his shoulder and bent his lips to hers.

"Don't worry, dearest," he murmured. "Mother is so unworldly, so simple-minded, and, though she is at times difficult, after all she has my happiness at heart. Let us wait and see what to-morrow brings forth."

But Rose Marie lay long awake that night, reflecting deeply on this unforeseen calamity. How was her presence under Monroe's roof ever to be explained to the old lady from Syracuse? Perhaps she had come to live with Barry. Rose Marie realized that the same roof could not cover them both.

"Oh, God!" she murmured in her agony. "Can it be that I am to be driven forth? How, how could I live without him? My friend, my protector, my lover!"

The girl sobbed herself to sleep.

CHAPTER IX.

At dusk the following evening, Mrs. Monroe walked with her son in the little enchanted garden. Rose Marie was not with them. She was lying on her bed upstairs, her face buried in the pillows, still agonizing over the terrible situation which confronted her.

What was she to do? And what would Mrs. Monroe say when she dis-

covered that Barry wished to marry her? The girl's brain reeled as she faced the complex situation.

Meantime, Mrs. Monroe in the garden below, paused before a white rose tree, and plucking one of the the blossoms, inhaled its fragrance.

"This is like your friend," she said, "so white, so sweet. But, Barry, my dear, I fear that this poor girl is unhappy over something. She seemed so distressed at breakfast. What can be the matter with her?"

"Well, you see, mother," he said hesitatingly, "Rose Marie is very sensitive and highly strung. She has been very ill for a long, long time."

"Oh, the poor child," interpolated Mrs. Monroe. "Where are her people?"

"She is alone in the world," responded Monroe.

Again he looked away from his mother's searching glance.

"Has she no home?" Mrs. Monroe asked.

"Well—you see, mother," Monroe fumbled, "this is her home—for the present."

"Oh, indeed," replied Mrs. Monroe. "And were all those people her guests?"

"Yes, in a way," Monroe answered. "They are acquaintances of mine who are stopping at the hotel near by and drove over to spend the evening."

"I see," said Mrs. Monroe thoughtfully. "Then, Barry, perhaps I have intruded in coming here?"

"Not the least bit in the world," replied her son stoutly. "She is delighted to entertain you. Now, mother, I must go up to San Francisco on Monday, but I think you had better remain here two or three days until I can get rooms in my house fitted up comfortably for you.

"You see, I have kept bachelor's hall there, and I'd like to make some changes before you visit me. Wednesday or Thursday I will come back for you and take you up to San Francisco with me.

You need a good rest after your long journey, and this, I have found, is the most restful place in California."

"Very well, my dear," his mother answered, "you arrange your plans as you think best, and I shall agree. Meantime, I shall certainly enjoy this beautiful old garden, and the quaint little house."

"And, mother," Monroe added boldly. "I want you to become fully acquainted with Rose Marie, and to love her for my sake, for—I intend to marry her."

His mother swayed slightly at this sudden announcement and caught at his arm.

"Barry!" she cried. "You intend to marry this girl—but, my dear, who is she? What is her name? Is Marie her family name, or has she another one?"

Monroe hesitated a moment, then faced his mother intrepidly.

"Her name is Renier," he said curtly. "But she has an aversion to it, and no one addresses her except as Rose Marie."

"Barry—my son!" Mrs. Monroe gasped. "You intend to make this girl who lives here—alone—with no companion but an old servant—under an assumed name—your wife! You, of whom I have had such high hopes—you—"

"Hush, mother—here comes Rose Marie," Monroe warned her. "Do not let her suspect what I have told you until I return from San Francisco—by then you will have learned to know her—to realize what a lucky chap I am to have won her."

At this moment the girl, a trifle pale, with traces of tears about her beautiful eyes, descended the steps, and Monroe acquainted her with his plans. Rose Marie was so accustomed to defer to his judgment that, apprehensive though she was, she made not the slightest objection to Mrs. Monroe's remaining with her for a good share of the next week.

Sunday passed uneventfully, though the little old lady from Syracuse did a vast amount of thinking, and the following morning Barry Monroe took the train for San Francisco, quite confident that on his return Rose Marie's beauty and sweetness would have overcome his mother's prejudices, and that she would be ready to welcome her as a beloved daughter.

And indeed his hopes might have been realized had it not been for an unforeseen episode. Mrs. Monroe had spoken of this place as a little Garden of Eden. It is well known that every Garden of Eden has its serpent. And so it proved in this case.

The day following Monroe's departure had been very hot and exhausting to the tired nerves of the little old lady. She went quite early to her chamber, hoping to have a comfortable night's rest. Her windows opened directly on the garden, and, turning off the light, she sat down in the darkness to enjoy a cooling night breeze that was coming up from the sea.

Rose Marie was sitting in her accustomed nook, listening to the drip of the fountain, inhaling the perfume of the exquisite flowers, thinking of her lover in the hot, noisy newspaper office, and wishing devotedly that he were with her. So absorbed was she in her reflections that she did not hear a slight rustle in the branches of the tree that sent its limbs over the high wall that surrounded the little garden.

A man stealthily caught one of these limbs, drew himself up to the top of the wall, and, descending, dropped noiselessly upon the soft turf below. Pausing only for a moment to adjust himself, he went toward the girl sitting by the fountain with the stride of a panther stalking its prey. He was at her side before Rose Marie discovered him.

"Mr. Vickery!" she exclaimed indignantly. "How is it that you dare

steal upon me like this? What do you seek?"

"I seek you." His bold eyes sought hers. "Do not reproach me, Rose Marie, for coming upon you like a thief in the night. There was no other way. Had I knocked at your door you would not have admitted me. Ever since we have met, you have persistently evaded and eluded me. But I'm not easily discouraged.

"Knowing that Barry was in San Francisco, I came down on the late train this afternoon, and have been waiting at the hotel for your accustomed hour in the garden. You see, my dear, I know all your habits."

"Mr. Vickery, I ask you to go at once," demanded the girl. "I do not wish to talk to you. Go as you came. No one in the house must know that you have been here."

"I shall not go until you have heard all I have to say to you," he stubbornly replied. "You must realize, Rose Marie, that you're in a devil of a fix. The coming of the mother of your lover has complicated your life a bit. What are you going to do about it?"

"That is not your affair," she retorted. "Me, I shall work out my own problems."

"Gad, you'll not work out this one," he scornfully laughed. "You're up against it, my dear girl. When Barry's mother learns that you were the wife of that notorious rake, Victor Renier——"

"Oh, for God's sake," cried the girl in agony, "do not speak that name to me—let me forget——"

"Well, were you not?" Vickery insolently demanded. "And now you are living with Monroe. I should think, Rose Marie, that by this time you would be weary of this bucolic existence. It is rather different from San Francisco, where you queened it for a time. Eh, is it not so, my dear?"

"You insult me. Mr. Vickery," the

girl cried. "I shall not remain here to listen."

She turned to go toward the house, but he caught her dress and held her forcibly.

"Listen to me, Rose Marie," he said brutally. "I want you. I've wanted you from the moment I first saw you. You can't remain here; that's perfectly evident, and where will you go? I want to take you to New York. There's your proper sphere. You will be the most famous beauty in that city of remarkable women.

"You shall have your jewels, your car, your yacht, a superb apartment in town, and a country house. Would that not be better than living sequestered in this stupid little village?"

"Oh, let me go," cried the girl wildly. "I will not listen to you!"—endeavoring in vain to tear her frock from his grasp as she spoke.

"Oh, yes, you will listen to me," her tormentor replied. "It is useless to try to escape me, Rose Marie. I shall follow you to the ends of the earth. You shall yet belong to me."

But with one mighty effort, the girl tore herself away and ran swiftly into the house, closing and bolting the doors behind her. Here she stood panting in terror for a few moments, then, going up to her room, she locked herself in for the night.

Vickery, laughing to himself, retraced his steps, swung himself over the wall, and disappeared as quietly as he had come.

CHAPTER X.

Every word of this conversation had been overheard by Mrs. Monroe, who sat white, shocked, and dazed, trying to realize its meaning.

She had expected that in due time her son would marry, but with the natural pride and ambition of a mother, she had hoped for a brilliant alliance which would further his career.

It was true that this girl was sweet and charming, but even before this compromising interview in the garden there had been something strange about it all—something which puzzled the mother. She recalled her son's hesitating manner in his explanation of the peculiar situation.

There was certainly a veil of mystery about the entire affair. Moreover, as she had intimated to Barry, to her strait-laced ideas of propriety, there could be no excuse for the girl's living here alone, entertaining her son for days at a time; or for her repudiating her lawful name for any reason whatever. And then there was that riotous supper party she had witnessed!

"No, he must not—shall not marry her," she resolved. "But how am I to prevent it?"

Directly after breakfast on the following morning, Mrs. Monroe turned a pale, perturbed face to Rose Marie and said, slowly:

"Will you come into the living room with me? I wish to speak to you on an important matter, and I do not care to have Juana hear our conversation."

Rose Marie nodded a mute assent, and followed the old lady into the tiny reception room with a quaking heart. The windows of this room, which was situated at one end of the adobe cottage, looked out on the garden, and through the open casements the nodding golden roses smiled a good morning, while myriad honeyed scents came floating in from flowers blooming in the little pleasure.

"Last evening," began Mrs. Monroe, "I was sitting by the open window before retiring, and heard that most distressing interview between you and the man who climbed over the garden wall. Mr. Vickery, I think you called him."

"Oh, madame!" burst from Rose Marie's white lips. "You heard—all?"

"Yes," returned Mrs. Monroe, "I

heard that evil man urge you to leave my son and go away with him. Miss Marie, are you engaged to Barry?"

"Yes, madame," the girl said faintly. "He has asked me to marry him."

"How can you marry him when you are the wife of another man?" demanded the mother austerely.

"But I am not," cried the girl excitedly.

"Miss Marie," icily interrupted Mrs. Monroe, "do not attempt to deceive me. I distinctly heard that wicked man say that you are the wife of a certain Victor Renier—a notorious evildoer."

"But, madame," Rose Marie broke in. "I am no longer his wife——"

"You are divorced?" Mrs. Monroe set her jaw firmly, as she put the question.

"No, madame," the girl replied quickly; "my husband is dead."

Mrs. Monroe drew a long sigh of relief. The situation was not quite so bad as she had feared. However, her son must not marry a woman who had been the wife of a man of vicious reputation.

Moreover, Vickery had insinuated that Rose Marie did not own this establishment—it belonged to Monroe, and that was not to be tolerated for a moment. She should not be living in Monroe's house before they were married.

The old lady spoke slowly and decisively:

"In one way I have been deceived—I had supposed this was your house and my son was your guest. So you are living in my son's house?"

"Yes," said Rose Marie proudly, "and your son is a man of honor—the only good man I have ever known. He saved me in the face of trouble and disaster, and shielded me from an appalling ordeal. Listen to me, madame."

In hurried words and under great stress, Rose Marie told Mrs. Monroe the story of her marriage, her unhappy life, and the events that led to the death of Victor Renier.

As the sordid details unfolded to the older woman's ears, her sensibilities recoiled with disgust and horror at the picture conveyed. She was a professing Christian, but not for a moment did she feel charity, or even pity, for the unfortunate victim of cruel circumstances who, with tear-filled eyes, withheld not a jot of the recital.

By contrast, the mother saw the son she had reared from birth, with all the high hopes of motherhood, in danger. She had planned and dreamed for him, business success, of course, but—greatest of all, a happy marriage. It must be not only happy, but appropriate.

How could she face her friends, those of the strait-laced circles in the East; orthodox, taught to look on sin as alien to them—yes, and she had to admit, contaminating to all whom it contacted?

She showed it in her face, her eyes, her voice, as she finally spoke.

"I am sorry for you," she faltered, with almost averted gaze. It was the sorrow of the Pharisee; it held no hope for forgiveness or rehabilitation.

"But, my son——" she tried to go on.

"Your son loves me, so he says," whispered Rose Marie.

A ray of hope came to the agitated old mother.

"Do you love him?" she said almost fiercely.

"You do not need to ask that," said Rose Marie sadly. "Have I not told you how I regard him—the only man who has ever befriended me in my life?"

"Do you love him well enough to desire his happiness before your own—could you make a sacrifice for him? If you knew it was for his good, regardless of your own feelings, could you refuse to marry him——"

The inquisitor stopped, for Rose Marie seemed about to fall from the chair, so white and ill she looked.

"But how could I make him happy by not marrying him, when he loves me so well?" Her lips framed the words,

but her eyes questioned the soul of the woman who eagerly bent to hear the answer.

"Listen, Rose Marie. Barry Monroe was born and reared in an atmosphere of reverence for all that is good and true. I, his mother, who bore him, have never even seen the depths of life that you have penetrated. I have wished for him marriage, of course, but also have held to the vision of a pure, untainted mother to bear his children and perpetuate the line.

"It is a fine old family, one of the best in America. You own that you are of uncertain—origin."

The listener winced at the choice of words, but she did not speak.

"In time he would forget you; that isn't meant to be cruel," Mrs. Monroe hastened to add. "You would forget him, and no doubt find some one more suitable——" Again she noted the shrinking figure bowing still more hopelessly in the easy-chair.

"I mean—you would find another—oh, there are plenty of men in the world, just as good as Barry Monroe, and you are pretty——"

Rose Marie stopped her with a gesture; weak though it was, it was compelling.

"And they might also have mothers, Mrs. Monroe, who would object to an alliance with a person of—uncertain origin—and who has had too intimate a knowledge of life under—uncertain conditions. I see, also, that you think he could have the same knowledge, but not be the worse for it."

"Of course, Mrs. Renier"—not noting the shudder that responded to the name—"it is different in business; his work might take him to—to—places that I wouldn't go. But neither should his wife. Oh, can't you see—I want him to come home to purity and peace?"

The anguished mother's voice broke almost with a wail. What if she should not be able to move her after all? If

she should insist on the marriage taking place?

But the old lady was spared further effort, for Rose Marie arose and, facing her persecutor, said calmly, the calm of utter hopelessness:

"Your son shall be free, is free this minute, from any obligation toward me. Moreover, I will make this freedom apparent to him by leaving here immediately. You are satisfied?"

Mrs. Monroe nodded. She could think of nothing appropriate or necessary to say, and though there was just the faintest stab of pity for the broken-spirited object of her dislike, she consoled herself with the thought—any mother would have done the same thing.

It mattered not to her at the moment, that the unhappy girl had told her of her complete renunciation of even the wealth of the man who had been her husband, in the expectation of a marriage with her son.

She was too disturbed and anxious to consider the other's situation, feeling her own was so urgent in its demands.

CHAPTER XI.

In a cheap little apartment, in the Spanish quarter of San Francisco, Rose Marie hid herself after her hurried flight from Monterey. At the close of her frightful interview with Mrs. Monroe, she went up to her room and quickly packing her belongings ordered them sent to the railway station. Then hastily dressing herself, she bade Juana good-bye to the profound amazement of the housekeeper.

"*Madre di Dios!*" she exclaimed. "You are leaving us? What shall I tell Señor Monroe?"

"Nothing, nothing." half sobbed the agonized girl, as she passed out into the little garden for the last time.

Slowly she walked about the paths, bending here and there to caress a flower, or to pluck one and thrust it inside the bodice of her frock.

Then going into the house, she gave one agonized look about the rooms, where she and Barry had spent so many happy hours, and closing the door behind her, went quietly away.

Mrs. Monroe peered from her chamber window after her.

"Thank Heaven!" she murmured. "It is over. Now I have but to reconcile Barry to the situation and in a year or two he will have forgotten her very existence. It was God, indeed," she piously reflected, "who sent me here."

Although Rose Marie departed with sudden stealth, her going was carefully marked by the man whom Vickery had set to watch the house. This look-out hastened at once to the hotel and made his report.

"The lady has left the house, her trunks preceded her to the railway station."

George Vickery smiled—a smile that was not good to see. He waited until he heard the whistle of the outgoing train, then, motoring over to the station, he sent a wire to one of his tools in San Francisco, to watch the arrival of that train, and follow Rose Marie and discover where she took lodgings.

All these orders were faithfully carried out, and when Vickery arrived in San Francisco the next day he knew to a certainty just where he could stalk his game.

The problem of existence now faced Rose Marie. She had only a little money—what she had received from the sale of some embroideries. After considering the situation calmly, she decided to go away, as far as possible from San Francisco.

"I will go to New York," she resolved. "It will be easier to forget, if I put a continent between myself and Barry, and there will surely be work for me in that great city."

Accordingly she made her plans for a speedy departure, and the following

day went to a railway office to secure her transportation. Returning completely exhausted, she realized she had eaten nothing since her breakfast of a cup of coffee and a cracker in the early morning.

As she entered the house, a brawny ruffian standing in the hallway, laughing insolently, blew his cigarette smoke in her face. She had seen this man on several occasions, and had remarked the manner in which his villainous eyes had scanned her.

She was terrified of him, and eager to escape from her present environment. Hurrying into her sordid little room, she sank into a chair and rested her head on the table. A sob welled up in her throat as she thought of the little adobe cottage and the enchanted garden where she had been so safe and happy.

She knew she should set about making herself a cup of tea to gain strength for the long journey before her, but she felt too sad and weary to stir, when suddenly she heard the door open softly.

George Vickery stood before her, debonair, perfectly groomed, superb in a fur-trimmed topcoat. He held a lighted cigarette in his fingers, as he surveyed her with a triumphant glance.

"Well, Rose Marie," he drawled, "have you had enough of it? Are you ready to capitulate?"

"Mr. Vickery," she panted, "how—why—do you come here?"

"I have come for you," he retorted airily. "I make sure that you must be tired of this poverty-stricken hole."

Rose Marie closed her eyes in despair. So faint was she from lack of food that she tottered and caught at the back of the chair to steady herself.

In an instant Vickery's arms were around her.

"Rose Marie," he said, "not one word—you're coming with me."

"No, no," she cried, struggling to free herself from his grasp. "I will not go with you."

"Oh, yes, you will," he laughed. "I'm not going to be thwarted this time—I've waited for you too long."

Her cloak was thrown across one end of the table. He caught it up and wrapped it about her. She tore it off and flung it on the floor. But stooping, he picked it up, threw it over her again, and half carried, half dragged her from the room, to the landing of the stairs.

The girl fought like a wild thing of the woods, fiercely and desperately, but Vickery merely laughed at her puny efforts to free herself. They were at the head of the stairs, when suddenly Rose Marie, with one wild, frantic movement pushed Vickery violently from her. Her attack was so unexpected that he lost his balance and plunged heavily down the stairs.

Mrs. Monroe faced a very disturbed man when her son returned to Monterey. In his distracted condition she found opportunity to plant the seeds of distrust and suspicion, without intentionally being untruthful.

She told him she did not know where Rose Marie had gone, and indeed she did not. But she also told him of the conversation she had overheard in the garden between Rose Marie and Vickery, and told it in a halfway manner.

He immediately tried to locate Vickery at the hotel, but without success. With the firm conviction that to find him would mean to also discover Rose Marie's whereabouts, he resolved to make a thorough search in San Francisco.

CHAPTER XII.

Barry Monroe closed the little cottage at Monterey and took his mother up to San Francisco with him. There, after establishing her in his town house, he spent his spare time trying to trace George Vickery.

He sought him in his accustomed haunts, at fashionable hotels, at famous

cafés. But Vickery was too clever to show himself in public until the marks of his encounter with Rose Marie had been effaced. He took a house across the bay, where he remained for some weeks. When he deemed the time was ripe he left for the East.

When Monroe was perfectly satisfied that he could not find Vickery, he severed his connection with the San Francisco paper and took his mother back to Syracuse.

After a few days in his home town, he went on to New York. His remarkable dramatic work in the West had attracted attention, and it was only a short time before he secured a similar position on a prominent New York daily.

His brilliant, caustic pen soon created a sensation. Managers, actors, as well as the general public, bought the *Evening Simoon*, simply for the purpose of perusing Monroe's dramatic criticisms.

Naturally a gentle-natured, kindly man, he grew morose and bitter, and would sit for hours in brooding silence. Of Vickery he heard nothing save that he had gone to London.

Mrs. Monroe came on from Syracuse to nurse her son through a fever, the result of the tremendous strain brought about by the events of the past months.

She was amazed to find him living in such luxury, and could not understand how a newspaper man could afford such elegant surroundings. However, she accepted his explanation that his salary was a very large one, and that he made money on the outside.

As soon as Barry was able to be up and about he asked his mother what she would like to do; return to her home or remain with him for some time? She decided upon the latter plan, and set herself to enjoy her stay in New York.

Every day Barry had his car at the disposal of his mother, and she drove

about and shopped to her heart's content. It was a new life for this simple old lady from up State, and she spent many hours in the large stores, wondering at and enjoying the beautiful things therein displayed.

One day she paused at a glove counter in a famous Fifth Avenue shop and asked to be shown some black gloves. The young woman behind the counter put before her several pairs for her selection. Mrs. Monroe put aside her heavy black veil, the better to look over the gloves, and as she did so, she heard the young woman who was waiting on her give a little choked cry. She quickly looked up and into the face of Rose Marie.

And such a Rose Marie! So different from the beautiful girl she had seen in Monterey—only a ghost of her former radiant self. Thin and wan with heavy black circles under the still beautiful eyes.

"Miss Marie!" burst from Mrs. Monroe's astonished lips.

The girl, pressing her hand to her heart, staggered back. She seemed on the point of fainting, but quickly recovered her poise.

"Madame Monroe," she murmured, "do I see you again?"

"How do you come here?" queried Mrs. Monroe tensely. "I thought that you went to San Francisco."

"I've been in New York for some time," replied the girl.

"You look very ill," said Mrs. Monroe, scanning her closely.

"Yes, madame," Rose Marie answered pathetically, "I am indeed ill."

"I am sorry," said Mrs. Monroe perfunctorily.

After which she selected several pairs of gloves, paid for them, said good afternoon to Rose Marie, and went out to her car.

But driving home, she could not banish the remembrance of that sad, white face.

"That girl is very ill," she said to herself more than once. "I wonder what is the matter with her? She kept her hand pressed close to her heart—she is suffering perhaps. I must not let Barry know I have seen her."

All that evening she sat in a luxurious chair before the fire, silent and moody. Her son rallied her on her abstraction.

"What is the matter with you to-night, mother?" he asked. "You're not a bit like yourself—anything gone wrong with you to-day?"

Something had indeed gone wrong with Mrs. Monroe. Over and over she saw that sick girl—the heavy eyes, the pale face, the slim hand pressed convulsively against her heart, and heard that pathetic murmur: "I am indeed ill, madame."

For three days Mrs. Monroe visualized this picture. Again and again did that face reproach her. Again and again did those heavy eyes beseech her.

At last, unable to endure it any longer, Mrs. Monroe sent for the car and went back to the shop in which she had seen Rose Marie. But she was not at the glove counter. She made inquiries of the other girls and was told that Miss Marie had been taken very ill the day before and had not been back to work.

"Do you know where she lives?" asked Mrs. Monroe.

"I can get the address for you," said the girl. "Be seated, madame, a moment."

Presently she was back with the address written on a sheet of paper.

Mrs. Monroe climbed the rickety stairs of a battered lodging house, which had been a fine mansion in its day, but now, like many a poor aristocrat, was decidedly out at elbows and down at the heel.

She tapped at the door of a hall room and a faint voice called: "Come in."

She entered. Rose Marie lay propped up on some flabby pillows. Her beautiful hair streamed over her shoulders, and her great, hollow eyes stared pleadingly at the visitor.

Mrs. Monroe bent over her and took her hand.

"My dear," she said, "I went to the shop and asked for you. They told me you were ill, so I thought I would come and see if there was anything I could do for you. Have you had a physician?"

"No, madame."

"Why not?"

"I had no money, madame. I gave the last to my landlady."

Mrs. Monroe drew back and regarded the wasted face before her. Suddenly she spoke again.

"Have you had anything to eat today?" she demanded.

"The woman downstairs brought me a cup of coffee this morning," replied the girl.

Mrs. Monroe arose with an outraged air and, going out of the room, pounded loudly with her umbrella on the rickety stairs.

A frowsy-haired woman presently appeared in the hall below.

"Come here!" cried Mrs. Monroe imperatively.

The woman came halfway up the stairs.

"What is the matter?" she asked in amazement.

"I want you to send at once to the nearest restaurant and have soup, chicken, jelly, and white grapes sent here. Hurry up about it—lose no time."

"But," objected the woman, "who's going to pay for all this?"

"I am," said Mrs. Monroe. "Don't stop to ask questions, but go at once."

Awed by the lady's autocratic manner, the woman hastened to carry out her orders.

A servant soon arrived with a cov-

ered tray, and Mrs. Monroe, lifting the half-famished girl against her shoulder, fed her the soup, chicken, and other dainties.

The food revived Rose Marie, and she murmured gratefully:

"How good you are, madame. I was very, very hungry."

Mrs. Monroe made no reply. She was searching her conscience and wondering if she were really good. Through her efforts to safeguard her son she had destroyed the happiness of this girl and had brought her down almost to starvation. It was a very thoughtful and saddened old lady who returned to her son's beautiful apartment that evening.

After dinner the mother and son sat again before the glowing open fire. Mrs. Monroe thought of the cold room in which she had been that afternoon, of the broken windowpane, the wretched blanket thrown over the sick girl, and all the other discomforts she had seen.

Again conscience was very, very busy. She glanced across at her son, who had drawn up his writing desk close to the fire and was absorbed in his work. He looked so weary, so unhappy. Her heart went out to him. She would die to make him happy. And yet, strangely enough, she had ruined his life, for she understood well why he had so changed.

She was silent so long that at last her son, putting down his pen, turned in his chair and said:

"Why, little mother, it strikes me you are growing moody of late. You sit here for hours at a time without speaking. What is the matter, dear?"

"Barry," said Mrs. Monroe earnestly, "I was studying you."

"Studying me?"

"Yes, I was studying your face. It has changed greatly within the past year."

"Ah, mother," he said thoughtfully, "I have had a great deal to change me."

"Barry," said his mother, leaning forward that she might better observe the

effect of her words, "you are not happy?"

He hesitated a moment, his eyes following the pattern of the rug before the fire. At last he spoke.

"No, mother," he said, "I am not happy."

"What is it, my son, that troubles you?" Mrs. Monroe tenderly questioned.

Barry lifted his suffering eyes and looked straight at his mother.

"How can I be happy," he demanded, "when the woman I loved more than life left me to live with George Vickery?"

This was the crucial moment. Mrs. Monroe had but to hold her peace and her son would never know.

"Why tell him?" the tempter whispered in her ear. "Why not let matters go on as they are? Let him believe Rose Marie is living with Vickery. You can go and see her just the same and help her in her misery and poverty. That's all you need to do. You know what will happen if you tell him. Be sensible and don't go digging up this old scandal. Time will comfort him—he will forget some day and be happy in some other woman's love."

And then she saw her again—that suffering, famished, possibly dying girl. She saw the dark, speaking eyes uplifted in agony, questioning her as she gave her food and drink. One tremendous struggle with pride, and Mrs. Monroe banished the tempter. Her son's happiness above everything else on earth.

"No, Barry," she heard herself say in a voice she scarcely recognized as her own, "no, my son, Rose Marie is not living with Mr. Vickery."

There was a tense silence in the room, broken only by the snapping of the fire in the grate, and the ticking of the clock upon the mantel. It seemed to Mrs. Monroe that hours passed before her son spoke.

"How do you know this?" At last the words came slowly from his white lips.

The little old lady from Syracuse rose from her seat and crossing the floor to her son's chair, sank on her knees beside him.

"Barry, my son," she faltered. "God forgive me. I have a confession to make you."

CHAPTER XIII.

Monroe mounted the ramshackle stairs and swiftly passed into the room where Rose Marie lay.

Startled at the intrusion, she half rose. For a second or two they stared at each other like two ghosts, meeting in No Man's Land. Then she was in his arms, on his broad breast. He held her as if he would never let her go, tears rained down his cheeks as he kissed her hair, her eyes, her lips.

"Rose Marie—Rose Marie!" he murmured brokenly. "Forgive me—forgive me—my mother has told me all—I should never have lost faith in you—I am unworthy of your great love and sacrifice."

"Oh, nothing matters but that you have come—you have come at last, my Barry! Thank God, I see you again, once more before I die!"

"Don't talk of dying, my darling," he replied, straining her still closer to him, "you are going to live, to live for me."

As on the night when he had carried Rose Marie down the stairs from the tragic revel in San Francisco, he now carried her down to his waiting car.

Mrs. Monroe had the guest chamber in readiness. A physician, hastily summoned, came out of the room after examining the girl and shook his head somewhat dubiously in reply to Monroe's anxious questioning.

"Her vitality is very low," he said, "heart action is extremely bad. She has passed through terrific mental strain, I should say. It has broken her down.

However, I shall do my best, and we shall see what rest and care will accomplish."

Under the loving ministrations of mother and son, Rose Marie progressed, but very slowly. At times she seemed on the point of drifting out into the Unknown. But when Barry bent over her and called her she would open her great eyes and come smiling back from the borderland.

One day as he sat beside her, he took her thin little hand in both his and said:

"My darling, is there anything you wish for? Tell me. Whatever you desire, I shall endeavor to get. Do not hesitate to ask."

The girl lay quiet for a moment or two, her eyes veiled by her long lashes. Then suddenly lifting them, she seemed to look far away, with the gaze of one who peers beyond the horizon.

"Oh, my Barry," she murmured, "if I could but once more see our garden at Monterey. If I could smell the roses and hear the drip of the fountain. That is all I wish."

Two weeks later Rose Marie sat in her accustomed seat in the enchanted garden. She gazed with loving eyes at the flowers and trees, and listened with delight as the fountain rang its fairy bells with joy.

Mrs. Monroe had accompanied the two on the long overland trip. She had found Juana and put the little house in order as of old. The days came and went with systematic regularity. Barry's table reappeared in the garden, and he took up the writing of his play again.

The soft air and the golden sunlight did wonders for the sick girl. She perceptibly gained strength, and color began to show once more in her white face.

It was a drowsy, golden afternoon when Mrs. Monroe appeared on the little piazza and beckoned her son.

"I wish to speak to you, Barry. Come in a minute."

Monroe left his work and, passing by Rose Marie's chair, bent down and kissed her.

"You're feeling better to-day, sweetheart, are you not?" he asked.

She took his hand and laid her face against it.

"Oh, yes, my Barry," she said, "I'm getting well fast."

Mrs. Monroe was waiting for her son in the little living room.

She came swiftly toward him, both hands outstretched.

"My son, I believe Rose Marie is going to live—I see a decided change for the better in her. I have been a very selfish woman—in my insane ambition I have nearly wrecked your life and that of this poor child. But it is not yet too late, thank God! If Rose Marie has great happiness brought to her she will undoubtedly recover——"

"Yes, mother—and I will try my best to make her happy when she is my wife," Monroe said wistfully.

The mother put both hands on her son's shoulders, and, smiling up at him, said:

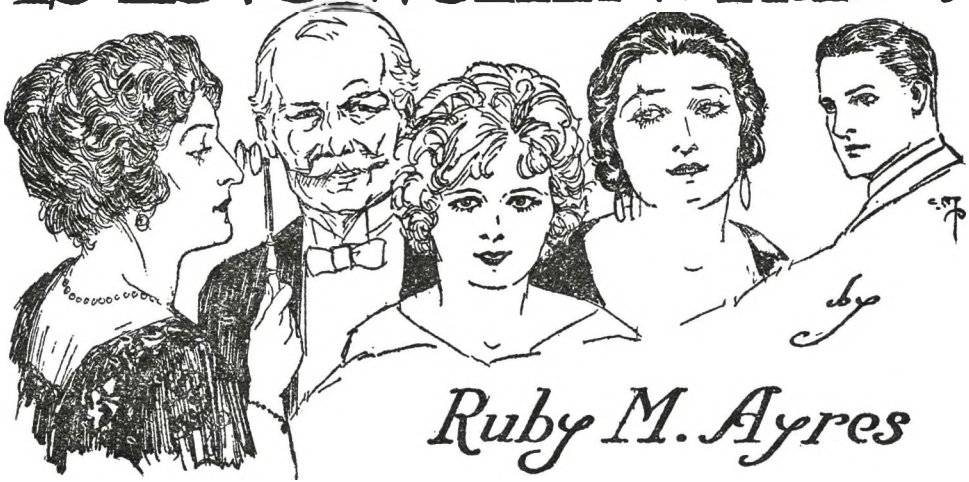
"Then, my boy, why wait any longer? Go at once for the clergyman at the little Episcopal church yonder."

The sun was down behind the mountains, but the scarlet afterglow still lingered, when Rose Marie, hearing footsteps on the piazza, looked up from the romance she was reading to see her lover and the black-robed clergyman descending the steps together.

The afterglow had faded, the great white stars glittered above the mountains, the moon sent down a shower of silver upon the enchanted garden where the newly wedded lovers sat clasped in each other's arms.

"Rose Marie," Barry whispered brokenly, "my white rose—no longer a flower of the night—your night of suffering and despair is far spent. Dawn is at hand."

Is Love Worth While?



Ruby M. Ayres

THE STORY SO FAR.

Henrietta Deering, late of the chorus, marries John Sloane after a third proposal. She dreads meeting his wealthy and aristocratic family, and the ordeal is all that she thought it would be. Archie, John's younger brother, immediately strikes up a friendship with Henrietta. Before the Sloanes leave on their first call, Honore Nesbitt is announced. She is highly interested in meeting John's wife, since she is a defeated candidate for such a position. Honore is amused by Henrietta's naïve and unsophisticated ways. This, combined with a general feeling that there is a barrier between her and the family she has married into, causes Henrietta to long for the old stage life and her freedom.

CHAPTER III—(Continued.)

THE old stage life had gone forever with its joys and hardships; its very real friendship and Bohemian ways. Henrietta had shut herself off from it when she married John Sloane and henceforward she belonged to this family of stiff, blue-blooded people.

She looked across the room to where Honore sat, leaning back against a sea-green cushion, lazily waving a huge feather fan to and fro, and then to where Mr. Sloane was glancing at her

rather anxiously from behind a newspaper.

A little shiver went down her spine. Would she, too, grow to be like these people, she wondered? Her eyes turned to her husband.

He was watching her with wistful anxiety, and she smiled.

There was no doubt about him, at any rate. She loved him, and it was for his sake that she was here, trying to make the best of a situation which every moment threatened to overwhelm her.

She turned to Mrs. Sloane.

"It was kind of you to want us to come," she said. "We were going to a theater, but we came here instead, of course. Archie said you wanted us to meet some one."

"Yes—a Mrs. Cunningham. She will be here presently."

John looked up quickly.

"Mrs. Cunningham! Do I know her, mother?"

"I don't think you have met her, my dear boy, but I am sure both you and Henrietta will like her. She is a widow, a very charming widow."

Mr. Sloane flung down his paper and rose suddenly.

"By the way, Henrietta," he said, "I've been thinking, you'll have to learn to ride. I've got just the mount for you down at Stonybrook! She's a nice, quiet little thing, and I'm sure you would like her."

Henrietta laughed, though she felt puzzled. Mr. Sloane had seemed as if he had been deliberately trying to interrupt his wife and prevent her from saying something that had been on the tip of her tongue.

"Oh, I can ride!" she told him eagerly. "Can't I, Billsey? John, I mean. I love it!"

"I suppose you ride astride of course, challenged Honore."

"Why not? Everybody does! and besides if you have well shaped legs," argued Henrietta. Then she laughed, and turned to Mr. Sloane, raising her soft skirts sufficiently high to show part of a very slim leg and ankle.

"That's all right, isn't it?" she appealed, confident of his approval.

Mr. Sloane fixed his glasses hurriedly and bent to make an inspection when his wife struck in, in a voice of flint:

"Henry! What in the world are you doing?"

His glasses fell with an agitated tinkle against his gold shirt-stud.

"Nothing, my dear!—nothing!" he answered mildly.

He turned away, grabbing up his paper again, and went back to his chair, a twinkle in his merry eyes.

Honore laughed.

"Why be so shocked, my dear?" she asked lazily. "You forget that Henrietta has been used to exhibiting her legs."

Henrietta swung round, her cheeks crimson, her lips trembling.

"And is there anything disgraceful in having a nice pair of legs?" she demanded. "I'll back mine against yours

any day, so now! Come on, let's compare, and Archie shall referee. Archie!"

Archie came forward willingly enough.

"Come on, Honore," he urged, but his mother swept in front of him.

"Archie! How dare you! Such a disgraceful scene!—positively disgraceful. I never witnessed anything so intolerable."

Honore waved her fan to and fro lightly.

"How very entertaining! A case of 'Molly, the Marchioness,' in real life."

John took a quick step toward his wife, and laid his hand on her arm.

"Henrietta dear——"

But she was too angry to be checked. She shook off his hand.

"You keep out of this, Billsey," she said furiously. "It's just as well that we should all understand each other once and for all."

Her eyes flashed sparks of fire at Honore.

"You've insulted me ever since the first moment we met," she accused her. "You think I'm common and not good enough to marry into this family—well, I'm not so common that I would deliberately insult any one as you have done! You've tried to prejudice Mrs. Sloane against me, and it seems to me that you've succeeded. I suppose it's all jealousy. You're wild because I took Billsey away from you—well, it was the kindest thing any one could have done for him. Goodness knows what he would have been like, poor man, if he'd had you for a wife——"

Honore rose to her feet. She was very pale beneath her rouge, and her lips quivered.

"John, I appeal to you," she said hoarsely. "Am I to be insulted by your wife like this?"

"I think you've asked for it." Archie broke in in his straightforward way.

Mrs. Sloane took her hand.

"Why appeal to John?" she said.

"He must be as bitterly ashamed as I am—as we all are——"

"I'm not ashamed, for one!" Archie said violently. "I think Honore asked for what she got."

There was a profound silence, then Henrietta turned slowly and looked at Mrs. Sloane.

Her face was quite colorless, and her hands trembled.

think, aunt, if you don't mind, I'll go now. Good-by, every one—good-by, John," she looked hard at him, but he did not raise his eyes. "I suppose you'll call it sarcasm if I wish you happiness."

She waited a moment, then turned to the door, but Mr. Sloane barred the way.

"Nonsense! Nonsense!" he said in



Henrietta raised her soft skirts sufficiently high to show part of a very slim leg and ankle. "That's all right, isn't it?" she appealed.

"I'm sorry," she said hoarsely. "I'm ever so sorry! I meant to be so nice when we came here, and now—I suppose I've done it again! What can I say? I wouldn't upset you for the world. I lost my temper—but she——" with another little flash in the direction of Honore, "she's enough to make a devil of the archangel Gabriel himself."

Honore broke into bitter laughter.

"Well, we had an entertaining evening, and no mistake," she said. "I

his kind, cheery fashion. "You two girls are not going to part like this! I simply won't have it. Henrietta, come here"—he held out his hand to the girl.

Henrietta came willingly enough, a wavering smile on her lips.

"I've been a little beast, I know," she said frankly. "I'm ever so sorry, Honore."

Honore tossed her head.

"Oh, there's no need to apologize," she said cuttingly. "I'm grateful to

you for having given us all such a very amusing evening. However, if I may be permitted to give you a little advice, try and keep your temper under control, and your tongue as well—good-by.”

She swept from the room, and this time nobody made any attempt to stop her, although John followed quickly.

“Honore, I will see you to the car.”

She stood still for a moment, her eyes sweeping his perturbed face with amusement.

“Oh, may you?” she asked ironically.

He pretended not to hear, but opened the door, and stood aside for her to pass.

Mr. Sloane turned to Henrietta.

“You mustn’t take her too seriously,” he said cheerily. “She’s been rather spoiled, I’m afraid. We’ve always made so much of her, not having a daughter of our own, you see, and so——”

“You’re talking nonsense as usual, Henry,” his wife struck in coldly. “Henrietta, come here! I want to talk to you.”

Archie walked over to the window, and leaned on the sill looking down into the street.

“Henrietta’s had enough talking to for one day, surely,” he muttered disrespectfully. “I think she’s to be sympathized with—coming into a family like ours.”

His mother took no notice.

“About this Mrs. Cunningham, Henrietta,” her voice held a note of embarrassment. “As I said, she is a very nice woman—I am sure you will like her. She is quite a lady in every sense of the word, and her husband was highly connected—one of the Cunninghams of Virginia. I have asked her to come to Stonybrook while you are there. I have arranged with her to give you the instruction which will be necessary to fit you to be John’s wife, and——”

She broke off, as Henrietta started up.

“You’ve arranged what?” she gasped.

She was sure she could not have heard aright. “You’ve arranged what?” she asked again hoarsely.

Archie came back from the window. His eyes were keenly distressed.

“Oh, I say, mother,” he began; but Mrs. Sloane went on very calmly and firmly:

“You heard what I said, Henrietta. I have engaged this Mrs. Cunningham to instruct you. John will agree with me that it is quite the best and kindest thing to do, in order to prevent you from ever again making such a scene as we have just witnessed, and I hope——” She stopped with a smothered gasp, as Henrietta stamped her foot in passionate rage.

There were tears in her eyes, though her cheeks were crimson.

“This is the limit!” The words broke from her with passionate incoherence. She had never felt so insulted in her life! The shame of it seemed to weigh her to the ground. She stood with clenched hands, trembling in every limb, not knowing what to do, or what to say.

Then, as the door opened and John came into the room, she ran to him, clasping him with both hands.

“Billsey! I won’t have it! I won’t!” Her voice was choked and trembling. “Your mother has engaged a—a sort of keeper person for me—to—to teach me how to behave! I won’t have it—I say I won’t!”

She broke into a passion of tears.

“Tell her you won’t allow it,” she sobbed. “Tell her you won’t.”

The hot blood rose slowly to John’s face as he looked past Henrietta to his mother, and for almost the first time in her life Mrs. Sloane saw anger in her son’s eyes.

He had always been so gentle and affectionate to her. It sent a cruel stab of pain through her proud heart to realize that already his marriage had begun to form a breach between them.

"It's perfectly intolerable, mother," he broke out passionately. "If you imagine I shall allow my wife——" He broke off as the door opened and Johnson appeared.

His well trained eyes took in the situation in a flash before his lids were discreetly lowered.

"Mrs. Cunningham, if you please, ma'am."

For a moment nobody spoke. Henrietta's tears were dried in a scorching flush as she moved away from her husband.

Mrs. Sloane had risen. Her usual self-possession had deserted her, she was pale and agitated as she turned to greet her visitor.

"Mrs. Cunningham, how very charming of you!" She turned to Henrietta. "My dear, I am sure you will not mind my having asked Mrs. Cunningham to call," she said, with a trace of nervousness in her voice. "It seemed such a golden opportunity for us all to meet and know one another. Mrs. Cunningham, may I introduce my daughter-in-law, Mrs. John Sloane?"

Henrietta's passionate, tearful eyes turned to the quiet face of the little woman who had entered, and there was an eloquent silence, and Mrs. Cunningham looked at Henrietta with gentle inquiry before she held out her hand.

"How do you do, Mrs. Sloane?" She spoke in a very charming, cultured voice, but Henrietta's pride was up in arms, and her voice was hard and curt as she answered.

"How do you do?" Then she put her hands behind her back and walked deliberately away.

There was a moment's embarrassment, then Mr. Sloane hurried forward, dragging a chair with him.

"How are you, Mrs. Cunningham? Isn't it hot? Please sit down, you look tired. John——" He turned appealingly to his son, but his son ignored him and walked out of the room, and the

embarrassing silence fell once more. Then with another desperate effort to dispel the awkwardness that filled the room, Mr. Sloane said again:

"Very mild for the time of year, don't you think?"

A stifled laugh broke from Henrietta.

"I think there's an east wind," she said, momentarily forgetting her anger. Then she turned on her heel and walked over to the window. "I hate them—I hate them all!" she told herself, with firm vigor. "How dare they treat me so? I'm not as bad as all that, I know, I'm not!"

Mrs. Cunningham had taken the chair offered her, and sat with her hands in her lap, calmly waiting.

Perhaps she had been prepared for some such scene, for at any rate she did not look at all disturbed, though her kind eyes turned again and again to Henrietta's defiant little figure in the window.

Mrs. Cunningham was a pretty woman still, though her youth had deserted her, and there was a sprinkling of gray in her soft brown hair. Her pretty eyes were brown, and very sweet in expression.

"Like a big, soft bumblebee's," as Henrietta described them later to her husband, and when she smiled her whole face seemed to light up in magical fashion.

"I think it is so good of you to have come, Mrs. Cunningham," Mrs. Sloane said, with an effort. "I have just explained to my son and his wife why I have enlisted your services, and I am very sorry to say that my daughter-in-law seems to have some slight objection to the arrangements."

Henrietta turned sharply.

"That's not true," she said shrilly. "My objections are not slight!"

Mrs. Cunningham turned quickly with her pretty smile.

"But I hope they are not insuperable,



"How do you do, Mrs. Sloane?" Mrs. Cunningham spoke in a very charming, cultured voice, but Henrietta's pride was up in arms, and her voice was hard and curt as she answered.

Mrs. Sloane," she said, in her quiet, friendly way.

There was a little silence. Henrietta seemed somehow taken aback for a moment, then she broke out impetuously:

"I don't know what you mean by that. I've never heard the word before, but I do know that I won't stand being criticized from morning till night by anybody! Not even the Prince of Princes, so there!

"Mrs. Cunningham rose, her color deepening a little.

"You frighten me," she said. "I had no idea that bullying and badgering were to be part of my duties. I thought I was going to be of some service to you."

Henrietta's hot eyes fell. She made a hopeless little gesture.

Mrs. Cunningham seemed kind, she thought, and then she hardened her heart again, telling herself that no doubt it was just a trick—a clever trick by which to carry out Mrs. Sloane's wishes.

"Perhaps you and Henrietta would like to talk together," Mrs. Sloane said. She thought she could see a faint relenting in Henrietta's face. "We will leave you alone for a little while. Come, Henry."

"Certainly, my dear—certainly." Mr. Sloane looked at Archie, who was hovering uncomfortably in the background. "Come, my boy," he said. "Your mother wants Henrietta and Mrs. Cunningham to have a little chat."

"I've nothing to say to Mrs. Cunningham," Henrietta protested strenuously.

Archie squeezed her hand as he passed her on his way out.

"Never mind! Buck up!" he whispered awkwardly.

Henrietta nodded. The tears had started to her eyes again at his sympathy; they had overflowed on to her cheeks when she looked at Mrs. Cunningham.

Mrs. Cunningham smiled.

"It seems that you have already made a conquest of Archie and Mr. Sloane," she said kindly.

Henrietta made no answer, and Mrs. Cunningham repeated her words.

"I heard you. I am not deaf! Anyway, Mrs. Sloane hates me. I can see it in her eyes, and hear it in her voice every time she speaks," Henrietta answered bitterly.

Mrs. Cunningham held out her hand.

"Come and sit down! I hate to see you so unhappy?"

Henrietta hesitated, and Mrs. Cunningham went on:

"After all, it's comparatively easy for a pretty woman to charm the men of a family, but it's different with the women, don't you think? Why not set out to make Mrs. Sloane like you? You see, Mrs. Sloane, it's the women who count in a family after all, isn't it?"

"How do I know? I've never belonged to a family like this before."

She flung herself dejectedly on the big couch, and after a moment Mrs. Cunningham sat down beside her.

"I am sure if you are patient," she said gently, "Mrs. Sloane will grow very fond of you. Why not make up your mind that she shall?"

Henrietta moved restlessly.

"I could have made her like me, I know I could," she said, in a choked voice. "It was that beast, Honore, who upset everything, and now you've come to torment the life out of me!"

Mrs. Cunningham laughed. She thought that there was something very youthful and appealing in Henrietta.

"Oh, no, I've not come to do that at all," she said. "I hoped we should be good friends, and I think we shall."

"Mrs. Sloane had no right to bring you here."

Mrs. Cunningham laid her hand on Henrietta's.

"But as I am here," she said. "why not let me try and be of some service to you?"

"The only service you can do," Henrietta broke out, "is to go away and leave me in peace!"

There was a little silence, then Mrs. Cunningham said quietly:

"If you really wish it, of course, I will, Mrs. Sloane; but you know, I should very much like to stay."

Henrietta turned her head slowly and for a moment the two women looked steadily at one another.

"I believe I rather like her," Henrietta thought, in sudden dismay, and looked quickly away again.

"You spoke of Honore Nesbitt just now. Mrs. Cunningham said, after a moment.

Henrietta turned at once.

"Yes! do you know her?"

"A little—yes."

Henrietta started up, her cheeks flushing.

"And isn't she the most ghastly mistake that was ever made?" she demanded excitedly. "Isn't she as artificial as they make 'em?"

"She is—well, a little unusual, perhaps," Mrs. Cunningham admitted cautiously.

"A little!" Henrietta echoed with scorn. "She's the limit! The absolute limit, and yet, in spite of it, Mrs. Sloane likes her, and hates me!"

Mrs. Cunningham laughed.

"Well, shall we try and change all that—you and I?"

Henrietta shook her head.

"It's too late. I——" Then, suddenly, she burst into tears again. "She'll always hate me! She'll never forget

what's happened to-day, and I did want her to like me so much. Billsey—John, I mean, told me she was a bit proper and severe, but I liked her the moment I saw her. I think she's wonderful, with that cold, calm manner! Why, I could never be like that if I lived for a thousand years, and married forty titled men! I didn't mind a bit what the others thought of me it was just that I did want her to like me!" She drew a long sigh, wiping her tears angrily away and shedding more. "She'll never, never forget what I did to-day!" she sobbed.

"If you will let me help you, we could make her," Mrs. Cunningham said gently.

Henrietta shook her head.

"I was rude to you, too," she said brokenly. "I seem to have been rude to every one."

"I can quite understand your feelings," Mrs. Cunningham agreed. "But I'm not really such an ogre, am I?"

Henrietta wiped away the last tear determinedly.

"You're not what I expected," she admitted grudgingly.

"And you're not what I expected, either," Mrs. Cunningham said frankly. "You're much nicer."

Henrietta smiled tremulously.

"That's great of you, after the way I've behaved!" she said.

Mrs. Cunningham smiled.

"Then, shall we be friends?"

Henrietta hesitated, then she nodded. "If you will—if you like."

Mrs. Cunningham held out her hand.

"That's delightful of you." She was sincerely pleased. "I shall take good care, you won't regret it."

They looked at one another a little shyly, then Henrietta impulsively stooped and kissed her.

Mrs. Cunningham flushed, and her eyes grew misty.

"That's sweet of you," she said, with real appreciation. She took the girl's

hand again. "And now won't you tell me a little about yourself?"

"I've nothing very interesting to tell," Henrietta said, with a rueful sigh. She screwed her handkerchief into a damp ball. "Both my parents are dead, and——"

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" Mrs. Cunningham said gently.

Henrietta laughed.

"Oh, you needn't be," she answered abruptly. "I don't think they had a very happy life, either of them. They died when I was quite little, and my mother's cousin brought me up till I was old enough to think for myself, then I left her and went on the stage. That's how I first met Billsey. He came to a supper party one of the girls gave and——" She drew a long breath, and her eyes softened. "I think he liked me right from the first," she went on, after a moment. "Though why, I don't know, because heaps of the others were prettier and much better dressed than I was. Well, after that first time he often came, nearly every night, and always to see me. Then one day he asked me to marry him—he was such a dear! No man could have been kinder or better than he was to me! At last—well, I said I would!" She looked up into Mrs. Cunningham's quiet face. "That's all," she added simply.

"A real love story, dear," Mrs. Cunningham said. "I think——"

She broke off as some one knocked at the door.

"Come in!"

Archie poked his head round the door.

"I say, can I come in?" He came in without waiting for a reply, and shut the door behind him. He looked from Henrietta to Mrs. Cunningham, then he broke out: "You've been crying! It's a rotten shame! Mother ought to be——"

Henrietta started up. She ran to him, and laid her hand over his lips.

"No, she oughtn't! It's all right! Everything's all right, isn't it, Mrs. Cunningham? I'm going to be ever so good, and Mrs. Cunningham is going to show me how. I'm going to develop blue blood. Can any one develop blue blood, Archie?"

Archie grinned.

"I shouldn't bother myself to try if I were you," he said. "You're much nicer as you are."

Henrietta swept him a mocking curtsy.

"Thank you very much, but it isn't true, all the same, and you know it isn't! I'm going to learn to talk like Honore does, and to look at the world through glasses on sticks or whatever you call them, as she does."

Archie made a grimace.

"Oh!" he objected. "Spare us that! One Honore is enough in a small family like ours, surely?"

Henrietta subsided on to the couch with a mock sigh.

"Too much I should have thought!" she said bluntly. "But your mother seems to like that type, and so Mrs. Cunningham's going to show me how it's done."

"You'll never be able to do it," Archie said complacently. "For which we'll be thankful anyway! Whew! What a hot night, isn't it?"

He flung himself into a chair, fanning his face with a newspaper.

"Mother's just telling the pater exactly what she thinks of him," he said after a moment. "Poor old pater! It's hard luck to try and do the right thing



"I believe I rather like her," Henrietta thought in sudden dismay, and looked quickly away again.

as conscientiously as he does, and then to be called down morning, noon, and night by the mater."

Henrietta frowned.

"You ought not to speak of your mother like that," she said severely.

Archie opened his eyes wide.

"You sticking up for the' mater?" he ejaculated.

Henrietta nodded.

"I like her! I do really!" she protested.

Archie sent his newspaper flying across the room.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he said in amazement.

Henrietta laughed. She leaned back among the cushions of the big couch and looked at him affectionately. After a moment she sat up with a jerk.

"Do you know," she said abruptly, "I've seen you before somewhere!"

Archie raised his brows.

"Have you? Funny! I thought I'd seen you, too!" he added. "I used to go to the theater a lot, you know, and—er—well, other places.

Henrietta sprang to her feet, her eyes very bright.

"I know. I've got it!" she said eagerly. "You came behind the scenes one night to see Ninon de Vaux. Yes, you did!" she urged, as Archie flushed. "And, Archie, you were in rotten company.

Archie ran an agitated finger round the inside of his collar.

"Oh, I say!" he protested. "I thought Ninon was a friend of yours."

"So she was, so she is! I didn't mean that she was bad company. I meant the man you came with—Jimmie Carruthers! I remember it all now. He's a slicker, that Jimmy!"

"Oh, I say, Henrietta!" Archie was indignant. "He's one of the best! Jimmie's all right. Why, he's coming down to stay at Stonybrook next week."

"What!" Henrietta almost screamed. "To stay! Does your mother know?"

"Of course, she does. She asked him."

Henrietta went into fits of laughter.

"Oh, imagine Jimmie and Honore in the same house! It will be as good as a play! I wouldn't miss it for worlds!"

Archie looked faintly uncomfortable.

"Jimmie's all right," he protested with little or no conviction.

Mrs. Cunningham struck in pleasantly.

"I believe I've met this Mr. Carruthers, haven't I, Archie?"

"I should say not!" Henrietta answered emphatically. "Why, he's——" She broke off, struck by the appeal in Archie's eyes. "Well, never mind what he is," she amended her words. "You wouldn't like him, anyway, Mrs. Cunningham. I hate him!"

"You seem to hate a good many people," Archie said rather sulkily.

Henrietta laid a hand on his shoulder.

"I don't hate you," she said affectionately. "And I hope you don't hate me."

Archie put his hand up to hers and squeezed it.

"You know I don't," he said. "Hello! Here comes John!" as his brother's voice was heard outside. Archie looked at Henrietta and winked. "I'll bet John's been having it out with mother," he added in an undertone.

It was certain John did look rather pale and agitated.

"If you're ready, I think we'll be going, dear," he said very gently. He frowned as he saw Mrs. Cunningham.

"I'm sorry my mother gave you to understand that Henrietta and I——" he began awkwardly, but his wife interrupted.

"You're not sorry, Billsey, and neither am I! Mrs. Cunningham and I are friends. I'm going to learn to be different. I'm going to cultivate blue blood, as I've just told Archie." She laughed and held out her hand to Mrs.

Cunningham. "United we stand, divided we fall—on mother!" she added, laughing.

John Sloane frowned.

"Fall on mother! Henrietta, what do you mean?"

She rose and slipped her hand through his arm.

"I'll explain as we go home. Archie, where's my coat, I wonder?"

Archie started up.

"I'll find it for you." He went off, whistling cheerily, and Henrietta turned again to Mrs. Cunningham. "I'm so pleased to have met you," she said. "And I shall see you again at Stonybrook next week?"

"Yes." The soft brown eyes smiled contentedly. "I'm so pleased, Mrs. Sloane, so very pleased."

"I suppose it's all right, darling?" John asked anxiously, when they were out on the landing. "But if mother thinks she is going to be allowed to make you unhappy——"

Henrietta reached up and kissed him quickly.

"She doesn't; and, anyway, she couldn't—while I've got you," she said impulsively. "John, where is she? We must say good night, I suppose."

"In the library, I think. This way."

Henrietta followed reluctantly, and her heart sank as she met again the cold, unfriendly eyes of Mrs. Sloane.

"It's all right," she volunteered naïvely. "Mrs. Cunningham is coming to Stonybrook to educate me."

Mrs. Sloane frowned.

"To educate you!" she echoed. "My dear Henrietta, what do you mean?"

Henrietta flushed.

"That's what you meant, wasn't it?" she asked. "And I like her—I really like her. I think we shall be ever such good friends."

"Mrs. Cunningham is a very charming woman," Mrs. Sloane said, in her cold voice.

"And I am not you mean," Henri-

etta broke out. "Oh, dear, I didn't mean that!" she added in despair. "John, take me away before I say any more wrong things," she appealed tremulously. "I shall never, never learn not to put my foot in it!" She told him with a sob as they drove away through the hot night. She put her head down on his shoulder in an abandon of dejection. "Oh, Billsey, why did you marry me?"

John Sloane took her into his arms.

"Because I love you—because I adore you!" he answered, his lips touching her hair. "Henrietta, if you like, we'll leave New York and go away somewhere, where my relations can't worry you again, or make you unhappy, and——"

Henrietta laughed tremulously.

"I shan't cry any more—not after to-night. It's been a bit difficult to-day, somehow! But I'm really a very determined character, Billsey, though you may not know it, and before I'm through with your family——" She paused.

"Well, what?" John asked, kissing her flushed cheek.

Henrietta struggled free, and sat up stiffly, her eyes like stars, her pretty brows frowning.

"I'll have them all where you are!" she told him roguishly. "Down there—at my feet!"

CHAPTER IV.

Henrietta went down to Stonybrook, as she expressed it, "chock full of good intentions."

She had bought herself some new clothes of the type of which she was sure Mrs. Sloane would approve. Then she had had Mrs. Cunningham to tea with her several times at the hotel, and had plied her with many questions as to what was likely to be expected of her in her husband's home.

Mrs. Cunningham was tactfulness itself, and Henrietta informed John Sloane heartily that she was "a dear."

"I shan't mind her telling me when

I put my foot in it," she said cheerfully, "because she does it in a nice way. But if that Honore starts!" She clenched her fists, and screwed her face up into a terrific frown.

"Honore won't start," John said decidedly. "You leave her to me."

"Do you think you can manage her, then?" Henrietta asked, with a faint shadow of jealousy.

"I think she will be more likely to listen to reason from me than from any one else," he answered modestly. "You see, we have known one another all our lives."

"Are you trying to make me jealous?" Henrietta demanded.

"My darling child!" John put down his table napkin—they were at breakfast—and came round to where she sat. "Whatever are you talking about?" he demanded, stooping to kiss her. "As if you could be jealous of Honore! Why, my dear, I'd—I'd throw her into the sea with pleasure to save you an ache in your little finger." He kissed her again. Henrietta clung to him for a moment, then pushed him away.

"And now I feel much better," she declared. "And you can go and finish your bacon with an easy conscience. John, what time do we have breakfast at Stonybrook?"

"About half past eight, I think. Mother's rather keen on early hours, you know."

"And do I come down clothed and in my sane mind, or do I put on a morning gown thing, and trail about?"

"You wear ordinary clothes, of course. Why do you ask?"

"Because I am sure Honore doesn't. She'll flop about the place in loose garments to look picturesque, I suppose. Ho hum! How I do hate that woman!"

"No, you don't and she doesn't hate you, and you're going to be the best of friends when you get to understand one another," John insisted.

Henrietta quickly answered:

"Yes! When we get to understand one another! My dear boy, we do understand one another already, and that's just the trouble! If we didn't we might manage to get along quite well. No, there's no hope, Billsey! Honore and I will hate one another to the bitter end."

But John Sloane did not have any patience with all of this. Nobody could hate Henrietta, he was sure, and as for Honore—well, she was not really so bad! He had known her all his life, and, manlike, imagined that he understood her.

As they drove through the lovely wooded park to Stonybrook, John felt a slight wave of apprehension as he looked up and saw Honore waiting for them on the porch.

"Oh, what a lovely place!" Henrietta gasped, as they swung round a bend in the drive, and came in full view of the old house.

"Oh, my word, Billsey! There's the unspeakable one!" she added in despair, as she caught sight of Honore. "Isn't she the limit? Isn't she the one blot on this beautiful landscape?"

The two girls greeted one another civilly enough, though there was a severe look in Honore's eyes, and Henrietta had to put forth an effort to keep the smile on her lips.

Mrs. Sloane joined them in the hall. She kissed Henrietta almost affectionately.

"So you've really come!" she said. "I am so glad. Dear John, it is nice to see you!"

"We're both pleased to be here," John answered. He was watching his wife with adoring eyes. She was like a wondering delighted child, he thought, as she stood there, her pretty eyes roaming round the fine old hall, with its many family portraits and antique furniture.

"It's like a scene out of a play," she

told him presently in an awe-struck whisper. "But I suppose I mustn't say things like that, must I? I ought to pretend I've been used to ancestors and things like that all my life?"

"Don't pretend anything," John answered. "Just be your own self, and you will make me happy."

They went in to tea, and found Mr. Sloane half asleep in an armchair with a handkerchief over his face. Mrs. Cunningham was working by the window, the sunset playing about her graceful head.

Henrietta flew over and kissed her. She had one friend she knew, while Mrs. Cunningham was in the house.

"I've come, you see," she whispered excitedly. "And oh, isn't it a lovely place? That glorious park! Imagine all that belonging to any one person. It seems too good to be true."

Mr. Sloane roused himself, yawned, and came forward.

"My dear Henrietta!" He kissed her with real affection. "I am glad you've come! We shall have a little sunshine in the house now, eh, Mrs. Cunningham—eh, my dear?" He met his wife's severe gaze, and subsided as usual. "Er—oh, yes, exactly!" he said vaguely.

Tea was brought.

"Shall I pour out for you, Mrs. Sloane?" Honore asked. She took her seat at the table without waiting for a reply, and Henrietta's eyes flashed ominously.

"It's my place to pour for Mrs. Sloane, if any one does, surely?" she said in an undertone to Mrs. Cunningham. "I'm her daughter-in-law, and Honore isn't!"

"There is plenty of time to alter little things like that," was the reply. "Wait till you've been here a day or two, my dear."

Henrietta sighed, shrugged her shoulders, and took a chair next to her husband.

"Quite a family party, John, isn't it?"

Honore asked. She looked across at him with a smile. "Sugar and cream, isn't it? And two lumps? You see, I have not forgotten."

"John doesn't take sugar at all now," Henrietta broke in sharply. "Do you, Billsey—John, I mean?" She hurriedly corrected herself as she saw Mrs. Sloane draw her shoulders together with a little shiver of distaste.

John smiled.

"It's one of the vices I gave up to please Henrietta," he told Honore. "She thought so many sweet things were bad for me."

"And being so sweet herself, she was more than able to make up the loss, I suppose?" Honore said, with her suave manner.

There was a silence. Henrietta half rose as if to speak, then sat down again, closing her lips firmly, and casting a swiftly appealing glance at Mrs. Cunningham.

Mr. Sloane broke in with his usual cheeriness:

"Where is Archie, I wonder? Has any one seen Archie?"

"He went out with Mr. Carruthers," Mrs. Sloane said. For once she was pleased by her husband's interference. She had seen the rising anger in Henrietta's eyes, and dreaded another scene.

But she need not have feared. Henrietta was quite mistress of herself, and was chatting easily to Mrs. Cunningham.

"So Mr. Carruthers has really come?" Honore was saying, in her slow, drawling voice. "Really, we ought to have quite a pleasant time with such a variety of guests."

"I was so surprised to find that you knew Mr. Carruthers," Mrs. Sloane answered. "I must admit that I was pleased, too! I really feared that he was just one of the many acquaintances Archie seems to be always picking up in his wanderings. But, of course, if you know him and like him——"

"Oh, I do very much!" Honore said rather constrainedly. "He is a most excellent business man."

Henrietta turned quickly.

"Why, he used to be an advertising man!" she said blankly. "I knew him months ago when I was at the theater. He used to come to see one of our girls—Beryl Stevens her name was—and Mr. Carruthers——"

She broke off, meeting Mrs. Sloane's cold gaze.

"I'm sorry! Have I said anything wrong?" she asked in despair.

"I am sure your Mr. Carruthers and Archie's friend cannot be one and the same, my dear Henrietta," Mrs. Sloane said calmly. "Our Mr. Carruthers is a gentleman!"

"Oh, well," laughed Henrietta, "our Mr. Carruthers wasn't. He was the most awful person. I hated him. I thought when Archie spoke of him it couldn't be the same. But it's rather an uncommon name, isn't it?" she asked, turning deliberately to Honore.

Nobody answered.

"I should like to show Henrietta the gardens before dinner," said John, rising. "Do you mind, mother? She is so anxious to see the roses."

He slipped a hand through his wife's arm, and they went through the open French window together and down on to the sloping lawn.

"Honore's started again!" Henrietta said, in a tragic whisper as soon as they were out of hearing. "Didn't you hear the tone of her voice, Billsey? Oh, she's a cat! I'd like to maul her."

"I shouldn't trouble, my dear," he answered comfortably. "She isn't a permanent fixture here, thank goodness! And, besides, I think we shall manage to have a good time, anyway, what do you say?"

"I think Stonybrook is the loveliest place I've ever seen," she said enthusiastically. "Fancy being mistress of all this!"

"As you will be some day."

Henrietta gave a cry of protest.

"How horrid! I should hate it! I should be scared to death! Besides that means you wouldn't have a mother and father, Billsey, and I'm sure you don't want that."

"You know I don't. I was only feeling so glad to feel that you really belong to me, and all this." He waved his hand comprehensively round the beautiful garden.

The wide lawns were like velvet to the feet, and were bordered on one side by a foliage bed which was a blaze of color, and behind them again rose a belt of dark fir trees.

"I should like my mother to have seen this," Henrietta said, with sudden earnestness. "Doesn't it seem queer that some people have so much, and others just nothing at all?"

"It's the way of the world, sweetheart."

"I know, but it doesn't seem fair, all the same." They turned down a flagstoned path into the rose garden.

"The best of them are gone," John said, as Henrietta gave a cry of delight, and ran forward. "June is the time for roses, you know. This is only the second blooming."

"But they're lovely! They're just perfect! Oh, do you think I might have one, just one?"

"You can have a dozen—as many as you like." He took out his pocket knife and cut a scented Marechal Niel from a tree close by.

"Let me fasten it in your frock."

But when she came close to him, he put his hands on her shoulders instead and looked down into her sweet, flushed face.

"How well do you love me, Henrietta?"

"Better than all the world—better than all the Stonybrooks in the world, Billsey dear—better than anything I can think of!"



"That's how I love you, too!" John fastened the rose clumsily in the lace of her dress, tilted her face backward by its soft, little chin, and kissed her on the lips.

"That's how I love you, too!" He fastened the rose clumsily in some of the lace in her dress, tilted her face backward by its soft, little chin, and kissed her on the lips as Honore came upon them down the narrow, flagged pathway.

She stood still for a moment, her lips twitching, a hard expression in her eyes, then she came on again slowly:

"Sorry to disturb such an idyl," she said cynically. "But your mother wants you, John. No, I don't know what for! She just asked me to come and tell you, that was all."

Henrietta slipped her hand into her husband's.

"I'll come with you, Billsey," she said. She never glanced at Honore, and the elder girl was left looking after them,

her beautiful face falling into haggard lines of pain.

She had loved John all her life. Her greatest ambition had been to be his wife. She had been so sure that he would marry her—too sure, perhaps, she realized now, as she watched him scamper across the lawn with Henrietta, both of them laughing like children.

She clenched her teeth as if with actual physical pain.

"I hate her! I hate her!" she muttered.

CHAPTER V.

Henrietta dressed early for dinner that night, and was downstairs before the second gong had sounded.

She stole down the wide staircase, feeling a little shy and strange. There

were so many family portraits, and they all seemed to be watching her with such critical eyes she thought, as she passed them and went into the drawing-room.

There was a long, old-fashioned mirror on the wall opposite the door, and as she entered she caught the reflection of her slim figure in its white frock. She stood still, with wistful eyes.

"I wonder if I look as if I belonged here?" she asked herself. "Or if I look out of place, as they all think I am! Just brown sugar!"

She went slowly forward, her eyes still criticizing herself.

"I haven't got either Honore's height or poise," she told herself. "And I certainly haven't got Mrs. Sloane's grand manners. I never shall have those, but perhaps if I try very hard——" She gave a smothered exclamation as there was a sound behind her, and the figure of a man appeared suddenly beside her own reflection in the mirror.

He bowed with exaggerated courtesy as their eyes met.

"Good evening, Mrs. Sloane!"

"Mr. Carruthers!" Henrietta was breathless with surprise. "Then it is you. It really is you!" she said amazed.

He bowed again.

"It is, and I am delighted to meet you in such charming circumstances."

He held out his hand, but Henrietta drew hers quickly behind her back.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded sharply.

He raised his eyebrows. Very dark brows they were which gave a sinister expression to his thin face.

"What am I doing here? Isn't that rather a strange question? You are here, and so why not I?"

She ignored his last words.

"You've no right to be here at all, you know that!" she said bluntly. "If Mrs. Sloane knew what I——"

He made a swiftly silencing gesture.

"In a house like this, the walls, sometimes have ears, my dear woman," he

said smoothly. "And I am sure that neither you nor I can afford to talk too loudly about the past."

"Speak for yourself," Henrietta answered sharply. "John knows everything I've ever done, or said—or thought, if you must know. I'll bet that's more than you would dare to tell any one about yourself!"

Carruthers smiled. He was not a bad looking man, but there was a pinched, anxious expression about his face, as if he did not often find life either easy or comfortable.

"You were always fond of being outspoken," he said calmly. "I always admire outspoken people as you know, but——" He broke off as Archie came whistling into the room.

"Hello, Henrietta!" He seized both her hands and wrung them hard. "Hello! Great of you to have come!"

"Glad to see you, too!" Henrietta answered delightedly. She kept one hand in his, and looked defiantly at Carruthers. "Archie and I are great friends, Mr. Carruthers."

"So I see. Archie has delightful taste."

Henrietta frowned.

"And from this day forward I shall make myself Archie's guardian angel," she said. "I'm going to protect him from the evil one, so you just look out for yourself!"

"Oh, I say!" Archie objected. "That's a bit plain, isn't it? It sounds as if you mean old Jimmie here is the evil one."

"If the cap fits," Henrietta said lightly, "Mr. Carruthers is quite at liberty to wear it. We're old acquaintances, you know, Archie, Mr. Carruthers and I. Nobody can teach me anything about him!"

Archie laughed. He did not take her seriously; and giving his head a toss, went over to a side table and helped himself to a chocolate from a box standing there.

"You'll spoil your dinner," Henrietta warned him.

He shook his head.

"Nothing can ever spoil my dinner. He took another, and, with his mouth full, strolled out into the garden.

Henrietta waited till he had disappeared, then she turned quickly to Carruthers.

a little saying that birds of a feather flock together, you know." She nodded meaningly, and turned away, humming a snatch of the song by which she had first sung her way into the affections of the public.

"The daffodil girl, the daffodil girl— She's stolen my heart, my head's in a whirl——"



"What are you doing here?" Henrietta demanded sharply. Carruthers raised his eyebrows.

"So you've got into high society since the old days," she said. "I hear that Honore is one of your friends."

"I am proud to say she is," he answered.

Henrietta sniffed inelegantly.

"It's not much to be proud of," she retorted. "And if I didn't hate her like the very dickens, I'd warn her against you, but, as it is—well, there's

Carruthers watched her with an amused smile in his eyes.

She walked to the open window, and had stepped down into the garden when Carruthers followed.

"Oh, Mrs. Sloane!"

She looked back disdainfully.

"Well, what do you want?"

Carruthers stood above her, his hands in his pockets, smiling complacently.

"Can't we be friends?" he asked.

Henrietta's eyes wandered over his immaculate evening clothes, and her lips curled contemptuously.

"Why should we?" she asked bluntly.

"Because I should like to be friends with you," he answered. "You're Archie's sister-in-law, and he is my friend."

"Your friend!" She laughed shortly.

"Well, that's good! That's the best yet! Your friend, when he's only a boy, and you're goodness knows how old!"

"That's unkind, isn't it?"

"No, it isn't," she answered flatly. "It's merely the truth. You're too old for him, years too old!"

"You mean, too old to share his enthusiasm—his love of motors and things like that.

"No! I mean something very different, and you know quite well that I do. You weren't born yesterday, my friend."

"Am I to take that as a compliment, or a reproach?" he asked coolly.

Henrietta shrugged her shoulders.

"From what I know of you, you'll take it as a compliment," she said bluntly.

Carruthers lit a cigarette, his keen eyes watching her all the time.

"I don't know," he said presently. "To be born yesterday—is to say the least—an error of judgment. To make a statement like that is more than an error! It's imbecility."

"I don't know what you mean, but it sounds like hot air," Henrietta told him scornfully. "And anyway, I know quite well why you're here, and quite well why you've got hold of Archie! You're teaching him to gamble!"

Carruthers raised his brows in feigned astonishment.

Henrietta turned her back on him and walked on into the gardens. The cool evening air fanned her flushed cheeks gratefully.

She had never liked Carruthers, and

she felt now that she would hate him. She turned furiously when she found that he had followed her again and was walking by her side.

"Most young men gamble a bit nowadays, as you know," he said sententiously. "After all, money is made to be circulated."

"Is it?" Henrietta laughed cynically. "Then I should think Archie's circulation must be about perfect by this time, that's all!" Her eyes were hot and angry. "I can't prevent you being here," she added, "I wish I could! But I can prevent you making a fool of that boy, and I mean to, if you try any of your tricks! See?"

She nodded defiantly, and turned away, leaving him standing there alone.

CHAPTER VI.

There was keen mortification in the eyes of Jimmie Carruthers as he stood watching Henrietta cross the lawn, and he frowned as he turned and walked slowly back to the house.

He was angry with himself because he had failed to acquire this girl's friendship. However, he was reluctantly obliged to admit that she had behaved honestly.

Marrying into the aristocracy had not as yet spoiled her. She was just the same as she had been in the old days when she had graced the third row of the chorus.

He had not considered her worthy of his notice then, and he felt now that he had made a mistake. Those had been the days in which he should have tried to enlist her friendship, although, naturally, it had been impossible to foresee to what heights she was to rise.

Jimmie Carruthers was a curious man. Deep down in the heart which the world and many hard knocks had left to him, his inclination was to run straight away. He would like to have been looked up to and respected by his fellow men, but the other course paid

him best, as he had discovered after one or two futile attempts at walking in the straight but narrow path.

Hitherto he had been fortunate, inasmuch as he had always managed to keep on the right side of the law, although doubtless there had been many shady transactions written by the recording angel against his name. His greatest stroke of luck so far was undoubtedly his chance friendship with Archie Sloane.

Archie was young and inexperienced, and he had been easily captured by the elder man's knowledge of life.

It was Carruthers who had first initiated Archie into the romance of the green room; Carruthers who had taken him to his first supper with the Palladrome chorus. Carruthers who had driven him down to the races, and skillfully putting him on a few winners, had systematically robbed him.

But Archie liked Carruthers and still believed in him, and knowing it the elder man was now and then conscious of a faint feeling of shame through all his elation when he met the boy's cheery smile.

It seemed a shame to snare such young and easy prey. It was a shame to take money from pockets into which one's hands were given such free and generous access! That was what Carruthers thought in his softer and most rare moments. At other times he looked at the whole matter philosophically, and told himself that he must live! He had angled laboriously for the invitation to Stonybrook, but had never really hoped to receive it. The gods were with him, he decided, when he found himself beneath the aristocratic roof of the Sloanes, and it seemed too good to be true when he discovered that Honore Nesbitt was also one of the house party.

Honore and he had done business together on more than one occasion, for Carruthers was a jack of many trades, and had most successfully loaned money

to foolish women at an exorbitant rate of interest.

It had amused him to see the dismay in Honore's eyes when they met in the Sloanes' drawing-room. It had amused him still more when she had threatened to tell something of his private history.

"I don't think you had better do that," he answered easily. "It would lead to too many complications—a great many unpleasant questions would have to be asked."

"What do you mean?" she had demanded, her haughtiness wavering, and Carruthers had shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't think you need to be told," he said ironically.

And apparently he had been right, for Honore had shown him marked friendliness during the past three days, and he knew that as far as she was concerned, he had nothing to fear.

Locked in a private safe of his were a few letters and documents which he would have sold only for half a king's ransom, and Honore's signature was at the foot of more than one of them.

But Henrietta was going to be more difficult! He could see that. He wondered why it was that she so thoroughly disliked him. He had never done her any wrong—possibly because she had never given him an opportunity—and he felt that she was going to spoil what he had considered would be a visit of unalloyed pleasure and success.

As he crossed the hall, Johnson, the butler, came toward him.

"A telegram for you, sir, and a reply is wanted."

The expression of Carruthers' keen face changed a little as he took the yellow envelope from the tray.

"Is the boy waiting?" he asked.

"Yes, sir!"

Carruthers read the message, and his face cleared.

He filled in the reply form, gave it to the man, and tore the telegram into tiny fragments.

"You might make the boy read that, Johnson, to be sure that he understands," he said casually.

"Shall I read it over to you first, sir?"

"Yes, perhaps you'd better."

Johnson bent over the form. Carruthers' writing was small and not very legible, and the man spelled the words out with difficulty.

"To Fair—Fairport. Is that right, sir?"

Carruthers laughed.

"Account another——" He paused; obviously the next word was beyond his comprehension.

"Century," Carruthers added for him.

"Thank you, sir, I see. I couldn't quite make it out, sir. "Another account, another century. Fleetfoot to win. Carruthers."

Johnson looked up.

"Is that right, sir?"

"That's right." Carruthers handed him a tip. "Give that to the boy, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

Johnson reached the door on his way out, then stopped, hesitated, and finally came back a step or two.

"Excuse me, sir," he said apologetically, "but Fleetfoot is running isn't he?"

"Yes. Why?"

Johnson smiled nervously.

"Well, sir, I backed Gypsy Flyer to win, and Frosty Boy for a place. I didn't know that Fleetfoot had a chance, but if you're on him sir——"

Carruthers glanced swiftly at the man, then shrugged his shoulders.

"You've backed two good horses," he said after a moment. "I should stick to 'em if I were you. Always back your fancy is a good motto. Fleetfoot's an outsider, and though there's been a lot of talk about him lately, I don't know that it means much. I thought he was worth a sporting flutter, that's all."

Johnson came a step nearer.

"Then you wouldn't advise me to touch him, sir?"

Carruthers shook his head.

"No; the odds don't make it worth your while to hedge. If you want to do anything, do Star Dust."

Johnson beamed.

"Thank you, sir! Much obliged, sir! I hope you don't mind me having taken the liberty, sir?"

"That's all right," Carruthers said.

"Oh, by the way, Johnson, I left the sporting sheet out on the porch this morning. Do you know what's become of it? There were some pencil notes on the margin I wanted."

"I'll find it, sir, and thank you once again."

Carruthers looked after the old man with a cynical smile.

"Old fool!" he said, under his breath.

"What's he want to meddle with horses for? Hanged if I would, if I had as comfortable a job as he has. Ho hum!" He stretched his arms wearily, and sauntering to the open door stood looking out into the sunny garden.

Somewhere in the distance he could hear Henrietta's cheery laugh, and he frowned again.

Why did she hate him so? As a rule he was rather lucky with women, and this one was nothing in particular—just a child of the people who had been sufficiently lucky to marry wealth.

She might have been very useful to him, he knew.

There was a step behind him in the hall.

"Mr. Carruthers!"

He looked round over his shoulder to find Honore beside him.

A half smile crossed his face as he bowed to her with exaggerated courtesy.

"At your service," he said.

She frowned.

"Please don't be absurd, Mr. Carruthers," she said impatiently. "I

haven't had a chance to speak to you all day, and now I do wish you would be sensible for a moment. Did you do as I asked you?"

"I put another hundred on."

She gave a sigh of relief, then she said with sudden change of manner:

"I've heard some very queer stories about you, Mr. Carruthers."

"Indeed!" He looked merely amused, and not in the least upset.

"Yes." Honore sat down on a bench close to the door, and leaned her head back against the paneled wall.

She looked tired and worried, and her hands moved jerkily as she spoke.

"I had a letter from Mrs. Fair this morning."

Carruthers laughed.

"And how is Mrs. Fair? Still mistaking prejudices for principles, I suppose? I have not seen her for ages."

"So I gathered." Honore's voice was bitter, and her eyes were angry as she looked up at him. "Mr. Carruthers, I used to believe in you, too," she said vehemently. "But now——"

He met her gaze calmly.

"But why not now?" he echoed, as she broke off.

She made a hopeless gesture with her beautiful hands.



"Mr. Carruthers, I used to believe in you, too," Honore said vehemently. "But now——"

"I don't know. Oh, I don't know," she said despairingly.

Carruthers' eyes were hard as they rested on her distressed face. He had no respect for this woman. To his way of thinking, Henrietta, low-born as she was, was on an infinitely higher plane than this daughter of the pampered rich.

"Dear lady, why worry?" he said, in his softest voice. "I never worry! What is the use? One only gets old before one's time."

She flushed angrily.

"If you were in trouble as I am," she began, then stopped abruptly. "It's waste of time talking to you, I know," she said, in a stifled voice. "You care only for yourself. You're made of flint. I wonder—I wonder how many more women besides me have found out, too late, what you really are?"

Her voice was bitter.

He made no reply, but just looked at her steadily. With a little cry of rage she started up and left him.

Carruthers frowned as he lit another cigarette. Women are so foolish, he thought. They were quite willing to play as long as they won, and as long as the rules of the game suited them, but if the luck turned ever so little, it was accusation and reproaches till the end of time.

He went off to the billiard room, where Archie was knocking the balls about in desultory fashion.

"Oh, there you are!" he said, his face brightening. "Come and play. I don't know what the dickens has happened to dinner. There wasn't a sign of it just now when I looked into the dining room."

But the gong sounded through the house as he spoke, and he put down his cue readily enough.

"Come on, let's go and feed," he said boyishly.

Carruthers slipped a hand through his arm.

"One moment—about that money, Archie?"

The boy stood still, his face paling. "I can't pay; I've told you," he said jerkily. "I know you've been awfully decent, and all that, but, hang it all, you can't get blood out of a stone, you know. The luck's bound to change soon, and when I have a decent win I'll pay you, honest Injun I will!"

"My dear boy, I don't doubt it," Carruthers said readily. "But I've got to live in the meantime, and I've lent you all my available cash."

"I know. It's certainly decent of you, but——" He ran his hand over his smooth hair agitatedly. "Listen! You're not thinking of going to John or father about it, are you?"

"Oh, no! That's the last thing I should do."

"Of course! I know you're a good sport! Come on, let's go and eat! I'm awfully hungry!" He made for the door, again, pausing as he opened it to look around and say optimistically:

"I've got a sort of feeling that my luck's going to change; you see if it doesn't!"

Carruthers smiled grimly.

"I've had that feeling myself—often!" he said dryly.

CHAPTER VII.

At the end of a week it seemed to Henrietta that she had made little or no progress in the affections of her mother-in-law.

She had, as she told John, "behaved," and there had not been one open rupture since she came to Stonybrook.

"I haven't used any bad words," she told her husband when they were alone. "At least—only to you, Billsey, and I haven't quarreled with Honore even once, though I've felt like it dozens of times! I've put up with Jimmie Carruthers, though I hate him, and I went to church twice on Sunday with your mother. What more can any self re-

specting daughter-in-law do? And yet she doesn't seem to like me!" she added in despair.

"Mother's difficult," John admitted reluctantly. "She's slower at things than most people—I mean she's not demonstrative, but once she does like any one, Henrietta, it's for life."

"I know," Henrietta nodded gloomily. "And once she disliked them, I suppose it's for life, too, so perhaps I'd better give up trying."

John Sloane laughed, and pulled her down on to his knee.

"You're such a funny child," he said. "I wish you wouldn't worry your little head so much. It will come out all right."

Henrietta sighed and leaned her cheek against his.

"That's what you say, but Heaven alone knows what a frightful handicap I'm facing. Honore hates me——"

"Honore doesn't count," he said quickly, but Henrietta would not listen to this.

"Oh, yes, she does, with your mother at all events. You see, Billsey, added to her natural dislike to me because of what I was when you married me, there's always the fact that she wanted you to marry Honore——"

"Oh, well, mother's idea about marrying wasn't mine," he told her soothingly. "I've married you, and it can't be undone!"

She cuddled her head on to his shoulder.

"That sounds as if you rather wish it could," she whispered.

"It doesn't sound like anything of the sort," he answered vehemently, kissing her. "And if you don't like being at Stonybrook, all I can say is that we'll pack up and go away at once—to-day—if you like."



What is the real meaning of beauty?

Read what it meant to Suzanne in

Where Beauty Lies

It will appear soon in **LOVE STORY**
MAGAZINE

A Chorus Girl's Secret

By
Louisa Carter Lee



HOWARD PARSONS glanced around the packed auditorium of the Newport Theater, New Hamptown. He had never seen it so full before. The Newport Theater was not much of a place, and New Hamptown was not a play-going town, yet to-night there was not a vacant seat. He wondered idly at the cause of it.

The entertainment was a revue called "The Flowers." He rarely attended the Newport, but he had had a hard week, and, feeling tired and rather bored, he had dropped in. He had hoped to find some relaxation.

Doctor Parsons was the most popular medical man in New Hamptown. He was a tall fellow of athletic build with a lean, clever face and a pair of deep-set, steady, gray eyes.

The curtain rose on a garden set. A bevy of girls, dressed in gowns that were designed to represent bouquets of flowers, tripped down to the footlights and broke into the opening song. A couple of comedians made their appearance and told some worn-out jokes. Then, amid a crescendo of music, the

whole lot trooped into the wings, the lights were switched off, and a single golden beam was focused upon an enormous basket of flowers at the back of the stage.

From this basket a girl appeared, a small and elfin thing. Her petalled frock of filmy tulle was of pink and green, and she wore a garland of roses around her small, shapely head. She was the star of the revue.

As Howard Parsons looked at her, he knew why the shabby old Newport was packed. She was as fragile as a bit of Dresden china, and her delicate features were exquisitely molded. Her eyes were violet and were lashed by long, silken lashes. As he listened to the pure, liquid notes of her voice he knew that this dainty actress was the attraction.

Howard was conscious of an odd stirring at his heart and a strange quickening of his pulses as that haunting melody filled his ears. In her short petal skirt, with her white arms bare, and her mass of chestnut curls falling over her shoulders, she seemed a child.

The end of the song came, the theater echoed with applause, and, smiling and bowing, she made her appreciation be known.

The man leaned farther out of the box, his face flushed. Suddenly their eyes met, and for a moment held each other. Then, with a deep curtsy, the girl was gone. After that, Howard Parsons sat like one in a dream. It was only when the girl was on the stage that he took any interest in the performance.

At last the show was over and he was out in the warm night air, with stars twinkling above. He didn't put on his hat, but let the cool breeze play upon his hot forehead. His whole body was atingle. Every nerve was tense with some strange emotion. All the way home he thought of a girl with violet eyes who had kindled a tiny spark within him that was to leap into an unquenchable flame.

Howard Parsons' mackintosh dripped with rain as he stood in the wide hall of his cottage. He had just come in from his afternoon round. A trim maid-servant came toward him, a smile of greeting on her face. All his servants liked him.

"If you please, sir," she said, "a woman came to ask you to go at once to No. 32 Drive Road. A young woman has been taken ill there."

Howard was tired. He had been up most of the night with a bad case, and had been looking forward to rest. But he never neglected duty for his own comforts. Less than five minutes after he had returned home, he was running along in his roadster to the house in Drive Road.

Mrs. Burke, the woman who had called at his house, opened the door. She took in theatrical folk.

"It's one of the young ladies of the revue that's ill, doctor," she told him. "Will you come this way, sir."

She led him up the stairs to a small, spotlessly clean bedroom. On a bed near the window a girl was tossing restlessly, muttering under her breath.

As Howard Parsons stood by the bedside and gazed down upon his patient, his heart gave a sudden wild leap. It was the girl of the violet eyes.

Now he saw what had escaped him amid the glitter and tinsel of the stage; her face was pitifully thin and pinched, on the cheeks spots of red burned, and his practiced eye told him that she was seriously ill.

Rapidly, skillfully, he made his examination. Then he asked a number of questions of the landlady. All the time the girl kept muttering and moaning to herself.

"It'll be a pretty hard fight, Mrs. Burke," he told the woman gravely. "Pneumonia—I'll send you a nurse."

Mrs. Burke nodded.

"I guessed she was pretty bad, poor girl," she said. "She's been here two weeks, and she had a cruel cold when she came. She told me she'd been out of work for a long spell—her show had only just started on the road."

Howard Parsons gazed at the girl, and a sudden mist dimmed his eyes. The landlady's words had stripped all the glamour of stageland away and shown him the pitiful tragedy of the life lived behind the footlights.

He pitied her.

He took one of the burning hands in his own. Mrs. Burke had run downstairs to attend to some one who had knocked at the door, and he and the girl were alone.

It was as though the strength of his personality pierced the mists of delirium that clouded her brain. She ceased to toss from side to side, and lay quite still, her eyes wide open, staring up at him.

Howard Parsons never knew what possessed him to do what he did. He obeyed an impulse stronger than him-

self, for he bent swiftly and laid his lips to hers.

The sun streamed into the prim little sitting room at No. 32 Drive Road. It was gay with many roses—Howard Parsons' thoughtfulness to the girl who sat in a big chair drawn up close to the wide-open window.

Betty Duray held one of Doctor Parsons' roses in her fingers, and as her eyes rested upon it a tender little smile quivered at the corners of her lips, and her eyes were misty with unshed tears. Mrs. Burke had told her of the fateful night when the doctor had fought to save her.

Now she was waiting for the man who seemed to fill her world, whose step on the stairs set her heart to beating rapidly.

A car came down the street and drew to a standstill at the curb. Howard Parsons jumped out and ran quickly to the front door of No. 32.

Betty wanted to lean out of the window and wave him a greeting, but she couldn't. She was trembling so much that she couldn't move or speak.

The doctor found her with the tears in her eyes.

He took her cold, shaking hand in both of his.

"My child, my dear child," he said gravely, "what's wrong? I can't have you upsetting yourself like this. Tell me."

"I'm so happy and grateful for your kindness," she whispered. "How can I ever thank you sufficiently for all you have done for me?"

He laughed a little unsteadily. He, too, was conscious of a wild beating of his heart. Still holding her hand, he pulled a chair near to hers and sat down.

"You begin to do me credit, little lady. The color's creeping back into your cheeks."

At his words she blushed, and they both laughed merrily.

"You blush like a schoolgirl," he teased her, then he added tenderly, "and that's all you are—just a little girl."

At his words a shadow darkened her eyes and her mouth twisted into lines of pain.

"No," she said, and her voice was filled with inexpressible bitterness. "I am not such a little girl. I am a woman who has suffered."

Something caught at the man's throat, and a surge of love and pity welled over him. Almost before he realized it, he was telling her of the love in his heart.

"Betty, my darling, I love you, I love you."

He dropped to his knees before her, his head bent forward. She stroked his hair, and her tears fell fast. She battled with the hardest temptation that she had ever known.

She loved this man, but love and marriage were not for her. A barrier high and insurmountable was between her and marriage. But her whole being cried out for love, for the shelter of a man's arms. She had battled long, against adversity, alone.

He held her closely against his heart.

"Betty, can you care a little?" he pleaded hoarsely.

She put him from her, her face very pale.

"I can never be your wife," she said, and her voice was harsh with pain.

The man's face was sad and drawn. Heavily he got to his feet, and the misery was like a knife in her heart. She flung out her hands toward him piteously.

"Howard! Howard!" she cried. "I have hurt you, and I would rather die than hurt you." She broke into uncontrollable weeping.

"Dearest," he said, "you must not upset yourself like this. You will be ill again. Darling, I don't blame you, it's not your fault that you can't love me."

She stared up at him, her hands pressed against his chest.

"Not love you?" she repeated. "I love you better than life, I love you with my whole soul—that's why I won't marry you."

"Betty, you love me?" His tones were exultant. "Then do you think that I will ever let you go?" He swept her into his arms with a triumphant gesture. "My beloved! Mine! Mine!"

She tried to release herself, but she was as a child in his strong arms. She was weak from her long illness—and she loved him.

"But listen, Howard," she begged. "You are a coming doctor, respected, looked up to in New Hamptown. I'm just a penniless chorus girl, whom you

know nothing about. I am not a fitting wife for you, dear. Really I'm not."

"It's no use your trying to run yourself down, sweetheart," he told her happily. "The mischief was done that night you stepped out of that basket of flowers. I walked the streets dreaming of you, my lady of the roses. Betty, kiss me, darling, put your arms around my neck, and tell me again that you love me."

She raised her tear-stained face to his.

"Howard, remember I have told you nothing about myself. Are you sure, sure?" she faltered. "Suppose you found that I was unworthy, that I——" She wanted to tell him of that dark cloud



"I can never be your wife," Betty said, and her voice was harsh with pain.

that loomed in the past, but she couldn't. Her love had robbed her of the strength.

"Betty, kiss me," he urged.

She twined her arms about him and clung to him, laying her lips to his in a long kiss.

When she was once more alone in the little parlor, fragrant with the scent of Howard's roses, she told herself that the past was dead, dead, dead—and that the future belonged to her and Howard.

Betty Parsons stood at the drawing-room window of her new home, gazing out into the sunlit garden. Her eyes traveled back from its beauty to the plain gold band that circled her finger.

Howard's ring!

Impulsively she pressed it to her lips. Her husband, her lover! The past few months had been like a wonderful dream. Her marriage had been so quiet and yet so impressive in the beautiful old parish church. Her honeymoon had been spent in Cuba. Health and happiness had painted her cheeks and lent a sparkle to her eyes. Her husband loved to lavish presents upon her, to spoil her in every way. He was like a boy again.

Through a wicket gate at the end of the garden there came the tall, straight figure of a girl in nurse's uniform. She had a child by the hand—a little, fairy-like creature with a mass of golden curls and a skin like a rose petal.

As Betty's gaze fell upon the child there came into her eyes a strange expression, a look of love and fear.

The child was the Parsons' little adopted girl, Gloria.

Betty had asked her husband if Gloria could come to live with them. She had told him that she was the child of an actress, and that she lived with Betty's landlady.

Howard, loving all children, had willingly consented to the little girl making her home with them. A nurse, Catherine Goldsmith, had been engaged to take charge of the child. Catherine,

with her quiet voice and narrow, white face, was the one thorn in Betty's bed of roses. There was something about the nurse that frightened her.

Betty was certain that Catherine disliked her, and that she liked her husband more than it was good for a girl to like another woman's husband. She was a perfect nurse. Howard had known her a long time, and she had often nursed his patients.

Gloria came running across the lawn when she caught sight of Betty. The nurse followed leisurely. Betty gathered the child up into her arms and kissed her again and again.

"My baby, my darling," she crooned, and her lovely face was transfigured with a wonderful radiance. Then she became aware of the tall, slim woman in her trim blue-and-white uniform, looking at her with a peculiar expression in her cold, blue eyes, and she set the child down hurriedly.

"It's rather hot for Gloria to be out this afternoon, isn't it, Miss Goldsmith?" she asked.

"Oh, no, Mrs. Parsons, there is a lovely breeze, and we have been in the shade," the nurse replied in that smooth tone of hers that had an irritating effect on Betty's nerves. Miss Goldsmith patted the child's curly head. "She's a good little soul." She looked up quickly. "Wonderfully like you, Mrs. Parsons, did you say she was a relation's little girl?"

Betty's fingers were tightly clenched. "No," she said harshly. "She is not a relation's child." Without another glance in Gloria's direction she swept through the French window and out onto the lawn.

For a moment the other stared after her. Her mouth was a cruel line across her narrow face.

"You've fooled him, you pretty doll," she thought bitterly. "But some day you'll give yourself away."

When the doctor came home to lunch

he found Betty among the roses, sitting on a white-painted seat. She was paler than usual, and there was a shadow in her eyes.

Howard bent down and kissed her.

"Headache, sweetheart?" he asked softly, seating himself on the arm of the seat.

"A—a little," she admitted.

"You must lie down for a while after lunch," he said. "You had a nasty illness, you know, and that sort of thing takes a long time to get over. I can't have you overdoing things. You are much too precious to me." His voice sank to that low, ardent note that thrilled her, and she pressed closer to him.

"Do I really mean a lot to you, Howard?" she asked.

He slipped his arm about her slender shoulders.

"I couldn't tell you how much," he answered, and his voice was husky with the depth of his feelings. "You have changed the face of this old world for me, Betty."

There were tears in Betty Parsons' eyes. Her husband had never spoken so to her before. He had never shown her his heart so clearly.

He was not a man who found it easy to express his emotions, and it filled her with a wonderful exultation. He loved her, he needed her. Surely if he knew of that dark shadow out of the past he would forgive. Some day in the future she would tell him her story.

Presently they went arm in arm toward the house.

From her window Miss Goldsmith watched them, and jealousy filled her heart. There passed over her pale face an expression of mingled rage and misery, then she dropped her head into her hands. But she didn't cry—Catherine Goldsmith was not a woman of tears.

The telephone bell rang sharply in the hall, and Betty, who was passing through, went to the instrument and

took down the receiver. Howard Parsons was at the other end of the wire.

"Sorry, dear," he called, "but I've got a very important case on. It may be late when I get home. If any patients come, tell them I shan't be able to see them till the morning. Good-by."

Betty was going out to pay some calls. As the wife of New Hamptown's most popular doctor she had many social engagements. The people of New Hamptown had taken her very warmly to their hearts, for Betty had an irresistible charm quite apart from her beauty. Howard and his bride bade fair to be a most sought-after couple.

She had donned a new gown of black silk. Patent-leather shoes, with silver buckles, adorned her feet, and a wide-brimmed black hat with a royal-blue plume completed a most becoming ensemble.

As she was about to leave the house she remembered that, while descending the stairs, she had heard the doctor's bell. Perhaps it was a patient. She went quickly along the corridor that led to the office and opened the waiting-room door.

For a moment a shaft of brilliant sunshine from the open window dazzled her. Then she became accustomed to the glare and was able to see a man sitting just beneath the window, his cap on the floor beside him.

He was a big man in shabby tweeds. His shoes were down at the heel and broken. He might at some time have been handsome and have laid claim to that much-abused title of gentleman. But upon his features vice had left its unmistakable mark. The dark eyes were shifty, the full lips loose, the skin yellow and unhealthy.

As Betty Parsons looked at him, every drop of color drained from her face. Her body grew tense, and in the wide eyes inexpressible horror dawned. Neither Betty nor the man spoke. They just stared at each other.



"You!" Betty whispered at length.
 "You—after all these years!"

She closed the door and leaned against it, her breath coming in labored gasps.

"You!" she whispered at length, hoarsely. "You—after all these years!"

The man had recovered from his astonishment, and was once more master of himself and the situation. An ugly leer disfigured his coarse mouth.

"Good Lord, Betty!" He would have touched her, but with a fierce gesture she struck his hand away.

"Don't come any nearer, you beast," she said between clenched teeth.

At the passionate scorn and hatred in her voice the ugly leer turned into a snarl.

"So you are going to ride the high horse, my dear. Why? What harm

have I done you?" He tried to make his tones conciliating.

Betty was perfectly gowned, evidently prosperous, and Dick Finch was ever on the lookout for the main chance.

"What harm have you done me?" she retorted bitterly. "You married me, that was all—turned my silly head with your flattery, and made me believe you cared for me, a mere child of sixteen. On the day they took you to prison as a bigamist—the day I learned that you had deceived me, that I was a wife, yet not a wife—I became a woman, a woman who had touched the very depths of shame and despair. That's what you did for me, Dick Finch. Isn't it enough?"

The man had the sensitiveness to

blush. His shifty eyes could not meet the blaze in those of the woman whose life he had wrecked.

"Betty, I didn't know the other woman was alive," he burst out. "I swear I didn't."

"That is a lie," she corrected sharply. "You forget I read the case in the papers. I knew then that you were simply a scoundrel who had tricked me, deliberately made me your latest victim. So I went away, changed my name, and tried to forget that horrible part of my life."

"Then I turn up like a bad penny, just when you have succeeded," he replied cynically. He looked her up and down in an insolent, appraising fashion. "You have evidently fallen on your feet. What are you doing in this house, by the way?"

"I am Doctor Parsons' wife," Betty answered, and she couldn't keep the thrill of pride out of her voice.

A crafty expression crept into the man's eyes. Doctor Parsons' wife! Doctor Parsons was a man of money and position. He knew all about the popular young doctor. He had taken lodgings with a woman in the town, and it was on her behalf that he had called this afternoon. Her husband was sick with bronchitis, and she wanted the doctor to call.

Betty was married to this doctor! His Betty, who had worn his ring, and believed herself his wife. It opened up big possibilities to this man who had no honor, no decency. He came a trifle nearer, and a new, menacing note was in his tones.

"Don't suppose the doctor would like the idea of his wife having been mixed up in a bigamy affair," he said meaningly.

Betty shut her eyes. Her teeth closed hard on her lower lip. Then she looked up at him defiantly.

"Are you going to tell him?" she demanded.

"Not if you pay me to hold my tongue."

"Blackmail!"

"An ugly word."

A bigamist, a blackmailer! Suddenly she covered her face with her trembling hands. Her body shook, but no tears relieved the awful tension of her mind. At length she raised her head, but all the defiance had died out of her. She looked infinitely tired, beaten, a woman broken in the storm of life.

"How much do you want?" she asked wearily.

"As much as I can get."

She opened the door and closed it carefully behind her. Then she went quietly up the stairs and to her own room. Her husband had insisted on opening a bank account in her name, and he never questioned how she spent the money.

She sat down in front of her desk. She would write out a check payable to Finch. Then she thought that that would not be wise. She opened a drawer and took out five bills. That would keep him quiet until she could draw some more from the bank to-morrow.

She went back to the waiting room. He counted the money over when she thrust it into his hands.

"I'm sick of this part of the country," he said. "Let me have five hundred dollars. I'll clear out and you won't be worried with my turning up again."

"Very well," she said. "Meet me in the village to-morrow after dark, and I'll bring it."

"Right! I'll be there." He stuffed the bills into his pocket, then was gone.

As he passed along the path to the gate he encountered Miss Goldsmith coming in, and stood aside for her to pass.

She glanced at him curiously. Then she went on into the house. The doctor had made up a bottle of medicine for her neuralgia, and told her he'd leave it on the waiting-room mantelpiece.

She sniffed thoughtfully. Mixed with the faint odor of disinfectant was the perfume that Howard Parsons had got from Paris for his wife.

Miss Goldsmith stooped. On the floor was a white suede glove—Betty's glove.

Had she been entertaining the tramp-like individual who had just left the house? Probably he was just a patient who had been interviewed by Mrs. Parsons because the doctor was out. That was the most natural explanation of the incident. But when one woman is always watching for something to give another away, she rarely puts the most obvious explanation to occurrences, but tries to probe beneath the surface for some hidden motive.

Upstairs Betty Parsons was on her knees by the cot in which little Gloria took her afternoon nap. The child was peacefully sleeping. Betty's face was tortured and her hands were tightly clasped. She was the actress who was Gloria's mother. Gloria was her child, and the child of the man who was a blackmailer and a bigamist. That was her secret. It was for this tiny mite that she had struggled and often starved.

"He must never know," she muttered to herself, but she wasn't thinking of Howard Parsons. She was thinking of that hardened villain, Dick Finch. She knew that little Gloria would be but an added lever in his hands to wring money from her.

Betty was sitting up for Doctor Parsons, for she knew that she could not sleep. The house was silent. The servants and Miss Goldsmith had gone to bed.

The young wife paced restlessly up and down the floor of the drawing-room. Her feet sank softly into the deep pile of the velvet carpet. The lights were shaded with primrose silk shades. Everything had an air of luxury.

Usually this room filled her with delight. Howard Parsons had had it en-

tirely refurnished and redecorated for her. But she was not thinking of the beauty of her home, the comfortable security of her position as Howard's wife. She was thinking of Howard.

Dare she tell him everything—would he understand?

It was anguish to think of losing him. She could see condemnation and disgust in those eyes that had always held love and tenderness. The sordid shame of her story overwhelmed her. Dare she fling herself upon his mercy? Suppose the affair leaked out in New Hamptown? What would those people who had received her into their homes as an honored guest say if they knew that she had been the victim of a scoundrel who had married her when he had a wife living? If they knew that she had a child—a child who had no name?

No! At any cost, she must buy Richard Finch's silence—for Howard's sake. And Gloria, for whom she had suffered so much, must she face the world with the stigma of her birth always upon her?

"I can't tell him," Betty moaned aloud in her anguish.

She flung herself on to the divan and burst into a storm of weeping.

When Howard Parsons let himself in quietly, just after midnight, he found his wife fast asleep.

"Poor little woman, tired out with waiting for me," he thought. He picked her up and carried her to her room. She just stirred in his arms, her eyes opened, she smiled at him dreamily, then the heavy lids drooped once more.

The case that was causing Doctor Parsons so much anxiety was a critical operation. He went off directly after dinner the next evening.

"Don't wait up for me to-night," he told his wife before he left the house.

"I can't have you losing your beauty sleep, you know," he teased.

He noticed that his wife was pale, with heavy shadows beneath her eyes.

When he kissed her she did not return his kiss with her usual loving ardor. As he got into his car he was conscious of a strange chill.

How was he to know that Betty's heart was racked with pain, that she had tortured herself into thinking that she was unfit to touch his lips with hers?

She had drawn the money from the bank. When her husband's car had swept through the gates at the end of the short drive she went upstairs to her room. Her evening dress was white, so she put over it a long, dark cloak, and wound a black chiffon scarf around her head. She left the house by way of a side door that led out to the garden.

The sky was overcast, and the wind was rising as she hurried through a wicket gate and sped quickly along the road on her way to the village.

She had not gone far when a dark form emerged into the path in front of her. A little scream left her lips.

The man was Finch, and he gave a low laugh.

"Conscience makes cowards of us all," he quoted softly.

"If you had had any conscience I should not be here now," she said bitterly.

"I admit, dear Betty, that conscience is something that has never troubled me," he replied suavely.

She held a bulky envelope toward him.

"Here is the money. And I hope I may never see your face again," she said fiercely.

He laughed again, and there was mockery in the sound. He counted the bills, then carefully placed them in a worn wallet which he stuffed deep into his pocket.

"All correct, my dear Betty. So I suppose this is good-by." A mocking light was in his shifty eyes.

In her hurry, the fastening of her cloak had come undone. By the light of the moon he saw the gleam of her white flesh, the beauty of her hair.

The sight of her loveliness sent a sudden swift message to his senses. His pulses leaped as they had done six years ago when he had first met her.

"You didn't hate me six years ago, Betty," he said thickly.

She backed away from him in fear and disgust. He caught her arms and held them, irresistibly drawing her nearer and nearer, until her soft, red lips were just beneath his own. Then, fiercely, passionately, she struggled until he had to let her go.

Neither of them had heard the slight swish of Miss Goldsmith's skirts as she came through the path from the village, where she had been spending the evening with friends.

Once released from those hateful hands, Betty sped along the path toward home.

The man gave a short, angry laugh, then he shrugged his shoulders and slouched off in the opposite direction.

He passed close to Miss Goldsmith, but he didn't see her standing in the shadow of a tree, still as a sentinel, a queer light in her eyes. She recognized him instantly as the man whom she had seen leaving the doctor's waiting room. As she made her way homeward she was smiling to herself triumphantly.

Had Howard Parsons guessed that Miss Goldsmith was head over heels in love with him, he would certainly not have recommended Betty to engage her as Gloria's nurse.

Miss Goldsmith was not the type to wear her heart on her sleeve, and so the doctor had always found her conscientious, capable, and pleasant.

When he was particularly busy she helped him dispense his medicine, for he made up all his own prescriptions. This evening they were working late in his office.

He had never been an observant man as far as women's looks were concerned. Betty was the first girl to make him

realize her beauty. But it dawned upon him as Miss Goldsmith bent over a table measuring different medicines that she looked very nice in her spotless blue gown and snowy apron and cap. In spite of its severity, the cap had a softening effect on the long, pale face.

Her eyes were darkened to-night by

they suggested cruelty—hands that would have used the knife ruthlessly.

"Miss Goldsmith, you ought to have been a surgeon," he said with a smile. "You've just the fingers."

A flush crept over the pallor of her skin. She spread out her hands and inspected them.



"You didn't hate me six years ago, Betty," the man said thickly. He caught her arms and held them, irresistibly drawing her nearer and nearer.

some inward excitement. He found himself wondering idly why she had not yet married, and if she were engaged. She was at least twenty-eight. She was rather a secretive person, he thought. The long, slim hands moving among the bottles were white and well shaped, yet in some indescribable way

"Do you think so, Doctor Parsons? I should like to be a surgeon."

"You are not squeamish, Miss Goldsmith," he said. "Now I can't imagine my wife taking up the career of medicine or surgery. She hates to kill a fly." His tones always subtly altered and softened when he spoke of Betty.

The woman's eyes narrowed and her expression was not good to see.

"Sometimes those who wield the knife are more merciful than the ones who are too cowardly to do so," she said quickly. "A cancer must be cut out or it spreads."

Something in her tones, in that queer look on her face, arrested his attention. He was conscious of a feeling of chilliness.

Catherine Goldsmith was looking straight at him now.

"I came home through the woods last night, doctor," she went on slowly. "I saw your wife there."

"Well?" he rapped out sharply.

"She was talking to a man who called here the day you were detained so long at that bad case. I passed him leaving the waiting room."

Howard Parsons stared at her blankly. At what was she hinting? Betty had not told him of the visit of any man to his office while he was away. But then, Betty was not in the habit of seeing his patients or attending to the doctor's bell, and the servant might have forgotten. But Betty had met this man in the open.

"Just what are you inferring?" he demanded.

Her tall, straight form was taut. Her eyes blazed with undisguised hatred. Her features were convulsed.

"I never trusted Mrs. Parsons," she said. "I always knew there was something queer about her. Women have instincts about each other, and I had the feeling that she wasn't—good. I determined to watch her."

"The day this man called I found her glove in the room adjoining the waiting room, and the place was filled with the perfume she uses. Then I saw her in the path leading to the village. Her head was covered with a scarf and she wore a black coat, as though she wanted to hide herself from the eyes of those who knew her. What was your wife doing meeting a strange man after dark? What was she doing in his arms? Your

wife was an actress before you married her, and actresses are a funny lot."

The man had listened without saying a word. His arms were folded and his face was terrible in its fury. But the nurse was beyond noticing the warning signs of his wrath. She was carried away by her own hatred of Betty Parsons.

"Why did you consider it necessary to watch my wife?" the doctor asked calmly. "What business is it of yours what she does—whom she meets?"

Miss Goldsmith gripped his arm with her trembling hands.

"I felt that she had fooled you," she said, "and I couldn't bear it. Howard, don't you understand? I couldn't bear it." Her voice choked.

His face set into even grimmer lines, and in his steely eyes there was not a spark of pity. His hand closed on hers and he thrust her unceremoniously aside. He went to his desk and pulled open a drawer, from which he took a check book. Rapidly he wrote, then came back to where she was standing, a dazed expression on her white, drawn face.

He held the check toward her.

"Your month's wages instead of notice! You will kindly pack your belongings and leave this house within an hour." Then he added sternly: "I warn you, if it comes to my ears that you have said one scandalous thing regarding my wife, I will have you punished with the utmost rigor of the law."

Miss Goldsmith gazed at him in utter consternation. She was bewildered, completely at a loss.

She had gloated over her discovery of Betty's meeting with the strange man in the woods. In imagination she had seen her hated rival driven in disgrace from her home by her outraged husband. She had seen herself, Catherine Goldsmith, reigning in triumph in Betty's place, taking charge of Gloria and the household. She had even gone so far as to foresee a sensational divorce, in which she fig-

ured as a prominent witness. Instead she was being dismissed.

A dull, ugly flush stole over her skin. She glared furiously at Howard, then snatched the check from his hand and swept from the room.

When he was alone, Howard sat down by his desk and leaned his head on his hands. He looked strangely haggard. Who was this mysterious man who had come to the house when he was out, whom Betty had met after dark? He did not doubt Catherine Goldsmith's story of the meeting. He was a keen student of human nature, and her tale, told from motives of malice and jealousy, had yet rung true. But Betty in this man's arms—no, he couldn't believe that.

She had been different lately. Try as he would to tell himself it was not so, deep down in his heart he knew that his wife had changed. There surged over him a veritable tornado of mad, unreasoning jealousy. This man who had taken her in his arms—was he a lover out of that past of which he—Howard—knew nothing?

Great beads of moisture started out on his forehead. Betty, his lady of the roses, untrue! He sprang to his feet. He must have this thing out with Betty at once. He strode out of the room and along the corridor to the hall. As he reached it the telephone bell tinkled shrilly. It was an urgent call to an automobile accident that had occurred just outside the town. There was no time now to stop for explanations. Duty called him, and he must obey the summons.

It was after eleven when he returned, and to his surprise a number of lights were blazing from the windows. A sudden sharp fear assailed him—what had happened in his absence?

Instead of taking the car around to the garage, he sprang out in front of the house. Simultaneously the door was

thrown open, and Betty stood on the threshold, her eyes wide with fear.

"Howard, Howard!" she gasped. "Thank Heaven you've come home. Gloria——" She choked over the name.

He followed her inside, closing the door behind them. "What's the matter with the child?" he asked curtly.

"I don't know what it is. She can hardly swallow. She keeps moaning and she's hot, oh, terribly, terribly hot."

Betty's lips were working piteously. She had been so full of her tragedy, of the fear that her husband would discover her miserable secret, that she had not noticed that Gloria had been far from well, and now the child's illness had come upon her with the suddenness of a blow.

He was frowning as he mounted the stairs two at a time. There was a lot of diphtheria in New England.

Betty followed him as quickly as her trembling limbs would allow.

"Miss Goldsmith has gone," she explained. "Stephen said she got a taxi and took her luggage. I was around at the Pattersons' playing bridge, but Simpson told me when I came in at ten o'clock. It was wicked of her to go and leave Gloria alone. Why did she do it?"

"I discharged Miss Goldsmith," Doctor Parsons said curtly.

They had reached the landing outside Gloria's door. Betty stared up at her husband's set, masklike face. Involuntarily a low cry left her lips.

What did Howard know?

He went into the bedroom with its nursery paper, its dwarf furniture of white enamel, and its gay-colored, washable rugs on the floor.

By the small white bed sat the cook, a kindly, motherly woman who worshiped "Miss Gloria."

He nodded to her, then stood looking down at the little one. As he watched that flushed face and held the tiny, burning hand in his, his expression grew grave.

He gave the woman a few curt instructions that sent her to his office for things he needed.

At last, fearfully, Betty crept into the room and to his side.

"Is she very ill?" she whispered. He nodded his head without speaking.

She caught his arm in panic.

"What—what is it?" she breathed.

"Wait! I am going to make a thorough examination."

A gleam of pity came into his eyes as he saw how completely unnerved she was, how ill she looked herself.

"I've sent the cook for what I want. She'll be here in a moment. Go downstairs; I'll come to you."

She leaned over the bed, gazing down hungrily at the child who tossed and moaned so piteously. Then with a sob she turned away and groped blindly for the door.

When her husband found her a little later in the drawing-room, she was sitting shivering in a chair. He dropped wearily into one opposite her.

"Well?" she asked tensely.

He had leaned back and closed his eyes.

"It's diphtheria," he said gravely. "She has no constitution. These poor little children belonging to stage people rarely have. I'm afraid it'll go hard with her."

He had spoken frankly to his wife. He had not softened the blow. To him Gloria was a dear child, and he loved all children. But she was not his child, so his attitude was not that of a father.

A cry rent the air. Betty had sprung from her seat. She stood swaying before him, her face distorted with anguish, her hands flung out toward him in an attitude of utter abandonment. Then she crumpled up at his feet.

"Howard, Howard, you must save her!" she cried. "My baby, my baby!" She broke into wild, terrible weeping.

His face was gray as he caught her by the shoulders and thrust her back until

he could see her distorted, tear-stained face.

"Your child?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes, Howard," she answered. "My baby, mine. I will tell you my story—I tried to hide it from you. I tried to hide it from the world—I was so ashamed. But now I must speak. When I was sixteen I went on the stage. I had no father or mother, no one to care what became of me, and I was hungry for love. I met Richard Finch. He was handsome, a gentleman, and I was too young to know that he was a scoundrel. I was dazzled, infatuated. I married him.

"Then a few weeks after our wedding he was arrested for bigamy. He had married me while he already had a wife, and I found out from the papers that he had known all along that she was living. I fled while he was in prison, changed my name—and then Gloria was born. After that, life was one long struggle. Sometimes I had a good engagement, sometimes I couldn't get work, and we nearly starved, my baby and I. Gloria lived with my landlady while I was on the road.

"Then I met you, Howard," her voice quivered piteously. "For the first time I knew the wonder of a good man's love. I married you and kept silent—that was my sin. You remember I warned you that you knew nothing of my past."

"And this man?" Howard broke in harshly.

"I never set eyes on him from the day he was arrested until two weeks ago, when he came here and recognized me. When he heard I was your wife he demanded money for his silence. I met him near the village and gave him five hundred dollars to keep him quiet. Now you know all."

She sank lower onto the floor.

"And this is my punishment—that perhaps I may lose her." She buried her face in her hands.

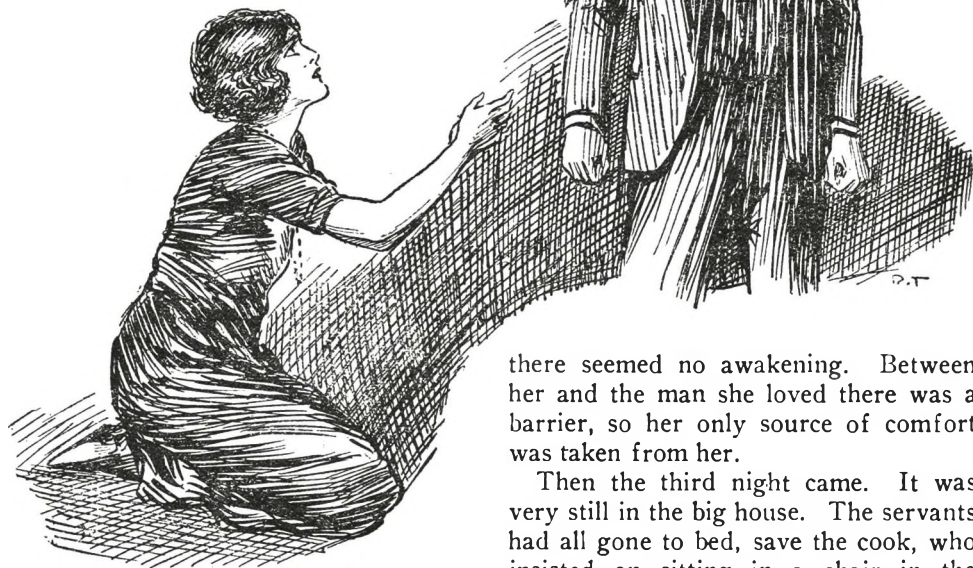
For a time the man sat staring straight before him, gazing at the ruins of his dream kingdom—that kingdom where his wonderful lady of the roses had reigned as queen.

She cowered at his feet, a poor, broken creature, a victim of man's diabolical wickedness, and the mother of the nameless child who was fighting for existence in the room upstairs.

Heavily he rose to his feet. She looked up at him fearfully, then she caught desperately at his hand.

"Howard, what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to fight for Gloria's life," he told her quietly and went out of the room.



"Howard, Howard, you must save her," Betty cried. "My baby, my baby!"

All through the night they watched by the bedside of the little girl—the woman who had borne her in shame and suffering, and the man who meant to use every ounce of skill that he possessed to save her if it were humanly possible.

The next day he arranged with a fellow medical man to take on his serious cases and the rest had to go to the wall. He never left the sick room except to snatch a hasty meal.

He and Betty scarcely spoke. She moved like one in a dream, an ugly dream of misery and fear from which

there seemed no awakening. Between her and the man she loved there was a barrier, so her only source of comfort was taken from her.

Then the third night came. It was very still in the big house. The servants had all gone to bed, save the cook, who insisted on sitting in a chair in the kitchen and dozing there, ready to wake for any emergency. A trained nurse had been engaged, but she, too, had gone to her room to snatch a little rest.

Howard Parsons sat on one side of the bed, and, crouching in a low chair on the other side, was Betty. Her hair lay on her shoulders, and her face had the pathetic wistfulness of a child's. The man's eyes were shaded with his hand.

Although she didn't know it, he was watching her, and he felt a keen pang of infinite bitterness.

She looked so young, so innocent and frail. But she had deceived him, deceived him even as that scoundrel Finch had deceived her. She had brought this child into his house, lied about it—her child, whom she had passed off as a stranger's. How could he trust her again? The man who had called her wife, a wife who was no wife, stood between them, a sinister ghost.

The man's head sank lower. He was weighted down with his own unhappy thoughts.

A movement on the bed roused him. Gloria, who for hours now had been lying in coma, moved.

Howard bent over her, and the harsh lines of pain about his mouth softened into a smile. He took the little hand in his, and its coldness struck chill. The fever had left her, but she was so weak that hope died in his heart as he watched her.

Betty was tense, rigid, an expression of agonized anxiety in her tortured eyes. She rose and went to the other side of the bed, her mouth quivering piteously. Her baby was conscious. The cruel fever that had come between Gloria and those around her had cleared away. She would know them again, know her mother who had yearned over her.

Betty tried to speak, but her lips trembled too much to frame the words of endearment she longed to utter. But Gloria wasn't looking at her, the shadowy mother who had come and gone in her baby life, who had so often cried and been sad, that the little one had been half frightened of her. She was looking at the man who had been the only father she had ever known, who had romped with her like a schoolboy, who had bought her a pony of her own, and who, in return, she had grown to worship with a doglike devotion.

She sat up, her tiny arms outflung.

"Daddy," she whispered in the piteous hoarseness that was all her poor throat could utter. The man caught and held her. Her poor little body lay sheltered in his arms, and her sunny head fell against his breast.

Thus the spirit of Gloria fled on the wings of love to that land where a Saviour waits for little children.

She had gone with the name on her lips that Howard Parsons had taught her to call him—daddy.

The mother stood swaying weakly from side to side, her eyes glazed with misery, her empty arms falling limply to her sides.

Betty Parsons stood in her darkened bedroom.

The tiny white coffin that had contained all that was mortal of her child had been taken to its last resting place under the shade of a leafy tree in a corner of the cemetery.

Betty couldn't bear to raise the blinds and let in the sunshine. Its brightness hurt too much.

After the funeral Howard had been called away to an urgent case, and she was quite alone save for the servants.

She had not been idle. She had packed the few belongings that she had brought with her from the land of stage-dom. The beautiful clothes and the jewels her husband had given her she had left untouched.

She was going away, unknown to him, away from the security of a well-ordered, luxurious home, out into the world once more to begin that fight that sometimes in the past had almost broken her.

Now she was quite alone. She was leaving the tiny soul for whom she had worked and planned behind in the cemetery.

Presently she crossed the corridor to a room that had once echoed to a child's prattle. She dropped to her knees beside the white cot.



Gloria sat up, her tiny arms outflung. "Daddy," she whispered in the piteous hoarseness that was all her poor throat could utter.

"My baby, my little baby," she moaned, and the tears ran down her cheeks. At last she dragged herself to her feet, and went back to her room. She gave one last lingering look around. Over a chair hung one of Howard's coats, and on the dressing table lay his cigarette case.

"Howard," she whispered longingly to the empty air. Then with a sob she picked up her bag and moved toward the door. She knew that it was the only thing to do—to go away. Richard Finch had come between her and happiness. To Howard she was no longer his lady of the roses; she was the bigamous wife of another man. With figure drooping and head bent, she groped her way out of the room, and out of the house.

Howard Parsons could never look back upon that time, after Betty disappeared, without a shudder. It was not until he lost her that he realized all she had meant to him. She had been the mainspring of his existence, and his inspiration. She had devoted all her time and energy to making him happy, studying his every wish, lavishing upon him her gratitude for all he had done for her.

Without her the house seemed a grave, and Gloria, too, was gone. He missed her sorely, but the loss of Betty lay deeper. It was like the loss of part of himself—the better, finer part. Then the demon of jealousy stirred in him. He remembered Miss Goldsmith's words—that she had seen Betty in Richard

Finch's arms. Howard Parsons was maddened by the thought that she had gone back to the other man.

Returning home late one night he saw the shadowy figure of a man peering through one of the windows on the ground floor. He went up behind him quietly. Before the other was aware of his nearness he had pounced upon him and swung him around.

He stared into the unshaven face of the man he held in his grip.

"What are you doing, hanging around here?" he asked sharply.

An evil glint had come into the other's shifty eyes, and his loose lips twisted into a sneer.

"I suppose you are the doctor?" he asked, and there was no trace of fear about him.

Howard released his hold, his expression grim.

"I am Doctor Parsons," he said quietly. "What do you want me for?"

"I don't want you," the other growled. "It's your wife I'd like to have a chat with."

It flashed across the other's mind that this was Richard Finch, the blackmailing bigamist!

The doctor's jaw jutted out aggressively.

"Come this way," he said. He led the man around to his office, unlocked the door, and took him into the waiting room. He switched on the light. "Now, then, what is your business with my wife?" he demanded.

Nonchalantly the man stuck his hands into his trouser pockets and replied.

"I'll tell her that when I see her."

"Then you won't tell her in this house, for she's gone."

Consternation flashed into those shifty, furtive eyes.

"Gone!" he repeated incredulously. Then he laughed. "I don't believe you."

"You can please yourself about that, but it's true. She left me the day after your child was buried. I have not seen

or heard of her since." Looking into the doctor's stern face, Finch knew he was speaking the truth.

The man's loose lips hung agape. He passed his hand dazedly across his forehead.

"A child," he muttered. He dropped into a chair and stared straight before him. "Then there was a child."

"Yes," the doctor's voice went on inexorably. "There was a child for whom Betty starved and suffered. When she married me and at last gained a little happiness, a little security, you came and tortured her with your threats of exposure—you blackmailed her. I suppose you came to-night because the money she gave you has been spent. You came to extort more from her, you scoundrel."

He caught him by the shoulder and dragged him down the passage, thrust open the outer door, and hurled him into the night.

In less than a week a substitute had taken charge of Doctor Parsons' practice, and Howard had started off to search for his wife. She had not gone back to Finch. He had wronged her in thinking that. She was out in the world somewhere alone, struggling—his lady of the roses. He knew that, in spite of everything, he loved her, he wanted her, and that he would not rest until he had found her and brought her home.

Betty Parsons sat at her solitary breakfast in a combination bed-sitting room in a tiny house in Maine.

She was playing at the local theater in a third-rate chorus. For several weeks she had not received her full salary. She was expecting at any minute to be told that the tour would have to end. She hardly cared; nothing seemed to count now she had lost everything that mattered.

Her cheeks had lost their perfect outlines, and she was pitifully thin. There were shadows beneath her eyes.

Listlessly she opened the pages of

the morning paper that her landlady had kindly brought her with her breakfast. She glanced through the news. A paragraph caught and held her attention. Her face whitened, her eyes dilated. The paragraph ran:

A man by the name of Richard Finch was accidentally shot dead while trying to escape the police, who were attempting to arrest him on a charge of burglary.

The paper dropped from Betty's nerveless fingers.

So Dick Finch was dead, had died as he had lived—shamefully. She shivered, and her thoughts went to that tiny grave in the quiet cemetery. It was better that she lay there sleeping—the child of this man.

Betty's head went forward onto her clasped hands. At last she rose from the table, put on her hat, and went out. She walked away from the ugly little mill town and out into the country that lay beyond. That paragraph had brought it all back so vividly. The shame and misery and the bitterness of her loss.

She sat on a stile that divided a field from the railway line. Her head ached intolerably. She took off her hat, and the sun turned her hair to molten copper. She rested her head against a tree that grew beside the stile, and closed her eyes.

A train thundered by. A man in the Pullman, staring out of the window at a flying landscape, saw her sitting there. He leaned out and cried a name, but the clanging of the wheels drowned his voice and the train bore him inexorably on.

That night the theater was almost empty. Betty tried to put a little life

into her singing. It was a terrible effort. The shadow of the past was upon her.

Every one was in the depths. If business didn't become better, the whole show would soon break up.

In the middle of the last act a man quietly slipped into a seat in the dress circle. The man was Howard Parsons. Later he was waiting for her outside the stage door.

"Betty!"

It was just a husky whisper, but it reached her ears. She stopped, and her heart was thudding madly against her breast. The next moment she was in his arms, strained to him as though he were afraid she might fade out of his sight.

"I've wanted you so, sweetheart," he told her huskily.

"And I you, Howard. I've been so lonely." Then at length: "He's dead."

Howard didn't ask who—he knew. He nodded.

"I read of it in the paper this morning."

He caught her in his arms again and kissed her upon the lips.

The ghost of Dick Finch was gone forever.

Betty and her husband stood by the tiny grave in the quiet cemetery. Their hands were filled with flowers. Betty leaned against her husband, and his arm went protectingly around her. Presently she lifted her face, and it glowed with a wonderful light.

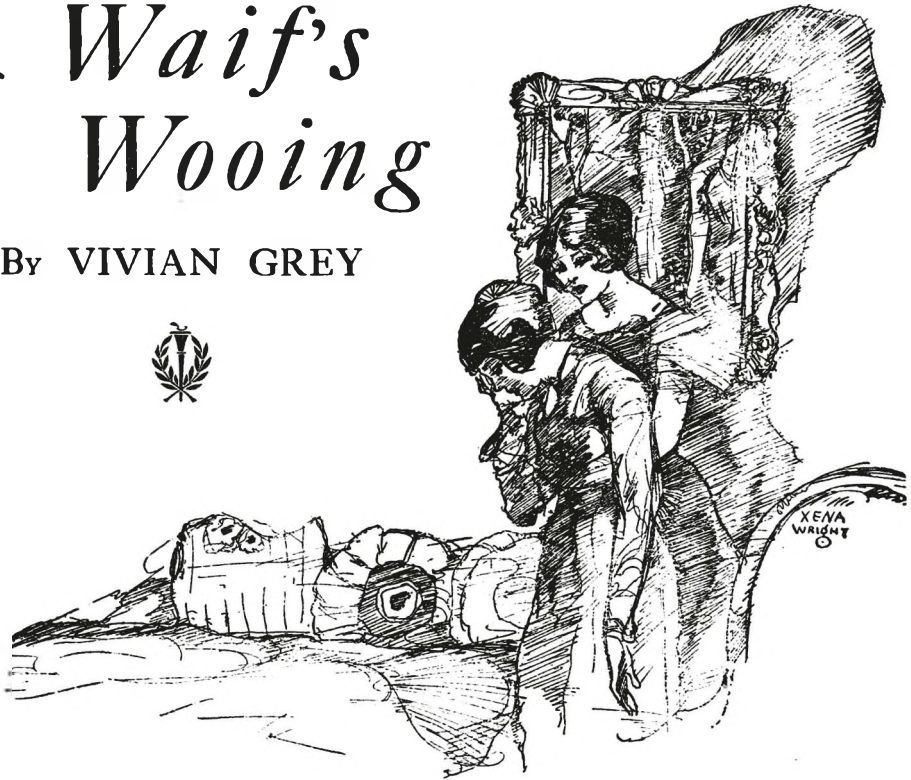
"Soon, Howard, soon we will have a little baby of our own. Yours and mine."

"My darling wife," he whispered reverently and, stooping, kissed her.



A Waif's Wooing

By VIVIAN GREY



CHAPTER I.

BBUBBLES" whirled in the middle of the narrow, dingy street, to the strains of a piano-organ—a slender figure, in spite of her ugly, patched shoes and ill-fitting, much-mended blouse, that had obviously been made for some one a great deal stouter than she was.

Gathered in doorways were the inhabitants of Orchard Street, forming as appreciative an audience of her gyrations as any in a theater applauding a highly salaried "star." Even the organ grinder smiled admiringly as he rattled out the "Russian Rag" over and over again, and watched Bubbles, whose red curls bobbing round her impudent little face had earned her her name. No one knew that her real one was Barbara except her aunt, and she had almost forgotten it.

The girl was a favorite among the poverty-stricken, hard-working denizens of Orchard Street, in spite of an amazing and unheard-of fastidiousness.

It was a matter of general knowledge that Bubbles washed her face every day—she had even done it twice, on occasions—and the glowing curls were ruthlessly scrubbed every Sunday morning, and dried at the open window of the room that sheltered Mrs. Osborne and the niece who had known no other mother.

Whenever an organ appeared in Orchard Street, Bubbles danced and sang, gay as a lark, light as thistledown. No matter how tired she might be after the long day at the factory where she worked so industriously, she was always ready to oblige. She was dancing solely for little Billy Walters, who sat, propped up by a collection of cats, at the ground-

floor window of No. 70, recovering as best he could from a broken leg.

The hospital was full, so Billy had perforce remained in the close room that served the entire family as home. Quite a considerable part of Bubbles' wages and spare time had gone to the lad, who openly adored her.

The sun had decided to shine before retiring for the night, lighting Bubbles' red hair as she danced untiringly. She looked a mere child as she poised on her toes, though, in reality, she was nearly seventeen.

Being Saturday afternoon, Orchard Street wore an air of leisure. Later on the housewives would betake themselves to the stands and bargain cleverly for meat and vegetables that must be sold cheaply, since they would not keep over Sunday.

Most of them managed a Sunday dinner of some sort. The small baker's shop at the corner did a brisk trade, baking queer-looking odds and ends for its customers.

"Say, Bubbles, w're's yer auntie?" one of the women asked, as the dancer paused for breath.

"Out scrubbing," the girl returned; "scrubbing some offices. It means a bit extra. I'd a-gone if she'd told me."

"Reckon you've done a-plenty, turning out that there room of yourn again! New curtings, too!"—with an envious glance at the gayly patterned chintz at the open window above.

"Can't stand dirt!" Bubbles said briefly. "I got that stuff off an old man for a few pennies. Billy, you shall have a good fill out to-morrow, maybe, and a plate of roast beef. Auntie and me, we're going to treat ourselves to a spread out of that extra she'll make. Now then, mister, what are you giving us next?"—turning to the willing organ grinder, as she tucked in the end of her too voluminous blouse.

Most of the other girls spent their scanty extras on finery, to which

feminine allure Bubbles seemed indifferent, preferring such strange things as curtains that could easily be dispensed with.

"Let's have 'Little Gray Home in the West,'" a chorus of voices suggested. "You sing it lovely, Bubbles!"

As the sentimental words rang out on the damp air, a man passing paused almost involuntarily, forcing his companion to do the same. They were obviously of a different class from the denizens of this shoddy neighborhood, wearing expensive clothes of an unimpeachable cut.

"By George! What wonderful hair that child has got!" Basil Densmore said admiringly. "And her voice, too, is amazingly good!"

"I don't see or hear anything uncommon in a ginger-haired, ragged brat squalling!" shrugged his companion ill-temperedly. "For goodness' sake push on, Basil! We are late as it is! Where on earth did you tell the car to wait for us?"

"There is no hurry, just for the moment!" Captain Densmore returned smiling. "That little girl's voice is worth listening to!"

"Her excruciating accent is all I hear!" Horace Underwood shrugged scornful shoulders. He hated the East Side, with its bustle, noise, and dirt. The rushing, clanging trains, the shabby crowds who jostled his well-fed person, were all offensive and nerve-racking.

It was, of course, exactly like his cousin to bring him to such an impossible part, on a wild-goose chase regarding the illness of a butler too old for his job, who ought to have been sacked months ago. But since Basil was rich and influential, his whims must be looked on with a tolerant eye. It was only poor mortals like himself who had to make martyrs of themselves by out-raging delicate susceptibilities which Basil seemed entirely to lack. He,

Horace Underwood, ought to have had the money, not Basil, who had no idea how to enjoy it. Just because he happened to be the offspring of Grandfather Densmore's son, he had been made rich for life, while the far more deserving son of the old man's daughter had nothing, and was dependent on what Basil chose to give him—Basil, who had absurd notions regarding work, and actually seemed to enjoy making a slave of himself to the business.

Horace Underwood loathed work of any sort. Grumbling incessantly when Basil could not hear him, he reluctantly filled the position of manager to his more fortunate cousin at an—in his opinion—absurdly inadequate salary.

Shivering in the damp air, he looked malevolently at the younger man.

"Do we stay here all the afternoon?" he demanded. "Must I remind you it's mail day for China? Here, give the kid a dollar, and come along!"

As he spoke he drew out a dollar, and flung it at Bubbles' feet just as she came to the end of her song.

The coin struck one of the patched shoes, startling the amateur performer.

She looked up sharply and saw them standing there. Her blue eyes went first to Basil's handsome, clean-shaven face, then to Horace, supercilious and dandified. Stooping, she snatched up the money and sprang forward.

"Say, mister," she said coolly, "you dropped this," holding out her small brown hand, on which the money gleamed.

"That's all right, little girl," Horace said magnificently, waving a white, well-manicured hand. "It's for you."

"Well, I don't want it. You can keep yer money. I was a-doing it for Billy—not charity."

She thrust the offending silver scornfully into his hand. A titter ran round the watchers in the doorways. Horace colored angrily.

"She's an ill-mannered child. I was

a fool to take any notice of her," he fumed.

Bubbles' gaze met Basil's. What a prince among men he was, standing there smiling so kindly and understandingly. She had never seen any one like him before, save at a distance. She had heard about grand gentlemen, and read of them in newspapers, with bated breath and shining eyes. Billy Walters possessed a torn book of fairy tales, and every story had a prince or king in it. This surely must be one of them come to life, dressed like other folks, and yet looking quite different.

"We enjoyed both your dancing and singing," Basil said soothingly, as he would have spoken to a child.

"'Tain't nothing," Bubbles said apologetically. "I often does it. Billy gets tired o' sitting still."

"Well, Basil, I am cold. I insist on returning to the office. The atmosphere of this dirty hole makes me sick," Horace cried, turning his back on Bubbles.

"It's yer mouth wants washing out!" she retorted. "Dirty hole yourself!"

"Hush!" Basil put a reproving hand on her shoulder. "That is rude."

"He was rude first!" the girl cried. Captain Densmore laughed.

"He did not intend to be. He meant to show his appreciation of your dancing." He patted her cheek amusedly, and followed his disgusted companion.

In the high road the luxurious car was waiting, the chauffeur talking to a group of merry factory girls, who were admiring his smart uniform. At sight of his master the man sprang to attention, coloring a little guiltily.

"We are rather late, Holt," Basil said. "Get us back as quickly as you can."

"Yes, sir."

"That was a very pretty child with a saucy tongue," Basil declared mischievously.

"A dirty, impertinent brat," fumed Horace. "We've wasted twenty minutes in that filthy place."

"You are not usually so anxious to get back to the office," was the quiet, significant answer. More than once he had been forced to insist that his manager should not exceed the allotted hour for his luncheon. The warehouse was always busy, for the trade built up so painstakingly by old Reuben Densmore had never been more flourishing than in Basil's capable hands.

"You can be quite sure I would never put another foot in the office if it were mine," Horace retorted. "Had I been in your place I should have sold it, and enjoyed myself."

"I've been brought up to like work. The idle life of a rich society man wouldn't suit me," was the brief answer. "Good heavens! We've run over her!"

The car jerked violently. A loud, terrified shout burst from the startled chauffeur. There was a crash, followed by a sickening jolt, as the car grated to a standstill.

In the roadway lay a woman's figure.

Instantly Basil was on his feet. He bent over her, a crowd gathering like magic.

"'Twasn't the chauffeur's fault," two workmen declared loudly. "We saw the whole thing. The poor creature dashed right across, never giving a look to where she was going, bang under his front wheels. We're ready to swear to that. He did all he could—clapped on his brakes—most knocked down a lamp-post trying to miss her, but it weren't no good."

Basil made no answer. With the assistance of a policeman he was rendering what aid he could to the unconscious victim.

"Not much use, sir, I'm afraid. She's a goner. Hit on the head, if I'm not mistaken. I've sent for the ambulance."

"I wouldn't have had such a thing happen for the world. My man is a most careful driver." Basil was white and shaken.

"She ran right under the car. There's plenty of witnesses to that."

"I will take her at once to the nearest hospital."

"No need. Here's the ambulance. You can follow. I'll take your name and address and all particulars."

"I must take a taxi and go home," Horace Underwood declared. "I am fearfully upset. I cannot endure such sights. The wretched woman has only herself to blame." He turned away without further ceremony, leaving Basil to do his best to reassure the distressed Holt.

At the hospital the house surgeon shook his head.

"She was dead when they got her here," he said. "Any idea who she is?"

"Not the least. But I must find out, of course, and tell her people."

"A respectable woman. Poor enough, I should imagine. Here is her bag. Perhaps we shall find an address. Here you are. This postcard will no doubt give us the information we want. It's addressed to 77 Orchard Street. A constable can go to the place."

"No, certainly not. I will go myself. Naturally I shall see that her relatives do not suffer—do all I can for them. Poor woman! It was all over so quickly. I never even saw her."

"Pull yourself together. It's sad, but it was purely an accident," the doctor sighed. He had so many such incidents in the course of his busy life. Very little of what was joyful and happy came his way.

Basil went slowly down the broad stone staircase to break the bad news to his anxious chauffeur. Calling a taxi, he sent the man home, with a few kind, reassuring words.

"It was not due to any carelessness on your part, Holt. Try not to think of it. The whole unfortunate matter was just an accident."

"Thank you, sir." Holt's muffled voice was grateful.

"Go home and rest. I shall not require you for a day or two."

Accompanied by a policeman, he drove his car himself in search of the dead woman's home.

"Seventy-seven Orchard Street. I've seen the name somewhere before," he observed, as they threaded their way in and out of the streets.

"Not very likely, sir. It's at the end of the high road, up this way," directed his blue-clad companion. "That's the place across there, sir. The whole street wants pulling down and rebuilding."

"Why, how extraordinary! I was here only an hour ago!" Basil exclaimed, as he recognized the scene of Bubbles' dance.

"Here, you kids, which is 77?" asked the constable.

A small boy pointed with a grubby forefinger.

"Yonder," he said, his eyes round with fearful curiosity.

CHAPTER II.

Bubbles moved about the small room more quietly than was her custom. For once she was silent. The gay song usually on her lips had given place to a sober thoughtfulness.

She was going over the brief little episode of the afternoon, recalling the appearance of Basil and his cousin.

"There ain't many as handsome as him!" Bubbles muttered.

This somewhat cryptic appellation referred to Captain Densmore, since she had taken a violent and instant dislike to Horace Underwood.

"He's like my picshure," she added, her blue eyes roving to the top part of an old calendar that hung over the well-scrubbed ancient table, where was depicted a bold cavalier of Charles II's reign, with flowing curls and sweeping plumes.

"Auntie's late," the girl went on, glancing round to make sure all her preparations were complete—the table

spread with a rough, clean cloth; the quarter in the gas meter, all ready to start the frying of two sausages reposing in the frying pan. "Come in, whoever you are!" she called out cheerfully, as a tap sounded on the door.

It opened to admit a youth in rough working clothes, whose loud-checked cap was pulled down over a thick lock of oiled hair.

"Hello! Wot's brought you along, Jim Willet?" she demanded.

"Goin' to the movies—coming?" Jim asked tersely.

Bubbles shook her head decidedly, causing the red curls to dance wildly.

"Thank yer all the same," she ended.

Jim Willet was, according to Orchard Street ideas, sober and industrious, earning good wages and putting a bit by every week. Bubbles found herself wondering why he should look quite different, less attractive altogether, as he stood by the open door.

"Haven't had grub yet," the girl added cheerfully. "Auntie's busy, I expect."

"I'll wait," offered Jim.

"Won't do a bit o' good. Got a lot of work to do," Bubbles insisted.

She would have died rather than admit even to her innermost heart that he compared most unfavorably with the great gentleman whom she had seen for only a few minutes.

"'Nother evening," was Jim's gruff farewell, as he slouched out of the room and down the stairs.

In the narrow passage he found Basil, looking doubtfully around, behind him the policeman.

"Miss Osborne lives here, I believe? Are you a relative of hers?" he asked.

Jim achieved what was, for him, a brilliant answer.

"Not yet, I ain't," he said. "She's out"—jerking his thumb toward the street.

"I know." Basil hesitated. "I—er—I wish to see her relations."

Jim scowled. What did this good-looking swell want? And a copper, too!

"Top floor—front!" he flung at them.

His unready tongue could not find the words to ask what had brought them there. He sought the street, lingering doubtfully, unwilling to go on his way, conscious of a curious feeling of calamity. In Orchard Street the appearance of a constable always led to trouble.

Basil stumbled up the dark stairs. He drew a breath of relief as he neared the top story of this overpopulated house, where children screamed and men and women quarreled incessantly.

Bubbles' door was wide open; she was peering eagerly out.

"Why, auntie I thought somethin' had happened——"

The words died on her red lips as the tall, great-coated figure advanced. Instantly she recognized him, and her heart began to beat furiously. What had brought him here, the man of whom her thoughts were still full?

"Miss Osborne?" the young man said interrogatively.

He, too, had recognized the girl before him as the child who had danced so gayly an hour before.

"My auntie—she's out still. I thought you was her," Bubbles explained. Then she added diffidently: "That's my name, too."

"I see." Captain Densmore sought vainly for words. "You—she lives here?"

"There's only the two of us—auntie and me."

Wildly, the unhappy bearer of bad news racked his brain. How to break it to this eager-faced child, staring at him with parted lips and anxious eyes?

"My poor little one——" he began feebly.

"Something has happened to auntie?" she said, her voice shrill with apprehension, catching sight of the sinister figure in the background.

"She—she is hurt—badly hurt."

He was stammering and incoherent in his anxiety to spare her.

"You don't mean as she's dead—my auntie?" Bubbles' voice was frantic with fear. "No, no; she can't be! She's all I got in the world!"

His kind heart aching with pity, he put his arm about the heaving shoulders.

"Child, your poor aunt did not suffer; it was instantaneous."

Tenderly and briefly he gave an account of what had happened.

"My chauffeur is broken up over it; it was not his fault. Your aunt——"

"Oh, auntie, auntie, wot will I do without you?"

Tears came with a rush. She sobbed wildly on Captain Densmore's shoulder, sobbing until she was exhausted. He held her patiently, tirelessly, venturing to whisper a word or two of comfort. It was best she should cry. When at last she was quiet he spoke softly.

"Don't be afraid. I will see you do not suffer, that your future is safe. It is my part to look after your welfare."

She lifted her ruffled head.

"Yer can't bring her back, wotever yer does. Oh, auntie, auntie! Take me to her, mister."

"Certainly I will; only try to pull yourself together. Of course, it is a dreadful shock."

"I was getting the grub," wailed poor Bubbles, beating her hands together.

The policeman had gone down to the floor below, where he held a whispered conversation with the stout, red-faced woman, who was the Osbornes' nearest neighbor. She at once enveloped the sobbing girl in her ample embrace.

"There, there! Have yer cry out. I'll take care of her, sir, till things is settled. It's Mother Clark, Bubbles duck. We'll go along together to the horspital. She was fond of her auntie, sir, and a better woman never stepped."

"I'm sure of it. I cannot say how

distressed I am. How old is the child?" asked Basil.

"She's no child," Mrs. Clark returned, vigorously patting the girl in her arms; "most on seventeen. Been earnin' her living this long time."

"She looks very much younger."

Basil's voice was slightly dismayed. It was one thing to undertake the charge of a girl of fourteen, but what on earth could he do with one considerably older, in experience as well as years?

"I'll see to her, don't you fear, sir," were Mrs. Clark's last words, when at last he felt himself free to return to his own comfortable bachelor rooms in a quiet West Side street.

Tired and depressed by the unfortunate occurrence of the afternoon, Basil tried to eat the simple but appetizing dinner that was awaiting him, but he found his appetite was not equal to it.

The moment the pretense of a meal was over, he decided to make a call on the girl he loved and meant to marry, though he had as yet said no word of his intentions.

Honore Dillingham had been the capable mistress of her father's palatial establishment ever since she left school. Tall and dark, with perfectly chiseled features, she seemed Basil's ideal of all a woman ought to be.

She did all things well—was, in fact, highly finished in every possible way, with charming manners, and a large circle of carefully chosen friends. She possessed a sufficient fortune of her own to allow her to marry a poor man, did she so desire.

This chilly autumn evening Honore was sitting alone by a blazing log fire, clad in a soft white dress trimmed with fur. She refused to allow the pursuit of pleasure to become a treadmill, and made a point of spending many evenings quietly at home with one, or, perhaps, two chosen friends, but more often alone with her father.

Her smooth, pale face warmed to rose

when Basil was shown in, and she held out her hand, on which glittered several almost priceless gems.

"Why, Basil, you look upset! What is the matter?" she asked. "Sit down and tell me! Father has gone to a committee meeting; he won't be in for an hour yet."

He obeyed readily, looking across to where she sat listening, a gracious figure in gleaming satin.

"What a dreadful thing to happen!" the soft voice said. "This orphan girl—of course, something must be done for her. You can depend on me to help you—you know that?"

"Yes," he answered. "I knew you would. I thought of sending her to a good school, but—"

Honore shook a wise head.

"My dear Basil, she's only a slum girl, after all. School would be quite unnecessary; it would do her more harm than good. A factory girl, you say? Pretty, too? This is what I suggest. I will have her here, and train her as a personal maid. She will be happier and better looked after than in any factory. You can trust her to me?"—smiling.

"I certainly can. It is awfully decent of you to bother. You see, I feel responsible. She has no one in the world left, and to give her money does not seem to meet the case."

"Quite right. I am sure my plan will be the best all round. If she is a willing girl, she'll learn very soon. It will be an advance in life for her. As I told you, Spiller is leaving to be married. I was dreading a new maid. No doubt she will agree to help me train this little protégée of yours before she goes; then she can take Spiller's place and become my personal maid."

"This poor, forlorn girl will be only too glad to grasp the opportunity you offer her!" Basil declared warmly, as he took his leave, comforted and reassured. Honore always had an answer for every problem, he thought, as he



"What a dreadful thing to happen!" the soft voice said. "This orphan girl—of course, something must be done for her."

strode away. He would be a fortunate man if he won her for a wife. Honore's husband would be heartily envied by the unlucky ones she had refused. Though Honore never boasted, he knew she had had many chances of marrying well.

CHAPTER III.

The funeral was over. Bubbles, arrayed in aggressively new and very unbecoming black, wept forlornly in the stuffy interior of the only mourning coach. Mrs. Osborne had been laid to rest under circumstances that struck Orchard Street dumb with admiration and envy. Basil himself had attended, accompanying poor Bubbles and standing beside the grave.

"Don't cry any more. You will make yourself ill," he said kindly. "Mrs. Clark promised to have tea ready when we get back. When you have had something to eat, I will tell you the plan I have made for your future."

He dried her eyes on his own im-

maculate handkerchief, privately wondering if such masses of rustling crape as adorned Bubbles' small person were really necessary.

"I reckon I can get along," the girl sobbed stormily.

"Oh, but you must let me help you, after all that has happened. I've already spoken to one of my friends, and she has offered to take you to live with her."

"Will you be there?" she asked bluntly.

"Of course!"—cheerfully. Naturally the poor little soul felt lonely and anxious to see a friendly face. "I often go to Miss Dillingham's, and I know you will be happy there."

"Dunno as I want ter go," the free denizen of the New York streets returned doubtfully. The merest hint of restraint was unpleasant. "Can't I live at your place? I could work fer you."

"Quite impossible, I'm afraid," he returned, with an air of one humoring

a child. "Anyhow, give the other a trial; we'll do something else if you don't like it. I'll call for you in the car tomorrow and take you there."

Bubbles raised candid eyes to his.

"You've been that good to me," she murmured gratefully.

"Who would not be under the circumstances?" he returned warmly.

"I'll go, if you say so," she went on.

Already she was trying to correct her faults of speech and manner, to copy the way Captain Densmore spoke. He seemed more godlike than ever in the position of comforter. To step down from the heights he occupied to help her! Her heart beat faster as she thought of all he had done.

"Miss Dillingham wants to train you as her maid. It will not be nearly such hard work as the factory, and you will be in a different world."

Bubbles' next question literally took his breath away.

"Will she make me a lady?"

"I—er—that depends on yourself, doesn't it?" stammered the young man.

"'At's right, you said it," the girl answered, relapsing into the vernacular, as they drew up at Orchard Street.

If Basil could have read his companion's thoughts he would have been considerably dismayed. The most modest and unassuming of men, he had no idea that this waif and stray, flung on his hands so unexpectedly, looked upon him with something very like adoration while she listened to his grave, kind voice explaining all Miss Dillingham intended to do.

"I'm sure you will do your best," Basil ended.

"I'll do it, 'cause you say so," returned Bubbles, "and if you want me to go, promise as I can see you."

"Of course you shall. I shall be anxious to hear how you progress. This—er—furniture shall be sold, and the money put in the bank till you want it. Anyway you wish to keep——"

"There's nothin' 'cept auntie's work-box and them chiny ornaments. I like 'em—they're fine."

Bubbles nodded toward a fearsome pair of green-and-blue vases, with unnatural-looking roses on them.

"They wos my mother's," she explained simply, "and I don' know how to thank you, Mister Densmore."

"You have nothing to thank me for," he asserted hastily, heartily relieved that everything had worked out so well.

"It is just like you, Basil, you are so kind! But why did you not ask me to take your protégée? I should have been delighted."

Harriette Underwood looked at her cousin reproachfully, making good use of her really fine eyes.

"Oh, it just happened I was telling Miss Dillingham about Bubbles, and she offered——"

"Bubbles! What an absurd name! What is her real one?" Harriette asked, biting her thin, reddened lips.

"I've no notion. I dare say Honore—Miss Dillingham, will find out." He colored at his slip, and wished again that he had been able to decline his cousin's pressing invitation to dinner.

The big, square dining room, with the heavy mahogany furniture of their grandfather's time, was warm and bright, but the food was badly cooked, the old-fashioned silver poorly cleaned. Harriette never kept a servant more than a month or two. She scorned domesticity, scolding shrewishly for faults which were the result of her own lack of supervision.

"If you go about adopting all the slum brats in the neighborhood, you'll have a large family," grumbled Horace.

"There is no question of adoption," Basil said quietly. "I am merely seeing that this girl is started in a life less wearing than the one she has been living."

"Let's hope Honore Dillingham won't

spoil her, then," Harriette chimed in, settling her many bangles with a vindictive jingle. "You would have been wiser to ask my aid, Basil. I thoroughly understand the training of young girls of that class."

"Do you?"

He looked at her curiously. Harriette's undoubted good looks did not in the least appeal to him; he was blissfully ignorant of her intention to become his wife.

Feeling that he had done his duty, Basil bade his cousins good night, and left them to talk him over to their hearts' content.

"That Honore Dillingham is a prying, pushful cat!" Harriette exclaimed angrily. "Basil ought to have come to me. She's doing all she can to catch him!"

"You'd better hurry up if you want him yourself," Horace remarked significantly. "You know as well as I do what his marriage will mean to us. Just our luck he wasn't killed in France! Why should he have it all just because he happens to be the son of our mother's eldest brother? It ought to have been divided!"

"I have heard all that dozens of times before!" snapped Harriette, who kept her manners for outsiders only. "It wasn't, so we must just do our best to get what we can."

"Basil will be a fool if he marries you!" were Horace's parting words as he sought his study.

Bubbles was waiting when Basil reached Orchard Street, pale and heavy-eyed, sitting in the bare, familiar attic that had been her home as long as she could remember anything. Mrs. Clark had tactfully retired to her own quarters, and only appeared to bid her temporary charge good-by.

With her few belongings tied up in an old cardboard hat box, Bubbles took her seat in the car, and in silence they drove to the Dillinghams' fine house.

"Here we are!" Basil said. "Don't be afraid, child."

"I ain't." She flung up her red head, determined not to show her surprise at the size of this new home.

In the pretty drawing-room Honore was waiting for them, serene and beautiful in her white gown and pearls, which, simple as they were, dazzled Bubbles.

"So this is my new little maid," Honore said kindly. "My dear, what is your name?"

"Bubbles."

"Bubbles! What a queer name!" Honore went on. "Have you no other?"

"Barbara Osborne. But I won't be called nothing but Bubbles!" was the emphatic announcement.

"Very well." Honore's voice was gentle. Later on there would be plenty of time to persuade this astonishingly beautiful girl to be reasonable. "I hope you will be very happy with us. My present maid has been with us for years, and she will show you exactly what you have to do. I am sure you will soon learn. Ah, here is Spiller! She will take you to your room and see that you have supper."

Bubbles looked at the smartly dressed maid who stood waiting, then at Basil.

"Shan't I see you again?" she asked.

"Why, yes! Probably to-morrow." He smiled reassuringly down at her.

Swallowing a lump in her throat, Bubbles marched out of the room.

Alone with Honore, Basil moved across to her side.

"What do you think of her?" he asked.

"Better than I expected. Quite likely to turn out a treasure. You have done your duty nobly, Basil."

"Nonsense! Honore, how shall I thank you? You know—you must know what I feel. But now I want to ask you still another favor. Dearest, I love you with all my heart! Will you be my wife?"

She caught her breath. Oh, if he only knew how she had longed for this moment! Her face was transfigured as she held out her hands.

"Basil——" Emotion choked her utterance. Alarmed, he bent over her.

"You do not—you cannot mean that you are trying to tell me you do not care?" he cried.

"Care, Basil? My darling, I love you—more than I can ever tell you!"

"Sweetheart! My own!" He caught her to him, and laid his lips on hers in a long kiss that seemed as though it would never end. Honore, utterly content, lay in his arms. He was hers at last. He loved her, as she had always prayed he would. Nothing else mattered.

Left alone, Bubbles began to wonder if Captain Densmore had gone.

"I'd like to slip down and have a peep at him. It'd be a comfort," muttered Bubbles, sitting up and listening intently. "And no one would know. I guess I will, too!"

Bubbles successfully negotiated a flight of softly carpeted stairs. Before her was a half-open door. She caught the murmur of voices. Peering through the curtains, she saw Basil.

Honore was in his arms. He was kissing her over and over again. There was no mistaking their relationship.

She dropped the velvet curtain and flew upstairs again and hurried into her bed, drawing the clothes over her head.

"It's her he loves!" she murmured, in a broken-hearted, sobbing breath, and was conscious of a fierce pain in her very heart at the knowledge. "It's her he loves!"

CHAPTER IV.

Bubbles, having sobbed herself to sleep, awoke to a new and strange world the following morning, her head as heavy as her heart, the result of travel and disturbed slumber. Spiller, rousing her charge, made no remark con-

cerning red-rimmed eyes and tear-blotched face. The new maid was only a child, and naturally homesick, she decided wisely.

"Up you get!" she cried briskly. "It's seven o'clock. Dress quickly. You've got to come along with me when I take up Miss Honore's tea and letters. It'll learn you quickest," she said kindly.

Bubbles sat up and looked round.

Spiller, arrayed in a plain black dress, with muslin collar and cuffs, and a small apron of the same transparent material, her taffy-colored, tightly curled locks hidden by a solid black velvet bow, was the very perfection of a lady's maid.

"Put on that print dress and apron!" she commanded briskly. "You'll wear the same as the housemaids to begin with. See you pin them curls of yours back tight and tidy—a fair mop, they are!" with a disapproving glance.

Bubbles, splashing in clear, cold water, felt considerably better after her ablutions. Her new life had begun. Orchard Street and poverty were left behind forever. She donned the neat uniform, and reluctantly fastened her beautiful hair out of sight beneath the starched cap. But try how she would, she could not keep her thoughts from the scene of the night before.

Captain Densmore, the splendid prince who had stepped so suddenly into her life, loved Miss Dillingham. They would be married. She, the little slum girl, must stand aside and see their devotion. Tears threatened again, but she forced them back, and made her way to the servants' hall, where a fire blazed, and good things loaded the table, presided over by the stout, good-humored cook. There was no lack of creature comforts. As she warmed her chilled hands she thought of the factory where, at this hour, she would have been beginning her hard day's work, after a sparse meal of bread and margarine and weak tea, eaten hurriedly to allow for "tidying up" before she left home.

Seated round the bountifully spread table were what seemed to the newcomer dozens of strangers, who presently sorted themselves out into a stately butler, two footmen, three housemaids, the cook, and her attendant kitchen and scullery maids, who, with Mr. Dillingham's valet and Spiller, comprised the domestic staff. A vast army to wait on two people, thought Bubbles, eating with appetite.

"You'll soon get used to it, deary," the cook said, nodding a wise head. "Miss Dillingham sees we do plenty of work, but she's fair and kind. There's a deal to be said for good service, I always say."

Spiller, her meal finished, was deftly setting an elegantly spread tray with wafer bread and butter and a tiny rose-wreathed teapot that matched the cup and saucer.

"Come along, Bubbles—an outlandish name you've got!—it's just on half past eight. Miss Honore likes to be called on the stroke, and her tea must be just so—she's particular," she explained.

"My! Is that all she gets for her breakfast?" inquired the learner, with eyes full of pity for the recipient of so scanty a meal.

"This is early tea. Breakfast comes at half past nine. Mr. Cleves—he takes up Mr. Dillingham's"—nodding toward a second identical tray.

"You can depend on me to give Miss Bubbles a helping hand when you've gone, Miss Spiller," the valet promised, bowing gallantly.

"She'll have learned how to get on without help by then," retorted Spiller. "Put them letters here."

Bubbles bit her lip. On the top of Honore's correspondence lay a square, gray envelope, addressed in Captain Densmore's clear writing. She knew it by heart, having read and re-read the one brief, kind note he had written to her. She had secretly resolved to model her own illiterate scrawl on his.

Writing to Miss Honore, and he'd only left the house a few hours ago! Fierce, primitive jealousy seized her. She stifled a desire to tear the letter to shreds. Honore was a lady, rich, with everything in the world she wanted, waited on hand and foot, while she, Bubbles, had had no advantages, just because she was poor.

"But I'll make myself the sort he likes," the poor child muttered passionately. "I'll work—I'll copy wot she says."

In Honore's luxurious bedroom everything was white even the thick carpet. The girl from Orchard Street could only stare as she obediently noted Spiller's ministrations to Honore. Clad in a delicate lace cap and dainty wrap, she was a being from another world.

"She'll do, Miss Honore," was Spiller's private summing up of the new maid, "with a lot of training and telling. I'm taking her round to have lessons at the hairdresser's as you said. She's not as handy with her needle as I'd like to see, but I reckon the poor thing has not had much chance"—shaking her neat head.

"I have no doubt that by the time you leave she'll be quite expert. Captain Densmore"—blushing again—"is so anxious she should settle down nicely. For the present we will call her Bubbles"—smiling over Spiller's objections to the fanciful name.

That afternoon came Basil, ardent and tender, armed with the all-important ring. He remembered to ask to see his protégée.

"To make sure you haven't killed her with kindness, darling," he said, smiling tenderly at Honore, more beautiful than ever in her new happiness.

Bubbles, summoned to the drawing-room, stood awkwardly just inside the door, and looked so changed, wearing her white cap and apron, that he hardly recognized her. The lovely little face was rose-red with excited anticipation.

She had been longing to see her hero again. She would not tell how irksome she found the unusual restrictions of the new life he had chosen for her.

"Miss Dillingham tells me you are a most promising pupil, Bubbles," he said approvingly, "and that you are settling down wonderfully. I am so glad to hear it! I shall hope to hear great things of your progress."

"I'll do my best," gulped Bubbles. "I want to learn all I can—quick—to please you."

"That's a good girl! Since Miss Dillingham is the most indulgent of mistresses, I'm sure you will have plenty of time to improve your mind. Oh, here is your savings-bank book. I have put the money your aunt's furniture realized to your credit." He did not tell her he had added twenty dollars to the tiny nest egg.

For a moment the girl lingered, her throat swelling. She wanted to tell him her impressions of this amazing change in her fortunes. It had been quite easy to talk to him in her own humble home; here there was a desolating barrier. The words would not come—with Honore Dillingham standing by her future husband, smiling at her.

"That will do, Bubbles," Honore said gently. "Captain Densmore knows how grateful you are for all he has done for you, and that you will do your best to repay him by working well."

"Thank you!" Bubbles cast a last desperate glance at Basil, then stumbled from the room, closing the door abruptly.

She rushed to her room, choking back sobs, leaving her disapproving mentor to retire with what dignity she could.

She smoothed the untidy curls with a brush dipped in water; then, tidy and composed, made her way downstairs, choosing, in her ignorance, the front staircase.

On the landing above the drawing-room Bubbles paused. The butler was

crossing the hall below to open the front door to a visitor. Afraid to be seen until the coast was clear, she peered through the banisters.

A woman's high-pitched voice was borne to her quick ears. A tall, fashionably dressed lady stood in the door. She seemed very much at home, Bubbles thought wistfully.

"All right, Saunders!" Bubbles heard her say. "I know your mistress is in. Don't trouble to announce me. I'll run up alone. My cousin is here."

"Captain Densmore is in the drawing-room with Miss Dillingham, madam."

"It's all right. They are expecting me," Miss Underwood said, boldly and glibly.

"Very good, madam!"

Saunders hastened back to the servant's parlor and the paper; the green-baize door swung to behind his stately figure with a soft slam. Harriette ran noiselessly up the broad, shallow stairs.

Basil had been here a ridiculously long time; she had seen his car nearly an hour and a half ago, when passing the top of the road on her way to the dress-maker's. She would insist on his driving her back. She told herself, anyway, she intended to call on Honore and see this new maid, and try to persuade her that it would be better to let the girl come to Bayside. Since Basil took an interest in her, he would make a point of seeing how she fared, and to get him to her house as often as possible was Harriette's desire.

Unconscious of the watchful eyes above, the visitor paused at the top of the first flight of stairs.

Bubbles, her red head pressed against the banisters, surveyed her critically, and decided that she did not like the bold, handsome face beneath the velvet hat.

The drawing-room door was closed. Harriette, with a hasty glance over her shoulder, bent down, and deliberately put her ear to the keyhole.

Bubbles stared for a second, unable to believe her eyes. This grandly dressed lady was a spy, trying to find out something. She just was not going to!

Harriette, crouching on the bearskin, was amazedly conscious of a small tornado as she was flung forward into the drawing-room on all fours by Bubbles dashing the door open with a crash.

"She's listening!" she cried scornfully, standing, a small figure of vengeance, over the prostrate eavesdropper. "I saw her!"

"Harriette!" exclaimed Basil, starting, as well as he might, at his discomfited relative.

"Bubbles"—Honore turned to the girl, amazed and startled—"what does this mean?"

"She had her ear to the keyhole, listening to wot you was saying! I saw her! I was coming down, so I just put a stopper on it, Miss Dillingham!" exclaimed Bubbles, glaring at her victim.

Miss Underwood, her plumed hat pushed over one eye, her bag and its contents scattered on the floor, was a sorry figure indeed as she scrambled to her feet with Captain Densmore's assistance.

"I was stooping to tie my shoe, when, without a moment's warning, this creature knocked me over! Most disgraceful behavior!" she stammered.

"That's a lie!" Bubbles retorted loudly. "I came down soft behind her and opened the door sudden, and she went over slap on her face! And serves her right!"

Harriette turned to Honore, recovering her self-possession.

"I merely told Saunders I'd run up—that he need not trouble to announce me. At the top of the stairs I saw my shoe was untied. I stooped to fasten it, and——"

"Pooh!" jeered Bubbles, pointing scornfully. "Your shoe is buttoned!"

"That will do, Bubbles! Tell Saunders to bring more tea. Sit down, Harriette. Basil, have you picked up her bag?"

Miss Dillingham controlled her laughter with difficulty. Bubbles, retiring obediently, paused for a second outside the closed door, shaking with mirth.

"Put a spoke in her wheel! Lord, she was took aback!" she said, resuming her journey toward the servants' hall.

Honore was apologizing as best she could.

"I am afraid Bubbles is rather impetuous. She has yet to learn how to behave. You must make allowances, Harriette. We have great hopes of Basil's protégée."

"Is that the girl? A regular hooligan!" was the sour reply. "She will indeed require a firm hand. It is just as well Basil did not ask me to take her. I have no doubt she is a thief as well as a liar! I trust my money is all there! Such a shock! I declare I feel quite faint! A most unheard-of thing to do!"

"Come up to my room and rearrange your hat. Bubbles will learn wisdom and manners in time," Honore said, with the air of one refusing to discuss the matter, and making the best of an awkward situation.

She privately felt certain that Miss Underwood was more than capable of eavesdropping.

Basil was obviously vexed. In his heart he, too, had no doubt but that Harriette had stooped to eavesdrop. He smiled grimly as he thought of Bubbles' impetuous action. Just the sort of thing she would do. He feared Honore would have her hands full in subduing such tendencies.

With coiffure and hat restored, Harriette accepted tea and buttered buns.

"Basil told me this impossible slum girl was a mere child; she is grown up!"

—acidly. "Surely very foolish to have anything to do with her—liable to make people gossip, I should imagine!"

"Nonsense!" Honore's eyes flashed, though she smiled. "I will not allow you to say such things of my future husband!"

The other woman's cup nearly dropped from her hands.

"Do you mean," she said slowly and with difficulty, "that you—he——"

"Honore is to be my wife!" the young man put in quietly, taking his fiancée's hand. "Congratulate me on my good fortune, cousin Harriette!"

Cousin Harriette sat very still. Horace was right, after all. Her own arts had miserably failed. Basil's marriage would be a disaster. Naturally, he would have children to succeed to his money, and she and her brother would lose their last chance of obtaining it. If she had only managed to win him, how different their prospects would be!

She forced her pale lips to speak the words required, smiled stiffly and unnaturally.

"I am not a bit surprised. I could see Honore meant to carry you off!" she said, with playful vindictiveness. "Horace said only the other day that he wondered how long it would be before your engagement was given out."

She took her leave as soon as possible, to break the bad news to her brother.

CHAPTER V.

"You really are a marvel, Bubbles!" Honore, sitting before her dressing table, smiled at the big, beveled glass wherein was reflected the figure of her attendant, absorbed in the task of waving her mistress' hair.

"Yes, miss?" Bubbles paused inquiringly, brush in hand. "You mean——"

"That I have never come across any one who learns as rapidly as you do! I really hardly miss Spiller at all; you are so clever!"

"Thank you, miss!" Bubbles smiled. "I do try hard!"

"And you succeed!" Miss Dillingham said emphatically. "Your appearance, too——"

She broke off, and gazed thoughtfully at the black-clad figure beside her. Bubbles' dress fitted her slim form perfectly; collar, cuffs, and apron were as dainty as it was possible to be; the glowing red hair, no longer short, was pinned up beneath a coquettish black bow. Never had lady a more attractive attendant. Honore congratulated herself on having secured such a treasure. It seemed incredible that only three months ago the girl had been a denizen of Orchard Street. Honore knew of and encouraged Bubbles' evening classes, where she studied diligently in the many hours her mistress was dining out or dancing till dawn. Spiller's pupil had indeed been an apt one.

"You like this life here? You are happy?" Miss Dillingham went on.

The electric light flashed on the diamonds in Basil's ring that adorned her left hand, and Bubbles caught her breath in a sigh.

"Yes, indeed I do! You have been very kind! I'm so glad I please you! I want to improve—get on—rise!"

"How much higher do you want to get?" Honore smiled, amused at the girl's earnestness. "As my maid, you will always be sure of good wages, many concessions——"

"I—I wasn't thinking of being a maid always!" Bubbles stammered, coloring. "I mean to get higher, Miss Honore."

"That is natural, perhaps. Don't be in a hurry to leave a comfortable certainty for something unknown that promises well, but is probably not so desirable. Of course, you are free to please yourself."

Honore wondered whether pretty, attractive Bubbles was hungering for a more exciting life, and hoped she was not.

"Perhaps you miss your old friends?" she suggested tentatively.

"No, miss, thank you! I've been along to Orchard Street most weeks."

"To see that nice-looking young Willet—eh? There, it's too bad to tease you, child. He is a very old friend."

Bubbles was silent. She had been pleased enough to see Jim when, summoning all his courage, he had called at the big house and asked to see his old playmate. A brief interview with the young man had convinced Honore he was entirely to be trusted to take the girl out. She and Basil together had decided that it would be a very good match—later on, of course, when Bubbles was a little older and they had both saved money.

Jim, indeed! Who would look twice at him?

Oh, if it were only possible to don a beautiful white gown like the one that lay on the bed, and accompany her hero into the wonderful world where Honore reigned a queen! Bubbles knew exactly how nice she would look. Spiller had introduced her to a secondhand clothes dealer, who bought all Honore's cast-off wearing apparel, the perquisite of her maid. At her own respectable establishment Mrs. Lang had let Bubbles "try on" a lovely, pink tulle frock that just fitted her small figure. If Captain Densmore could see her wearing such clothes he would be as surprised and pleased as Mrs. Lang had been. Surely—surely he would admire her?

Bubbles sighed again as she bound the sparkling bandeau across Honore's serene forehead, and fastened the priceless pearls safely about her throat.

"Go to bed early, child; you look tired. We shall be late, I'm afraid," Honore directed, when she was ready to start. Bubbles knew that she and Mr. Dillingham were going to a grand dinner, to which, for once, Captain Densmore was not accompanying them. "You must get out of doors as much

as possible," she insisted. "Fresh air will do you good."

"I go out most days, miss, and I'm never tired."

Bubbles, following downstairs with the sable-trimmed cloak on her arm, almost wished that Honore was not always so kind and thoughtful. It made her feel uncomfortable, since she envied her Basil's love so passionately.

Standing in the hall, she watched the car drive off, starting when Jocelyn, Mr. Dillingham's valet, addressed her.

"What about the movies, Miss Bubbles, and a bite at a little restaurant I know of? Taxi there and back?" he asked.

"No, thank you! I promised to go to the movies with a friend. It's very good of you, Mr. Jocelyn. Take Ada; it's her night off."

She left the disappointed valet to digest her refusal.

She had altered and remade the ugly black garments bought for her aunt's funeral. When she ran up the area steps to join her faithful Jim she looked smart and fashionable in her warm, rough coat, which was of excellent quality.

"I'm sorry to keep you waiting, Jim," she said apologetically.

"I don't mind how long I waits fer you, Bubbles!" her faithful swain returned. "Cook, she asked me in, but them girls fairly scare me."

"Nonsense!"

For some reason she felt annoyed. To be tongue-tied and afraid of half a dozen giggling girls! Why, she had seen Captain Densmore talking to more than that all at once, making them laugh, too! Jim ought to have more sense.

"Billy's half crazed with joy at going to the country. Sure you can 'ford to send him?" Jim asked.

"Quite sure! Why, I don't have nothing—anything to buy! It's all found. Billy'll never get his strength back in Orchard Street. I couldn't sleep

easy thinking of him on that old stretcher bed, full o' lumps. We've all got spring mattresses and feather pillows, with eiderdowns."

"Lap o' luxury!" grunted Jim approvingly.

The movies were an unqualified success. Bubbles loved the sentimental pieces best. There was one all about a girl who first sang in the streets and then in lovely concert halls, making heaps of money, and marrying a duke. Bubbles had no longing for strawberry leaves. All she wanted was—

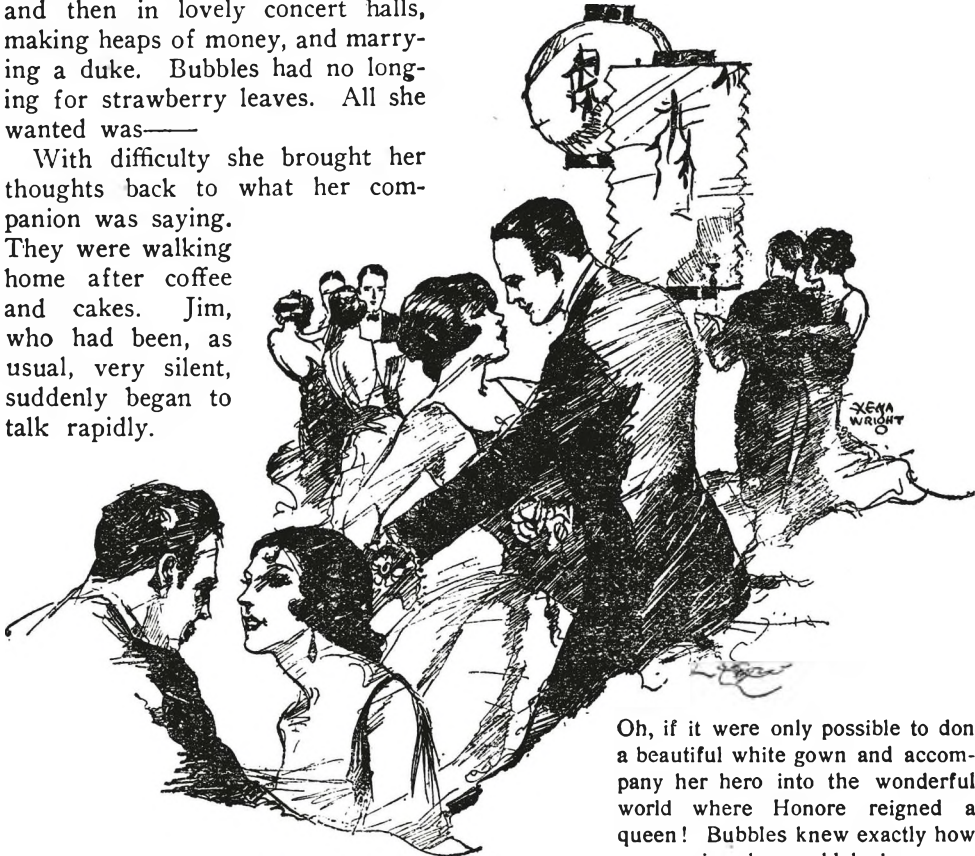
With difficulty she brought her thoughts back to what her companion was saying. They were walking home after coffee and cakes. Jim, who had been, as usual, very silent, suddenly began to talk rapidly.

You'll end by being one o' the bosses, yet."

"P'r'aps," he agreed briefly. They were quite near to the Dillingham house, and he had not yet found words in which to tell her the rest.

Bubbles squeezed his arm. She was very pleased with his success.

"You deserve it!" she asserted.



Oh, if it were only possible to don a beautiful white gown and accompany her hero into the wonderful world where Honore reigned a queen! Bubbles knew exactly how nice she would look.

He was telling her the good news he had been saving up all the evening, and could no longer keep to himself.

"I gotta rise, Bubbles—a good one. They've made me foreman, and th' boss—well, he hinted it wouldn't stop there."

"How splendid!" The girl glowed with pleasure. "Oh, I am glad, Jim!

Jim cleared his throat. The street was very quiet.

"See here," he mumbled. "I—you gotta know, Bubbles, there's no call for you to work as you do—"

"Oh, it's child's play," she laughed.

"There's no call for my wife to do a hand's turn, 'cept in 'er own house."

It was out now. He held his breath

and fingered the cheap little ring he had bought that very afternoon, having had his eye on it for weeks.

Bubbles was thinking again of Basil. She hardly heard what her companion said.

"Your wife will be lucky, I reckon," she said absently.

In her wonderful dream-world, Basil was listening once more to her singing in a room full of costly furniture, she herself wearing white satin.

Jim's voice was close to her ear now, his arm about her.

"I loves yer, Bubbles! You know it, don't you? I allus have. We can git spliced next year. I've a bit saved. We'll have a little home—none of yer instalment furniture—all paid for proper. You shan't want for nothing, darling."

"Me?"

Bubbles came to earth with a crash. Her heart throbbed. Dear, kind old Jim was asking her to marry him.

"Oh, Jim, I'm that sorry! I never thought as you wanted that——"

"Never looked at no one else!" he interposed.

"I can't—oh, I can't! I don't love you! I'm that sorry!"

Jim's ruddy color faded. His slow mind grasped her meaning. His house of cards lay in ruins at his feet.

"There's some one else, maybe?" The man's voice was harsh as he looked at her. "You're a-going to marry another chap?"

"No: I'm not going to marry any one. I'm just going to work and get on, and be a lady."

The words slipped from her un-awares. Her great secret, kept so carefully in the recesses of her heart, was one no longer.

"A lady?" He repeated the words dully. "What d' y' mean?"

"I don't know quite. But I will—I will. I tell you! Why shouldn't I?"

"Why should yer?" he retorted.

"There's something 'at I don't like behind all this. Wot is it?"

"Nothing. It's just that I want to, and I shall, so there!"

Bubbles faced him defiantly, angered by his manner. What right had Jim to speak in such a way, to jeer at her? What a fool she had been not to be more careful, to guard her lips better, to keep her cherished project to herself!

As they stood for a moment beside the lamp outside the Dillingham house, a long, gray car slid noiselessly to the curb, and Basil, in evening dress, his fur-lined coat open, stepped out.

His eyes fell on the pair, and he smiled.

"Good evening, Bubbles! I hardly knew you. You seem to have grown up suddenly."

With a friendly nod he ran up the steps and rang the bell, vanishing inside after a word or two with the butler.

As the door closed Jim seized Bubbles by the wrist.

"So," he hissed, "that's it, is it?"

"That's what? Let me go; you are hurting my wrist!" she cried.

"It's that there fine gent as took you from Orchard Street, you love! Don't say it ain't! I see it writ on yer face. Mark me, I'll kill him before he comes between us!"

CHAPTER VI.

Bubbles made no effort to free herself from Jim's grasp. She stood motionless, staring at her old playmate with eyes that saw nothing.

Kill Basil! Why, Honore would break her heart, and she—Bubbles—would die.

With a great effort she hid her fears and faced the man beside her. In the moonlight Jim Willet's eyes gleamed red and horrible; he was showing all his strong white teeth, like a dog snarling. He had never been taught to control himself—he was a primitive man claiming what he considered his own.

"How—how dare you!" Bubbles whispered furiously. "You've no reason to tell such wicked lies! Captain Densmore—he's been kind, that's all and——"

"It's you 'at lies!" Jim said. He was panting, as though he had been running. "Save yer breath, Bubbles. I saw it on yer face as he spoke to yer—flung the words at you as if you was a dog, and was grateful! Don't you think as I know how a gal looks w'en she loves a chap? I'd die this minute if ye'd look that way at me!"

"Let me go! I won't have nothing more to do——"

Bubbles broke off. If she refused to see Jim again he might wreak his vengeance on an innocent man. It was a situation that required to be handled with the greatest care. Whatever happened Basil must not suffer.

"You are hurting my wrist!" she said plaintively. "Cruel!"

He opened his thick fingers slowly, reluctantly.

"Just see the bruise," Bubbles went on, holding up her arm. "You forget how strong you are!"

"I shan't forget," was the significant answer, "not when I go for him. I love you, Bubbles, and you are mine!"

"I ain't—I ain't! I never give you no reason to think so."

"Leastways, I took it. I love you, Bubbles, that hard it makes me feel mad to think as you don't care. You'll marry me. I tell you I'll kill Captain Densmore if you don't promise!"

"I'll do no such thing!" Bubbles, recovering from her fright, lost her temper. "He's engaged to Miss Honore—they're going to be married."

Jim stood glowering at her.

"If that's true, it's just as well he is!" he growled.

"I hate you!" burst out the frightened, overwrought girl, stamping her foot. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, carrying on in such a way——"

"What's the matter, Bubbles?" Captain Densmore, issuing from the house unseen by the excited pair, was standing beside her. "Can I help you in any way?" he asked quietly, with a level glance at the sullen, lowering Jim.

"No, no!" gasped Bubbles. "Jim and me——"

Jim forced his thick-set figure between them, looking up at Captain Densmore with a threatening air.

"I'm a-telling Bubbles," he said slowly, "as I'll kill any one that comes atween us—any one," he reiterated; "even if it's a fine gentleman with pots o' money!"

"You seem decidedly truculent, Willet—a queer way to win a girl's love," Basil replied. "Is there any suggestion that Bubbles prefers some one else? If so, you will certainly not be permitted to intimidate her. She will please herself."

"Oh, will she?" Jim thrust out his square chin. "She and me, we was walking out long before you butted in. She's going to marry me. You can keep off the grass."

"You mean it is none of my business? But I mean to make it so."

Bubbles interposed hurriedly, scarlet with shame and distress.

"Please, sir, go away. Jim is angry because I told him I wouldn't marry him," she urged.

"I see. Well, you are sure it is all right? He must not be allowed to bully you."

Basil stepped into his car reluctantly, while Bubbles turned toward the steps. Jim laid a detaining hand on her arm.

"I mean what I said! I'll stick to it, Bubbles, mark that!"

With that he slumped away, leaving her to enter the kitchen, flushed and upset.

She managed to gain her own room unseen, and, still in her outdoor things, sat down to think matters over. That Jim Willet should behave so badly and

put his clumsy finger on her sore and aching heart!

"I'd rather tear my eyes out than have any harm come to Captain Densmore!" she cried. "Maybe, when the wedding takes place, Jim will believe what I said."

No doubt her old playmate would cool down. She must do her best to persuade him he was wrong.

Weighted with care, poor Bubbles tried to compose herself to sleep, only to dwell continually on the scene with Jim, to the utter exclusion of rest or slumber.

Jim Willet walked all the way back to Orchard Street with an expression on his face that warned the knowing ones to keep clear. His mother placed a supper before him in silence, and made no comment when he pushed it away untouched. Jim was worse than a wild animal, if crossed, in Mrs. Willet's opinion. She hastily betook herself to bed, and left him to sit over the handful of fire till night was far advanced.

When at last he rose he had come to a decision. He would see Captain Densmore at once.

He clenched and unclenched his formidable fists as he thought over the interview. It would mean the loss of half a day's pay, but that couldn't be helped.

The following afternoon, having, by persistent inquiry, discovered where Reuben Densmore's flourishing tea warehouse was situated, he presented himself in the outer office, and demanded audience of Captain Densmore.

"Out!" said the clerk tersely.

"I'm goin' ter see him, if I wait till midnight," was the instant answer.

"See whom?" a cold voice behind him questioned, as Horace Underwood came forward.

"Captain Densmore is out. This—er—person wishes to see him," explained the clerk.

Mr. Underwood surveyed the caller superciliously.

Knowledge was power. Jim Willet was certainly not a customer. It would perhaps pay him to learn what had brought him here.

"Come this way," he said.

Jim clumped after him into the private office.

"My cousin, Captain Densmore, is out. He will not be back for some time," Horace explained, waving his white, manicured hand toward a seat. "Perhaps I shall do as well, if you will tell me what it is you want?"

"It's Captain Densmore I want," Jim said doggedly, looking round. He felt uneasy and out of his element, but he was not going to let this fine gentleman discover the fact—not he! "I got something to say to him!" he added threateningly. "Your cousin, is he? A nice sort of cousin, I don't think!"

"Oh!" Mr. Underwood looked alert. His instinct had not deceived him; he was about to learn something interesting. What had the saintly Basil been up to?

"So," he said smoothly, "you have a grievance against him?"

Jim spat contemptuously; his wrath was increasing.

"I've come t' tell him I ain't going to have him meddling atween me and the gal who belongs ter me. If he does—"

"What girl?" Horace's small eyes gleamed with anticipation. He had difficulty not to show his excitement.

"Bubbles. She's maid to Miss Dillingham, and him, in and out, there's plenty of chances for turning her head and making her think she's too good for me. I'll smash his head in—"

"Bubbles—the girl from the slums he made such a fuss over? Has he been making love to her?" demanded the other.

"He's made her turn her back on me—we've been walking out these four years—and he'll answer to me for it, will Captain Densmore!"

"Here he comes!" Horace, said warningly. Then, as the office door opened, he turned.

"Ah, Basil! Mr.—er—thank you—Willet wishes particularly to see you."

Something in the expression of the speaker's face brought the angry red to Basil's. He looked at him incredulously.

"Willet—you here? What is your business? Bubbles——"

"Yus, it's Bubbles, O. K." Jim was stammering with fury. He resented his rival's well-groomed appearance, his easy self-possession. He burst into wild-goose accusations.

"Stop! That will do! Have you lost your senses?" Basil's voice was low and furious, his lips twitching. "Because I have endeavored to help that poor child you accuse me of this! Get up—do you hear?—at once! I'm going to thrash you!"

Instantly Jim sprang forward. A second later, safely behind the big desk, Horace was watching Mr. Willet receive a well-deserved lesson.

"There!" Basil said, breathing hard. "That will teach you to be more careful about what you say. In refusing to marry you, I think Bubbles, poor child, shows her sense. Clear out!"

He flung the door wide, and Willet had no choice but to obey. Against Basil, a skillful boxer, in excellent training, he had no chance whatever. Smarting and cursing, he left the office.

"He'll have you up for assault," Horace said warningly.

"Let him! I never heard such outrageous nonsense! I have hardly exchanged two words with the girl, only shown a little interest in her welfare. The man is blinded by jealousy and rancor."

"What can you expect? I warned you people would be spiteful. Young men like you can't take a fatherly interest in a pretty girl. Harriette said——"

"I have no desire to hear what Harriette said!" Basil was plainly ruffled.

"There is an end to the whole affair. Where are those invoices? We have wasted enough time."

"I'll bring them." With an inscrutable expression, Horace went out of the office, and hurried down into the street, muttering an excuse regarding letters to mail.

Round the corner he overtook the disgruntled and still swearing Jim.

"Am I right in supposing," Mr. Underwood observed coolly, "that you do not exactly love my worthy relative, Captain Densmore?"

Jim's answer was profanely to the point.

"He has certainly spoiled your beauty for a time. Suppose you call and see me one evening? It strikes me we might possibly be useful to each other."

Jim pulled his cap over his discolored eye.

"Mean that you're down on him, too?" he sneered.

Horace smiled blandly.

"This is my address." He repeated it slowly.

"Write it down," Jim grunted.

"No; you must remember it. Here is ten dollars for you. I dare say you will have the opportunity to add to it. Wait till your most interesting countenance has ceased to resemble a map of many colors before you call. Such marks give rise to unnecessary comments from the servants."

With which unkind reference to Jim's rapidly closing black eye, Mr. Underwood dropped a letter in the mail box, congratulating himself that he had really done a good stroke of business.

Here, right at his unscrupulous hand, was just the sort of man——

He pulled his thoughts up abruptly. In his wicked mind an idea had suddenly been born. It might or might not prove feasible.

He recounted to his sister all that had happened.

"I'm not a bit surprised," Miss Un-

derwood said. "Basil is capable of anything. I consider he has treated me disgracefully. He gave me every reason to suppose he cared for me."

"No, he didn't!" Horace retorted bluntly. "He's barely been civil. It makes my blood boil to see him flourishing around, pretending to be so good and superior. What on earth can he see in that red-haired girl? Why, she isn't in the least pretty!"

"Some people might call her so," Harriette said. "Honore is a fool to trust her, to have her in the house. If I was in her place I'd soon turn her out. It's my duty to warn Honore of what is going on."

"She won't listen to you. Trust Basil for making his own case good and explaining all this away."

But Basil said nothing of what had occurred to Honore Dillingham.

As for making love to Bubbles, nothing was further from his thoughts. She was a delightful, spontaneous child of nature, grateful for all he had done, striving hard to please Honore.

CHAPTER VII.

Honore's boudoir was, in Bubbles' opinion, the most beautiful room in the world. She moved about lightly, arranging the flowers, a task she loved. Her small, pale face was very thoughtful as she worked.

What must Captain Densmore think of Jim's extraordinary behavior? She blushed with mortification at the memory of the scene. She bent over the scented blossom, sighing, then started, coloring furiously as the butler ushered in the man of whom she was thinking.

Basil smiled as his eyes fell on the black-and-white-clad girl who stepped forward impulsively, unconsciously crushing a deep red rose between her hands.

"If you please," she faltered, "I—I must say—how sorry I am, Jim——"

The words stuck in her throat.

"My dear child, I quite understand. You are not to think about it again." He laid a kindly, reassuring hand on her shoulder. "Your old playmate was naturally upset over your refusal to marry him. You do not love him, Bubbles? Don't think I am unnecessarily curious. I look upon myself as a sort of guardian, and I want you to be happy."

Bubbles, trembling at his touch, controlled her voice with the greatest difficulty.

"No—I don't love him. I never shall. I told him so."

"Ah! That accounts for his behavior. Is there, perhaps, some one else, child?"

The lovely rose color flooded her down-bent face.

Some one else! And he stood beside her, the man she loved with all her soul!

"There, never mind; I won't ask inconvenient questions," Captain Densmore declared. "If ever you want any advice, Bubbles, don't hesitate to come to me. I shall always take an interest in your welfare. Miss Dillingham tells me that you are thinking of trying different work. I should not do that unless you are certain it is for the better."

"I want to promote myself," she muttered.

"Of course you do. You have done wonders. But I am sure you will not easily get as good a mistress as you have now."

Bubbles jerked herself free and walked to the door.

"Thank you, sir! I will tell Miss Honore you are here."

She was gone before he could say another word.

"Queer girl she is! By Jove, how lovely she is getting, too!"

Honore came to him now, in her usual white gown.

"You are earlier than I expected, dear. Bubbles has not finished the

flowers—she does them so well. Shall we go down to the drawing-room?"

"No; we'll stay here. Honore, I could not wait—I had to come round!"

"Why? What is the matter? You are not ill?"

"Never better." He drew her down beside him on the big chintz couch and kissed her tenderly.

"Darling, I want you to marry me as soon as possible," he whispered.

Honore laughed indulgently.

"You absurd boy, you know I cannot do that!"

"There is no reason you should not—no reason whatever. I want my wife. I am restless—unsettled."

"There is every reason, Basil dear," Honore said gently but firmly. "It would not be fair to leave my father. He will miss me so terribly. He is not well. Later on—next summer—he will be more used to the idea."

"Next summer!" Basil was aghast. "It is ridiculous to expect me to wait! I want you to marry me now—in a month's time!"

"Darling, there is nothing I should like better, but duty must come first." Honore was so sure of herself, so certain she was right. She was smiling tolerantly, as she might at a child, firm as a rock in her determination to have things her way.

Basil controlled a most unusual irritability with difficulty. He was not quite sure himself of his reasons for wishing to hasten the ceremony.

"Mr. Dillingham is only suffering from a mild attack of gout," he said gently. "He'll be quite all right long before the month is up. He can't help missing you, Honore, and it won't be easier later on. He can travel, or come and live with us."

"No, indeed, that would be a great

mistake. It never answers. Next summer, dearest, or perhaps late spring"—with a charming air of concession that seemed to be the last straw.

"You cannot really love me, or you would be as anxious as I am for our marriage," he said coldly.

"I love you dearly." Honore kissed him as she spoke.

Basil and she had talked it over and agreed to next summer, and now, without rhyme or reason, he suddenly insisted on an almost immediate marriage.

"I love you, and I am going to marry you in the summer," she repeated.

"This is the first thing I ask of you, and you refuse it me!"

Honore was not to know of the heart-searchings and doubts that had assailed her lover, the queer feeling that he must marry her at once, for fear—yes, he must admit it to himself in the innermost recesses of his heart—the intangible doubt that he did not love her as deeply as he had thought, became a tangible fact. Once married, all such uncomfortable doubts would fly. He could not possibly tell her how he felt. Man-like, he was blundering, going the wrong way to procure what he wanted.

"Honore, for the last time, will you agree to what I ask? Will you marry me next month?"

"No, I will not!"—obstinately. "You must see it is absurd."

"Very well, we will abide by your decision!" Basil said.

"Perhaps it would be better to put it off indefinitely?" she said.

"Just as you please," he agreed grimly.

Honore found herself alone a moment later. Her lover had gone. From below came the sound of a door slamming, a hollow bang that made her feel desolate.

She found that her hands were shaking. To upset themselves in this way!



Their Little Savage

By
Mrs. Harry Pugh Smith

AMONG the conventional miscellany of morning mail which cluttered the elegantly appointed desk one envelope in particular stood out. It was travel-stained, poorly, almost illegibly addressed in a huge sprawling masculine hand, the paper and ink were cheap and the post mark foreign.

Ruthven Ashley stared at it curiously a long time before he picked it out of the clutter of more prepossessing epistles and slit it open. Perhaps he had a presentiment even then that the contents were likely to prove as disconcerting as the outer cover. Having read it through once, he proceeded to reread it a second and a third time, his slender, well-kept hands shaking so violently at each perusal that the sheet of coarse paper trembled in his grasp while his

lean, patrician face grew paler and paler.

It was not a lengthy communication. As a matter of fact it was brief to the point of curtness and, for all the scrawling hand in which it was inscribed and the thin, watery ink that blurred and blotted on the rough paper, legible enough. It read.

MR. RUTHVEN ASHLEY, ESQUIRE: About eighteen years ago—seventeen years and nine months to be exact—you lost your wife and baby girl in a shipwreck in the South Seas. The body of your wife was cast ashore on a certain island and recovered, but the child was never heard of, and after a great deal of time and money had been spent in a vain effort to learn its fate was given up as dead by every one except yourself who, I understand, have never entirely lost hope that in spite of everything it may still be living. Without wishing to excite false hopes in your breast at this late date I should like to suggest that if you are still interested in the matter you go to Benoist's Inn on the Water Front, Bombay, and ask about the girl they call Jacqueminot or Jack Benoist.

There abruptly and without signature the letter ended. To the man to whom it had been addressed it came like an echo of a painful past. Old memories, a grief that had never lost its bitterness, gripped him again.

Elsa, his wife, the bride of his passionate youth, lost in that terrific hurricane which had smashed his yacht like an eggshell in its path; Marguerite,

their little girl, not yet a year old—the two of them snatched from him forever by a relentless fate unless—unless—a curiously carved ivory stiletto snapped in his fingers under the stress of emotion that swept him as a giant hand might sweep the strings of a zither—unless there were after all some truth in that old instinct which had never let him rest, that the child, his little Marguerite, still lived.

He had never somehow been able to accept the fact of her death. All hands on board had been lost. By an irony of fate he had escaped. He had gone on a week's trek inland, leaving the yacht at anchor in the primitive harbor. Elsa usually accompanied him on his expeditions into the interior but on this occasion she had not gone, the heat being intense and the child far from well. The hurricane had struck suddenly, entirely without warning, tearing the yacht from its moorings and driving it before it into the uncharted waters dotted with microscopic islands, dashing it to pieces finally on a vicious, low-lying reef of needle-like rocks, with the loss of every soul on board.

After a long and frantic search Ashley came upon the ruins of the vessel washed ashore on a desolate and uninhabited island by the gigantic waves that had followed the simoon. There, too, he had found the bleached bones of his wife and others of the crew, but although he searched for days beneath the blazing sun until he became ill with fever, combing every adjacent island for miles around, he found no trace of the child. That it had surely perished with the rest was every one's belief but his.

As soon as his health permitted he renewed his search with the same heart-breaking results. He had, from the beginning, offered a generous reward for any information regarding the lost child. Again and again he had received word that here, there, or yonder was to be

found a mysterious white girl-child who was undoubtedly his Marguerite. But although in every instance he had run these meager clues to earth, disappointment had been his only dole. The child had not been found.

As failure succeeded failure, and still he clung to his stubborn belief that his daughter lived, people began to think him a little touched with the fever that had laid him low at that terrible time, and finally, with the passing of years, he had learned to keep his thoughts to himself.

It had been a long, long time since he had mentioned to any one that passionate hope which would not down in his breast that somewhere, somehow his Elsa's child lived. But he had never ceased to hope, and although in the strange and disturbing letter which had come to him by the morning post he saw most probably only another bitter and heartbreaking disappointment, another will-o'-the-wisp for the chasing of which he would very likely reap nothing except pain and disillusion, to neglect it did not occur to him.

Touching a bell under his hand he strummed impatiently on the highly polished surface of his desk with his long, slender fingers until, with the opening of the door, a withered old serving man, with faded blue eyes, appeared.

"Bevans, call up Captain Adams. Tell him to have the *Aletha* ready to sail day after to-morrow. Have him see to it that she is provisioned for at least a month's voyage and full-manned. Report to me at once."

"Yes, sir, certainly, sir," murmured the old servant stolidly, by neither word nor look betraying that he had observed telltale signs of agitation in the face of the master he had served for forty years.

The girl who had entered Ruthven Ashley's study on Bevans' heels was less capable of concealing her thoughts however.

"We are going away, father?" she asked rather timidly. "You are ordering the *Aletha* for a month's voyage?"

Ruthven Ashley did not speak for a minute. The girl studied his averted profile intently, a slight frown puckering her finely penciled brows. She was a slender, slightly built young woman with the exquisite coloring of a Dresden doll, ash-blond hair which lay close to her small, beautifully shaped head in delicate waves, peach-blossom skin, incredibly fine in tint and texture, blue eyes, black-fringed and luminous, and a lovely scarlet mouth with sensitive, finely chiseled lips.

Three years before he married Elsa, Ruthven Ashley, more because of the insistence of his family than for any desire of his own, had married a gentle, unobtrusive young girl who died at the birth of their daughter, Evelyn.

Had he never known Elsa, Ashley would have always believed he loved his first wife, for whom he had had, as a matter of fact, affection, an affection, however, that paled to insignificance beside the passion that was his when his eyes first met the glowing black eyes of Marguerite's mother. Their love was as tempestuous a thing as the storm which finally parted them. Though nearly twenty years had intervened Ruthven Ashley's sense of loss when he thought of her, his mate, had never dimmed, just as the affection born in his heart for their child had remained a vital thing, more real sometimes it seemed than his feeling for the daughter who lived.

Evelyn on his remarriage had remained at Ashley Court with her mother's old nurse and so had been spared him when the yacht and all on board had perished, but sometimes during the dreary years that followed the girl had almost found it in her heart to wish she had gone down with that ill-fated vessel. She was gentle and unobtrusive like her mother, but deeply affectionate, and no

one, unless perhaps it was old Nurse Alice, had ever guessed, certainly not Ruthven Ashley himself, how lonely his motherless daughter was or how deeply she yearned for the love and affection her father had lavished through the years on the memory of her half-sister, whom all but he had long ago given up as dead.

Something of this was no doubt in her thought for all the serene mask which she had learned to wear over the ache in her breast as she stared from the travel-stained envelope in her father's hand to the glint in his eyes.

"You've had some word again? You are off on another wild-goose chase?" she asked unevenly.

Ruthven Ashley nodded. He was too preoccupied with ways and means to pay her any great amount of attention, just as he had been ever since she could remember. The color washed suddenly into her delicate face.

"Why do you pay any attention to them, father?" she cried, her breath catching a little. She came nearer and laid her slender white hand timidly on his arm. "It only means more pain and suffering for you. Why will you reopen an old wound? They never do any good, these wild jaunts of yours, and it seems to me you come back sadder and older every trip."

Ruthven Ashley flung off the gently protesting hand with an impatient gesture.

"You know I will never leave a stone unturned that may help me find your little lost sister, Evelyn," he said sternly. "As long as I live, I shall prosecute the search."

"But, father," persisted the girl beseechingly. "it is so hard on you and so useless when every one except yourself knows that she is dead and has been dead all these years."

"Hush!" He turned on her almost savagely. "Never let such words cross your lips again. She is not dead! Do

you hear? Not dead!" His eyes gleamed fiercely.

The girl sighed and turned away.

"Will you really leave day after tomorrow?" she asked from the threshold.

"Yes," he replied more gently. "Allan and I were already planning a trip down that way. He's finishing up his work, you know, and hopes to secure some additional data. We were really half prepared already. I see no reason why we shouldn't leave that soon at least."

"How long do you expect to be gone?" she asked in a low voice.

"That all depends," he answered, frowning slightly. "Allan's investigations will take several weeks. Of course," his face lighted wonderfully, "if—if the girl I'm going to see is really Marguerite, there's no telling what we'll do."

The girl's hands suddenly locked on the handle of the frilly parasol she carried until the delicate skin tautened to white.

"Father," she cried, her sensitive lips quivering a little, "take me with you."

Ruthven Ashley looked up with an impatient frown.

"Don't be silly, Evelyn," he said coldly. "You could never stand one of these rough and ready expeditions of ours."

"Please, father! I am not so delicate as I look. I am not delicate at all. You remember I won the tennis championship last year and I passed the life-saver examinations in swimming long ago. I may look like a Dresden doll as some one is forever telling me"—this with a hint of exasperation—"but I am really quite strong. It's so lonely here when you're away. I've always wanted so badly to go on one of your excursions. Please, father, just this once!"

Ruthven Ashley sought to avoid the eager, pleading face lifted to his but the girl's wistful eyes were something which even he found a little hard to withstand.

"You wouldn't like it at all, Evelyn," he said more gently. "You'd be sick of it all before we were three days out."

"Maybe so," acknowledged the girl, quick to catch the softening note in his voice, "but I am wild to try it! Do, please, father! It's the very first thing I've ever asked of you."

Ruthven Ashley wriggled uncomfortably. He didn't want the girl along, but perhaps his conscience hurt him. Deny it as he would he must have known that all her life he had consistently neglected this lovely, fragile-looking daughter of his. In every way that matters they were the rankest strangers. Frowning, he threw her an exasperated glance but finally capitulated.

"All right," he conceded grudgingly. "Although I am sure you are going to regret your insistence."

"Oh," the girl's face was glowing. "thank you, father!"

Slipping an arm about his neck she kissed him shyly. Ruthven Ashley colored. Caresses had always been infrequent and highly perfunctory between them. Rather awkwardly he disengaged himself from her embrace.

"Don't thank me until you've seen what you've let yourself in for," he said coldly.

But Evelyn refused to have her enthusiasm dashed by his lack of sympathy and, her blue eyes shining, her pretty head already busy with her outfit for the ensuing voyage, she slipped out of the room, humming a gay little tune under her breath.

The *Aletha* lifted anchor just at midnight of the second day following. The yacht was a slim but powerful thing, constructed with an eye for speed and strength rather than beauty, but attaining the latter in a fashion by reason of its long, clean-cut lines. There was an utter absence of the elaborate awnings and deck furnishings and luxuriously equipped cabins and saloons that mark many such crafts.

No money had been spent on externals. The cabins were quite plain, almost bare, but fully equipped for the passengers' needs. The dining saloon and lounge were quietly, almost somberly, furnished, but comfortable in the extreme. Evelyn was quite sure she was going to have a very happy time in spite of her father's efforts to discourage her.

Ruthven Ashley himself had not come aboard with his daughter. He had some last minute arrangements to make that would prevent him from embarking until close to sailing time and as his guest, Allan Gates, was coming out with him in the launch, Evelyn had the vessel to herself.

A dying half moon silvered the waters. The night was chill so the girl slipped into a white woolly cape and stealing up on deck gazed with dreamy eyes at the silver track that lay broad and shining across the sea.

The put-putter of an approaching launch aroused her. Realizing that her father would not care to bother with her just then, neither, most likely, would the younger man, who, report had it, was as little apt to relish a feminine addition to the party as Ruthven Ashley himself, Evelyn slipped away to her cabin, there to listen blissfully to the yacht's preliminary quiverings and throbbings as it put slowly out to sea.

She had a wild, childish desire to jump up and down and sing and, perhaps, weep a little. For the dearest wish of her life was coming true.

She was going with her father on one of the long-drawn-out world trampings that had kept him from her save for brief, unsatisfactory intervals all her life. She was going at last to have an opportunity to know him better than ever before, to enter more intimately into his life than had ever been permitted her heretofore. Who knows, her breath quickened, perhaps on this very trip she might win the place in his heart she had so long and so hopelessly coveted.

That she must go about her campaign politically no one knew better than herself; for, behind a very pretty face, Evelyn concealed no small amount of brains. She realized perfectly she was handicapped by the fact that both her father and his guest were more or less prejudiced against sharing their jaunt with a woman.

She had never met Allan Gates, but she had heard and read a great deal about him and had seen him often coming for long discussions with her father about their common hobby, the flora and fauna of the most distant and out of the way places in the world. To these conferences, needless to say, she had never been invited, but she had often gazed wistfully at the two of them as she slipped past the open door of the library so that the handsome, if somewhat austere face of her father's friend was familiar to her, although she was well aware that he had never given her a second glance if he even knew of her existence, which was doubtful, since her father seldom thought of her, much less mentioned her when riding his scientific hobby.

To the majority of people it had seemed very strange that a young man of Allan Gates' birth and breeding should have deliberately turned his back on society and the more conventional paths open to the only son of a very wealthy family, and gone in for such absurd things as deep-sea polyps and queer fly-trap orchids and what nots.

That he had come to be an authority on the animals and flowers of all the out of the way corners of the globe had by no means satisfied the world to which he had been born. Just what had started him on his strange career was a mere matter of conjecture. No one really knew. There was, however, a theory, whether well-founded or not, that when a mere boy Allan Gates had been cruelly jilted by a young society woman, and the fact that he shunned the entire sex,

particularly those of the former class, lent color to the idea.

At any rate he was something of a woman-hater, especially where such dainty, well-bred, patrician young creatures as Ruthven Ashley's daughter were concerned, and so it is to be seen that if she hoped to win a place in the thoughts and consideration of these two strikingly similar men, Evelyn had her work cut out for her.

She had a glimpse of her father's plan of campaign when he presented her to Gates the following morning.

"My daughter, Evelyn, Allan," he said perfunctorily, and the two of them went calmly on with their very intricate technical discussion, seemingly totally oblivious of the presence of a young woman who looked thoroughly charming in her sensible white flannel yachting suit.

Evelyn bit her lip and yet she almost had to laugh. It was so perfectly plain what tactics the enemy had adopted. She had more or less forced herself upon their masculine privacy and they meant to give her no encouragement for further poaching on their preserves. In other words they intended to sicken her so thoroughly of the jaunt into which she had so unwelcomely insinuated herself that she would never transgress again.

In the days that followed they left her absolutely alone. The weather was glorious, the sea heavenly. Evelyn had never appeared to greater advantage, but so far as her father and his guest were concerned she might as well have remained at home. Apparently beyond a preoccupied good morning and good night neither saw her.

Even when Evelyn proved herself unexpectedly useful by suddenly announcing a knowledge of typing with an offer at doing their notes for them in absence of the stenographers they had left behind, they were not impressed. Although properly surprised that her slen-

der, pink-tipped fingers were actually useful they never gave her the credit of assuming that her fluffy golden head held any intelligence. Neither of them supposed for a moment that she was capable of understanding the import of the notes she so neatly transcribed and told her so when she asked questions now and then about the fascinating study to which they were both slaves.

As a matter of fact, Evelyn was by no means so ignorant as they supposed of the subject. Ever since she could remember, her father's library had been full of strange erudite volumes along the line he pursued.

When a little wide-eyed child, it had seemed to bring him nearer during his long absences, to curl up in one of his deep chairs and stare solemnly at the pages over which he spent the greater part of his time. Later the subject had come to have for her an interest of its own and now it would have surprised her complacent father and somewhat taciturn guest to know that the slender Dresden doll beside them was almost as familiar with the subject matter of their lifelong research as themselves.

One day she even presumed to correct a notation her father had made, a fact which brought a sharp reproof from Ruthven Ashley until Allan Gates came to the rescue and corroborated the change she had made.

"It's strange you happened to get it exactly right, Miss Ashley," he said, eyeing her curiously.

"A happy accident," snapped her father somewhat peevishly.

Allan Gates said nothing, but his eyes were slightly skeptical.

They were in tropical waters. Long, breathless days were followed by gorgeous moon-mad nights. The heat did not affect Ruthven Ashley. He was singularly impervious to atmospheric conditions. But the younger man was less fortunate. He was moody and haggard and unable to work. Evelyn was

sure he slept poorly. Often, as she lay in her deck chair watching the glory of the moonlit sea, she saw him wandering restlessly about and long after she had gone to her cabin she heard his tread.

One night, with the magic of the sea in her blood, she brought her violin on deck and, taking care not to arouse her father, who was asleep, played a soft haunting accompaniment to the moan of the sea. Suddenly she realized that Gates stood in the shadows close on her left, staring at her somberly, his face stern, almost set.

"You play better than most society girls," he said when he realized she had seen him. "Few are proficient at anything."

Evelyn smiled.

"If you mean I am proficient at my violin," she said mischievously, "it is because I love it."

"Is that why you've gone to the trouble of acquainting yourself with your father's hobby, because you love it?" he asked her almost harshly.

She flushed slightly.

"I did that because I love my father," she replied softly.

He came a step nearer, staring down at her almost angrily.

"I don't know exactly what your game is," he said through harsh, unsmiling lips, "but I know your kind well enough to distrust anything you do in the name of love."

Evelyn suddenly pitied him. How he must have suffered, how cruelly he had been disillusioned, to have become so bitter!

"You wrong us," she said lightly, "we really aren't so bad."

She half turned away. The sea gave a long, deep swell, the yacht pitched suddenly, just enough to fling her violently against him. For a moment she lay on his breast in the glamour of the moonlight, her wide, startled blue eyes lifted to his, a lock of her long, pale-gold hair escaping and as fragrant on

his lips as a flower. The man's arms tightened. The color washed to the roots of his dark hair. Stooping suddenly he kissed her fiercely on quivering scarlet mouth and tender white throat.

"How lovely you are, how maddeningly lovely!" he cried, the words wrung from him by some strange overpowering emotion he was for the moment unable to resist. Then as abruptly as he had taken her, he thrust her from him. "God! What a fool I am to be taken in by a bit of fluff and floss totally lacking in every quality that makes for real womanhood."

And without a backward glance he strode away, vanishing in the darkness. The girl on whose lips he had rained fierce kisses stared after him, in a strange, tremulous happiness. Despite the bitterness with which he had repulsed her, he had called her lovely, "maddeningly lovely," and though he had declared her a bit of fluff and floss lacking in every quality that makes for real womanhood, his lips had been hungry upon hers, his arms loathe to release her, though why these facts should bring such thrilling happiness Evelyn dared not ask herself.

When she met Allan the following morning, however, his face betrayed no recollection of the extraordinary scene of the night before, and later in the day she heard him getting off a lengthy diatribe to her father about the artificiality of the modern society girl.

"They are a matter of veneer, inside and out," he concluded fiercely. "Even their emotions are not genuine. They really care for nothing but themselves and their appearance. They have totally lost the divine conception of womanhood and all for which it once stood."

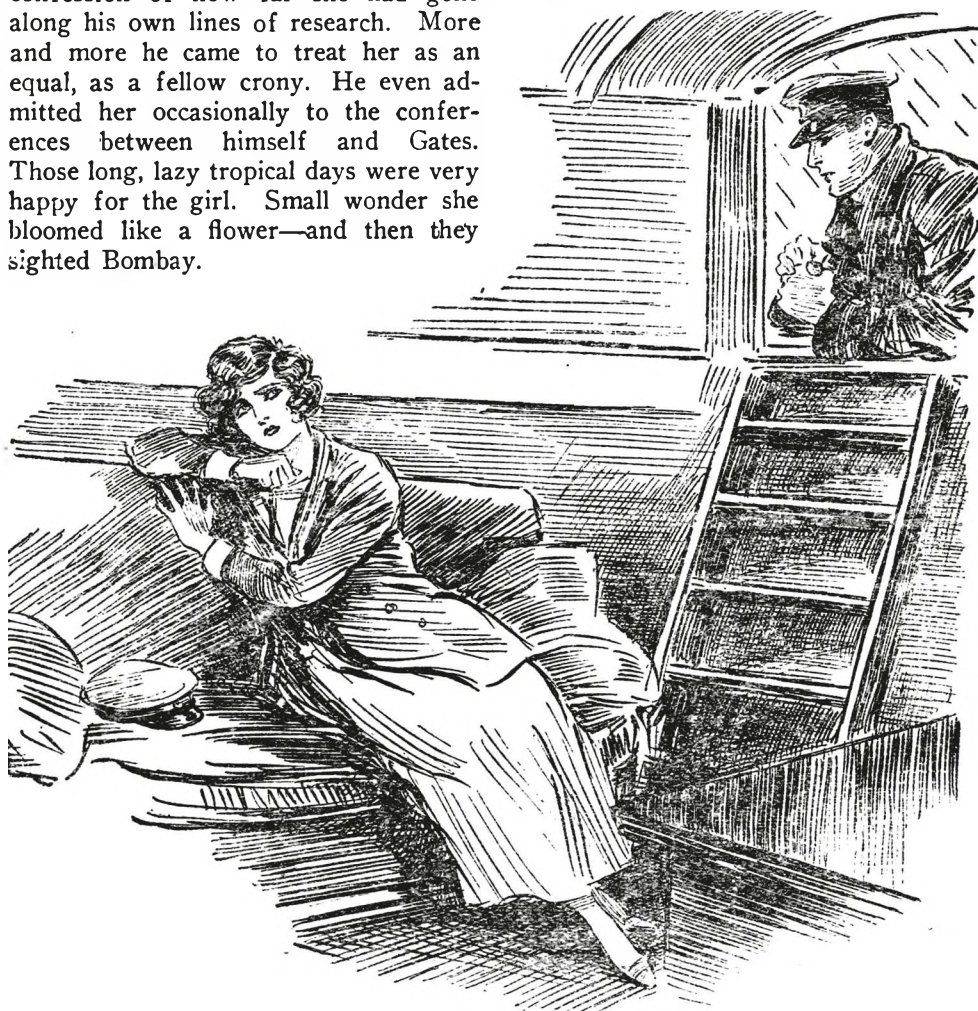
Bitter as it was, the philippic had a false note in Evelyn's ears. It did not ring quite true. He reminded her of a man trying to convince himself. And as the days passed she became more and

more certain she was right. Deny it as he would her father's guest was more or less attracted to her. He could not keep entirely away from her. He was continually stealing glances at her, and if by chance his hand touched her he paled to the lips.

Nor was Ruthven Ashley as oblivious of his daughter's presence as he had been. Little by little he had awakened to the fact that Evelyn was by no means the little shallow-head he had thought her. One day he surprised her into a confession of how far she had gone along his own lines of research. More and more he came to treat her as an equal, as a fellow crony. He even admitted her occasionally to the conferences between himself and Gates. Those long, lazy tropical days were very happy for the girl. Small wonder she bloomed like a flower—and then they sighted Bombay.

Somehow from the first Evelyn had dreaded the day they should come into the Indian harbor. While she was sure that, like all the others, this quest, too, would prove only a will-o'-the-wisp, still she knew her newly found happiness was menaced by the painful memories which these jaunts always provoked in her father's breast. She was afraid that thought of Elsa's child would crowd her out of the little niche which the past weeks had vouchsafed her in his heart.

As a matter of fact the nearer they



Deny it as he would, her father's guest was more or less attracted to her.
Allan could not keep away from Evelyn.

drew to their destination, the moodier grew Ruthven Ashley's face. For the first time in days he resumed the old preoccupied manner he had so long maintained toward the daughter he had during the last month for the first time admitted to anything like affectionate intimacy. When at the close of a peculiarly sultry torrid afternoon they docked, he had all too patently forgotten her very existence.

Ashley, as soon as a boat could be put ashore, set off for Benoist's Inn. Gates had offered to go along only to be curtly refused for his pains. He was a little startled to see Evelyn a few minutes after her father's departure preparing to step into a launch.

"You aren't thinking of going ashore alone?" he stammered completely disconcerted.

Evelyn's pretty face settled grimly.

"I am going to follow my father," she said quietly. "He may need me."

"But you can't do that. It wouldn't be safe—I can't allow you to!" he cried excitedly.

By way of reply Evelyn moved toward the waiting boat. When he had exhausted himself in an effort to dissuade her Allan Gates yielded to the inevitable and decided to go along.

Evelyn was glad. She hadn't been any too easy about venturing into this strange, swarming city. On landing Gates secured a vehicle which after devious wanderings through crowded streets that reminded Evelyn of scenes from the "Arabian Nights," finally deposited them before a tall, narrow top-lofty building down on the Water Front, from the ground story of which lights and raucous music streamed, while jumbled black letters on the pane announced that this was Benoist's Inn. On entering, the pair from the yacht found themselves in a squalid, low-ceilinged room crowded with small tables and a polyglot collection of all sorts of nondescript races. Shabby Frenchmen elbowed

shabby Spaniards. Down-at-the-heel Americans rubbed shoulders with blasé Englishmen—a far from prepossessing-looking company. Allan Gates turned to the girl with a last protest, but she had already pushed past him into the room.

Slipping into a seat where she could watch the table where her father had taken refuge, unobserved she waited patiently for developments. A villainous native orchestra whined and sawed away in a corner, and hardly had Gates given their order to the waiter who bustled up on their arrival before from somewhere toward the rear of the smoke-hung room there came a great clapping of hands and pushing back of chairs, and the next instant a girl danced into view amid loud cries of "*Vive la Jacqueminot.*"

A long, convulsive shudder ran through Ruthven Ashley's frame, and even Evelyn felt a strange thrill at the thought that this girl at whom she gazed might possibly be of her blood.

The girl was a lovely, gypsylike child, her beauty as unconventional as her dancing, with short, thick black hair surrounding a small, elfish face, large, luminous black eyes dancing above laughing scarlet lips and dazzlingly white teeth. She wore an absurdly low-cut crimson bodice revealing a childish white bosom and knee-length ballet skirts above beautifully shaped, slender limbs and tiny feet in high-heeled slippers with huge rhinestone buckles. Again Evelyn Ashley caught her breath. Was there, could there be any bond between her and this tawdry little dancer in a cheap restaurant in Bombay's worst district?

No! No, she was telling herself passionately when her gaze fell on her father's face. He was staring as if mesmerized at the girl Jacqueminot, and something in his rapt gaze cut Evelyn to the heart.

The dance ended, the little dancer was immediately surrounded by the polyglot

patrons of the café. Young as she was, Jacqueminot was more than a match for her coarse admirers. Her sharp little tongue was a rapier. Evelyn shuddered even while she was amused at the girl's gaminlike repartee. The music began again. A handsome, rather sullen-looking youth whom the crowd called Luigi elbowed others aside and appropriated Jacqueminot.

They danced beautifully together. There was something feline in their graceful movements, something almost hypnotic. They held every eye by a sort of mesmerism. After a while Evelyn realized that her father had risen and approached the proprietor of the café, a swarthy Frenchman, blind in one eye from an unsightly cataract.

The Frenchman started slightly when addressed by the stranger. His good eye fastened on the other craftily, but after a few minutes' conversation he buttonholed Ashley and drew him off toward an inner room, still talking volubly in low tones.

Jacqueminot and the boy Luigi having finished their dance vanished. Suddenly Evelyn felt very tired. A vast weariness had descended on her. Rising, she turned a pale face on her companion.

"Let us go back to the yacht," she said lifelessly.

Gates made no reply, but, as they left the inn, she saw him glance over his shoulder at the spot where the lovely elfin figure of the dancer had vanished. The girl went straight to her cabin and to bed but not to sleep. Almost immediately she heard the launch putting back to shore. An ironical smile curled her lips. So Gates had gone ashore again—to Benoist's Inn undoubtedly. After a long while she fell into a troubled sleep. She awoke with a start. Dawn, dull, gray, ragged, was peeping in at her porthole. She heard a burst of childish laughter followed by a shrill French oath, and just as surely as she

realized the *Altha* was under way knew that the girl known as Jacqueminot Benoist was aboard.

Every one was late to breakfast the following morning so that Evelyn had the dining saloon to herself, and it was not until she was rising to go that her father entered, a new father, whose glowing eyes and smiling face seemed suddenly to the girl to belong to a stranger.

"Ah, my dear," he beamed upon her, "have you heard the glorious news?"

Evelyn shook her head. He went on like an eager child.

"I have found my lost Marguerite—at last!" he exulted.

The girl said nothing for a moment. Their positions seemed magically reversed. She felt immeasurably the older of the two.

"Benoist told me the whole story. Years ago when she was merely a baby a sailor left the girl with them. He was a strange old fellow, about half mad. He swore the child was his. The Benoists thought nothing of it and reared her as their own. Six months ago the old sailor died. Before his death, however, he confessed that he had never had a child, that he had picked the girl up tied to a spar in a terrible simoon in the South Seas. He had kept the little clothes she wore and a tiny necklace. And," his voice changed, "here they are."

On the polished table he unrolled a small packet displaying a dainty little dress yellowed with age on which the name Marguerite had been embroidered, and beside it a worn gold necklace on which the initials "M" and "A" were engraved. Evelyn stared speechlessly at the pathetic relics. Her father pressed them to his lips. Tears stood in his eyes.

"God has been good," he cried reverently. "He has restored to me my own."

"Are you sure, father?" she asked

timidly. "It would be so easy to be mistaken in such a matter as this."

Her father regarded her with a frown.

"Sure? Of course I'm sure!" he cried angrily. "If I had no proofs other than my own heart I'd swear Jacqueminot is mine. But as a matter of fact I'd know the necklace anywhere. I gave it to—to Elsa for the baby when it was four weeks old, and as for the dress—Elsa had the sisters at Mount St. Mary's make a dozen such dresses for the little one. There can be no mistake. Both of them belonged to my Marguerite."

Unwise as she knew it was to anger him Evelyn persisted.

"But don't you think before you take this strange girl into your affection you should make a thorough investigation into her claims?" she persisted.

Her father's face darkened.

"I am entirely satisfied in my own mind," he said coldly, "that she is my lost Marguerite and I shall see to it that she is accepted as such by every one else!"

"Righto, my new papa!" sang a shrill, though not unmusical voice, and in the doorway, with Allan Gates just behind her, stood the girl, Jacqueminot. Her black eyes darted shrewdly from Ruthven Ashley's angry countenance to Evelyn's perturbed face. "What's this? The lovely daughter you tell me about, object to her little long-lost sister?"

Evelyn flushed hotly beneath the insolence of the other's gibe. Her father, however, had eyes only for his newly found daughter.

"This is your sister, Marguerite, Evelyn," he said perfunctorily.

The two girls moved nearer. Evelyn with an effort bent to kiss the younger girl. But Jacqueminot, or Marguerite as her father persisted in calling her, drew back sharply.

"None of that, Evie!" she cried impudently. "You know you'd rather spit

on me than kiss me. Why bother to pretend?"

An ironical smile flitted across Allan Gates' face at this outrageous remark. He had been a silent but interested observer of the scene, and by the mocking light in his eyes Evelyn knew he was thinking how perfectly this little heathen had upset what he had been pleased to call "the artificiality of the modern society girl." Instinctively, she realized that for him, jaded and disillusioned as he was, Marguerite's abrupt breezy manner had an undeniable charm.

Breakfast was a most disconcerting meal. Marguerite was a little savage so far as table etiquette was concerned. Even Ruthven Ashley, who beamed on her continually, looked slightly disconcerted when his new daughter proceeded to shovel food into her pretty mouth with both hands as if she were stoking a boiler. Afterward he spoke to Evelyn a little shamefacedly.

"Of course she's been sadly neglected, a diamond in the rough, you know," he murmured apologetically. "But you can help her and you will, won't you?"

"If she will let me," replied Evelyn doubtfully.

She had a premonition that this pert, impudent child was going to resent any suggestions she made. For a day or two she strove desperately to tone down her new sister's ridiculous speech, her table manners, her absurd clothes. It was a stupendous task. There were so many things off color about Marguerite and the little gamin absolutely refused any coöperation.

"Why shouldn't I eat with my fingers? Why shouldn't I say 'damn' or '*le diable*' or '*mon Dieu*' if I want to?" And a thousand other things she demanded angrily over and over until Evelyn was all but in despair.

There came, however, a sudden change for the better. It all followed a certain conversation between the two sisters the third day after Jacqueminot

came to the yacht. Evelyn chanced to mention the fact that Allan, besides being a great authority in scientific circles and a famous author on fauna and flora was also a very wealthy man.

"So?" Marguerite ejaculated. "He is then what you *Americaines* call 'a great catch?'"

Evelyn nodded, wondering at a strange gleam that had suddenly illuminated the other's black eyes.

From then on Marguerite set herself deliberately to absorb all Evelyn had been trying to teach her. She became surprisingly docile and, being naturally quick-witted, she made remarkable progress. She was, however, forever doing some ridiculous thing against which Evelyn had never even thought of warning her. On the whole, however, her improvement was gratifying, especially to Ruthven Ashley, on whom, much as he tried to conceal the fact, her *gaucherie* and vulgarisms visibly jarred.

Between Evelyn and the girl there was never any pretense of affection. Each instinctively resented the other, and while the older girl tried to disguise her sentiment, the younger made no effort to conceal her dislike. She had been uncannily quick to sense the relations between Evelyn and her father, and she took a malicious pleasure in beguiling caresses from him in his older daughter's presence for the sheer delight of seeing Evelyn flinch and turn away, and from the day she learned Allan Gates' financial status she deliberately set out to capture him.

To Evelyn, looking hopelessly on, it seemed incredible that any man could be taken in by such crude blandishments as those Marguerite employed to ensnare the man of her choice. But, apparently, like many another man, Gates mistook ignorance of table manners and drawing room etiquette for an utter lack of sophistication along all lines, little dreaming that when it came to the game she was playing with him Mar-

guerite could give the average society girl cards and spades and beat her.

That she knew her sister was interested in Gates, Marguerite left Evelyn no doubt. She delighted in parading him before the older girl's eyes, and often across his shoulder her black eyes mocked Evelyn. Of all of which Gates himself was sublimely ignorant.

Against a girl of Evelyn's type he had been forearmed, but he looked on Marguerite as a lovely, artless child and was wax in her pretty, unscrupulous hands. On the night she announced their engagement with a malicious little side glance at Evelyn's stricken face, he was confused and bewildered. Evelyn saw that he hadn't the faintest idea how it had all happened.

He suffered Ruthven Ashley, who was delighted, of course, to clap him on the shoulder and even planted a perfunctory kiss on Marguerite's cheek, such a kiss as one offers a charming child. But when he faced Evelyn he grew deathly white, and by the anguish in his eyes she knew what he had not suspected himself until that moment, that he loved her.

If Allan Gates realized he had been neatly snared in a silken net he evidently believed the snaring to have been of his own doing. He believed Marguerite to be a lovely, thoughtless child, who had fallen head over heels in love with him and whom he had unwittingly led to believe her love was returned. Consequently, he quixotically set himself to make the most of a bad bargain by doing everything in his power to keep her from suspecting that, so far from being in love with her, he was breaking his heart over her sister whom he had tried desperately to keep out of his affections, only to fail miserably at the last. He little dreamed, of course, that Marguerite had known the latter fact long before he did and had acted accordingly.

Those weren't the happiest of days on

the yacht. Evelyn's heart was heavier than she ever remembered it to have been. Gates went about with a drawn white face and a tired smile that cut her to the heart. Even Ruthven Ashley's first ecstasy at the recovery of his lost child paled somewhat.

Marguerite was lamentably ignorant. She had read nothing and had no patience with the isms and ogoms with which her father liked to fill his days. Unlike Evelyn, she was not content to go off alone while the men labored over scientific data. She had no resources within to amuse herself. Even the companionship of another woman bored her.

She made constant demands not only on Gates' time but on her father's until it became the unusual rather than the common thing for them to escape to themselves for a morning's work. She had a trick of flying into a fury and pounding the deck with her heels and clenched fists, when her slightest wish was denied. This never failed to prove efficacious, although after a repetition or two it rather lost its charm so far as the two men were concerned. Each of them began to look a little haggard. Evelyn suspected that they were finding their "charming little savage" a trifle wearisome, but it was not until after a month's dallying in the Indian Ocean they turned the *Alcitha* homeward that she suspected Marguerite was unhappy.

The yacht had been hugging the shore for miles. It was a sluggish afternoon. Everyone had gone below for a nap. A persistent wailing music aroused Evelyn. Some one in a small boat was trailing the larger vessel. It was from this boat the music came, a haunting, restless melody played on some sort of native pipe. Evelyn, half asleep, listened dreamily. Where had she heard the tune before? It came to her so suddenly as to make her start up. It was the strain to which Jacqueminot and the handsome boy they called Luigi had danced in Benoist's Inn.

The music ceased abruptly. Rising, Evelyn went out on deck. The boat had vanished. A muffled sound drew her. Jacqueminot was stretched full length on the scrubbed planks, weeping convulsively, and in her hand she clutched a single crimson flower, a flower Evelyn was sure had not come from the yacht.

Sensing instinctively that the other neither desired nor would countenance her sympathy, Evelyn tiptoed away. That night Marguerite was gayer than ever. There was something almost hysterical in her laughter. But the older girl noted that the black eyes burned feverishly above dark painted shadows, and suddenly, although she did not understand why, she pitied the child, perverse and malicious though she was.

Sometime during the night, though whether waking or dreaming she could not be sure, Evelyn heard again the plaintive wail of the pipe, quite near at hand, then receding until it was lost in the restless moan of the sea. She slept badly and awakened early, and thus it happened she was fully dressed when her father, white-faced, a single sheet of paper in his hand, spoke to her.

"Evelyn! Evelyn, a—a dreadful thing has happened!" he cried.

The girl's heart suddenly leaped as she saw how instinctively he came to her and leaned on her in this crisis of his life.

"Marguerite is—she has——" He choked and thrust the letter into her hand.

Evelyn read with difficulty, the writing being none too legible and plainly hurriedly dashed off.

When you this get, I shall be gone with Luigi. I him love always. I thought I could him give up for rich man even though he be as big and stupide as Monsieur Gates. But Luigi he come, he play, he call me, and I go.

I am no Marguerite Ashley. I, Jacqueminot Benoist, old Benoist's granddaughter. It all a very clever scheme to cheat you, Mon-

sieur Ashley. My aunt, Gini Latier, once was a maid to your wife. She steal the baby dress and necklace then for me to wear. Grandmamma Benoist save them all these years because I had them wear. When she die Grandpapa Benoist them find and have idea. He plan to palm me off as your daughter so I get big money. *C'est tout.*

I ask your pardon, monsieur, and Monsieur Gates' *aussi.* Tell him he big fool to let me make foolishness of h'im. Mademoiselle Evelyn is one good sport. I think she know all the time, but she is too great lad. to say anything. She is craze. I never sit by and let any other woman take my Luigi.

Thus abruptly the note ended. Ruthven Ashley stared helplessly at his daughter. Silently she handed the letter to Allan Gates whom the commotion had brought to the scene. He read it slowly, then returned it to her father. It came to her suddenly that the eyes of both men were a little relieved, shame-faced as they were about it. Suddenly Evelyn laughed.

"Well," she said making each by the arm, "that's that! Suppose we go in to breakfast."

"To be sure! To be sure!" assented her father, mopping his brow. "And then, Allan, maybe we can get in a day's work at last."

But Allan Gates appeared not to hear. His eyes were fastened on Evelyn's face. His arms stretched lovingly toward her.

"You—you know—it was always you I loved and always will?" he asked jerkily.

"I know," replied Evelyn softly, slipping into his arms and lifting her lovely mouth to his.

Ruthven Ashley smothered a startled exclamation, then smiling broadly, tip-toed away, while far off somewhere ashore a reed pipe piped a rollicking tune in which love and youth were triumphant.



How was the Asp's Head involved in the mysterious murder of two of the inmates of Isis House? There is excitement and mystery in Edith Sessions Tupper's new story,

The Affair at Isis House

It will appear soon in LOVE STORY MAGAZINE.
Watch for it!



Defying Destiny

By Georgette MacMillan.

I THINK you are mad, Harold, to take the girl without a satisfactory reference! Why, she might be a thief, or anything!"

Vera Hughes spoke sharply, and darted an angry glance at her brother.

"Any one can forge a reference," he laughed. "I have decided on Miss Forrest as a companion for my little David, because I feel she loves and understands children. You will please me, Vera, by doing your best to make her feel happy and at home."

Vera's angry eyes followed her brother as he went out of the room. She had come to keep house for him when his wife had died two years before, shortly after David was born. Her one dread was that he might marry again, for he was handsome, and only twenty-eight. Vera had no wish to leave the luxurious home where she reigned as mistress.

"To think that he should choose the

only girl with any good looks to be David's governess!" she muttered. "I suppose she worked on his pity with her black dress and big eyes. Well, Fay Forrest, I will have to keep you in your place when you do arrive!"

Miles away, in a dingy boarding house, Fay was eagerly packing her simple wardrobe. A happy smile lingered on her sweet red mouth, and her gray eyes shone like stars. Life had been very hard for her since her parents' death, and she had found that her beauty was a handicap. The color rushed to her face as she recalled her undeserved dismissal from her last situation.

Her employer's brother had tried to make love to her, despite her protests. She had been sent away without a reference.

"How lucky I am to get this work!" she murmured. "Mr. Hughes looks so kind"

The following morning Fay journeyed to Hillside Junction, where a car from the Hall met her. She reveled in the drive through the pretty country. Later on, she learned that Harold Hughes owned a good deal of property in the district.

As Fay entered the house a tall, dark girl came forward to greet her. Fay's heart sank as she met Vera's gaze.

"My brother wishes you and David to lunch with us," Vera told her.

She took Fay to her room, which opened out of David's. The child, a curly-headed boy of two and a half, smiled shyly at her.

"Pretty lady!" he cried, and Fay stooped impulsively to kiss him. Vera sneered, but a quick pang of jealousy shot through her.

"You had better hurry. Miss Forrest," she said. "I hope you have a quiet frock to wear. Anything showy would be out of place."

Fay's eyes smarted with sudden tears as the door closed on Vera.

"Don't cry!" pleaded David, snuggling close to her. "I love you!" Fay smiled as she brushed the tears away.

A few minutes later she descended the stairs with her little charge. Harold Hughes, watching her, drew a sharp breath.

Fay wore a frock of soft gray, and its lines showed her slender figure to advantage. Her hair, a warm, rich golden, rippled around her dainty head, and her creamy skin was faintly flushed.

She reminded Harold of some sweet woodland flower. Fay was utterly unconscious of the interest she had aroused in him, but she thrilled as her hand rested for a second in his firm clasp.

But for Vera, Fay would have been happy in her new home. It was inexplicable to her why her employer's sister should dislike her, but Fay was quick to sense the enmity beneath Vera Hughes' outwardly friendly manner.

As the weeks glided away Fay grew

to love her tiny charge, and Harold's kindly friendship renewed her faith in mankind.

Vera watched them closely, and did her best to discourage Fay from thinking about Harold.

"My brother will be a great man some day," she told her once. "He has written several important books, and he is going to run for congress. His early marriage was a great mistake, and when he marries again he will choose some one who is rich and well bred. I think he has almost decided on Geraldine Vermont."

She watched Fay as she spoke, and smiled as she saw the color rush to the lovely face, then fade away, leaving it deadly pale.

"Harold is a very proud man," she continued. "He could not bear to have any disgrace connected with his wife or her family."

Fay made no reply, but a sharp pain tugged at her heart. With a shock she realized what a deep impression David's father had made upon her. She knew why she had been so happy all this time. It was because of Harold.

When at last Fay was free, she fled to her room, and flung herself upon the bed, sobbing as though her heart would break.

"Oh, Harold, I love you! I love you!"

Harold Hughes had been for a week on business in New York and was expected home soon.

"Thank goodness I'm going home at last!" he muttered, as he boarded the train. "This week has seemed like a year."

There was an unusual glow in his brown eyes, and his grave face relaxed frequently in a tender smile as the train sped along.

"My little love!" he murmured. "I did not know until I left you how dear you were to me!"

What Vera feared had actually come to pass. The man who had thought that he had done with love was discovering that a gray-eyed girl was all the world to him. He loved Fay Forrest! Surely his love would wake an echo in her heart!

Yet he feared to put his fate to the test.

If Harold Hughes could have read his sister's thoughts that night at dinner, he would have been filled with disgust and dismay. For Vera knew his secret! She could see in every glance, in every word he gave Fay, a deep and passionate love. It was only by a superhuman effort that Vera hid her wild anger. The soft light in Fay's eyes made her clench her hands fiercely.

"I suppose Jackson has collected the rents, Vera?" Harold asked, indifferently.

"Yes, the money is in the safe," she replied. "I have not banked it yet. Do you know the safe is damaged? The lock doesn't catch."

"Oh, yes," he said, carelessly. "I must have it seen to."

Vera started slightly as a sudden thought came to her. It was only the germ of an idea, but it caught and held her mind. She wanted so much to find some means by which she could prevent Harold marrying again.

Fay was surprised when Vera suddenly began to speak to her in quite a friendly manner, and she responded at once. She never suspected that behind Vera's smiling face lurked hatred which made her long to hurt the girl who had won her brother's love.

Vera did not give Harold a chance to speak to Fay alone, but love cannot entirely hide itself, and sometimes Fay caught a glance from his brown eyes which caused her heart to beat wildly.

That night, as Fay lay in bed, unable to sleep, the words Vera had once spoken returned to her.

Was it really true that Harold in-

tended to marry Geraldine, who came sometimes to visit Vera?

In the distance a clock chimed midnight.

Suddenly Fay gave a startled cry at the sound of a hoarse whisper at her door.

"Miss Forrest, are you asleep?"

A tall figure, clad in a satin dressing gown, glided stealthily into the room, and switched on the electric light.

Fay stared in amazement at Vera Hughes, who seemed to be laboring under great distress.

"Oh, Miss Hughes, what is the matter?" she murmured.

Vera uttered a stifled sob.

"I'm in such trouble, Fay!" she said. "I simply had to come and tell you."

Instantly Fay's sympathy was aroused, and she slid out of bed.

"I'm so sorry," she whispered. "Please tell me what it is, and perhaps I can help you."

"It is about that money we were speaking of to-night," Vera murmured, haltingly. "I wanted money very badly, and I was afraid to ask Harold for it, so I took fifty dollars from the rents Jackson gave me. I didn't expect Harold back so soon, and he is sure to find out what I have done in the morning. It will break his heart to know his sister is a thief."

Fay's color faded as she listened to the other girl's confession.

"I suppose you have spent the money?" she said slowly.

"No, that is just it. I haven't," Vera cried. "I could put the bills back in the safe now, only I am too nervous to go downstairs, and to-morrow may be too late. Oh, dear, I wish I were not such a coward!"

Fay fell into the trap.

"Shall I go down for you?" she asked, after a slight pause. "I'm not a bit afraid, and I have an electric torch. I suppose every one has gone to bed."

"How good you are, dear!" exclaimed Vera, and her eyes glittered strangely. "Here it is! You don't know what a weight you are taking off my mind. Harold would never have forgiven me!"

Fay slipped on her dressing gown of pale blue, and as she stole cautiously down the stairs she looked like a fairy. Her golden hair hung in loose waves over her shoulders, and her lips were slightly parted. She reached the library, and entered. She dared not switch on the light, but her torch was sufficient guide.

The instant Fay had gone Vera hurried along the corridor to her brother's room, and tapped at his door.

He opened it at once. He was still fully dressed, and he stared in surprise at his sister.

"Harold, go down quickly—there are burglars! I heard a noise, and you know there is money in the safe."

She spoke in a low whisper, and her brother nodded.

"I'll soon settle them!" he said, reaching for his revolver.

"Hurry! Hurry!" she cried. "You may be too late."

Meanwhile, utterly unconscious of the trick Vera had played on her, Fay managed to open the safe.

While still upon her knees the lights were suddenly switched on and a voice sounded in her ears.

"Great heavens! Fay! You?"

She sprang to her feet with a cry of terror, and the bundle of notes dropped from her hand. Her eyes, big with fright, met the man's contemptuous gaze. Harold Hughes felt his heart contract with pain at the sight of the girl he loved, caught in the act of stealing.

There was a moment's silence in which Fay wished that she might sink through the floor. Harold believed her a thief, and who could blame him?

She opened her lips to tell him of his mistake, then she hesitated.

Her explanation meant Vera's disgrace. Surely never was a girl in such an awful position! With a low moan, Fay hid her white face in her trembling hands.

"Why didn't you ask me if you needed money?" Harold said, at last, in a low, broken voice. "How could you do this thing—you, the girl I thought so pure and good?"

"I—I——" Fay tried to speak, but tears choked her.

Believing her guilty, Harold conquered his emotion, and when he spoke again, his voice was hard and cold.

"Kindly return to your room, Miss Forrest. I will communicate with you in the morning."

Fay stumbled from the room, and dragged herself upstairs. Her heart felt heavy, but one gleam of hope sustained her. Surely Vera would exonerate her from all blame! In the morning she would see her, and everything would be all right.

Fay little dreamed she had been the victim of a cunning plot to disgrace her in Harold's eyes.

When Fay went downstairs the next morning, pale and heavy-eyed, she was told that Vera was unable to see any one. A maid handed her a note from Harold Hughes. It contained her month's salary! Fay's tears fell fast as she realized that she was being sent away in disgrace, and that Vera would not help her.

Wearily she packed her bag and then sat down to write a pleading letter to the woman she had helped.

She placed it on her dressing table and, kissing David, who was still asleep, she crept downstairs and out of the house.

Harold did not see her go. He was sitting in his study with bowed head, trying to fight the despair which gripped him.

A little later, he roused himself and went up to see his little son. David

was up and playing with his toys, and on the floor beside him were several torn scraps of paper. Harold picked a piece up idly, and glanced at the writing on it. Then his face whitened.

The sentences danced up and down before his eyes.

Was he dreaming?

He read the words aloud:

"Please tell your brother the truth. I cannot bear that he should think I am guilty. I kept silent to shield you, but when you know, I am sure you will explain. It is——"

There was more and Harold hurriedly pieced the other fragments together, and soon he understood all. Little David did not dream that his destructive fingers had given happiness back to his father.

With a stern, set face Harold went in search of Vera.

As the train steamed into Hillside Junction station Fay walked along the

platform with dragging steps. Her face was pale, and there were dark shadows beneath her large, gray eyes. She felt dazed with misery.

Suddenly a firm hand gripped her arm as she was about to step into a car. She looked up with a startled cry.

The color dyed her cheeks as she met Harold's tender gaze.

"My poor little girl! Can you ever forgive me? I know the truth, Fay. Thank Heaven I was in time. Come back with me. I have so much to say to you."

Joy flooded Fay's heart, as she let him take her bag.

"Fay! I love you! Will you be my wife?" he whispered.

Fay, reading the longing in his face, murmured a shy but happy "Yes."

She never discovered Vera's real treachery. That remained Harold's secret.



ARE all of our heroines beautiful? Read about a homely girl for a change. :: :: Watch for

Where Beauty Lies

It is the story of a plain girl, and will be published soon in LOVE STORY MAGAZINE

The Marriage of Mary

By Violet Gordon



MARY WALCOTT was not happy. It is hard to be happy when one is not popular; for youth loves youth; and gay laughter and pretty clothes; and the glint of sunlight tangled in happy heartstrings. So poor Mary Walcott kept a brave chin in the air, and pretended she didn't care when Erie Fortune and Ida Weiner—the other stenographers at Bamburger's—drew all the smiles, the banter, the compliments, and the invitations.

"It's not their fault, or the fault of the men," she was honest enough to admit to herself. "It's because I'm plain and grouchy and—and sour, I guess. The men see I hate them; and they're afraid of the razor edge on my tongue."

But despite her candor Mary seemed unable to curb that caustic little tongue. And as the years passed, each one left her a little lonelier than the last.

As for being plain—"beauty," as grandmothers love to quote, "is more a question of disposition" than many acknowledge. Mary's thin, long face, her eyes luscious as purple-blue grapes, and her mouth, its delicious, humorous twist, would have all been charming had any one taken the trouble to look for

these qualities. But who would bother? And why should they? When eyes give sharp, suspicious glances no one thinks of purple-blue grapes. And when a mouth is pursed in hard little lines there is small chance for a beguiling, humorous smile.

Mary was tall and far too thin. Her skin was sallow. Her dark hair unbecomingly dressed. But there was one point which even Erie Fortune and Ida Weiner acknowledged. Mary had beautiful hands, slight but strong fingered, soft as a butterfly's wings, supple and graceful in movement. Though her clothes hung awkwardly on her lean frame, her hands were always exquisitely manicured, each filbert nail dainty as a rose-tinted pearl. Yes, Mary had lovely hands!

"And a lot of good they do her," Erie Fortune scoffed. "The old vinegar cruet!"

She called Mary old because for ten years the latter had worked at Bamburger's. But Mary was not old; she was only twenty-five, though in her mind she felt a hundred. At first she had supported a paralyzed father. Her mother had died when she was born,

and to him at least she had seemed all those things she might have been.

But that was not for long. Old Mr. Walcott had slipped out very suddenly and peacefully early one dawn. And after that Mary had grown more reserved and more caustic than ever. Her great pride was in the confidence Mr. Bamburger placed in her ability. If there was an important letter to be written or special estimates to be gotten out, it was always Mary who was intrusted with the work. So it is not hard to understand that when "the thing" happened, it completely broke Mary's grim little heart. She felt dazed and stupefied.

"The thing" was not really a mystery, though it seemed so. It was simply the outcome of long hours, hard work, uninteresting food, and no diversion. Mary's ability slumped. She became no longer an asset to the business world. One morning when she came to the office she was faced with the discovery that an important letter received some days before had not been brought to Bamburger's attention. Bamburger was a leading New York antique dealer. In opening the mail, a duty for which she was solely responsible, she had mislaid an offer from a rich customer for a Chippendale dining table and sideboard, and had later forgotten about it.

"There goes six thousand cold!" the angry man roared at her. "Old Stinson got in ahead of me and sold her his set—a reproduction. He told Mrs. Barnes that ours was gone; and I'd never have known about it if Al Stinson hadn't spilled the beans. It's your fault, Mary Walcott. And what's more, for the last two weeks everything that's gone wrong has been your fault. What in the name of smothering smoke has got into you?"

Mary's face was grave. She could give no explanation. "Maybe I'd better go," she said dully.

"Maybe you had," he jeered. "I've lost several years of your salary on

you." Then, thinking of past efficiency: "Perhaps you're sick, Mary. Get this week's pay check and rest up a bit. Buy some clothes, go to a dance, and get some pep in you. If—if you'd talk softer you could make friends."

"No, I can't do it," said Mary, choking; and left his office.

Erie and Ida were sympathetic; and that nearly killed their proud superior.

"Save your kind words," she told them. "I don't need them."

She went home to the cheap room she had lived in for so many years. The room in which she had often thrilled at the memory of careless words of appreciation spoken by little Mr. Bamburger. Mary was not in the least sentimental about him. That would have been grotesque. Nevertheless, since her father's death her only pleasure had been the gratitude of her employer. And now, was it possible that she, Mary Walcott, head stenographer on the staff, had been fired from Bamburger's?

Until she reached her room her face had been ashen. Then, slowly, wretchedly, the blood mounted to the roots of her hair. With no one to witness her shame she dropped her forehead on the hard, unyielding surface of a table, and rocked herself in the grip of an unspeakable agony, too harsh for tears. She did not go down for dinner, and none of her fellow lodgers took enough interest even to inquire for her.

Next morning Mary could scarcely drag herself from bed. Her landlady sent for the doctor, and he confirmed Bamburger's opinion that she needed rest, and a change. It would be useless, he said, to look for another position.

"Have you saved any money?" he asked with kindly interest.

Mary nodded. She had saved a thousand dollars during her long service.

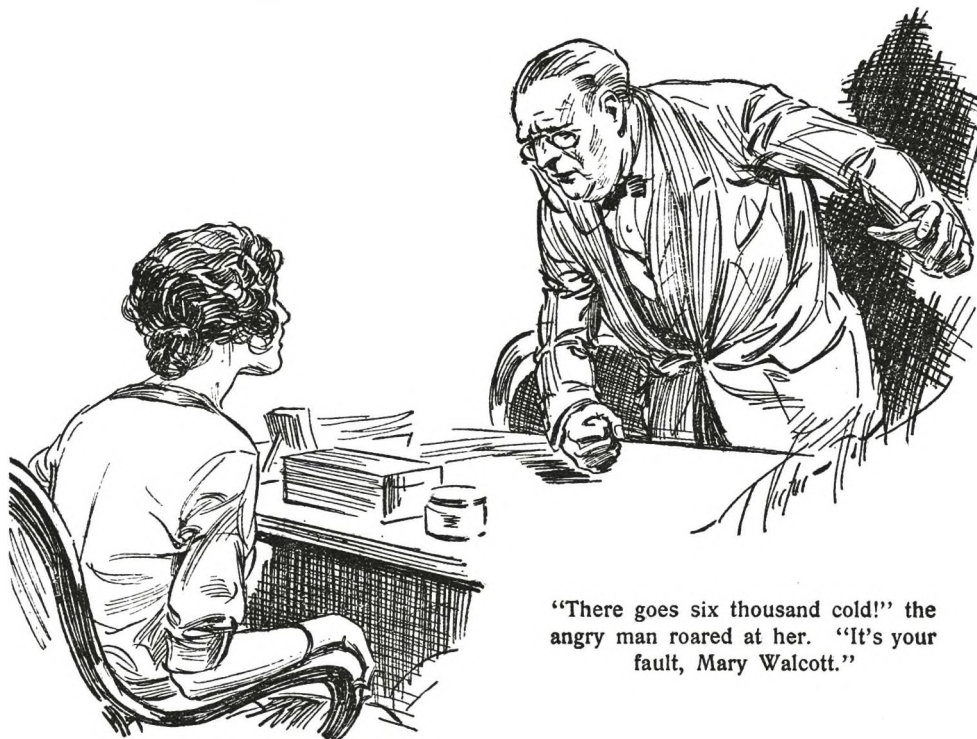
With a stone where her heart should have been she prepared for a forced vacation. The doctor recommended an inexpensive sanitarium in Maryland.

where the air would be just sufficiently bracing, and where she would be too far from New York to return on the prompting of a whim. Mary bought a few necessary clothes and left for the Stepney Rest Home on the following morning.

She found it to be a beautiful spot in a belt of low hills surrounded by farm

the conversation, but found this difficult. Despite her physical improvement Mary still fretted over her failure at Bam-burger's, and avoided companionship.

One circumstance consoled her. Sitting beside her was a man as taciturn as herself, who never addressed her even to ask for the salt. His name, she afterward learned, was Aylwin Molesworth.



"There goes six thousand cold!" the angry man roared at her. "It's your fault, Mary Walcott."

lands purple with clover, and promising pink-and-white vistas of buckwheat—a regular oasis for the honey bee. The sanitarium was a converted farmhouse, winged by sleeping porches. Mary was instantly put to bed on one of these, and kept there for two weeks. At the end of this time, feeling like a different being, she was allowed to go to her meals in the general dining room.

Here she met a number of the patients, men and women, some depressed, but the majority in excellent spirits. They generously tried to include her in

He was considerably taller than Mary, likewise dark, and so thin that his cheekbones protruded. His eyes were gray, the color of a brooding storm. His face, strong in outline, was repellent in expression. Mary found him anything but likable; yet sensed in him the unflattering resemblance to herself. One day she overheard the two nurses discussing him.

"He looks as though he lived on a diet of cinders," said one. "I'm sure it hurts him to thank me for anything. I wish he'd stayed in India."

"Is that where he comes from?" the other rejoined. "What's wrong with him?"

"Jungle fever for one thing, and a sour disposition for another."

"Well, he's not the only one, I'm thinking," came the answer.

And Marv rightly guessed they were referring to her. But she was used to this sort of thing, and was not particularly sensitive.

By degrees she was allowed to take first short walks, and then longer ones. It was during one of these that she ran across "The Honey Bower," and drew in her breath in sharp ecstasy; for nothing so lovely had ever come within range of her experience. It was a bee farm. That was instantly evident. The house was small, and from the vine-wreathed stones one could see it was very old. The front garden, exquisitely kept, was filled with roses and old-fashioned sweet-smelling flowers. Behind the house stretched the vegetable garden, and to one side an amphitheater of the most condensed activity the world has yet produced. Mary counted hive upon hive of cheerful, enterprising bees.

"What stacks of honey they must store!" she marveled, her eyes roving to a background of flowering buckwheat. For beekeepers are in a sense thieves. Their produce is gathered from all the neighboring farms.

"How I should love to live here all by myself, where people wouldn't hate me!"

Two men were working over one of the hives. Mary, overcome by curiosity, followed the fence to a point near where they stooped. They wore screens on their faces and gloves on their hands; and while they worked, they talked. At least one of them did.

"Two thousand," she overheard, "and it's cheap at that. Land's not dear hereabouts, but there's the bees and the house. It's a good investment for one who knows how to work it. And I

wouldn't let it go if it wasn't that I want to try my luck as a salesman, and my girl's keen set on living in the city."

"I tell you I've got only five hundred," the other man answered irritably. "I know bees. I can make future payments. Can't you give me an easy payment down?"

They continued to dispute, and Mary, aware that she was eavesdropping, left them. But all that night she thought of the bee farm, and the fact that it was for sale. If only she might buy it! The man might accept eight hundred down, and for the rest she could take out a mortgage.

But this, she soon realized, was a candle dream. She knew nothing about bees or gardening. She would have no money to live on till she made some profits, and might find herself in the position even of starving. Nevertheless, the picture absorbed her. And when she finally slept, the musical drone of bees hovered above her pillow and the scent of clover sweetened her dreams.

Of course she returned to "The Honey Bower" the very next day, and interviewed the owner. He was one of the men she had overheard by the hives.

"Well now, miss," he hesitated when she told him her problems, "I'd like real well to sell you the place, but as I told a gentleman that's got a fancy for it, I won't sell under a thousand down. And since you've been so frank with me, I think you're taking a long chance it you don't know anything about bees or gardening or such like."

It was obvious that he considered it a case of taking candy from a child. Mary felt she had made a fool of herself, and turned angrily away. But not before her sharp little tongue got in its work.

"If you think you can get a job as salesman in a city with those antique notions of salesmanship," she threw at him, "you'll find yourself properly stung worse than by bees."

Then as she neared the gate she heard the man's hearty laugh. "Come back, Miss Spitfire," he called, "and see if a hick can give you another notion." He actually ran after her and laid his hand on her arm. "This gentleman I was telling you about—why don't you and him buy 'The Honey Bower' on shares? He's looking round now for some fellow that might go in with him."

Mary shook her head.

"I don't like men," she said. "He'd want to run everything his way."

"He couldn't. Not with you for his partner," was the snappy retort.

Mary's eyes wandered over the beautiful garden, the peaceful house with its muslin curtains, and the amphitheater of restless honey makers.

"What's this man like?" she asked.

"Well!—er—I believe you'd like him fine, miss," said the beekeeper cautiously. "And I'll say this for him: he knows nearly as much about them sugar insects as I do myself. By Hickory—'speaking of angels' as the saying is—here's the man himself. Say, Mr. Molesworth," he called excitedly, "I've got your partner for you."

Mary turned like a shot, and to her amazement encountered the storm-clouded eyes of Aylwin Molesworth, her reticent and unpopular fellow patient.

"What do you mean?" the newcomer asked, after curtly raising his hat to Mary.

Volubly the man explained. Here were two people, each anxious to recover their health in the open, and to earn a living while they were doing it. They each had enough capital to contribute half of the first payment. One of them—Miss Walcott—had sufficient over to pay preliminary expenses till the profits came in. The other, to compensate this, had a knowledge of the work. The idea was a dandy. What more could you want?

When he had finished Mr. Molesworth glanced at him scornfully.

"Don't you see, man, that Miss Walcott is a girl?"

"Sure," said the beekeeper stupidly. "Why not?"

But Mary had flushed with quick comprehension.

"It's just that Mr. Molesworth happens to be a man," she elucidated.

"Well—he's all the better for that, to my way of thinking," was the ungallant response.

The other two exchanged looks of keen exasperation.

"I suppose," said Mr. Molesworth sarcastically, "that even in Stepney, Maryland, the proprieties aren't dead."

The beekeeper clapped his hand to his head. "Gosh," he grumbled, "I never thought of that." But his was an agile brain, and he proved that after all he was not such a poor salesman. "There's old Mrs. Carson," he suddenly remembered, "looking for bed and board. Why don't you take her in and make a little extra that way?"

He grinned hopefully.

"Two women?" Molesworth exploded. "Not on your life!"

This was enough for Mary.

"I wouldn't consider it for a minute," she declared. "The old lady might be all right—but the other—er—disadvantages are unthinkable."

And she walked stiffly away, not even turning to enjoy the angry surprise in young Mr. Molesworth's face. Notwithstanding, her triumph was short-lived. All along the road she met tiny honey makers returning to their hives with pockets crammed with nectar, and hairy bodies yellow with pollen. Every nodding flower, every breath of clover, whispered a regret. And suddenly Mary knew that she wanted "The Honey Bower" more than she had ever wanted anything in her life. It spelled sweetness, health, and new life to her.

Of course at the sanitarium they had to serve honey for supper. Mary, sitting beside Aylwin, coldly refused it.

Aylwin, on the other hand, helped himself to a large square, and seemed to enjoy it immensely, to his companion's annoyance. And during the entire meal neither of them spoke a word.

But Mary was unhappy, acutely unhappy. For years her life had been so negative that she had never actually set her heart on anything. Her honey dream was unique. Something that burned its way into her fancy. She thought of the bee farm during the remainder of the day, and again could not sleep when she went to bed on her small sleeping porch.

The moon rose very bright. It silvered the low hills and fair stretches of young crops. Down in the valley a river wound like a jeweled serpent. Mary rose, slipped into her bath robe, and feasted her eyes on the kingdom of the bees.

Presently a bright spark falling through shadows in an outjutting wing of the house caught her eye. On investigation she found that she was not the only patient moon gazing. Aylwin Molesworth, cigarette in hand, was leaning across another balcony. Simultaneously he discovered Mary; and both ducked out of view.

"The crusty old bear!" she communed with herself. "Now what in the world is he doing up at this hour of the night?"

Cautiously she again peered out, and of course encountered Aylwin in a similar act. It was desperately annoying and very undignified. Then, quite suddenly, Aylwin spoke:

"I've been thinking about that bee farm, Miss Walcott."

"Yes," noncommittally from Mary, her ears nevertheless hanging on his words.

"Why, I—I've been thinking that perhaps the beekeeper isn't such a fool as I took him for. Ordinarily the situation would be impossible. But—you don't like men, and I don't like women. We

might mutually agree to keep out of each other's way."

"Ye-es," again slowly from Mary, "the less I see of you the better. But you'd have to understand that I won't do the work in the house while you have all the fun out of doors. You must play fair and do your share of housework."

Gleefully she watched his cigarette flash in a savage curve toward a bed of asters.

"You've a neat way of putting things," he remarked with irony. "But if you think I'm going to dry nurse that Carson woman—the scheme's all off."

"She'll have to be boarded," said Mary, enjoying herself. "And I'll agree to do half of that, half of the housework, and half of the gardening and taking care of the bees."

There were sounds of unrest from the other balcony.

"I suppose he's grinding his teeth and tearing up the bedclothes," thought Mary blandly.

And indeed it was some time before Aylwin could command himself sufficiently to reply. When he managed it, his voice was hoarse and unsteady.

"Have your own way then," he said; and vanished from the scene.

Mary, undoubtedly the victor, returned happily to bed.

The next day they met by appointment at "The Honey Bower"—but not for anything would they have gone there together. And the beekeeper, delighted with his success, showed them his house.

"It was once a barn," he explained. "The furniture is old stuff—belonged to my grandfather, who owned most of the land round here, but I reckon it will hold together."

Mary, who knew more about furniture than anything else, could hardly refrain from gasping. Badly in need of polish, shabby in the extreme, it was nearly all early American. With a little labor the house could be made beautiful.

They visited a law office in Stepney,

and exchanged the requisite money for a deed of the two acres comprising "The Honey Bower," house, and effects. Then Mary and Aylwin went to see old Mrs. Carson and easily secured her as a lodger for the beginning of the next week. This accomplished they returned to the sanitarium—separately.

On the following Monday, however, they took formal possession of "The Honey Bower," with Mrs. Carson established in the best bedroom. There were only two of these; but an attic afforded privacy for Aylwin, who fortunately liked it on account of the view. Downstairs there was a big living room and kitchen—nothing more. Everything was clean and in applie-pie order, so that it was necessary only to settle their few belongings.

And then ensued a phase of life so strange that the very crickets on the old-fashioned hearth must have laughed at the spectacle. According to their agreement Mary and Aylwin were to keep strictly out of one another's way. On the other hand, also according to their agreement, they were to share the work on a fifty-fifty basis. Each was fiercely determined to see that the other gained no advantage, and the result was that neither ever allowed the other out of his or her sight. They prepared meals together—somewhat amateurishly; washed the dishes; made the beds; swept and dusted; gardened and cared for the bees, all with a formal pretense of isolation.

It soon developed that Mary was one of those rare persons whom bees do not sting, and consequently her fondness for them developed into a passion. Eagerly she watched Aylwin and benefited from her observations, for unquestionably he knew far more than she. But despite her joy in the out-of-door work there was a big ant hiding in the honey, and that ant proved to be Mrs. Carson. For, no matter how much care was taken of her room, which Mary and Aylwin

tidied jointly; no matter how hard they tried to serve her appetite, Mrs. Carson was never pleased.

At the end of two weeks she declared that unless the meals were more to her liking she would not pay so much board. Miss Walcott had burned the potatoes; Mr. Molesworth had left tons of sand in the spinach. No one could live on such a diet.

Of course Mary flew off the handle.

"We wait on you from morning to night," she declared furiously. "The garden is neglected on your account. We took this place to regain our health. Easy outdoor work was what the doctors ordered, and here we spend our time in the house slaving for you."

Aylwin's eyes quickly darted toward Mary. Perhaps it struck him as strange that she should include him in all her remarks.

"We" and "our" had tripped off her tongue quite unconsciously. She was defending him as well as herself.

But Mrs. Carson's eyes glinted wickedly.

"That's all very well, deary," she said. "But if it wasn't for me you couldn't live here. And a precious hard time you'd have finding another lodger to stay in these parts. So don't let your temper fly away with you. I won't pay more than five dollars a week for what I get until you can do better by me." That was three dollars less than she had agreed to pay. "And I want my breakfast brought to my room." Feeling triumphant she stalked upstairs, leaving the two owners to grin and bear it.

But Mary did not grin. She was tired with her unwonted labors and efforts to control her tongue. With a dejected movement she dropped into an old Windsor chair and burst into silent tears.

"The old vixen!" Aylwin fumed. "Here, Miss Walcott, there's no use crying. Let's think of a way out."

"There isn't—any way," Mary



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sobbed. "We're in her power. And—and if we weren't in her power we'd be in some one else's, and they might be worse. I hate lodgers!"

"So do I," her companion heartily seconded. "Furthermore, the work on the place is going to the dogs. I have an idea," he continued, "that might be worth discussing."

Mary dried her eyes and looked up at him. To her surprise he seemed curiously flushed and nervous.

"It's just this, Miss Walcott. Since you dislike men and I avoid women, it's unlikely that either of us will ever marry."

"Not me, anyway," said Mary with finality.

"Exactly," he returned. "That makes it easier. If we—er—went through the form of a marriage ceremony, there could be no objection to our carrying on here without a lodger, could there?"

Mary was thunderstruck. She had a wild desire to laugh, and with difficulty curbed it.

"It need make no difference in our mode of living," he went on. "We need see no more of each other than we do at present."

"N-o-o," Mary admitted, secretly wondering if her partner realized how seldom they were separated.

"Very well, then." Aylwin sounded businesslike. "Suppose we get a license this afternoon and hunt up a parson."

"All—right," said Mary, concluding that she would soon wake up.

But the dream persisted. Presently she put on her hat and, with Aylwin, left the house. Together they walked to Stepney, secured a ring and license, in much the same way they would have bought a new bee hive, and presented themselves to a clergyman, who took them at once to his church.

Curiously enough Mary had never witnessed a wedding. As the service progressed a vague uneasiness stirred her. The solemn words of the marriage sacrament startled and alarmed her. Was she committing a sin? Was it mocking the laws of God?

The church was very silent, roseate with the glow of the afternoon sun flooding through stained-glass windows. The minister's voice was musical, resonant with a strange, uplifted thrill. Mary found herself repeating words after him, vowing to love, cherish, and obey Aylwin, "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health—till death us do part."

The minister dismissed them with his blessing. The two witnesses pressed congratulations upon them, and Mary, realizing she must be pale, left the church with a plain, narrow ring burn-

ing into her finger. Aylwin, she noticed, kept his face turned from her. She wondered if he, too, felt guilty.

As they neared home the atmosphere of the church faded somewhat. The prophetic warning of the service lost its sharp outline. And Mary prepared for the interview with Mrs. Carson.

"Let me do the talking," said Aylwin. "She takes it out of you." And to Mary's astonishment he slipped his hand under her elbow and helped her up the single step before the house door, though never before had he done such a thing.

Mrs. Carson was rocking herself violently in the one rocking chair.

"A nice time to get in," she snapped. "Six o'clock and not even a fire laid. I've a good mind to pack my things and get out. I'm told Mis' Heaton is looking for a steady boarder, and I could go to her this very night."

Aylwin nodded pleasantly.

"That might be an excellent idea," he agreed. "I'll borrow a horse from the next farm and drive you over after a while. You could pack your things while my wife and I get dinner."

Mrs. Carson's eyes nearly popped out of her head.

"Your wife!" she screamed.

Aylwin gestured with peculiar dignity toward Mary.

"Yes, my wife. Mrs. Aylwin Molesworth."

A bright flush flooded Mary's cheeks. What strange words to hear from any man! She had to remind herself sharply that Aylwin's pride was not in her, but in his triumph over their testy lodger.

But at that moment the angry old woman completely lost her head. She wanted to hurt some one, and instinctively directed her thrust, if not her words, at Mary.

"It's small sense you've got, Mr. Molesworth. You! A gentleman born, if I ever saw one, and I've worked for some of the best families in my day, taking up with a plain piece that hasn't

the manners of a——” Her simile was drowned.

“Silence!” Aylwin thundered, towering above the woman in such a rage that she quailed before him. “Not one more word from you! My wife is my wife, and so long as I live she shall be treated with respect. Mary”—his voice dropped, but still held a tone that required obedience—“please stay in your room for a while. I’ll bring your dinner to you.”

And Mary found herself moving toward the stairs with the docility of a child, while the silence commanded by her husband reigned below.

She sat by her window and tried to collect her thoughts. Was it true? Had she married a man who could have a right to be ashamed of her? She had never even thought of his social standing. He had always been so taciturn, so grouchy. And yet, there were little things about him that might have opened her eyes. His voice, his unconscious bearing—— Unwillingly she had to admit that there was something aristocratic about the mysterious stranger with whose life she had so casually linked her own. Yes, though he had daily by her side performed the most menial tasks, he had never once lost that quality of poise and bearing which stamps people of refinement. A wave of humiliating fear swept over Mary as she thought of her own sharp tongue, her lifelong indifference to social amenities. Would he grow to despise her?

All at once she heard his footstep on the stair. He tapped on the door; then brought her in a tray.

“She’ll be gone in half an hour,” he said briefly. “I’ve got a man to drive her.”

Mary saw that he had taken some trouble with her dinner, and to please him she tried to eat it. At last she heard Mrs. Carson’s trunk being carried downstairs; and soon Aylwin’s voice called from below. Mary instantly went down to him.

He was standing with his feet apart, a curved pipe in his mouth, and his hands folded behind his back. He glanced up and smiled, half shyly.

“Now we can live!” he said.

That was all. They neither of them referred to the things that had been said. But Mary felt comforted; and from this day forward their lives moved on in a vastly different fashion from the past. Though Mary offered to do all the housework, Aylwin would not hear of it.

“The outdoor work is what you need,” he said. “We’ll carry on as before.”

Somehow their tongues were loosened. They talked and planned cheerfully over their labors. They bought an old horse and dilapidated wagon, and together drove to Stepney and other markets, disposing of their wares. They polished the shabby furniture, and by degrees transformed their house into a little gem of early American beauty and simplicity.

“I wouldn’t sell a stick of this,” Mary would often say, “although we could get a small fortune for it as it stands.”

In the evenings Aylwin often read to her, and Mary found herself peeping into a world of romance and color such as she had never dreamed of. Sometimes Aylwin, forgetting his reserve, would tell her of his own experiences in India, in Persia, and in Africa, while Mary listened, enthralled.

Then in a burst of extraordinary confidence:

“The reason why I began globe trotting was because I lost my girl.” The quick sympathy in Mary’s eyes led him on. “We were engaged before I went to Egypt, but she lost her heart to some admiral who was years older than herself, and married him. And I got soured on women.”

“You let one woman do that to you?”

He hesitated, and presently drew a small photograph from his pocket.

“She was all the women in the world to me.”

Mary studied the picture enviously. Eileen, as it was signed, was rarely beautiful. So beautiful that she seemed hardly real. Mary returned the photograph.

"I'm sorry," she said in a low voice, "terribly sorry."

"Thank you," he replied. "You are the first person whose sympathy would not have infuriated me. But I'm not sorry for myself any more." Then, in a lighter tone: "Even as a boy I had a mania for beekeeping."

She laughed.

"And now—you've married a wasp."

Aylwin seemed surprised, doubtful how to take this.

"Oh, well—you've married something of a hornet yourself, my dear," he countered. "By the way, since we're being confidential, do you mind telling me 'how you got that way,' as they say over here?"

And quite candidly Mary told him the unvarnished truth about herself—even about the trouble at Bamburger's.

After this their friendship was cemented; and though neither of them instantly realized it, they magically ceased to be either wasp or hornet.

The summer advanced, the bees multiplied, the honey waxed abundant, and a warm prosperity settled on "The Honey Bower." From time to time the bees swarmed, and Mary and Aylwin would beat upon tin pans, smoke them drowsy, and then sweep them into a new hive.

On one of these occasions Mary stood for a minute with the queen bee clinging to her finger—a daring procedure. But she did not think of the danger. Instead she rejoiced at her strange power over the little sovereign mother. Aylwin, on the contrary, was nervous, till he forgot himself in watching Mary's hand, wondering why he had never before noticed its rose-petal perfection. For even if her work was rough Mary still took undue care of the two mem-

bers that constituted her sole vanity. His eyes drifted to his companion's figure, and with a start he realized that she had changed. The pink cotton frock clung in seductive lines to graceful young curves that had not been in existence when Mary came to Stepney.

Aylwin glanced higher, at the girl's face, and caught his breath. Mary's red lips were parted in a winsome, tender smile. Her cheeks, no longer sallow, were softly flushed. And her eyes? There was no mistaking the likeness to luscious, purple-blue grapes beneath twilight shadows. Aylwin felt suddenly giddy.

With a little laugh Mary put the queen bee into the new hive and helped to restore her subjects to her. Slowly Aylwin removed his head screen and gloves, but all the time he was covertly watching Mary.

"Not a sting?" he asked in an oddly gentle voice.

"Not a sting," she returned gayly, and ran off to prepare lunch, while Aylwin took up his hoe and wandered to the garden.

"The lightest of ham omelets," thought Mary. "He loves them." And the girl who had once been called an old vinegar cruet, presently glowed with pride over a savory brown and yellow achievement. She arranged some mig-nonette and nasturtiums on the gate-leg table, and then slipped out to call Aylwin.

His back was turned to her as she approached him, and he was singing as he worked, in a low rich baritone. The surprise of it held her spellbound. Not once had she heard him do such a thing.

"Pale hands pink tipped like lotus buds that float

Upon the waters where we used to dwell.
I would have rather felt you round my throat
Crushing out life, than waving me fare-
well."

Foolish Mary! Another woman might have known that men of Aylwin's

type do not sing sentimental love songs when they burn with longing for the girl who has rejected them. But this woman was ill versed in the ways of men. It flashed upon her that her comrade was thinking of Eileen, the beautiful trifter who had so ruthlessly waved her lover farewell. Mary's heart contracted. She crept back to the house, so that he would not know she had heard his love song. Then, smothering down a surge of jealousy that frightened her by its violence, she called him to lunch from the doorway.

All through the meal she felt his eyes upon her, and placed her own interpretation upon every glance. Aylwin, his health restored, was regretting his marriage to a girl who had neither beauty nor charm—he who had so nearly won Eileen. It was true that Eileen was lost to him, but there were other beautiful girls of his own station. Mary gritted her teeth when she thought of them. They, who would be only too ready to love him. For the change in Aylwin's appearance and manner since coming to "The Honey Bower" was illuminating.

And with each day he was regaining a part of what he had lost.

Yes, Mary tortured herself with every form of mental rack and thumb-screw her ingenious brain could devise. Not only that day, but on several succeeding days and nights. There could be no doubt about it. Aylwin's attitude had changed toward her, and the cause of that change Mary never questioned. From her own sensitive imagination she supplied it. This, she believed, was her punishment for trifling with God's marriage laws.

Then there fell a heavy rain, colder than the season warranted, and Aylwin, taxing his newly established health too severely, caught a cold. He made light of it, and protested when Mary refused to let him go to town with the weekly produce. But she was firm.

"I can drive alone," she said. "You rest this morning."

Aylwin looked at her queerly.

"You're good to me, Mary," he said.

"Tush!" said Mary. But her heavy heart was lighter as she joggled along the country roads.

The air was sweet and sharp, and the fresh green leaves driven to the ground by the recent rains were like tiny cups of liquid pearls. Against her will Mary kept thinking of a dream she had had that morning, a picture that mocked her with its futility. She had dreamed that Aylwin slipped in through her slightly open door and dropped a kiss, soft as a morning sunbeam, on the palm of her hand relaxed upon her pillow.

The road wound near a bend of the river heavy with mire, and the little horse tugged strenuously at the mud-bound wheels. An automobile, Mary noticed, was navigating a ditch with some difficulty. When she came abreast of it the driver leaned forward and questioned her.

"Can you tell me the way to Molesworth's bee farm?" he asked.

"Why, yes." Mary wondered if his passengers—two, it seemed—were looking for produce. If so, she might save them the trip by giving them what she had. "I'm coming from there now. Did you want honey?"

A man leaned out from the rear of the car and scrutinized her. He was small, gray haired, and immaculately dressed.

"No, I want to see Mr. Wainright on business—Mr. Aylwin Wainright," he explained. "We've lost our way. The directions were not clear, and I'd be grateful if you'd put us right."

"Mr. Wainright?" Mary repeated.

"I should have said Mr. Molesworth," the little man fussily corrected himself. "I understand he has changed his name. Terrible name, too! There are many who would be only too proud

to have such a distinguished name as Wainright. Wonder what his aristocratic old father would think!"

With an effort Mary got herself in hand. If anything had been needed to widen the breach between herself and the man she loved—this was it. Why had he never told her about his family? And yet, she was positive he had been poorer than herself when they bought the bee farm on shares. She heard her own voice giving minute directions, as though that voice did not belong to her. And presently the second passenger leaned forward and addressed her.

"I—I understand Mr. Wainright has been ill. Is he—stronger now?"

Mary stared into the eyes of the speaker, and felt every drop of blood in her body turn to ice. For there could be no mistake. This was the girl of the picture—Eileen. The slight maturity the years had added had in no wise detracted from her amazing beauty. Nor was this all. Eileen was wearing a close black hat bordered with narrow white, from which hung the somber veil that marks the newly made widow. Eileen was free.

With a note of impatience she repeated her question.

"Oh, yes, he's much better," Mary told her wearily, and spasmodically urged her horse forward.

Behind her the motor's engine came to life, and Eileen continued on her journey to "The Honey Bower," while Mary drove on to Stepney. Through two more miles of sweet-smelling roadway she traveled. Two miles of cruel, soul-torturing renunciation, with her eyes blinded by scorching tears. But when she reached her destination her course was mapped out. She disposed of her wares, bought a writing tablet at a drug store, and wrote Aylwin a letter.

I should never have married you. It was wrong, almost wicked. I am giving you back your freedom. The girl you call Eileen is

also free, and as soon as you have secured a divorce from me you can marry her. I don't know a thing about divorce laws, but I feel sure there will be no trouble in this case. It was not a true marriage. I shall have a lawyer communicate with you in a few days, but you must not ask him for my address.

She dashed the hot tears from her eyes and studied the letter; then added: "Thank you for all your kindness."

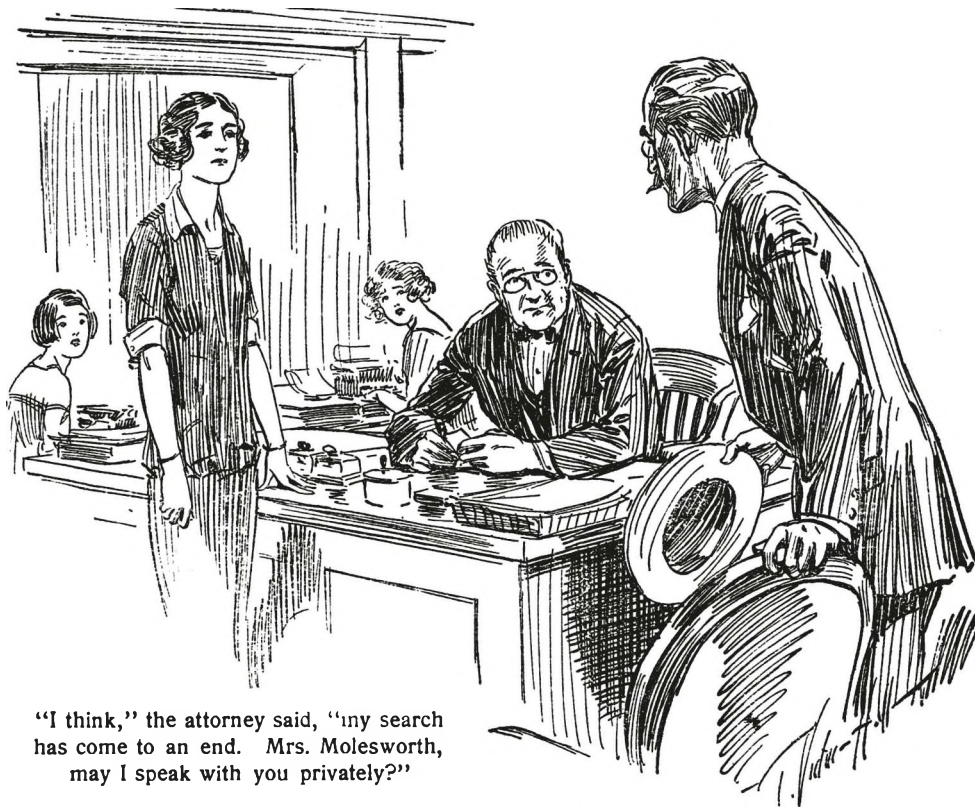
It was a trite, bald ending, but she could not trust herself to say more. Above all she must not make him feel that he was hurting her. She engaged a boy to drive the horse home and to deliver the letter, before she caught the train for New York, traveling without extra clothes and with very little money.

A few days later Mary was back with Bamburger, and all the staff were whispering about the change in her. For, though her experience had left its indelible print of sorrow upon her, Mary was both strengthened and softened by her memories. If she wept at night, if her heart ached with a longing she could hardly bear, she was at least brave by day. The new gentleness of her attitude perplexed as much as it pleased her old employer, who had not hesitated to reengage her.

"You've turned into quite a beauty," Bamburger told her admiringly. "I always said you could knock the other girls silly if you put some flesh on your bones and"—he was about to say, "changed your disposition," but thought better of it in time—"and got some color in your checks."

For not even her storms of secret grief could immediately undo what Aylwin's care and the wholesome country life had accomplished. There was a change, too, in the attitude of the other stenographers and the salesmen.

"What do you know about Miss Walcott?" one of the latter whispered to Erie Fortune. "Don't she look like the clam's spareribs since she came back?"



"I think," the attorney said, "my search has come to an end. Mrs. Molesworth, may I speak with you privately?"

"Har! har!" laughed Erie good-naturedly. "She'll be cutting Ida and me out if we don't look sharp."

But Mary was indifferent to what might be thought of her. She plunged into her work with such energy, in order to drown her thoughts, that in two weeks Bamburger proved his return of confidence by raising her salary. Though even this did not interest her.

One day when the little boss was in his private office above the shops, dictating a letter to Ida Weiner, a small, clapper, gray-haired man was admitted to him. Bamburger laid down his cigar stub and, taking the stranger for a customer, wreathed his face in urbanity.

"What can I do for you, sir?"

The small man presented his card, which showed him to be Andrew Trine, an attorney, representing Black & Cornwall, San Francisco.

"I'm afraid I'm not a customer," he said, "but I have hopes that you can help me in an extremely important matter. I am looking for a young woman who has disappeared."

"Yes?" from Bamburger. "What is her name?"

"Her name is Molesworth—but——"

"I have no customers of that name, sir." Bamburger was very busy at this time of day. "I believe I can be of no help."

"But," Mr. Trine insisted, "I have reason to think you may be employing her. She——"

"Employing her!" This struck the New York merchant as singularly droll.

"Not that I know of, Mr. Trine. Unless Ida's holding out on us."

Andrew Trine smiled frigidly.

"This is not a joke," he explained. "I know that Mrs. Molesworth was once

an employee here. Her maiden name was——”

At that moment the door opened, and Mary entered to place a number of letters before Mr. Bamburger. Instantly the attorney was on his feet.

“I think,” he said, “my search has come to an end. Mrs. Molesworth, may I speak with you privately?”

The name, Molesworth, caused her to draw up with a quick start. The

information. But this morning Aylwin was able to remember the name of your former employer, and I came at once to find you. If you will hurry we can just make the three fifteen express.”

Mary’s eyes were wide with conflicting emotions. But one fact was clear. Aylwin was ill. He wanted her. She barely took time to seize her hat and coat, and toss a hurried word of farewell to Bamburger and Ida before she

“My darling!”
Aylwin said. “Is
it—true, or am I
delirious?”



color fled from her face as she recognized the man whom she had directed to “The Honey Bower” the day she left Stepney.

“Why did you follow me?” she asked resentfully.

“You will have to forgive me,” said Mr. Trine. “Your husband is seriously ill with pleurisy and pneumonia. He calls for you day and night, and if you want him to recover you must return to him. Your lawyer would give no

vanished with Mr. Trine from the office.

The two she left sat staring at each other petrified.

“Mary Walcott!” said little Bamburger. “Mary Walcott—married!”

He leaned forward, grinning feebly. "Well, what do you know about that?"

"It's a knock-out, replied Ida. "Wait till I tell the girls!"

That evening in an upper room of the house at "The Honey Bower," Aylwin lay upon his bed, his face turned to the wall. A nurse pleaded with him to take some nourishment; but he would not listen.

"Where is my wife?" he kept repeating monotonously. "Can't they find my wife?"

"Well, sir, we haven't heard yet. But Mr. Trine should be back any minute."

She soothed him; and presently he drifted into an uneasy sleep. Below a car drew up to the door. Footsteps sounded in the hall, and the nurse hastened downstairs.

"How is he?" said Mary breathlessly, grasping the woman's arm.

"He'll get better now," was the low-voiced answer.

Mary crept up to her husband's room, and stood silent for a minute, conquering the sobs that shook her. Aylwin was muttering in his sleep, calling her by name.

"Here I am, dearest," she whispered, and kneeling by his side drew his head to her breast.

He opened his eyes and stared into hers.

"My darling!" he said. "Is it—true, or am I delirious?"

But Mary's kiss was very real. It was warm and full of glowing life. She gathered Aylwin close and crooned over him with a passion of tenderness and mother love.

"My dear one! My own love, how could I know your cold would be so serious? How could I know you would want me? I thought it was Eileen you longed for, or I would never, never have left you."

He reached up and touched her face, fighting hard to keep tears of weakness

from his eyes. Then he caught the hand that stroked his cheek, and drew it to his lips.

"How I suffered to keep from kissing you," he told her. "But you grew so distant, I was afraid of losing you. Eileen is less than nothing to me now, sweetheart."

Mary had an instant of pity for the beautiful young widow who had traveled so far in vain. She knew from Mr. Trine that Eileen had returned to her home after learning that Aylwin was married and deeply in love with his wife. Mary had discovered, too, that Aylwin had been informed of his uncle's death, and a moderate fortune which had been bequeathed to him.

"Once," Aylwin was saying, "I kissed your hand when you were asleep."

Mary flushed with happiness. It had actually been true!

"Why," he went on, "did you grow distant with me just when I learned how much I loved you?"

"I heard you singing an Indian love song," she confessed. "I thought it was for Eileen."

He seemed astonished.

"Do you mean the Kashmiri song? You blessed child! It was your own beautiful hands that made me think of that!"

"O-o-h!" Mary nestled closer in the flood tide of her joy. "I wish we could live in this lovely place forever, Aylwin. The Honey Bower—is a sweeter place than ever with love in it."

"We shall—as long as you wish it," he promised. "Trine says he can lease my uncle's estate for three years."

The moon rose upon their reunion, outlined amber clear in the open window.

"It's like a great round hive of honey," said Mary. "And the stars are silver bees."

"Of course." Aylwin turned his head till his lips touched her throat. "It's our Honey Moon, dear heart."



WOULD YOU BE BEAUTIFUL?

By HELEN ROBERTS

AS a general rule, I am quite sure that the majority of women are underfed rather than overfed. Half the troubles of our sex are due to this persistent underfeeding—it is so easy to have a cup of tea and a boiled egg for lunch, or one small piece of toast for breakfast.

Never begrudge money spent on food.

And don't think that you must necessarily get thin because you are under-eating.

If you are afraid of putting on weight, by all means adjust your diet, but this needs doing with the greatest care. You cannot suddenly cut out all carbohydrates—which means all starches and sugars—and all fats, and expect to go on working as efficiently and to feel as well as on a normal diet.

It sounds rather paradoxical, but one of the great causes of obesity is anæmia, and the obesity will go with the anæmia when you follow the right diet.

It is now recognized that no one has a chance of good looks or of good health unless they have food which contains a certain amount of vitamins. These are

mysterious substances only contained in *living* foods—that is, foods which have not been overcooked.

There are three classes of vitamins and to be deprived of any one of the three opens the gate to serious trouble. All three are mainly found in fresh fruits and vegetables, and in dairy produce, such as milk, eggs, and butter.

If you have an abundant supply of these health-givers your general and nervous condition are receiving what they need.

These delicate substances are easily killed by heat, so it is important to eat as much uncooked food as you can. Don't think that tinned fruit will do in place of fresh, as the high temperature to which it is subjected in the sealing of the tins is sufficient to kill all the vitamins.

Try and get as much fresh fruit and salads as you can. You may find that a fruit-and-salad meal once a day suits you better than having fruit two or three times during the day after your ordinary meals.

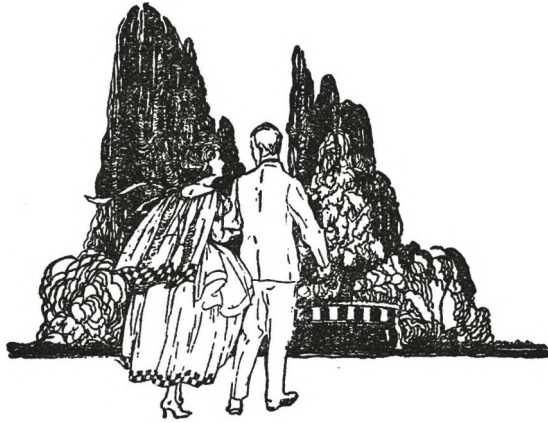
Salads are the greatest beautifiers.

The women who would be attractive should eat plentifully of them. They not only contain life-giving salts, but also they go far to combat constipation, by stimulating the muscular action of the bowels by their bulk.

Be sure you take plenty of liquid. Most of us would clear our complexions marvellously if only we would drink four or five pints of water every day. If you are afraid of putting on weight,

dry meals are for you, and the fluid must be taken in between. If you add a squeeze of lemon juice, you will reduce all the more quickly.

It is a wise experiment to try lunching out of doors. The lunches you prepare yourself will probably repay you in health and good looks far more than the type of lunch one usually gets in a restaurant amid steam and bustle and confusion.

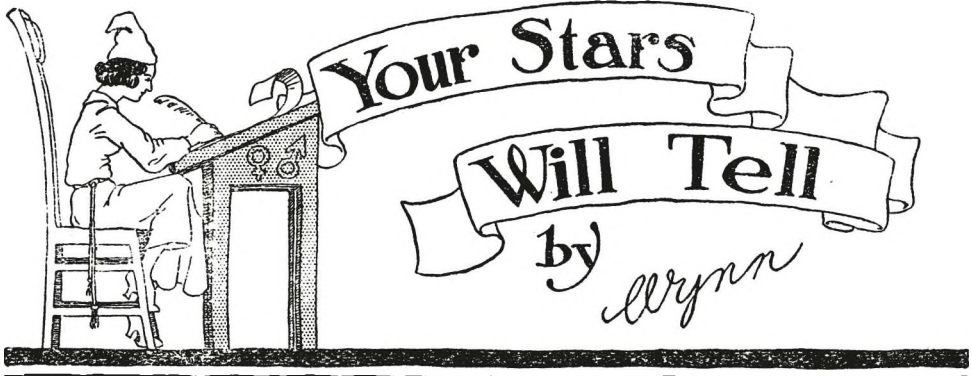


Can a successful marriage be based on anything but love?

☞ Watch for the *different* love story—

The Marriage of Mary

It is full of humor, and will appear soon in LOVE STORY MAGAZINE



Editor's Note: This department is conducted for the benefit of the readers of "Love Story Magazine" as well as for their entertainment, but neither the publishers nor the author can assume responsibility for the reliability of any statement made herein, for incorrect data is often furnished, even when the sender has every reason to believe it correct. Wynne does not make any claim whatever to superhuman knowledge or power, making all deductions by means of the positions of the planets alone, and the results must be taken for what they are worth in the light of your experience.

In order that the greatest number of readers may use the department, each is limited to asking one question. Your questions should be about yourself or your problems. No questions about lost articles, the stock market or gambling will be answered.

Give as much as you can of the following data: date, month, year and place of birth, the hour of the day or night if possible, and the sex.

MAKE THE MOST OF NEXT WEEK

Hours mentioned are Eastern standard time.

Sunday, September 13th

The week starts with a decidedly unpleasant aspect forming at 7 a. m. This lasts only a couple of hours. The balance of the day is quiet in the planetary world. If you were born between July 21st and August 3d, things will be pleasant for you. Those having a birthday on October 20th have a desirable day for social matters.

Monday, September 14th

Only those who are capable of surmounting difficulties will find the day profitable. Discouragement and lack of opportunity are the clouds shadowing the brightness. Those who have birthdays between the 3d and 15th of August can make progress to-day if they are alert to grasp their opportunities. If your birthday falls on the 21st or 22d of October, happiness through the home or through love affairs will be yours.

Tuesday September 15th

Beware of the person who tries to put any visionary ideas into your head between 9 and 10 a. m. The inclination will be to fall for impractical schemes. The entire day is unfavorable for the exercise of good judgment. Activity and interesting events are scheduled for those born between the 15th and 28th of August. Those who have birthdays on or near October 23d will meet with progress through contacts with friends.

Wednesday, September 16th

To-day will make up for those preceding. It is full of promise. Social relations will greatly improve. Those who cater to the needs of women will have a profitable day. A good time for mental activity and making sales is between 1 and 2 p. m. Great strides toward progress can be made if you were born between August 28th and September 9th. Advancement in affectional matters is indicated for those born on October 24th.

Thursday, September 17th

Control your temper at all costs between 8 and 9 p. m. It will prove a blessing for the balance of the day. A better day than the average is indicated for those born between the 9th and 22d of September. Your thoughts will be turning to matters of the heart today if you were born on or near October 25th.

Friday, September 18th

The planetary bodies are unfavorably active to-day. It would be wise to postpone important matters. Between 10 and 12 a. m. will prove the strongest period of the day. An active and beneficial day is indicated for those born between September 22d and October 5th, but they also will be compelled to exercise care. Those born on October 26th will have to use ingenuity and tact concerning their love affairs.

Saturday, September 19th

Hang on to your money between 9 and 10 a. m. There is an influence operating which suggests waste and poor judgment. Optimism reigns from 1 p. m. on. If you celebrate your birthday between the 5th and 18th of October, make the most of your opportunities today. Pleasure and social activity is promised those born on October 27th and 28th.

THE WHOLE WEEK

If you have a birthday within the coming week, the Sun is transiting its own place in your chart. Now is the time to make plans for progress.

A hazy, visionary, and uncertain influence is at present coloring the lives of those born between August 14th and 19th. These people are experiencing a transit of Neptune and should postpone important decisions until this planet passes on its way.

If you were born between March 11th and 15th, Uranus is doing its best to unsettle you. You undoubtedly feel a desire for any kind of a change, but hang fast to existing conditions because Uranus does not warrant profitable changes.

Struggle, gloom, depression, and lowered vitality are things you will have to fight against if you were born between November 1st and 5th. Saturn in transit over the Sun is never a happy influence, but remember it won't last forever.

Now we come to the fortunate birthdays at the present time. The lucky group includes people born between January 1st and 6th. Be alert to your opportunities, for the Jupiter transit brings financial settlement.

CHOOSING AN OCCUPATION

This week we will take up Scorpio, the eighth sign of the Zodiac. Natives of Scorpio are those born between October 24th and November 23d. The position of the Sun is important, and the sign in which you were born tells much of the occupation which will most appeal to you.

Natives of Scorpio are noted for their industry. They are impatient with those who are inclined to be lax or lazy. Marked executive ability is theirs because of their great intuitive ability. They enjoy responsibility and make splendid employees. Scorpio is the doctor's sign, as the majority of our great doctors and surgeons are natives of Scorpio. The women make capable nurses. The problems of life and death seem to attract those born in this sign. Scorpio rules death. Not many of us can look upon being an undertaker as a very joyous occupation, but coming under Scorpio, it is a suitable occupation for many born in this sign. Scorpio also rules oil, and connection in a business way with oil products is favorable for natives of October 24th to November 23d. They have it pretty much within their own power to travel far in the world. If these people have developed their possibilities they have a great deal of force within and a great deal of charm without. Things aren't going as well as they might at present, because Saturn is passing through the sign Scorpio. Accept this as only temporary.

Answers to Questions

Will I have any children? Woman, born November 11, 1902; man, born November 24, 1898.

It looks as if you are going to have a regular old-fashioned family, and you will be very fortunate in this regard. A favorable time for the birth of a child is during 1926-1927.

Will I marry? Born August 10, 1902.
SMILES.

Neptune has just recently been transiting your Sun, and Saturn is affecting your Moon. Control your romantic tendencies for the present. You are very apt to marry a man who has had a previous attachment in his life. It seems probable that the opportunity will come along before the end of 1926.

What has the future in store for my little son? Born August 27, 1919.

Mrs. E. N. G.

Your little son has a horoscope which promises great success during the latter half of his life. He may have an uphill road at times, but this will only develop his resourcefulness. Being of the purely intellectual type, he should be trained for literary work. The newspaper field would be preferable.

What has fate in store for me? Born May 16, 1899.

MISS GENEVIEVE.

You are a very practical person, having a tendency to live largely in the material things of life. Because your nature is a fixed one, you are inclined to let things take their own course. However, you will not lack excitement beginning in 1927. There will be an opportunity to marry, and there seems to be considerable opposition in this connection. Since you are not lacking in will power, you will be well able to defend your own interests.

Will the man I marry be well off? Born August 11, 1909.

M. W.

I think you ask this question because you are not old enough to have formed a true sense of values. Money won't be much of a consideration when the right one comes along. Wait until you are thirty to marry if you desire lasting happiness.

What can you tell me about myself? Born September 4, 1889.

F. B. M.

I would expect you to have an expansive, enthusiastic, and sympathetic nature, but you are at the same time practical, critical, and

businesslike. There is business ability of a high order shown in your chart; also some musical talent. You are extremely independent, self-reliant, and certainly will make a success of life.

Would this man and woman be happy together? Woman, born March 26, 1906; man, born October 4, 1900.

TRYING AGAIN.

There is strong attraction between your two charts. However, it may be more infatuation than real congeniality. The woman should consider carefully before marrying. Her chart holds the possibility of more than one marriage, and there is one which will end disastrously.

What am I best adapted for? Born March 4, 1903.

PEG.

You are well fitted for some work catering to the needs of women. I would suggest that you become a saleswoman in a woman's shop, with the idea of studying to become a buyer.

When will I marry? Born July 25, 1906.

P. A. B.

You are inclined to be restless and dissatisfied, and if you read your letter over before you sent it, didn't you impress yourself as being a trifle with love? If you wait until 1934, you will meet a man who will make you desirous of giving affection rather than taking it.

What am I best suited for? Born February 15, 1905.

D. D. D.

Study to be a nurse. You will be very successful in this work, and are just the type of person that is a source of comfort to those who are ill.





The Friend in Need

Department conducted by
Laura Alston Brown

SOMETIMES it hurts our vanity to find out the real truth but sometimes it's awfully good for us as in the case of Not Regretful.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: You're right, Mrs. Brown! I take my hat off to you! Some time ago I wrote a letter to you signed Regretful, and you told me probably my old sweetheart had forgotten me long ago, and that it was a serious step I would be taking to go back there to see him, leaving my husband here. Yes, you are right.

Although I have not been able, because of finances, to make the trip back as I had expected to, even so I think I have found out in another way that, as you thought, he forgot me long ago, and I was only making a fool out of myself, over former dreams of something that never was! Ha! What fools we are sometimes! I'll tell you what I did—and you can blush for me—in desperation to hear from him I wrote him a letter, sent it to his home town, with a notation to forward it to wherever he is now. His folks still live back there, and I knew they would get the letter and forward it to him. Well—that was at least three months ago, maybe more, and to this day I never received a response. Therefore, you are right! And I guess I woke up!

You suggested in your letter that perhaps he had married and was happy in his own home now. But I happen to know that he has never married, although I learned that he is engaged to a girl. You must be right—he has forgotten me, else he would have answered my letter. True, it has been nearly eight years since I last saw him, and it is easy to forget when you're young!

The last department had a letter that warned me, too. A writer wrote of how through her temporary desire for a mild flirtation, although she was married, she lost her home and loved possessions, and it seemed to warn me not to do likewise.

In her case I do not side with the husband. Indeed, he has probably done worse,

or the same, as she, and yet men are the very ones to set their foot down on a mistake. She has hurt no one, only taught herself a lesson. As for shying from his relatives as he does, he's a coward to do so. She didn't marry them. She is not accountable to them. Let them mind their own business. If he loves her, he will live with her in front of all the wagging tongues.

He can get away if he wants to, and he ought to want to, for her sake, but there's no reason to act as if she had committed murder. Any one is liable to make a mistake, and it is a narrow-minded prig who will throw up that mistake to her the rest of her life. If all the mistakes most men make in their lifetime were thrown up to them, as they are to women, why the men wouldn't be able to show their blushing faces to the world, they would suffer from mortification so badly.

I, too, wondered if he had got his divorce, or if they were remarried. She didn't mention that part of it. She has no business to live with him unless she is really in the eyes of the law his wife. I laughed over what he had said to her, that he would live with her as long as people didn't find out she had flirted with this other man! How like a man! They will do most anything as long as people don't know, but let things leak out, and wow! they run like whipped dogs! Afraid to stick by, afraid to face the music! Yet he claimed he still loved her! He loved himself—nobody else!

NOT REGRETFUL.

It never pays to retrace steps. And there is nothing deadier than a dead love.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: I was married in 1913 to a man I knew was morally unfit, but, like so many others, I thought he would change after marriage. We lived together about six years, then separated.

He has never helped me to support our ten-year-old girl. Mrs. Brown, she is all the world to me, but I must leave her for some one else to care for, and work every day. The work is getting too much for me, although I am not sickly, just tired out.

My work deals with the public, and I meet so many men of good character, and several have asked to marry me, but I loved once, and don't seem able to care for any one I meet.

For my child's sake I feel I should marry and have a home, but I can't marry without love. I can't forget my bitter experience.

I am thirty-five—well educated. Would you advise me to marry with just respect for a man?

DISCOURAGED.

Sometimes, especially when persons reach thirty, sincere respect and admiration are as good a basis for marriage as can be found. Each case, however, must be considered individually. Love is often inspired by respect and admiration, you know.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: I am twenty-two, small, and considered attractive.

To explain my trouble—course it concerns a man! I have known a young man—whom I shall call X—for five years. The first year and a half I went with X rather steady. We gradually drifted apart, and I rarely saw him until two years later, and I started going steady with him again.

I learned to love him very dearly, and thought the world of him, and still do, strange as it may seem, after the way he treated me.

We kept company for quite a while, then he threw me over! I was heartbroken, and a great many nights after I cried myself to sleep. His only explanation was that he liked me, but did not love me. Previously he had declared he loved me! Just recently I found out he met another girl around that time. Why are men so changeable?

Now this is what is puzzling me, Mrs. Brown—this girl has thrown him over and is now engaged to some one else. He told me so himself. Now he turns to me again, and I am at present going out with him occasionally. He said he had thought a lot about me, was sorry for the way he had treated me. But I wonder if he really is?

He appears indifferent, and yet he seems very much displeased when any one else pays me attention. I do not understand him. I imagine you will say "forget him," but, dear Mrs. Brown, I have tried my hardest for the past two years, but my thoughts still wander back to him. I still love him! Just how can I win X's love and make him forget this other girl?

I'd give the world for his love and a little home of our own, but do you know, Mrs.

Brown, if he asked me now to marry him I'm afraid I'd be too proud to unless I was very positive X truly loved me. How can I tell?

MISS PUZZLED.

And what shall I say to you, my dear, if it isn't "forget" him? Apparently he isn't worth the time of a really fine girl. He's too wavering. You're young, so even though you don't want to really forget him now, try having other friends, and spend less time thinking of him.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: I have read Harry J.'s letter. Did he say some of the girls should speak up? Well, here is one right now, although I do not think you are crazy, as you stated in your letter, and I have no argument for you. I think you are right in saying that a man and woman should go on a fifty-fifty basis. How many homes have been broken for the lack of this! I never knew there was a man like you in the whole wide world. There are a great many men who are always ready to take and give nothing in return.

Just a word to L. M. Valland. Your letter was a confession. I do agree with you in many things, but disagree in more.

I speak from experience. I went to dances, and it is the absolute truth that some girls go there for mushing. But how about the men? If men didn't encourage a girl would she attempt it? I do not dance any more, for the sights I saw at many of the dance halls were sickening. Are you sure you want an old-fashioned girl for a wife? I'm afraid you made a mistake in saying that. There may be a lot of girls with old-fashioned ideas, but not in old-fashioned clothes. Being a girl myself I know just how a girl has to carry herself. You probably do not know that if a girl does not dress as the style is today she is an outcast. I don't mean that she has to paint and go half nude, because that is exaggerating it. I know just what fellows think of a girl that is a slave to cosmetics. They call her a bum just like we girls do the sheiks of to-day.

A year ago I was an old-fashioned girl. How I had to work to overcome it! I blushed whenever the boss told me anything, and let me tell you blushing may make you feel most uncomfortable at times. I have overcome it a little now, but it is no easy task.

I am nineteen years of age and I work during the day, and in the evening I cook

and put our home in order, as mother is not always well and I have to assist her.

I wish Sunshine would write again. Although she didn't give me the advice, I must compliment her on the truth about kissing.

VALENTINE.

Why overcome the blushing, Valentine? It has the charm of rarity.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: I have read such a lot about girls smoking and drinking that I could not be satisfied until I had written you my opinion—that is, on girls smoking. I am just twenty, have a fine position as secretary to one of the biggest business men in our city.

I am well liked and respected by all of my friends of both sexes. My parents both died when I was very young, and I grew up without the guidance, restraint, and advice so necessary. Well, naturally, one would expect a girl to do just as she pleased when she had no one to account to. Singularly, I have never really felt or actually experienced the wonderful sense of freedom that I know in mine.

I never smoked until I was about fifteen or sixteen, and then I thought I had to do it to be thought "modern." I was actually afraid my friends would call me a prude, a dumb Dora, or whatever they call them nowadays. But I played the game! I asked my brother to teach me the tricks—he's three years older than I am, and knows better! He was shocked at first, and wouldn't hear of it, but I pestered him so he finally reluctantly did so. He taught me all there was to smoking, and I had a selfish pleasure in strutting my stuff wherever the girls congregated. That was in 1922, when I was seventeen, and thought I had the world at my heels.

One night a girl friend and I went out with two fellows, who were real gentlemen. We went to a dance, and after the dance took a ride. During the ride my girl friend, who was full of fun, and very mischievous, asked for a smoke. One of the fellows was taken aback at first, but gave her a cigarette, and she smoked it. I demurred, as I wanted the fellow I was with to have a good opinion of me. After persistently nagging me to smoke, she said, "Oh, you smoke—you're no angel with gilt wings."

The fellow I was with could hardly believe it, and I felt terribly embarrassed. His manner after that damning accusation was polite, but cool. I know his estimation of me dropped five hundred degrees in those few minutes. All the way home he asked me if I would promise him to stop smoking. I flip-pantly remarked I would "think it over." When he left me, he did not kiss me good night,

as he used to do, nor did he ask me for another date.

I cried myself to sleep that night, because I really liked him. I never heard from him, and never saw him again. But he was a real gentleman. I wonder what he thinks of me now?

So passed the summer. I still took an occasional smoke, as I had to keep up with the crowd. There was no going back. I had to be either white or black.

Then I met another nice fellow. While out riding with him one night, just for fun, I took one of his cigarettes which he had left in a pack on the seat. I lit it, and started to smoke. He stopped the car, and forcibly took the cigarette from my lips. Then he gave me a good lecture, which made my ears burn.

At last, here was somebody who could tell me something! And he proceeded to do so. Then he took me home. And to-day we are the best of friends! Since that night I have not as much as touched a cigarette, let alone smoke one.

That was three years ago, and now I am quite a young lady. I guess the few friends who knew I smoked have forgotten. My advice to girls is don't smoke. It only lowers you in the eyes of the ones who might have some respect for you. AN EX-FLAPPER.

All of which seems to prove that after all it isn't the ultra modern girl who is being sought most.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: I am a girl in my teens—and am in love with a boy of the same age. We have run together for a year and a half, he began to flirt with other girls, and even go out of our own borough to get girls. I heard about this, and asked him about it. At first he denied it, but he finally owned up.

He wrote me a letter and told me, even though he did go with those other girls, he cared for me only, but his actions have not proven it, as he stopped speaking to me.

Passing me on the street he doesn't speak, but if he is some distance away, he will smile or call to me, but I ignore him as he does me. There are several boys who told me that he still cared about me, but he and I constantly quarrel, and he said if it wasn't for that he would go with me.

I care for him as I have never for any other boy, and have tried to forget him, but it is impossible. I go out with other boys, but I do not care for any of them. He knows that I care for him. Recently a boy friend of his asked him why he quit school. He replied that since I wasn't in school he had no

reason to go. We went through school together, but I was a year ahead of him in high school, and when I graduated and began to work he left school. I do not know whether to believe it or not. Can you advise me?

MARGIE.

There isn't a thing you can do, Margie, but there is one thing that you can keep in mind and that is that men always go after what they really want and they do not need encouragement.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: Just a word to Billie the Goat.

Say, Billie, when I read your letter, I wondered if this was 1876 or 1925 with all those "nice" barn dances.

I am very fond of dancing, but don't think I could get any kick in barn dancing. I have found that there is no respect for the girl who goes to public dances, so I enjoy my dancing at home. And as far as combing your hair in public, now, honest, don't you do it? I am afraid there are quite a few ill-mannered girls in my crowd, for we comb our hair whenever we get ready.

Billie, how old are you? You seem terrible independent. You said in your letter, "Well, guess I'm too frank or something is wrong." Did you ever stop to think that perhaps its independence?

I agree with you as to the love affairs of girls from twelve to eighteen. I myself think it's all "bunk." I will soon be nineteen, and have imagined myself in love, but always wake up to the fact its bologna. So think I shall wait until I am twenty-five before thinking of marriage, and then perhaps I'll have sense enough to know whether I am really in love.

I am what you would call a flapper. I wear my dresses short, dance, and use cosmetics, but not to extreme, as I have an olive complexion, and need very little of any but lip stick.

As for petting parties, they are usually disgusting to me. I have kissed few boys—very few—and they all have the same respect for me as they always did. That is not meant to encourage kissing, for I do not think it is the right thing to do.

GEORGIA.

You're right, Georgia. It really isn't.

MY DEAR MRS. BROWN: They say that life is what you make it. Do you, dear Friend to Humanity, think so? Don't you really think that quite often life is what other people make it for us? Or am I wrong?

I keep company—in fact, I am engaged to a man much younger than I am. I love him dearly, but every one seems to think I am headed straight for unhappiness. His sister is trying to show me how ridiculous I am.

My friends laugh at me and ask me why I do not get myself a real man.

You see, dear Mrs. Brown, he is not only younger, but he looks much younger than he really is. Because he is very thin and small he will not take up any kind of athletics. He is afraid of water or any gymnasium. He does not dance. He looks sickly. While I go in for dancing, swimming, play tennis, I even play baseball. I ride horseback. I'm built very athletically and am nearly thirty. I am quite modern, but a good cook and housewife. My mother has been a good teacher.

Will you let me hear from your readers? Maybe some of them can tell me their experience, for surely there must be some who are married to men younger than they are. I am so unhappy I don't know what way to turn. I am on the verge of breaking the engagement, although I do love him.

I want to say that there is another man, big physically and mentally, who wants to marry me. I like him. I respect him. We sure have more things in common, but I do not love him. My mother wants me to marry him, but how can I when I do not love him?

My mother and sisters laugh at me and ridicule me about my sweetheart. They say that it is the maternal instinct in me, that I only want something to mother, that is why he appeals to me, and that I will regret it when people all laugh and I will see him then as others see him—a weakling. They call him my "mouse man."

They say that every woman, when she is married, wants her husband to be the head of the house, and he will never be that.

VIOLET.

The question is not so much what other people will say and how that will affect you as it is whether or not you can be really happy with this man whose tastes are so evidently everything that is opposite from yours. Think that side of the problem over well before you marry him. I'd be glad to hear from the readers on this. What do you think?

DEAR MRS. BROWN: What surprises me, Mrs. Brown, as I read your column, is of the number of unhappy girls who write. Or shall I

say really unhappy? They are so young, surely they do not know what real trouble is, and these romances of their youth will be forgotten and they will enjoy themselves once again and look back at those affairs and wonder what they saw in the person to believe themselves to have been in love with.

I have had some experience myself, Mrs. Brown, for when I was sixteen years of age, I met a young man and went out with him regularly, and thought I was in love with him. He was respectable, never overstepping the bounds, but after going with him about two years—and of course we planned on getting married as soon as he could save enough money—I gradually began to tire of him. Little things he did got on my nerves, things which before had never been noticeable at all. One thing in particular, Mrs. Brown—no doubt you will think me very foolish when I tell you—but this young man was about a head shorter than I, and when I first met him and believed myself in love with him I never even noticed this, but when I started to tire of him, I was very sensitive about it and didn't want any of my girl friends to see him. I knew then for sure that I had never really loved him, for when one loves, they are proud of that person and want your friends to meet him.

After making sure of my feelings for about a month longer, I finally told him that I thought it best that he should not come to see me any more, as I could never marry him, as I had found out that I did not really love him. I don't want to appear conceited, Mrs. Brown, but I really believe he did love me, and it was hard even for me, as I had become quite used to going out with him, and all my folks liked him, too. But how glad I am that I decided that way. What misery I would have had, if I had married him instead of the dear boy I now have for a husband, whom I love with all my heart and have every reason to believe he feels the same toward me.

I am different than most of the girls that write you, Mrs. Brown. I am quite plain looking, and never was considered pretty even by my best friends, but I believe I am one of the happiest girls in the world, for my husband is everything to me, and always will be.

Sometimes I used to feel that I had done a serious wrong to that other boy, but really and truly, Mrs. Brown, I did think I loved him at first, and I knew positively that I did not love him when I asked him not to come to see me any more.

Of course he wrote me for quite a while, and called me up almost every day, thinking

I perhaps would change when I didn't see him any more, but I know now it was the *only* thing I should have done, though I surely hated to hurt him and make him so blue. But I guess he has forgotten, and who knows may thank me in his heart for not marrying him, as he also might have met some one whom he loves more than he ever loved me.

You see he was about seven years older than I and naturally it took longer to wear off. By the way, I am now twenty-four years of age, and met quite a few fellows before my husband and had good times.

All I want to say, Mrs. Brown, is that these young girls who write of sweethearts and marrying and disappointments in love should be careful and not mistake being in love with love and being in love with one certain man. There is no such happiness equal to that of being married to the right man and the one who means everything in the world to you, and I suppose there is no such misery as being married to one you do not love. *BEB.*

What a lovely letter! Write again some time and tell us more about that nice husband of yours. We like to hear about the good ones, too, you know.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: Eight months ago I left home to go visit my married sister. While at my sister's house I met and fell in love with the most wonderful boy. It was love at first sight for both of us. We went together for three months and then we were married.

I married without my mother's consent. And when I wrote her she wrote back and told me to never come home as long as I remained the wife of the man I married.

Mother said she would have forgiven me for marrying without her consent if I had married some one of my own nationality. Mrs. Brown, should I leave my husband and go home to my mother? I don't know what to do. I love my husband very dearly. My husband is very hurt by the way my people have treated him. He wants me to go to his country with him at once. But I can't stand the thought of going so far away from mother.

WORRIED NORA.

You're married now, Worried Nora. You're not a little girl any more. You made some promises when you stood up before the clergyman and became a wife, didn't you? What about those promises? Can you throw them all

over now just because your mother is displeased? Let time take care of all this trouble. Don't go so far away with your husband. Tell him to be patient, to remain here with you since you are here. Any mother, who is natural at all, will want to see her daughter, and I'm sure yours will too.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: I am five feet and five inches in height, have light-brown hair, blue eyes, and am considered very good looking, though I am not conceited. I'm four months past my sixteenth birthday, but am not a flapper.

I have been going with a boy, or rather young man, twenty-five years old for two years steady. I have always liked him immensely, and a few months ago decided that I loved him. We have been engaged about three months now, and I know he loves me dearly.

I must tell you about another couple's affair to get to what I want to ask you. But I forgot to tell you that the man I'm engaged to has been away from here a few months. Right after he left I was visiting relatives a short distance away from here and met a girl and boy who turned out to be very good friends of mine, and still are.

This boy and girl have been going together nearly three years, and about three weeks ago she announced to him that she was going to be married this month. Of course the boy, after going with her so long, showering her with gifts and giving her anything she ever said she liked, expected some day to marry her. He has confided to me that he would mention getting married, and said she would always say, "I'm not ready." So, of course, he was very much hurt at the loss of her, and being a good friend to him he turned to me for comfort.

We have always liked each other very much as friends. And, Mrs. Brown, here's the trouble, in sympathizing with him so I believe I am about to fall in love with him. He has kind of gotten over losing her now, and doesn't seem to worry so much. I think he's about decided that he's lost her and there's no use grieving and is trying to forget her. Of course he hasn't given me any reason to believe that we would ever be anything to each other, for he knows that I'm engaged. He is the only one that I have told. He is such a wonderful fellow all the way round that in spite of myself I'm liking him more every day.

I have not gone with any one since the boy

I'm engaged to went away. I've seen this other fellow on different occasions, but not until yesterday did I have an actual date with him. The first one I've had since my own beau left. Last night he said he wished he knew he had a chance with me. And that is the only time he has mentioned anything like that.

The fellow I'm engaged to is foreign and of a different religion than myself. However, he is a nice fellow. But, gee! Him being away and me going with the other boy is kinda worrying me! Cause, as I said before, I'm liking him more every day. I am actually afraid that something is going to come of this and somebody will be hurt. Though just now I can't say who the somebody will be. I'm sure that if I would let this boy come to see me regular that things would develop real quick, because I do know that he likes me a lot. But, Mrs. Brown, I can't stand the thought of telling my beau that I'm not so sure of myself as I have been, and would like to break the engagement for a while because he loves me so much, and it would hurt him so to tell him that I don't love him.

When I told him that I did love him I didn't care two cents for any other boy—in fact, I would not even go to a movie with any one else, and I have had boys tell me that I was a fool to go with just one boy. Though the reason I did this was that so many of the boys are so disgusting and only out for petting parties, and when I found one that had a little sense I held on to him and let the others go.

At that time, not caring for the company of other boys and liking this one so much, I decided that I loved him, at the same time thinking that if it wasn't love that as long as he loved me and my heart was open to nobody else that everything would be fine. And it has just dawned on me that some day I may meet some one I will really love, and then something would happen and there would be broken hearts all around.

I made a great mistake when I became engaged so early in life, and I guess I'll regret it before everything is over. But every time I think about breaking the engagement it makes me feel terrible to think of hurting him so.

As I am only sixteen now, and do not intend getting married until I am at least eighteen, maybe things will work out themselves. But it will not seem exactly right to go regularly with this fellow, being engaged to another all the time.

I am sure that if my beau knew that I

wasn't so sure as I thought I was that he would not want me to be engaged to him until I was sure. But I just don't believe that I can tell him that I wish to break it.

What do you think I should do, Mrs. Brown? I am worried to death and can't sleep nights for thinking about it.

PINK CHEEKS.

You're such a little girl to be engaged. But, since you are, better go slowly about breaking it. Think twice, my child. Your feeling toward the man you are engaged to may be only a temporary thing. And your feeling for the new man may be just as fleeting.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: I am a girl of eighteen. I have brown eyes and dark hair. I'm rather small for my age, but I'm always happy and full of fun. I make friends, and have many of them. I was at a theater one night, and it was there that I got acquainted with the one that I think belongs to me now.

He is two months older than I; has blond hair, blue eyes, and dresses just decently. I fell for him that first night. He took me home and we talked of many things. I am the happiest girl now. We go together and have happy evenings, for he has a spiffy car.

I want you to tell me, Mrs. Brown, if he really does love me. Many times when we are out riding he will stop talking, and say I don't love him, that I just go out with him on account of his car. But that isn't the case. I love him. I wouldn't mind if he didn't have any car.

Why does he say that to me? He knows it hurts me, but still he will say that every time we are out. I treat him well and I like the way he treats me.

GIRL.

Don't take the youth too seriously, Girl. I'm afraid you are.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: I have read the letter from Three Curious Girls who want advice from male readers. Do not worry your heads

about these men that go out with only the popular girls.

Popularity with the opposite sex is not the desirable thing, that most girls believe it to be. So-called popular girls often lose out in the game of matrimony. The price that some girls pay for popularity is so high that it takes a lifetime of regret to cancel the debt.

There are many worthy men looking for the old-fashioned girl who has not sacrificed her good name for good times. A man does not want a girl who pets, smokes, and drinks to be the mother of his children.

I am afraid you girls are wrong about men being nearly alike. They are not alike. You have met the wrong kind. These men who take the popular girls out are not looking for matrimony. Men respect a girl a hundred per cent more if she slaps him when he tries to kiss her than he does the girl who gives her kisses to Tom, Dick, and Harry.

When Mr. Right comes along you will be glad that you let petting parties alone. Surely girls can tell the right sort of man from the wrong as easily as men do the right girl from her vamping sister.

Join some clubs, and then you will have more chances to meet the right sort of men. We boys have our ideals the same as you girls. We are looking for a good girl to be the mother of our children, and to take charge of the home and pay envelope.

JAUN W.

Jaun puts it rather clearly.

DEAR MRS. BROWN: I would like to have your opinion, Mrs. Brown, as to whether nine or even ten years difference in age between a young lady and gentleman is too much. I am nineteen years old and have been keeping company with a friend twenty-eight. We love each other, but it seems to worry him sometimes because I am so young. Do you think it should, Mrs. Brown?

PAX.

Not a bit of difference, Pax, as long as you're on the right side of it. If you were the older then it would be bad.

Mrs. Brown will be glad to help solve in these pages problems on which you desire her advice. Your letters will be regarded confidentially and signatures will be withheld.

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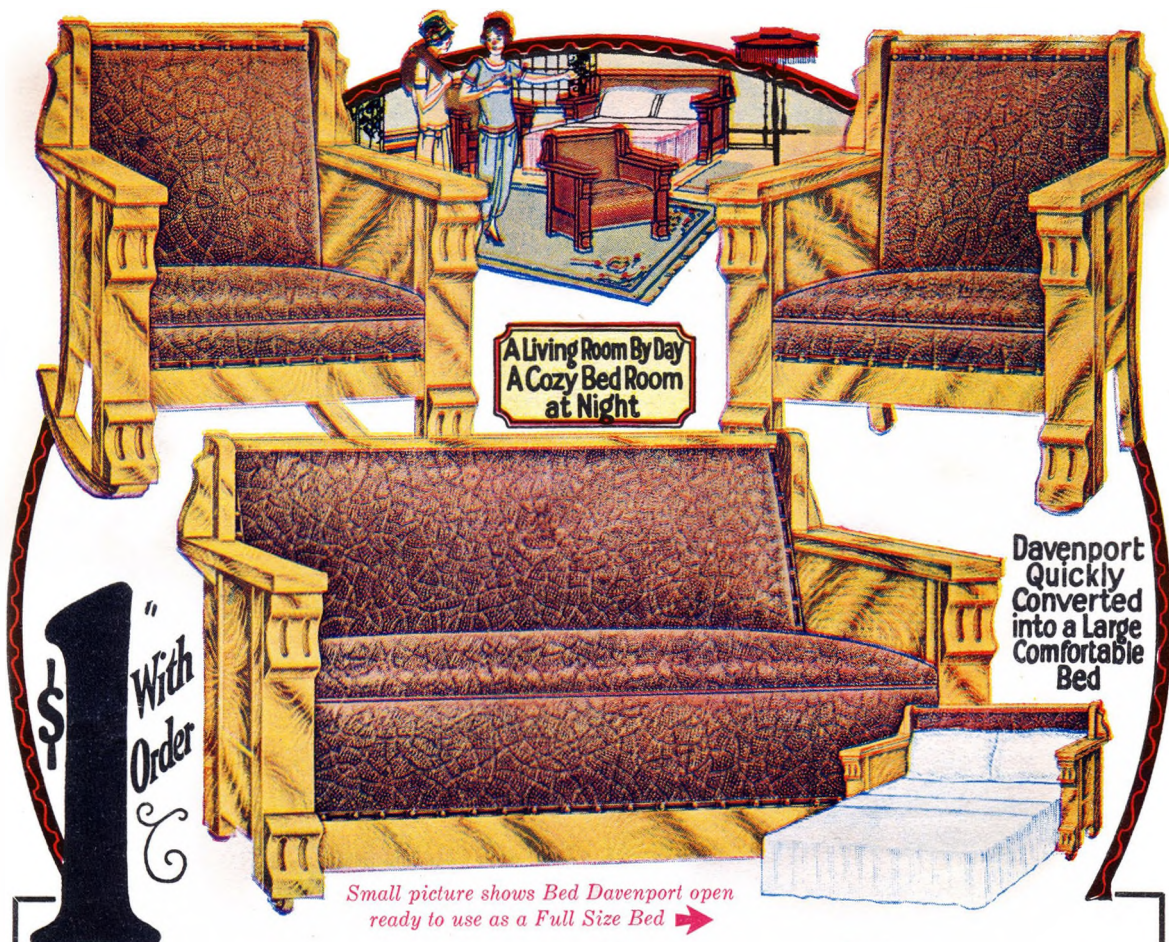
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