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Title: His Second Wife

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Release date: December 9, 2005 [EBook #17259]

Most recently updated: December 13, 2020

Language: English

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HIS SECOND WIFE ***

Produced by MRK

HIS SECOND WIFE

BY

ERNEST POOLE

TO M.A.

HIS SECOND WIFE

CHAPTER I

On a train speeding toward New York, in one of the parlour cars two young women sat facing each other, talking and smiling, deeply absorbed. They took little apparent notice of any one else in the car, but most of the people near them kept throwing curious glances their way.

These glances differed vastly, as did the thoughts behind them. A tall, genial Westerner, who looked as though he had come from a ranch, smiled frankly and hungrily on the pair and told himself with emphasis, "Those two girls are fifty-fifty. I'd like a dozen of each brand." And a slim college boy with fresh, eager eyes kept darting quick looks from time to time at the older of the two, the blonde. He asked himself confusedly, "How'd I start in with a woman like her?" And exciting pictures rose in his mind. In the meantime an elderly lady, with a sharp, inquisitive air, had put down the ages of the girls at twenty-two and thirty.

"They're sisters," she decided, but then she nearly changed her mind. They were such contrasted types. The blonde gave an appearance of sleek and moneyed elegance, with carefully undulated hair, a rounded bust, and pretty features smooth and plump, with a retroussé nose and rich, full lips, and a manner of easy assurance. The brunette was younger and less developed, slim and lithe, her curling

black hair rebellious, her features more clean-cut and clear, with wide, eager lips and warm brown eyes set wide apart.

"Nevertheless, they are sisters," the little lady firmly concluded. "The family resemblance is quite unmistakable." And frowning in perplexity, "But if they are sisters," she went on, "why is only one in mourning?" She looked at the younger of the two, who was simply dressed in black; and then at the blonde, whose sable cloak put back from her shoulders revealed a stylish travelling suit. "And why is one rich and the other poor?"

Meanwhile a young woman nearby, with a fat, discontented face, regarded the blonde with envy and thought:

"She's an actress with her maid. Why can't Harry allow me a maid, a real clever one like that? Men see these actresses on the stage and get to expecting things from their wives—without being willing to pay for it! Think what that girl could make of me!"

A quiet, able-looking woman sitting just across the aisle, who travelled for a clothing store, was watching the "maid," the brunette, and was thinking, "She makes her clothes herself. She has been the beauty of her small town. She's smart, too, and original. That collar was a clever idea—and that fichu of lace. A pity she's in mourning."

But the large fat man behind the two girls had little thought for the brunette. His heavy eyes, quite motionless, were upon the older girl. He took in her sensuous shoulders, the rounded contour of her bust, her glossy coiffure, the small, fine hairs at the back of her neck. And he thought, "Yes, she has been loved pretty well." She was talking, and he could just hear her voice, soft and provocative, like the little gloved hand on her chair. By her eyes, which were of a violet hue, he saw she was aware of his gaze. Something gleamed in them that sent a thrill far down into his sluggish soul.

In the meantime a kindly old lady, whose eyes were fixed on the brunette, noticed how hard she was listening, noticed the fresh expectancy in her parted lips and clear brown eyes, and asked with a touch of sadness:

"I wonder what's waiting for you in New York? I'm afraid I don't like this companion of yours. And you're so very young, my dear, and eager and gay. And you are to be so beautiful."

And while all these conjectures were being made about them both, the brunette was wrapt in her own inner fancies, vivid and exciting. Listening to her sister, swift thoughts and expectations mingled with the memories of the life behind her. As she stared out of the window, fields and woods and houses kept whirling back out of her view—and so it was with her memories. It was hard to keep hold of any one.

She had lived with her father, a lonely old man in a small, quiet town in Ohio, down in the lower part of the State. He was dead, and she was going to live with her married sister in New York. He was dead and his daughter was not sad, though she'd been his only close companion and had loved him tenderly. And this brought a guilty feeling now, which she fought down by telling herself there had been little sadness in his death. She pictured her father making his speech at the unveiling of the Monument. How happy and proud he had appeared. For half his life old Colonel Knight had exhorted his fellow townsmen and painted dark the shame of their town: "The only county seat in Ohio with no soldiers' monument, sir!" He had held countless meetings, he had gone begging to his neighbours, and every dollar he himself could save had gone into that dream of his. At last he had triumphed; and after all the excitement of his final victory, the old soldier had made his speech, and died.

Around him and the monument and the old frame house on River Street, the lazy, shallow river, the high school near the court house, Demley's Tavern across the square, the line of shops on either side, the new "movie" theatre of pink tile, and the old yellow church on the corner—the pictures of her life trooped by, the pictures of her last few years—with the miracle, the discovery that she herself, Ethel Knight, who had always been considered "plain," was slowly now developing into a beautiful woman. That brought memories which thrilled—various faces of men, young and old, looks and glances, words overheard, and countless small attentions. But these came in mere fragments, rising only to be whirled back again into the past, as the train sped on toward the city.

She was going to live in New York with her married sister, Amy Lanier. And from looking out of the car window, Ethel would turn quickly, throw a swift glance at her sister and smile. Amy seemed quite wonderful—Amy with her elegance, her worldly assurance, her smiling good-humour and knowledge of "life," her apparent content, her sense of well being, of being a joy to look at and love; Amy who had an adoring husband, Amy who spent money like water, Amy with dash and beauty and style.

"New York just fairly shimmering in everything she wears!" thought

Ethel.

Amy's sable cloak was long. She had worn it at the funeral, with a black skirt and a heavy veil. But the veil she had put into her bag as soon as they had left the town, and the cloak thrown back revealed rich colours, the glitter and glint of a diamond brooch; and she wore a small blue feathered hat which threw out changing colours in the play of light in the car. There was to be no more mourning. Amy didn't believe in that; she was good-humouredly arguing her young sister out of it. And Ethel, smiling back at her, saw how sensible it was. She felt death and sadness slipping away, and the life in the city opening.

Since Amy's marriage five years ago, Ethel had only seen her twice—once when Amy had come home, appearing resplendent with Joe her husband in a large new touring car, and had sent a wave of excitement through the quiet little town; and again when she had asked Ethel to visit her for a week in New York. That had been a glamorous week, but it had not been repeated. For nearly three years they had not met. In that time had come the change in Ethel's own appearance. And glancing now at Amy, she read in those clear, smiling eyes that Amy was relieved and pleased and surprised at the striking beauty which had come to her young sister. There was even a tone of expectancy in Amy's talk of their life in New York.

"She thinks I'll get on finely!" This exciting thought kept rising repeatedly in Ethel's mind. And with it came the sturdy resolve, "I mustn't be too humble now, or too dependent on her. I must show her I'm somebody all by myself—that I won't be a burden on her hands. I've got to make a life of my own—find work perhaps—or marry!"

Then all such resolutions would merge in the images vivid and new, which kept rising in her mind, of the life she would have in the city.

She had a good voice. Old Mr. Riggs, the organist in the yellow church at home, had planted that idea deep in her mind. If only her voice could be brought out! She hadn't much money for teachers, but how she would work if she got a chance! In her heart she knew she had no great voice, but gaily she let her fancy go and pictured herself on the stage. . . . This image passed and was replaced by a platform in an immense auditorium crowded with cheering women and girls. Suffrage banners were all about, and she was speaking to the crowd. Her voice rang clear and resolute. . . . There were other dreams and pictures—of dances in New York cafés, of theatre parties, trips to Paris, hosts of friends. And the vague thought flashed into her mind:

"What possibilities for life—in me—me—Ethel Knight!"

She went on listening, building. She took in fragments of what Amy said and mingled them with things she had read and pictures she'd seen in books, magazines and Sunday papers; or with things that she had heard in the long discussions in her club of high school girls, over suffrage, marriage, Bernard Shaw. She thought of the opera, concerts, plays. She saw Fifth Avenue at night agleam with countless motors, torrents of tempestuous life—and numberless shop windows, hats and dainty gowns and shoes. She pictured herself at dinners and balls, men noticing her everywhere. "As they are doing now," she thought, "this very minute in this car!" Out of all the pictures rose one of a church wedding. And then this picture faded, and changed to that of her father's funeral in the old frame yellow church. She frowned, her brown eyes saddened and suddenly grew wet with a deep homesick tenderness. But in a few moments she smiled again; once more her pulse-beat quickened. For Amy was talking good-humouredly. And Ethel's eyes, now curious, now plainly thrilled, now quizzical, amused and pleased, kept watching her, and she asked herself:

"Shall I ever be like that?"

The picture she had of her sister grew each moment more warm and desirable. Eagerly she explored it by the quick questions she threw out.

They were coming into the city now, in a dusk rich with twinkling lights. In the car the passengers were stirring. Amy stood up to be brushed—sleek and alluring, worldly wise—and the fat man in the chair behind her opened wide his heavy eyes. Then Ethel stood up—and in the poise of her figure, slim and lithe with its lovely lines, in her carriage, in her slender neck, in her dark face with its features clear, her lips a little parted, and in the look in her brown eyes—there was something which made glances turn from all down the softly lighted car. There was even a brief silence. And Ethel drew a sudden breath, as from close behind her the soft voice of the darky porter drawled:

"Yes'm—yes'm—dis is New York. We's comin' right into de station now."

CHAPTER II

"Well, Ethel my love, we're here at last! . . . It must be after midnight. I wonder when I'll get to sleep? . . . Not that I care especially. What a quaint habit sleeping is."

She had formed the habit long ago of holding these inner conversations. Her father had been a silent man, and often as she faced him at meals Ethel had talked and talked to herself in quite as animated a way as though she were saying it all aloud. Now she sat up suddenly in bed and turned on the light just over her head, and amiably she surveyed her room. It was a pretty, fresh, little room with flowered curtains, a blue rug, a luxurious chaise longue and a small French dressing table. Very cheerful, very empty. "It looks," she decided, "just like the bed feels. I'm the first fellow who has been here."

"No," she corrected herself in a moment, "that's very ignorant of you, my dear. This is a New York apartment, you know. All kinds of other fellows have been in this room ahead of me; and they've lain awake by the hour here, planning how to get married or divorced, or getting ready to write a great book or make a million dollars, or sing in grand opera or murder their child. All the things in the newspapers have been arranged in this spot where I lie! Now I'll turn out the light," she added, "and sink quietly to rest!"

But in the dark she lay listening to the strange low hub-hub from outside. And it made her think of what she had seen an hour before, when at the open window, resting her elbows on the sill, she had begun to make her acquaintance with her backyard—a yawning abyss of brick and cement which went down and down to cement below, and up and up to a strip of blue sky, and to right and to left went stretching away with rows and rows of windows. And now as the murmurs and quick low cries, piano music, a baritone voice and a sudden burst of laughter, came to her ears, she gravely named her neighbours:

"Wives and husbands, divorcees, secret lovers, grafters, burglars, suffragettes, actresses and anarchists and millionaires and poor young things—all spending a quiet evening at home. And that's so sensible in you all. You'll need your strength for tomorrow."

From the city far and near came numberless other voices. From street cars, motors and the L, from boats far off on the river this calm and still October night, from Broadway and from Harlem and the many teeming slums, came the vast murmuring voice of the town. And she thought:

"I'm becoming a part of all this!" She listened a little and added, "It breathes, like something quite alive." She smiled and added approvingly, "Quite right, my dear, just breathe right on. But don't go and breathe as though you were sleeping. Keep me company tonight."

Suddenly she remembered how in their taxi from the train, as they had sped up Park Avenue all agleam with its cold blue lights and she had chattered gaily of anything that came into her head, twice she had caught in her sister's eyes that glimmer of expectancy. "Amy feels sure I will be a success!" Ethel thrilled at the recollection, and thought, "Oh, yes, you're quite a wag, my love; and as soon as you get over being so young you'll probably make a name for yourself. No dinner or suffrage party will ever again be quite complete without your droll dry humour. . . . I suppose I ought to be going to sleep!"

And she yawned excitedly. From somewhere far in the distance there came to her ears the dull bellowing roar of an ocean liner leaving dock at one o'clock to start the long journey over the sea.

"I'm going to Paris, too!" she resolved. Her fancy travelled over the ocean and roamed madly for awhile, with the help of many photographs which she had seen in magazines. But she wearied of that and soon returned.

"Well, what do I think of Amy's home?"

She went over in her memory her eager inspection of the apartment. The rooms had been dark when they arrived; for they had not been expected so soon, and a somewhat dishevelled Irish maid had opened the door and let them in. With a quick annoyed exclamation, Amy had switched on the lights; and room after room as it leaped into view had appeared to Ethel's eyes like parts of a suite in some rich hotel. And although as her sister went about moving chairs a bit this way and that and putting things on the table to rights, it took on a little more the semblance of somebody's home, still that first impression had remained in Ethel's mind.

"People have sat in this room," she had thought, "but they haven't lived here. They haven't sewed or read aloud or talked things out and out and out."

To her sister she had been loud in her praise. What a perfectly lovely room it was, what a wonderful lounge with the table behind it, and what lamps, what a heavenly rug and how well it went with the

curtains! When Amy lighted the gas logs, Ethel had drawn a quick breath of dismay. But then she had sharply told herself:

"This isn't an old frame house in Ohio, this is a gay little place in New York! You're going to love it, living here! And you're pretty much of a kid, my dear, to be criticizing like an old maid!" She had gone into Amy's room, and there her mood had quickly changed. For the curtains and the deep soft rug, the broad low dressing table with its drop-light shaded in chintz, the curious gold lacquered chair, the powder boxes, brushes, trays, the faint delicious perfume of the place; and back in the shadow, softly curtained, the low wide luxurious bed—had given to her the feeling that this room at least was personal. Here two people had really lived—a man and a woman. There had come into Ethel's brown eyes a mingling of confused delight and awkward admiration. And her sister, with a quick look and a smile, had lost the slightly ruffled expression her face had worn in the other rooms. She had regained her ascendancy.

It had not been until Ethel was left in her own small room adjoining, that with an exclamation of remembrance and surprise she had stopped undressing, opened her door and listened in the silence. "How perfectly uncanny!" Frowning a moment, puzzled, her eye had gone to the only other room in the apartment, down at the end of the narrow hall. The door had been closed. She had stolen to it and listened, but at first she had not heard a sound. Then she had given a slight start, had knocked softly and asked, "May I come in?" A woman's voice with a hostile note had replied, "Yes, ma'am." She had entered. And a moment later, down on her knees before a grave little girl of two who sat at a tiny table soberly having her supper, Ethel had cried:

"Oh, you adorable baby!"

For a time she had tried to make friends with the child, but the voice of the nurse had soon cut in. And in the motherly Scotch face Ethel had detected again a feeling of hostility. "What for?" she had asked. And the answer had flashed into her mind. "She's angry because Amy hasn't been in to see Susette." And Ethel had frowned. "It's funny. If I had been away three days—"

She had gone back to her own room and began slowly to take off her things. And a few minutes after that, she had heard a gruff kindly voice, a man's heavy tread and a glad little cry from Amy's room.

"Joe has come home," she had told herself. "I wonder how he and I will get on."

And she had met him a little later with no slight uneasiness. But this had been at once dispelled. Rather tall and full of figure, with thick curling hair and close-cut moustache, Joe Lanier at thirty-five still gave to his young sister-in-law the impression of kindly friendliness she had had from him some years before. There was nothing to be afraid of in Joe. But she had noticed the change in his face, the slightly tightened harassed expression. And she had thought:

"You poor man. How hard you have been working."

And yet she could not say he looked tired, for at dinner his talk had been almost boyish in its welcoming good humour. Later he had drawn her aside and had said with a touch of awkwardness:

"No use in talking about it, of course. I just want you to know I'm so glad you're here." She had clutched his hand:

"That's nice of you, Joe." And then she had turned from him, and with a sudden quiver inside she had added quite inaudibly: "Oh, Dad, dearest! I'm so homesick! Just this minute—if I could be back!"

But she had liked Joe that evening.

She remembered the hungry light in his eyes. He and Amy had soon gone to their room. And as Ethel thought about them now, lying here alone in the dark she felt again that vague delight and confused expectancy.

"How much of all this is coming to me? . . . Everything, I guess, but sleep!"

A wisp of her hair fell on her nose, and she blew it back with a vicious, "Pfew!"

CHAPTER III

Her first month in town was a season of shopping and of warm anticipations—and then came a sudden crash. Afterward it was hard to remember. For tragedy entered into these rooms, and it was not easy to look back and see them clearly as they had been. That first month became confused, the memories

uneven; in some spots clear and vivid, in others hazy and unreal.

"I want you to be gay, my dear," Amy told her at the start. "You've been through such a lonely time. And what earthly good will it do poor Dad to have you go about in black? You're here now and you've got to make friends and a place for yourself. If he were alive I know he'd agree. He'd want you to have every chance."

So they started in to shop. And though Ethel had her memories, her moods of homesick longing for the old soldier who was gone, these soon became less frequent. There was little time to be lonely or sad.

Amy herself felt new youth these days. Relieved of the first uneasiness with which she had gone to Ohio to bring her young sister to New York, surprised and delighted at finding how the awkward girl she had known had developed since the last time they had met, Amy now took Ethel about to get her "clothes fit to be seen in." And as with intent little glances she kept studying "Ethel's type" in order to set off her charms, the slightly bored expression, the look of disillusionment left Amy's pretty countenance. For Ethel's freshness had given to Amy new zest and belief in her own life, in its purpose and importance. To get Ethel clothes, to show her about, to find her friends, to give her a gay winter in town and later to make a good match for her—these aims loomed large in Amy's mind. She felt her own youth returning, and she prolonged this period. She wanted Ethel all to herself. She even shut her husband out.

"You can rest up a bit," she told him, "for what's coming later on." And Joe, with a good-natured groan at the prospect of late hours ahead, made the most of the rest allowed to him.

Each morning the two sisters fared forth in a taxi. And Amy began to reveal to her sister the dazzling world of shops in New York: shops large and small, American, French and English, shops for gowns and hats and shoes, and furs and gloves and corsets. At numberless counters they studied and counselled, and lunching at Sherry's they shopped on. And the shimmer and sheen of pretty things made life a glamorous mirage, in which Ethel could feel herself rapidly becoming a New Yorker, gaining assurance day by day, feeling "her type" emerge in the glass where she studied herself with impatient delight.

There were little reminders now and then of what she had left behind her. One day in a department store, as they stood before a counter looking at silk stockings, all at once to Ethel's ears came the deep tones of an organ, and turning with a low cry of surprise she looked over the bustling throngs of women to an organ loft above, where a girl was singing a solo in a high sweet soprano voice. In a flash to Ethel's mind there came a vivid picture of the old yellow church at home. And with a queer expression looking about her at the crowds, she exclaimed, "How funny!" She was again reminded of church when one afternoon in a large darkened chamber she sat with scores of women whose eyes were fixed as though in devotion upon a softly lighted stage where "models" kept appearing. What lovely figures some of them had. Others rather took her breath, and gave her the feeling she'd had before in her sister's bedroom. But then as her eye was caught again by the rapt faces all about, she chuckled to herself and thought, "There ought to be candles and incense here!"

She was appalled at the prices. And as the exciting days wore on, uneasily in her room at night she would sit down with pencil and paper and ask, "How much did I spend today?" Her father had left her nothing but the shabby old frame house. This she had sold to a friend of his, and the small fund thus secured she had resolved to husband.

"Oh, Ethel, go slow, you little fool. This is every penny you have in the world."

But the adorable things she saw, and the growing hunger she felt as she began to notice with a more discerning eye the women in shops and on the streets—just why they were so dashing and how they got this and that effect—all swept aside her caution, the easier because of the fact that everything she bought was charged.

One evening in a large café she sat watching Amy who was dancing with her husband. It was at the time when the new style dances were just coming into vogue. In Ohio they had been only a myth. But Amy was a beautiful dancer; and watching her now, Ethel reflected, "She expects me to be like that. If I'm not, she'll be disappointed, ashamed. And why shouldn't I be! What do you ever get in this world if you're always saving every cent? You miss your chance and then it's too late. I'll be meeting her friends in a few weeks more. I've simply got to hurry!" And with Amy's dancing teacher she arranged for lessons—at a price that made her gasp. But the lessons were a decided success.

"You've a wonderful figure for dancing," the teacher said confidently, "and a sense for rhythm that most of these women haven't any idea of." He smiled down at her and she fairly beamed.

"Oh, how nice!" sighed Ethel. Something in the little look which flashed between them gave her a thrill of assurance. And this feeling came again and again, in the shops and while she was seated at luncheon in some crowded restaurant, or on the streets or back at home, where even Joe was beginning to show his admiring surprise.

"You're making a fine little job of it," she heard him say to Amy one night.

She caught other remarks and glances from strangers, men and women. And Ethel now began to feel the whole vast bustling ardent town centred on what in her high-school club, as they read Bernard Shaw, they had quite frankly and solemnly spoken of as "Sex." All the work and the business, the scheming and planning and rush for money, were focussed on this. And for this she was attracting those swift admiring glances. What she would be, what she wanted to be, what she now ardently longed to become, grew clearer to her day by day. For the picture was there before her eyes. Each day it grew more familiar, as at home in Amy's room she watched her beautiful sister, a stranger no longer to her now, seated at her dressing table good-humouredly chatting, and meanwhile revealing by numberless deft little things she was doing the secrets of clothes and of figure, and of cheeks and lips and eyes, with subtle hints behind it all of the ancient magic art of Pan. She felt Amy ceaselessly bringing her out. This gave her thrills of excitement. And looking at her sister she asked:

"Shall I ever be like that?"

And they kept talking, talking. And through it all the same feeling was there, the sense of this driving force of the town.

With the sturdy independence which was so deep a part of her, Ethel strove to hold up her end of these intent conversations and show that she had views of her own. She was no old-fashioned country girl, but modern, something different! They had discussed things in her club which would have shocked their mothers, discussed them long and seriously. They had spoken of marriage and divorce, of love and having children, and then had gone eagerly on to suffrage, jobs and "mental science," art, music and the rest of life. She had gathered there an image of New York as a glittering region of strong clever men and fascinating women, who not only loved to dance but held the most brilliant discussions at dinners livened by witty remarks—a place of vistas opening into a world of great ideas. And now with her older sister, she questioned her about it all, the art and all the "movements," the "salons" and the clever talk. She asked:

"Do you know any suffragists? Do you know any men who write plays or novels, or any musicians or painters—or actresses?" And again and again by an air of assurance Ethel tried to hide her dismay, as her sister subtly made all this seem like a school-girl's fancies.

"Yes," Amy would say good-humouredly, "there are such people, I suppose—plenty of them, all over town. And they talk and talk and hold meetings, and they go to high-brow plays—and some women even work. But it doesn't sound very thrilling, does it? I don't know. They never seem to me quite real."

And then Amy would go on to hint what did seem real to her in life. And again that picture of the town, all centred on what emerged from the shops and poured into the cafes to dance, was painted for her sister.

But behind her smiling manner of one with an intimate knowledge of life, Amy would glance at the girl by her side in a curious, rather anxious way. For vaguely she knew that years ago when she herself had come to New York, she too had had dreams and imaginings of what her young sister called "the real thing." And she knew that these had dropped away—at first in the struggle, which for her had been so intense and narrowing, to gain a foothold in the town; then through rebuffs from the clever friends of Joe Lanier when she married him; and later through a feeling of lazy acceptance of her lot. But Ethel's talk and Ethel's eyes recalled what had been left behind. And Amy thought of her present friends, and again with a little uneasy pang she put off their meeting with Ethel. For they did not seem good to her then, and the picture she found herself painting of their lives and her own appeared a bit flat and trivial in the light of Ethel's eagerness. They dressed and went shopping, they went to tea dances, they dined in cafés or in their homes, rushed off in taxis to musical plays, and had supper and danced. They loved and were loved, they "played the game."

"My dear," she said decisively, "it's not what you say that interests men; it's how you look and what you have on."

But despite her air of assurance and her own liking of her life, she felt the picture growing flat, and so she added quietly:

"Oh, my friends aren't all I'd like. They never are, if you've anything in you. If you really want to be somebody—" and here her whole expression changed to one of resolute faith in herself—"you need just

one thing, money. And you can't do anything about that, you have to wait for your husband. Joe's a dear, of course, and he's working hard. And he's getting it, too, he's getting it!" A gleam of hunger almost fierce came into her clear violet eyes. "I want a larger apartment—I've picked out the very one. And I want a car, a limousine. I know just how I'll paint it a mauve body with white wheels. And I want a house on Long Island. I've picked out the very spot—just next to Fanny Carr's new place."

As her sister spoke of these ideals, again Ethel had that feeling of church, but only for a moment.

"Who's Fanny Carr?" she asked alertly.

Amy was slowly combing her hair, and she smiled with kindly tolerance, for her little confession had brought back her faith in herself and her future.

"Fanny was a writer once—"

"Oh, really!"

"Yes. She ran a department on one of the papers." It had been the dress pattern page, but Amy did not mention that. Instead she yawned complacently. "Oh, she dropped it quick enough—she thought it rather tiresome. She's one of the cleverest women I know. She'd have got a long way up in the world, if it weren't for her second husband—"

"Her second?"

"Yes. The first one didn't do very well. She told me once, 'If you want to get on, change your name at least once in every three years.' Her second, as it happened, was no better than the first. But she was clever enough by then to get an able lawyer; and when it came to the divorce, Fanny succeeded in keeping the house, the one out on Long Island."

"Oh," said Ethel tensely. Her sister shot a look at her.

"I don't care especially for Fanny's ideas about husbands," she said. "But at least she has a love of a home." And Amy went on to explain to her sister the value and importance of being able to give "week ends." Again the gleam came into her eyes.

"It's money, my dear, it's money. They are the same women in Newport exactly—just like all the rest of us—only they are richer. That's all—but it is everything. Put me in a big house out there, and my friends wouldn't know me in a few years."

A cloud came on her face as she looked in the glass.

"But that's just the trouble. A few years more and I'll be too late. You've got to get there while you're young. And there's so little time. You lose your looks. It's all very well for some women to talk about ideas and things—and travel and—and children. I did, too, I talked a lot—oh, how I wanted everything! But one has to narrow down. Thank heaven, Ethel, you've years ahead. I've only got a few more left—I'm already thirty-one. And my type ages fast in this town, if you do the things you're expected to do. But you—oh, Ethel, I want you to marry well! Not a millionaire—that's rather hard, and besides he'd probably be too fat—but the kind who will be a millionaire, who has it written all over his face and makes you feel it in his voice! Don't sell yourself too cheap, my dear! Don't go running about with men who'll keep you poor for the rest of your days. They talk so well—some of them do; and it sounds so fine—ideas and books and pictures and—I knew one who was an architect. And it's all very well for later on, but what you've got to do right at the start—while you have the looks and youth—is to find the man who can give you a house where all those other people will be tumbling to get in—because you'll have the money—you'll be able to entertain—and give them what they really want—in spite of all their talking."

Once more, with a weary sigh, she dropped the religious intensity, and smiled as she wistfully added:

"That's where some man can put you. They do, you know, they do it. Some man does it every day. You can see his name in the papers. Dozens of wives get to Newport each year. And what do they do it on? Money!

"That's romance enough for me, my dear. And if you want work and a career, the most fascinating kind I know is to study the man you've married—find what's holding him back and take it away—what's pushing him on and help it grow! You've got to narrow, narrow down! You may want a lot of children. They're loves, of course, to have around. But you run a big risk in that. I could give you so many cases—mothers who have just dropped out. If you want to really get on in this town, you've got to stick to your husband and make your husband stick to you! There are things about that you will learn soon enough. It comes so naturally, once you are in it—married, I mean. And that's your hold.

"And if you love him as I love Joe," she added almost in a whisper, "you find it so easy that often you forget what it is you're trying to do, what you're really doing it for. You're just happy and you shut your eyes. But then you wake up and use it all—everything—to drive him on. You can do that while you are still young and have what he wants—the looks, I mean—and can make him see that any number of other men would be glad to step into his shoes. But you give them only just enough to keep your husband from feeling too safe. You hold them off, you make him feel that he's everything to you if he'll work and give you what you ought to have! And unless you're a fool you don't listen to this talk of women's rights and women doing the work of men. You keep on your own ground and play the game. And you keep making him get what you need—before it's too late!" All at once she gave a sharp little laugh. "It's a kind of a race, you see," she said.

The night after this talk, Ethel lay in her bed, and tried to remember and think it out. How new and queer and puzzling. So many vistas she had dreamed of had been closed on every hand.

"What's the matter with me?"

The matter was that her old ideals and standards were being torn up by the roots, roots that went deep down into the soil of life in the town in Ohio. But Ethel did not think of that. She scowled and sighed.

"Well, this is real! I was dreaming! And after all, this is much the same, but different in the way you get it. This is New York. One thing is sure," she added. "Amy needs every dollar Joe can make—and she must not have me on her hands. I've got to find what I really want—a job or a man—and be quick about it!"

It threw a tinge of uneasiness into those breathless shopping tours. And it changed her attitude toward Joe. He had not counted for much at first; he had been a mere man of business; and business men had had little place in her dreams of friends in the city. But watching him now she changed her mind.

Joe Lanier was what is called "a speculative builder." He was an architect, building contractor and real estate gambler, all in one. He put up apartment buildings "on spec," buildings of the cheaper sort, most of them up in the Bronx, and sold them at a profit—or a loss, as the case might be. He dealt in the rapidly shifting values of neighbourhoods in the changing town. "The gamble in it is the fun," he remarked to Ethel one evening. Joe was just the kind of a man, as Amy had told her sister, to make a big sudden success of his work. Unfortunately he was tied to a partner, Nourse by name, who held him back. This man Amy keenly disliked. She said that Nourse was a perfect grind, a heavy tiresome creature who thought business was everything in the world.

"Sometimes I really believe he forgets it's for making money," Amy declared. "He's as anxious about it as an old hen, and he wants it steady as a cow. He detests me, as I do him. He has stopped coming here, thank heaven. And the time is not so far away when I'll make Joe see that he's got to lose his partner."

Joe's image gained steadily in importance to Ethel's awakening eyes. Of his force as a man, all that she saw made her more and more certain that Amy was right. Joe was the kind who was bound to succeed. He not only worked hard, his work was a passion. At night and on Sunday mornings he could sit for hours absorbed in the tiresome pages of real estate news in his paper. He went out for strolls in the evenings; one night he asked Ethel to come along; and his talk to her about buildings, the growth of the city by leaps and bounds, now in this direction, now in that, caught her imagination at once. Joe felt the town as a living thing, as she had felt it that first night. Different? Yes, this was business. But even business, to her surprise, as Joe saw and felt it, had a strange thrilling romance of its own.

And she soon noticed something else that drew her to Joe. Almost every evening he would sit down at his piano and start playing idly. As a rule he played dance music, popular songs from Broadway. But sometimes leaning back he would drift into other music. And though his hand would bungle and only sketch it, so to speak—in his black eyes, scowling slightly over the smoke of his cigar, would come a look which Ethel liked. But vaguely she felt that Amy did not, that it even made her uneasy. For almost invariably at such times, Amy would come behind him, her plump softly rounded arm would find its way down over his shoulder—and little by little the music would change and would come back to Broadway.

When Joe heard one evening that Ethel was "mad to learn to sing," he took her by the arm at once and marched her over to the piano. And they had quite a session together—till Amy suggested going out to a new cabaret she had heard of that day. Her voice sounded hurt and strained. And Ethel from that night on dropped all mention of singing.

Her curiosity deepened toward this city love affair, this husband and wife who apparently had left so

many things out of their lives, things vital in the Ohio town. The sober wee girl in the nursery kept just as quiet as before. Often Ethel opened that door and went in and tried to make friends with its grave shy little inmate and the hostile nurse. And returning to her room she would frown and wonder for a time. But the pretty things piling in from the shops, and the gay anticipations, soon crowded such questioning out of her mind. Swiftly this household was growing more real, the rooms familiar, intimate; the day's routine with its small events were becoming parts of her life. Her own room was familiar now, for by many touches she'd made it her own. And the dining-room and the living room, where she grew acquainted with Joe, these too assumed an intimate air. Most of all, her sister's room grew more and more vivid in her thoughts, though this was still far from familiar, it held too much, it meant too much.

"Shall I ever live with a man like that?"

The way they looked at each other at times! The way they seemed keeping watch on each other. If Joe were out very late at night, Amy would almost invariably grow uneasy and absentminded, and there would be a challenging note in the way she greeted him on his return. On one such occasion Ethel was in Amy's room. She went out when Joe came in; but a queer little gasping sigh behind gave her a start and a swift thrill, for although she did not turn around she knew they were in each other's arms. And again, late one afternoon when the sisters came home and found Joe at work with a tired anxious look on his face, his wife came up behind him. And the picture of her small gloved hand upon Joe's heavy shoulder remained in Ethel's memory. It seemed so soft and yet so strong.

"She can do anything with him she likes. When I marry somebody how will it be?"

Upon the living-room mantel was a photograph of Amy. And on the smooth and pretty face with the lips slightly parting, and in the smiling violet eyes, there was the expression of something which Ethel did not quite name to herself—for she had forgotten the night long ago in her high-school club when they had sturdily tackled the word "sensual" and what it meant. But the picture grew familiar and real, filled in by the living presence here of this woman who so carefully tended her beautiful body, her glossy hair, her cheeks and lips; this sister with so many moods, now intent and watchful, now good-humoured, indolent, now expectant, hungry, now smilingly content and gay.

And as the picture grew more real, warm and close and thrilling, it symbolized for Ethel that mysterious force which she could feel on every side, driving the throngs of humanity—in this city where so many things she had once deemed important were fading rapidly away. That hungry hope of a singer's career, that craving for work and self-education, trips to Paris, London, Rome, books, art and clever people, "salons," brilliant discussions of life; and deeper still, those mysterious dreams about having children and making a home—all began to drop behind, so quietly and easily that she barely noticed the change.

For this was happening in a few weeks, in the first whirl and excitement of those dazzling streets and shops, those models, gowns, hats, gloves and shoes. "It's not what you say that interests men—it's how you look and what you have on." The image of her sister grew vivid in Ethel's eager mind. And with it came the question, now ardent though still a little confused:

"Shall I ever be like that?"

CHAPTER IV

Ethel had been about four weeks in town, and now she was to meet Amy's friends. Amy was giving a dinner the next evening in her honour; and to let the cook and the waitress have a rest on the preceding night, Joe took Amy and Ethel out to dine in a café. His business had gone well that week and Joe was a genial husband. They had a sea-food supper and later he took them to a play. When they came home, Ethel went to her room, for she felt very tired. It was not long before she was asleep.

She was awakened by Joe, half dressed.

"Amy is sick!" he said sharply. "Go in and help her, will you? I'll try to get a doctor!"

On Amy's bed, a little later, Ethel saw a face so changed from the one of a few hours before, that she felt her heart jump into her throat. Amy's face was ugly and queer, distorted by frequent spasms of pain. But worse was the terror in her eyes.

"Ethel, I think I'm dying!" she cried. "Something I ate—it poisoned me!" There was a violent catch in her breath.

"Amy! Why, you poor little darling!" Ethel held her sister tight, asked quick anxious questions and did things to relieve her, but with little or no success. It seemed hours till Joe came back. With him was a doctor, who made an examination and then took Joe into the hall. Ethel followed anxiously. She heard the doctor questioning Joe, and she heard him say:

"I'm afraid it's ptomaine.

"What does *that* mean?" Joe fiercely inquired. But before Ethel could hear the reply she was called back into the bedroom, where on her bed with both hands clenched Amy was saying:

"I can't bear this! Make him give me something—quick!"

The rest of the night was a blur and a haze, of which Joe was the centre—Joe half crazed and impatient, making impossible demands.

"You can't get a nurse in a minute, my friend, at five A. M.," the doctor cried. "I'm doing my best, if you'll give me a chance!"

The fight went on. The nurse arrived, and turning to Ethel the doctor said, "Get him out of this." And she took Joe into the living-room. But there with a sudden curse and a groan he began to walk the floor.

"This doctor—what do we know of him? He was all I could find! We haven't been to a doctor in years! . . . Ah—that's it!" And he went to the telephone, where in a few moments she heard him saying tensely, "Bill, old man, I'm in trouble." And she thought, "It's his partner."

"What have you done?" she asked him.

"Got Bill Nourse on the 'phone. He's bringing another doctor."

"But Joe! You should have asked this one first!"

"Should I?" was his distracted reply.

The second physician soon arrived, and was as surprised and annoyed as the first one when he found how he had been summoned. In a moment with angry apologies he was backing out of the door. But Joe caught his arm.

"You two and your etiquette be damned! Go in and look at that woman!" he cried. And with a glance into Joe's eyes, the second doctor turned to the first, muttered, "Hold this man. He's crazy"—and went into the bedroom.

It was long before Ethel forgot the look that appeared on Joe's face when the second physician came out and said:

"I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do."

She went in with Joe to Amy. And her sister looked so relieved, the lines of pain all smoothed away. Heavily drugged, she was nearly asleep. Her hand felt for Joe's and closed on it, and with a little nestling movement of her soft lovely body she murmured smiling:

"Oh, so tired and sleepy now."

Again, in spite of her grief and fright, Ethel noticed how her sister's hand closed on that of her husband. In the months and years that followed, she recalled it vividly so many times.

Joe sat there long after Amy was dead.

The doctor signed to Ethel to come into the living-room.

"Are you to be in charge?" he asked. She looked at him and shivered. She felt a pang of such loneliness as she had never known before.

"I know nobody—nothing—I don't know how you arrange," she said. "I've only been a month in town."

The doctor gave her a curious look of pity and uneasiness. It was as though he had told her, "I'm sorry, but don't count on me for help. I'm busy. This is New York, you know." He said:

"I'll see to the undertaker." She shivered again, and he added, "Don't you know some older woman here?"

This reminded her of the dinner which Amy was to have given that night. A lump rose in her throat. She waited a moment and then she said:

"Yes, I know of several."

"That's good. You'd better send for them." And soon afterward he hurried away.

But just as Ethel was rising to go to the telephone, there was a ring at the door. She opened it, and a tall man, rather stooped, with iron grey hair and moustache, a lean but rather heavy face and deep-set impassive eyes, came in and said:

"I'm Joe's partner—Nourse, you know. How is it going? Better?"

"She's dead."

"God!" With that low exclamation, she thought she saw a gleam of shock but then of triumph come in his eyes. He went into Joe's room, and closed the door; and with a mingling of relief and of sharp hostility she felt at once how she was shut out. Who was she but a stranger now? She thought of Amy, and with a quick cry Ethel began to walk up and down in a scared hunted fashion. She stopped with a sudden resolute clenching of her teeth, and said, "Now I've got to do something! If I don't, I'll go right out of my mind!" But what? She stared about her, then went to the windows and threw back the curtains. It was well along toward noon. Daylight flooded into the room, with one yellow path of light which came down from the distant sun.

"I'll go out and get her some flowers."

When she came back a half hour later, Ethel still had that resolute look. The door of Joe's room was still closed and she saw Nourse's hat in the hall. She turned and went to the telephone, stopped and frowned.

"Yes, that's the next thing."

She called up Amy's friend Fanny Carr. But at the sound of the woman's voice which came back over the wire, Ethel gave a start of dismay. For it had a jarring quality, and although it was prompt in its exclamations of shocked surprise and sympathy and proffers of help—the words, "You poor child, I'll come over at once!"—made Ethel inwardly beseech her, "Oh, no, no! Please stay away!" Aloud she said, "Thank you," put up the receiver and stood staring at the wall. Was this Amy's best friend?

"I want some one I know!" She thought of Susette. She went at once to the nursery, kissed the wee girl and sat down on the floor. And as they built a house of blocks, Ethel could feel herself softening, the strained tight sensation going. Suddenly in her hot dry eyes she felt in a moment the tears would come.

"What's to become of me and this child?"

She turned with a start and met the unfriendly eyes of the nurse. They had a jealous light in them.

"You'll stay here, of course," said Ethel. "Surely you are not thinking of going—"

"No. Are you?"

A little cold sensation struck into her spine at the tone of that question.

"I haven't decided yet on my plans. Hadn't you better take Susette out to the Park?"

"All right."

"And keep her there as much as you can—till it's over."

"All right," said the nurse again.

Ethel went out of the room. Were there only strangers here?

Just after that Fanny Carr arrived, and Ethel had a feeling at once of a shrewd strong personality. A woman of about medium height, still young but rather over-developed, artificial and overdressed, with a full bust and thick red lips and lustrous eyes of greenish grey—her beauty was of the obtrusive type that is made to catch the eye on the street and in noisy crowded rooms. When Fanny kissed her, Ethel shrank. "I mustn't do that!" she exclaimed to herself. But the other woman had noticed it and shot a little look at her.

"You poor girl. I can't tell you how sorry I feel," she was saying.

"It's horrible. Tell me about it."

And Ethel in a lifeless voice recounted the tragedy of the night.

"Where's Joe?"

"In there, with his partner."

"Oh, Mr. Nourse. He would be." Mrs. Carr threw a glance of dislike at the door. "And you, my dear—I won't ask you now what are your plans. Just let me help you. What can I do? There's that dinner tonight, to begin with. Have you let the people know?"

"Not yet—"

"Have you a list of the ones who were asked?"

"I think there's one on Amy's desk."

"Then I'll attend to it."

Soon Fanny was at the telephone. Her voice, hard and incisive, kept talking, stopping, talking again, repeating it to friend after friend, and making it hard, abrupt and real, stripping it of its mystery, making it naked and commonplace, like a newspaper item—Amy's death. And Ethel sat rigid, listening.

"Amy's best friend! Oh, how strange!"

Suddenly she remembered things Amy had said about this friend—admiring things. She bit her lips.

"What a queer time for hating a person. But I hate you—oh, I hate you!" She went to the window and frowned at the street and slowly again got control of herself. "What's wrong with me? Why am I so dull I ought to be doing something. But what?" Again came the voice from the telephone, and again she clenched her hands. "How did you make Amy take you for a friend? Oh, what difference does it make?"

But it did make a difference. The presence of Fanny got on her nerves; and when a little later two of the dinner guests arrived, to exclaim and pity and offer their help, she faced them and thought:

"You're all alike! You're all just hard and over-dressed! You're cheap! Oh, please—please go away!"

The two visitors seemed glad enough to find she did not want them here, that she was not going to cling to them and make this abyss she was facing a region they must face by her side. In their eyes again she caught the look she had seen on the face of the doctor. "After all, this is not my affair."

The two women left her. Fanny, too, soon went out on an errand. And no other woman came to her that day. How different from the Ohio town. Only once a girl came from the dressmaker's.

But just after Fanny had gone out, Joe's partner came into the living-room. In the last few hours several times she had heard his voice as he talked with Joe. Deep, heavy and gruff, it had yet revealed a tenderness that had given to Ethel a sudden thrill—which she had forgotten the next moment, for her thoughts kept spinning so. But now as he looked down at her she saw in his gaunt lean face a reflection of that tenderness; and there was a pity in his voice which set her lip to quivering.

"The sooner we have this over," he said, "the better it will be for Joe."

"Yes."

"Tomorrow!"

"Yes."

"At four!"

"All right."

"I'll see to it."

"Thank you." There was a pause.

"Is there any special cemetery? You have any preference?" he asked.

"I don't know any in New York." And again there was a silence.

"You haven't been here long," he said.

"You'll be going back now to your home, I suppose."

"I haven't any."

"Oh," he said. She glanced up and saw a gleam of uneasiness in his steady tired eyes. She shrank a little.

"You have no relatives living?" he asked.

"None that I care about," she replied. She swallowed sharply. "They're scattered—gone West. We lost track of them."

"Oh. . . . Then do you intend to stay here?"

"For awhile—if Joe wants me."

"I'll take care of Joe." Though the voice was low, it had an anxious jealous note which made her shiver slightly.

"There's the child," she reminded him sharply. "Why not take it away?" he asked. "Joe never cared for it, did he? Do you think it has been happy here?"

And at that she could have struck him. At her glare he turned away.

"Forgive me. Of course I—should not have said that." A pause. "Nor talked of your plans. I'm not myself. Sorry for Joe. Forgive me." He turned away from her, frowning. "I'll see to everything," he said, and she heard him leave the apartment.

And all the rest of the day and the night and through the morning which followed, no one else came but professional men, and Mrs. Carr. She came and went; and her voice grew familiar—hard, intrusive, naked. And the thought kept rising in Ethel's mind, like a flash of revelation in all the storm and blackness:

"This kind of a woman was Amy's best friend!"

The funeral was soon over, and of its ugly details only a few remained in her mind. She had a glimpse of Amy's face down in the handsome coffin, and at the sight she turned away with a swift pang of self-reproach. "I shouldn't have let Fanny do that!" Fanny had dressed her sister.

She remembered the low respectful voice of the building superintendent: "There's an afternoon tea on the floor below, so the casket and the funeral guests had better go down by the freight elevator."

She gave a strained little laugh at that and asked, "I wonder when I'll cry?"

The preacher, a tall kindly young man, came in and seemed about to speak; but after a look at her face he stopped. He had come from a church two blocks away. Joe and Amy had never been to his church, and it was Nourse who had brought him here. Nourse had learned of him from the undertaker.

Several boxes of flowers came.

Later from a milliner's shop two pretty autumn hats arrived.

The guests began arriving—silent, awkward strangers—ten or twelve.

She heard the nurse come in with Susette and take her back to the nursery.

There was no music. Not a sound.

At last the silence was broken by the minister's low voice. Thank heaven that was kindly. He was brief, and yet too long; for from the apartment one flight below, before he had finished, the festive throb of a little orchestra was heard.

He prayed just a minute or two.

Then they followed the coffin out into the hall and back and down by the freight elevator.

A motor hearse was waiting below.

When the burial was over, she came home alone with Joe. She sat in the living-room watching his face, while the dusk grew mercifully deep. Then she made him eat some supper and take something to make him sleep. And later in her own small room she lay on her bed, dishevelled, tearless, her mind stunned, her feelings queer and uneven, now surging up, now cold and still.

"Where has she gone? What do I know? . . . What do I believe?
Where is God? . . . What is life? What am I here for?"

With a pang she recalled the town in Ohio where she and Amy had been born, and her thoughts went drifting for awhile. Pictures floated in and out, pictures of her life at home. She was hungry for them now, the old stays and firm supports, the old frame house, her father and the God in the yellow church, the quiet river, the high school and that friendly group of eager girl companions, with work, discussions, young ideals, plans and dreams of life and love. . . . All up by the roots in a few swift weeks!

"Shall I go back?" she asked herself. "Do I want to go—now that Dad is dead, and most of the girls have gone away, scattered all over the country?" Again she lapsed. "I'm too dull to think." She let the pictures drift again. Church sociables, a Christmas tree, dances, suppers and buggy rides, picnics by the river. How small and very far-away and trivial they now appeared. All had pointed toward New York. "Go back and marry, settle down? Do I want to? No. And anyhow, there's Joe and Susette. My place is right here—and I'm going to stay. But what is it going to mean to me? What do I want in this city now?"

In the turmoil, startled, she looked about her for a purpose, some ideal. But the old beliefs seemed dim; the new ones, garish and confused. She recalled those faces of Amy's friends. "Yes, cheap and tough, for all their clothes!" Or was it just this ghastly time that had made them all appear so?

Again she thought of her sister dead. "Oh Amy—Amy! Where have you gone?" And at last, quite suddenly, the tears came, and she huddled and shook on her bed.

CHAPTER V

She slept that night exhausted, woke up early the next morning and lay motionless on her bed: at first staring bewildered about the room, and then, with a sharp contraction of her brows and a quick breath, looking intently up at the ceiling. A vigilant look crept into her eyes, for at once instinctively she was on guard against letting the feelings of yesterday rise.

"What a selfish little beast I've been. Did I help in the funeral? Not a bit. Did I comfort poor Joe? Not at all. I was occupied wholly with my own morbid little soul. Now we're going to stiffen up, my love, and try to be of some use to Joe, and do as Amy would have liked." She began to tremble suddenly. "No, we're not going to think of her! It's dangerous! Be practical! To begin with, I must clear things up. I'll have a little talk with Joe. Poor Joe—it's going to be pretty dreadful. I'll stick by him, though, and I've got to learn how to keep him from going out of his mind." More staring at the ceiling. "One thing I know. I shan't wear black. Amy detested mourning, and Joe will see life black enough as it is. . . . Thank Heaven there's the housekeeping to do. That shall run smoothly if it kills me! . . . All right, now suppose we get out of bed."

About an hour later, from behind Amy's silver coffee pot, Ethel had her talk with Joe. She felt ill, but she bit her lips and smiled. She had dressed her hair becomingly and had donned a blue silk waist, one of the countless pretty things that she had bought with Amy. Her brown eyes had a resolute brightness.

"We'll have to help each other," she said. "And there's Susette to be thought of. The best way, I guess, is not to try to do much planning ahead just now. But I'd like to stay here if you want me, Joe. There's no other place where I want to be."

He gave her a grateful tired smile. His hair was a bit dishevelled, and over his blunt kindly face had come a haggard lost expression. His voice was low:

"Thank you, Ethel—you're a brick. I want you here at first, God knows. Later I'll try to fix things so that you can feel more free. You're only a kid, with a life of your own. Big city, you know, and you'll find your place."

He stared over at the window, where the sun was streaming in.

"Another cup of coffee, Joe?"

"No, thanks." he rose slowly, and added, "Let's go now to—Amy's desk—and fix up the housekeeping part of it."

Later he said, "I'll see the nurse and the other two maids and tell 'em they're to take orders from you." He paused a moment. "And Ethel—if you're to stay here, I want it to be as nearly like it was as I can." he gave a wincing frown. "I mean on the money side," he said. "I'll give you a check the first of each month. You'll need things of your own, of course—as she did. I want it just like that."

"Thank you, dear." She saw a muscle in his cheek suddenly begin to twitch, and she thought, "It won't be easy."

When Joe left for his office, she went with him to the door.

She turned at once to the housekeeping. Her talks with the waitress and the cook left her both a little relieved and a good deal disappointed. For there seemed to be nothing for her to do; she was made to feel that things would run best with the least possible interference. She learned with surprise that hitherto the cook had done all the ordering.

"All I need to know is how many is coming," said the cook.

"There won't be any one for awhile."

"Then it's very simple, ma'am." On the woman's face was a look which said, "Just you keep out of my kitchen."

It was the same in her talk with the nurse. That tall gaunt creature briefly explained that, "Mrs. Lanier bought clothes Spring and Fall, and then she left the child to me. I go out every Thursday and every other Sunday—afternoon and evening. Lucy the waitress takes my place. The rest of the time I've managed alone." She looked around in a jealous way and asked, "I suppose you'll want things as before?"

"Yes, for the present," Ethel said. She felt the woman glance at her sharply as she turned toward the door.

She went into her sister's room, sat down and had a little cry. But the sunlight was streaming in through the pretty chintz curtains there; and its softness and its ease, its luxury and blithe content, stole into her spirit and quieted her. She sat looking about.

"What is there for me to do?"

It came over her that the cook and the nurse could tell her just about what they pleased. She had no means of checking them up, for Amy had never talked of such things. It had all been pretty clothes and shops, in those brief exciting weeks, and shrewd counsel about men and what it was they wanted of women. How appallingly shallow and meaningless those conversations now appeared. They gave no comfort or support. The remembrance of the terror in Amy's eyes at the thought of death rose vividly in Ethel's mind, and she got up and walked the floor.

"We'll fight this down—we'll fight this down," she kept repeating determinedly. And as soon as she was quiet again: "What is there for me to do? Why Joe, of course—and heaven knows he'll be enough. He's the hardest kind, he doesn't cry, he keeps it all inside of him." She drew a deep breath. "How about this room?" She frowned and looked around her. "No, I don't think he wants anything changed. For the present at least, I'll leave it alone. But he ought not to be reminded of her by every little thing he sees."

She looked into the closets. In Joe's she found some of Amy's things. She put them back in her sister's closet and then gently closed the door. As she stood there a moment longer, she had a curious feeling of Amy's presence by her side.

"Now, my dear, we'd better go out for a walk," she told herself as she turned away. But she threw a glance behind her.

In the weeks that followed she and Joe were more intensely alone together than she could have imagined.

At first a few of Amy's friends kept dropping in every now and then. But although their intentions were kindly enough, Ethel felt repelled by them. She resented their having been Amy's friends. For swiftly and quite unconsciously, in her resolute groping in the dark for solid ground on which to stand,

she was building up an ideal of her sister—and these women jarred on that. They came to her direct from a world, her sister's world, which she now vaguely felt to be cheap, shallow, disillusioning. And she needed her illusions. By nature frank to bluntness, she was not good at hiding dislikes; and her uneasy visitors soon realized with relief that they were not wanted here.

Fanny Carr still came for a time. For some reason that Ethel could not understand, this shrewd person seemed reluctant to let go her hold as a friend. She was most solicitous about Joe and tried to come when he was at home. But as Ethel's dislike of the woman deepened in intensity, gradually Fanny's visits, too, grew less frequent and then ceased.

During the first week or two, Joe's partner almost every night came home with him to dinner and took him out for evening walks. But his talk was all of business. It seemed to Ethel that purposely Nourse shut her out of the conversation. His manner to her, though not unkind, was like that of the cook and the nurse. "The less you meddle here," it said, "the better it will be for Joe. Leave him to me."

Gleams of this feeling came in his eyes. It showed now and then so openly that even Joe took notice. He stopped bringing his partner home, and he drew closer to Ethel now, as together they cherished the memory of the woman who was gone.

And slowly, in this companionship, this loneliness, this quiet, Joe grew very real to her, and appealing in his grief. Everything else seemed so remote—but he was close. "He needs me." It was a bright spot in the dark. At times this darkness had no end, it stretched away to eternity; but at least she did not face it alone. Of Joe's grief she could have no doubt. Each week his blunt strong features displayed more lines of suffering; his high cheek-bones showed hard and grim. He was grateful, affectionate at times, but more often silent, and she saw in his eyes what frightened her. He had so few resources here. In his office was his work, just as it had always been; but at home there was nothing; his wife was gone, and he seemed restless to get out.

"Let's go somewhere," he would mutter.

She went with him for strolls in the evenings. Often they walked on and on till both were ready to drop with fatigue, but she stuck doggedly by his side. One evening they passed the open door of a church. It was lighted, and the deep low rumble of an organ floated out. Joe stopped a moment irresolute, and then started to go inside. But a glance through the door revealed to him that the church was nearly empty; and he turned away as he would have turned from any show on Broadway which was so obviously "not a hit."

"Sometimes on Sunday mornings I seem to hear 'em, preachers, droning and shouting all over the land," he told her once. "What's in it? What do they know about God or where you go when you are dead? Nothing, no more than you or I!"

His voice was harsh and bitter then, but the next instant it was kind. With his arm about her he was saying:

"Don't, Ethel—please—don't take it like that! I was a brute! I won't again! I'll keep it inside! I'm sorry, dear!"

"Oh, Joe," she whispered, "if we only knew!"

So these two faced eternity.

But only at moments. They looked away. For she saw how good it was for Joe to have the distractions that he craved; and so on their long walks at night she took him to the noisy streets, or into the movies, where his mind appeared to stop and find some rest. Best of all, she discovered, was to go with him in the small car which he used for his business. Driving this car through crowded streets amid a clamour and blare of horns and shouts and peals of laughter, the look on Joe's face made Ethel see how this dulled his grief, how he lost himself and his questionings and became a mere part of the town. What a glamorous seething town! There was something terrific to her in its laugh. If you stopped to think and ask yourself, "What are we all doing here?" how soon it jostled you back into line!

So passed another fortnight. Then Joe grew quieter, and with relief she saw he was ready to stay home. She herself felt tired and relaxed; and it was good to sit at home on these December evenings and feel that both had partly emerged from the sea of doubts in which they had been plunged. He had come out of it, she soon learned, with an image of his wife that even Ethel vaguely felt was swiftly becoming so ideal as to have little or no resemblance to the woman who had died. But eagerly she helped him in this building of Amy's memory. She dwelt upon Amy's appealing side, her lovable moods, her beauty and dash, her unerring instinct for pretty things, her unselfishness, her anxious planning for Ethel's good.

And all this fitted in so well with the picture Joe was making of the wife who had been so true to him, who had never had a thought or a wish for anything but his career. How cheerfully she had given up all sorts of pleasures, trips abroad, a house in the country, summer vacations. Year after year she had spent the hot months almost wholly in town because he could not afford to leave, although she herself had had many chances to go to friends in the mountains or up along the seashore. Instead she had stayed with him in town; and in the evenings always she had been waiting, good-humoured and gay, ready to stay home or go out; with never a word of complaint for the delay of his prosperity, but only encouragement and praise.

At times, as Joe talked on and on, in this mood of hungry wistful love and humility and self-reproach, Ethel would bring herself back with a jerk to the Amy she had known; but again she would feel herself borne along upon the tide of his belief, and she was glad that it was so. So the picture grew. Nor was it only when they talked. For often in long silences, when she thought he was reading his paper, she would glance up from her book and find him staring into the past. And again at the piano, smoking and playing idly, his music made her realize how his mind was groping back through the years, picking and choosing here and there what he needed to build up his ideal.

This music at times made her curious, wondering what kind of a man he had been before Amy took him in hand.

"Where did you learn to play like that, Joe?" He frowned a little.

"Oh, long ago."

He did not seem to care to go back of his marriage. So Ethel let him continue his building; and though at times she smiled a little at some of his fond recollections, still her own deep adoration of her older sister, the whirl of happy memories of that vivid month in town, and the sense of all that Amy had been planning to do for her, combined now with her desperate loneliness to put Ethel in a mood where she gladly and loyally believed almost anything good of her sister.

Christmas was only one example of many similar incidents. They had a small Christmas tree for Susette, and they hung up her stocking as well, and went out Christmas Eve and bought candy canes and dogs and dolls and picture books. And although this was Ethel's idea, it was made to appear as only the thing which Amy would have done had she lived.

So in these two hungry souls, groping for something bright and deep and strong upon which they could live, swiftly and unawares to them both the picture of Amy was stamped deep, idealized and beautified. In life it had been fascinating, but now it was almost heroic as well. It was as though the small gloved hand, which Ethel had noticed so many times, in death had increased the power of its light, firm, tenacious hold.

Ethel began to feel more free, for Joe was no longer on her mind. More than once, in fact, she was surprised at the way he seemed to be settling down. She felt a deeper change in him, something she did not understand. The worn harassed expression she had so often seen on his face while his wife had been alive, the look of a man driven and drained of his vitality, was now gone; and in its place was an unconscious look of content. He often stayed very late at the office; and more and more in his evenings at home he went to his desk and became absorbed in documents and blue print plans.

"What a refuge a man's business is," she thought with a twinge of envy.

And wistfully she began to look about for some resource for herself. She felt the youth within her rise, but the city seemed so vast and strange. In her loneliness the big building of which her present home was a part, seemed doubly huge, impersonal, hard; and so did every other building on that block appear. She felt lost, left out amid ceaseless tides of gaiety on every hand. She took long determined walks, and on these walks she donned the smart attractive clothes that she had bought with Amy. She strove to keep her mind on the sights, the faces of people afoot and in cars, the adorable things in shop windows. And she chatted busily to herself in order to keep on admiring. This old habit of hers, of soliloquy, had grown upon her unawares, as a refuge from her loneliness. Sometimes she even talked aloud. Sturdily she told herself:

"You've only begun. You'll get up out of this, Ethel Knight—just wait. Can't you give a few months to Amy now?"

And scowling at her "morbidness" in feeling dreary and forlorn, she resolutely scanned the papers for news of lectures, plays and concerts. She went to a few in the afternoons, and dressed for them as carefully as though they were great social affairs. And in the intermissions when a buzz of talk would rise, she would begin with quick animation to converse with herself and be gay, or alert and

argumentative. Her lips would move inaudibly. Now and then she would brightly smile and nod across the house at some friend she pretended to have seen. She enrolled for a course of lectures upon "Mental Science." She resumed her reading of magazines and books on all kinds of topics. It made her think of high school days, and hungrily she reached back for that old zest and inquisitiveness about everything under the moon and stars.

And through this searching she caught hints of the presence in the city of a life wider and deeper than shops and yet not antagonistic—a life of gaiety, grace and ease, but with it all the brilliancy to which Amy had been blind; the rich ferment of new ideas in women's lives, discussions, work of many kinds, art, music, "movements" all combined into one thrilling pulsing whole. And again she felt within herself that rising tide of youth and eager vitality.

"Oh, what couldn't I do, my dear, if I only had a chance? Why doesn't somebody see it at once—notice me now, right here on the street? You, madam, in that limousine—look out and see me—don't go by! You're losing the chance of a lifetime! You're missing me—me—Ethel Knight!"

As the dame in her car sped smoothly by, Ethel suddenly laughed aloud. But her laughter had a dangerous note, and she added fiercely, biting her lip:

"Now, don't be silly and burst into tears!"

"Ma'am?" said a voice.

She stopped with a jerk and looked up into the startled eyes of a massive young policeman. Her last remark had been spoken directly up into his face, and the youth was blushing visibly.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Excuse me!"

"Certainly, ma'am."

And she hurried on.

This loneliness lasted several weeks. Then Joe grew dimly aware of it, and came to her assistance with awkward efforts to comfort her. He was at home more often at night. His gruff voice took on a kindlier tone, and in an offhand manner intended to seem casual he would ask where she had been that day or what book she was reading. And they would discuss it for a while. He took her to the theatre and to a concert now and then. They went for rides at night in his car, and he talked to her about his work. She could feel his anxious friendliness. "What a dear he is to me," she thought.

As time went on this companionship grew so natural to them both that more than once Ethel felt in herself a content which made her a little uneasy. As in his blunt kindly way Joe drew closer to her now, she had an awkward consciousness of being in her sister's place. No, not that exactly. Still, she did not care to think of it. She kept out of Amy's room. It had subtly changed and become Joe's room—to her mind at least—though by little things he said and did she knew that Joe was keeping that idealized image of his wife still warm and living in his mind.

But was he—altogether? At times she would frown to herself a bit. Joe loyal? Yes, of course he was, she would indignantly declare. In a novel Ethel had once read, the hero who had lost his wife had taken his grief in this same silent way; and the author had laid it down as a law that all quiet widowers are the kind who never, never marry again. This thought had taken root in her mind; and she applied it now to Joe.

Soon at his suggestion she began to use some of Amy's things. One night when they were going out, he helped her slip into her sister's soft luxurious sable cloak. And as she turned, she detected a queerly uncertain look in Joe's eyes. But in an instant it was gone, and she soon dismissed her uneasiness. For through the weeks that followed he became engrossed in his business and barely noticed her at all.

CHAPTER VI

About this time a letter from home brought her a sharp disappointment. Ethel was not a good correspondent, but during the homesick winter months she had written several times to three of the girls she had known in school. Two had gone west, but the other one was still in Ohio and was planning to come to New York, to take a course of training as nurse in one of the hospitals. In fact it had been all arranged. And Ethel had not realized how much she had counted on this friend, until now a letter came announcing her engagement to a young doctor in Detroit. She was going there to live, and her letter was full of her happiness. Ethel was very blue that night.

But only a few days after this she received another missive that had quite a different effect. It was a long bulky epistle, a "round robin" from the members of the little high school club to which she had belonged at home. The girls had scattered far and wide. One was teaching music in an Oklahoma town; another had gone to Cleveland and was a stenographer in a broker's office there; a third was in Chicago, the wife of a young lawyer; and a fourth had married an engineer who was working a mine in Montana. It made an absorbing narrative, and she read it several times. At first it took her out of herself, far, far out all over the land. How good it was to get news of them all, how nice and gossipy and gay. It was almost as though they were here in the room; she seemed to be talking with each one; and as they chatted on and on, the feeling grew in Ethel that each was starting like herself and that some were having no easy time in unfamiliar places. She could read between the lines.

But the part that struck her most was the contribution of their former history "prof," a little lame woman with snappy black eyes, who had been the leading spirit in their long discussions. She was an ardent suffragist, and she it was who had brought so many modern books and plays and "movements" into their talk. Chained to her job in the small town, she had followed voraciously all the news of the seething changing world outside, of the yeast at work in the cities. And to the letters of some of the girls who seemed bent upon nothing but social success, the little teacher now replied by an appeal to all of them:

"Girls, some of these letters worry me. I don't want to preach—you will lead your own lives. But I cannot help reminding you of the things we talked about—the splendid things, exciting things that are stirring in this land today. Oh, what a chance for women—what openings with narrow doors—what fights to make the doorways wide for the girls who will come after you! Keep yourselves strong and awake and alive—keep growing—remember that life is a school and for you it has only just begun. Don't sit at your desks—in your homes, I mean—blinking with a man at your side. Keep yourselves free—don't marry for money—don't let yourselves get under the thumb of any husband, rich or poor, or of social position or money or clothes or any such silly trumpery. Get the real things! Oh, I'm preaching, I know, as I did in spite of myself at home. But girls—dear friends and comrades—be strong—and don't give up the ship!"

Ethel read it many times. She could hear the voice of the little "prof," now earnest, scornful, pleading, now obstinate and angry, again light-hearted, mocking. She recalled how their leader had warned them against the bribery of men. Most of the girls had smiled at her then, for they had felt themselves so strong and clear in their aims and desires.

"Oh, Ethel—Ethel—Ethel Knight. How have the mighty fallen. One week in New York and your eyes were glued to the windows of shops. You got ready to dance and find a man."

The thought rose in her mind—"That was Amy's idea." But she dismissed it with a frown. She turned back to the letters and read them all through over again. She rose and walked slowly up and down with her hands locked behind her. Then she went to her desk, and to the round robin she added this:

"I am in New York and have nothing to say. I have been a fool. I have spent nearly all my money on a lot of silly clothes. No, not silly—fetching clothes—for they were meant to fetch a man. But in getting them I got nothing else. I have had a shock—a terrible one. My sister Amy suddenly died. I am here now to care for her child. But am I? Nothing of the kind. The nurse does that and I do nothing. I just sit or walk about and scowl at what I am missing. No more from me, girls, until the round robin—the dear splendid thrilling round robin—comes back here on its next yearly round. I swear I'll have a job by then! Good luck and God bless us all! We're young!"

Quickly she crammed all the letters into a large envelope, licked it, pressed it firmly down, and addressed it to, "Miss Barbara Wells, Bismarck, North Dakota." She stamped it, felt the tears come, kissed the letter a fierce good-bye, took it out and dropped it in the mail box in the hall. Then she came back to her own room, and with swift, determined jerks took off the black cloth wrapping of a large old-fashioned typewriter, one of the few belongings she had brought from Ohio. She had purchased it several years ago, and by typing sermons and other occasional documents she had earned almost money enough for the clothes that had cost so little at home.

She sat down and began to pound the keys, but soon she stopped and shook her head. She had never been an expert. Self-taught, her work had been laboured and slow, and the lapse of months had thrown her out. "However! Something must be done!" And the pounding went on for days and days, hour after hour; and when her fingers, wrists and arms felt like "two long tooth-aches," she exclaimed impatiently:

"Oh, for goodness sake stop being so soft! You're a new woman, Ethel Knight, and you're going to earn your living!"

At times, however, stopping to rest and carefully scan her labour for faults, her mind would rove far

out into life. She was copying from two books the little "prof" had given her, the "Life and Letters of George Sand"; and "The Work of Susan B. Anthony." And as Ethel pounded on, each book in its own way revealed exciting vistas to her eyes of life in great cities both here and abroad, life earnest and inspiring, life bright and thrilling, brilliant, free!

"Oh, your future life, my love, will be far from dull and blinking!"

And this mood lasted for two weeks. Then as her hand grew more expert, and she scanned the papers for information of employment bureaus, there came some ugly hours when much pounding was required. She went out and tramped the streets, meeting the town with angry eyes that struggled for self-confidence. And twice, although she had dressed herself with a keen and vigilant eye to her own attractiveness and had gone to the bureau she had selected, with a sinking heart she turned back from the door. But the second time, after leaving, with a scowl she faced about, went back and marched into the office. And a little later when she emerged, her face had a stunned and dazed expression. She still could not believe it! For the woman in charge, after one sharp look and a number of questions, had remarked:

"Why, yes, I think we can place you. I've one position waiting right now." There had been more questioning, but this had seemed rather perfunctory. The woman had not appeared to care very much that Ethel had only one reference—from the old minister back at home; and the brief exhibition of her skill which Ethel gave upon a machine, with her fingers excited, cold and tense, had lasted but a minute or two when the woman had said, "Yes, that will do."

Ethel scowled as she tried to remember it all. There had been one flaw. What was it?

"Oh, yes, she warned me about men." And here Ethel gave a sharp little laugh, with a lump of excitement in her throat. "Well, I think I can handle myself on that point." She recalled with assurance recollections—and there had been not a few—of youths at home who had tried to "get fresh," and had soon been shown where they got off!

She was walking very rapidly toward a subway station, and soon she was on her way downtown.

"Yes, my dear, I'm sorry to say that it isn't your skill, it is your face that has got you this chance. All right, Face, thank you very much. If you'll just keep steady, eyes easy and cool, jaw firm but not too ugly." . . .`

And when a few minutes later she was shown into the private office of her future employer, she almost laughed in his fat round face—so absurd in that first moment did all her little qualms appear.

"He's forty and he loves his meals."

And she answered his questions so blithely, with such an anxious friendliness, that the dumpy man who sat at the desk was plainly attracted and easily caught. In fact, in his heavy-lidded eyes and about his thick lips came a look which repelled her a little. "I shouldn't wonder if even you might get feeling young again," she thought to herself disgustedly. "But I guess I can attend to that!"

"Yes, sir, fifteen dollars a week," she was saying meanwhile in a firm brisk tone of voice. "Of course I know it's just a trial, but I'll do my best, I promise you."

"Vell," said Mr. Greesheimer, "you be here tomorrow at nine und ve'll see." He sighed. "Ve'll see, my friend." He turned back to his desk with an abrupt and businesslike little gesture of dismissal.

And this businesslike air he retained on the morrow. As he explained her work to her, the tone of his voice was crisp and dry. Ladies' cloaks were Greesheimer's "line," and though his business was still new he was increasing it rapidly. He was eager, hungry, almost fierce in the way he snapped off his letters at times; again he was a genial soul, boasting to her of his success and giving forth shrewd homely proverbs that he had learned long ago as a child in some Galician village. But never in those weeks of work did she catch a suggestion of "freshness." He was her boss, and at times her friend in a fatherly fashion—that was all. She worked hard, overcame her awkwardness, was punctual, laboured to please him. And he was not slow to praise.

"You're a smart young goil," he said more than once. "Keep on—it's great—it suits me fine."

And despite the monotonous bleak detail of her life in that room, Ethel grew steadily happier there. For she was gaining confidence fast, she was living up to her ideals. Soon she would be ready to leave this funny little man and get a place of a different kind—as secretary, for instance, to some clever

woman novelist or noted suffrage leader. She had already put down her name at three employment bureaus, in each of which the woman in charge seemed to look upon her with a favourable eye.

Too bad poor Joe disliked it so. When she informed him of what she had done, he had appeared quite taken back.

"All right, Ethel, go ahead. I don't want to meddle," he had replied. "Only—" he had scowled at her in an effort to smile—"I don't quite see—well, go ahead."

Plainly it had been a surprise. It was so utterly different from what Amy would have done. It had set him thinking, hurt him. "She wants to get away," he had thought. Ethel had caught his feeling and had pitied him for it. But mingled with this pity had been a vague resentment:

"The minute you show you've made up your mind to be a little independent, they treat it like a slap in the face. All right, Mr. Male Provider, your tender feelings will have to be hurt. There's nothing the matter, I mean to stay here. I'll stick by you just as long as you need me. Only, I propose to be free!"

Their relations had grown a little strained. He had stayed at the office more often at night. Very well, let him sulk in his masculine way. Only one remark of his had annoyed her. Like the woman in the employment bureau, he had warned Ethel against men.

"When it comes to looks," he had ended, "you're one in a thousand. And in this town—"

"Oh, Joe, for goodness sake hush up!" she had cried. A bright spot of colour had come in each cheek and her strong little mouth had set viciously. "You'll be telling me next that I got my position simply on my pretty face! No brains behind it, of course, no mind!" And she had tapped one foot on the floor in a way which made him look at her in a curious manner, startled and admiring.

"Oh, no, I won't," he had told her meekly. "You've got the makings of more real mind than any girl I've ever seen."

"Thank you," she had snapped at him, but she had liked him nevertheless. So long as one had to live with a man, even as his sister-in-law, it was well to have him in his place.

So her annoyance had died down, and had only risen a little again when one day Joe came to her office. There was some excuse, of course, but his real reason obviously was to have a look at her employer and at the same time show the man that she had a male protector. Booh! . . . But Joe had smiled at Greesheimer and had withdrawn quite reassured, leaving her and her job in peace.

As Ethel's business life went on, her self-confidence grew apace. And now that she had proved to herself that she had brains behind her face, she dropped her air of severity and even began to enjoy the glances which she knew were cast her way, on the streets and in the office. Even on old Greesheimer, when he was in one of his genial moods, she would bestow a winning smile. It was good to have both brains and face. She looked at the city with challenging eyes, a self-supporting woman.

And this state of mind might have lasted some time, had it not happened that one sunny day toward the end of April Greesheimer opened a letter with eager trembling fingers, read it swiftly and glared with joy, his big glistening eyes nearly leaving their sockets. Then he whirled around in his chair, and as his eye lit on Ethel, he laughed, and in a harsh queer voice he cried, "Vell? Now you see? I'm rich already, I'm vell off! I got the Zimmerman contract—see! I can do vot I like! I got it! I got it!" He capered in triumphant glee, laughing again and seizing her arms. "Vell, vot you say! Vy don't you speak? By Gott, I raise your salary!"

"Oh, Mr. Greesheimer!" she cried, half laughing. "It's simply too wonderful for words!"

"Ha—ha!" He still had her by the arms. "All you young goils could love me now—eh?—you could take an old fehlah! Ha-ha-ha!" And the next instant, furious, she felt herself hugged violently, kissed! His lips! His fat soft body! Ugh! She dug her elbow into him with a stifled cry and wrenched away. A moment she turned on him eyes ablaze.

"You dirty—beastly—" she gasped for breath, then turned, and seizing her hat and coat she rushed blindly from the room and through the outer office. In the elevator crowded with men she felt a queer taste in her mouth. "That's blood," she thought. "Biting my lip, am I—well, bite on. I'm not going to cry—I'm not, I'm not—I'll reach that street if it kills me!"

Meanwhile in his office Greesheimer was still staring, first at the door and then at the window, and upon his pudgy countenance was a glare of utter astonishment and honest indignation.

"Mein Gott!" he exploded. "I give her a hug—a hug like a daughter—and off like a rocket—off she

goes!" And in Yiddish and in Hebrew and Russian and American, Greesheimer expressed himself as he strode swiftly up and down.

For seven years without a break he had "kept a goil" more fascinating to his taste than any female in New York. Her name was Sadie, she was a model in a dressmaker's shop uptown, and she owned him body and soul. Their marriage had only been put off until he had bridged the dangerous time in the launching of his business. For Greesheimer had a mother, an old uncle and a sister and two small nephews to support. But this Zimmerman contract, "Gott sei danke!" would clear the way for marriage at once. And as that glorious vision, of relatives all radiant and Sadie flushed and joyous leaping into his embrace, had burst upon his dazzled soul, his glance had lit on his employée, and he had hugged her in his joy! And she—Again did Greesheimer swear! He felt hot angry blushes rise. And later at his telephone he was saying to a woman friend who ran an employment bureau:

"I got to have a stenographer. See? Und I don't want a goil, I want a man—a smart young fellah, y'understand. . . . Jewish? Yes! You betcher! No more Christian goils in mine! Dey have rotten minds—plain rotten minds!"

But to Ethel, walking blindly, no such explanation occurred. She could still feel that body, those greedy lips and clutching hands, and out of her disgust and rage emerged another feeling which grew like a load on her shoulders, sagging her spirit and crushing her down.

"Joe was right. It was only my face. That beast was only waiting! . . . I wonder if they're all like that? Probably not. But how can I tell the sheep from the goats? I thought I could. I thought I knew how to handle myself—I thought I knew how to get on in this town! But I don't, it seems—I've done nothing at all! I've just been a little fool! . . . And New York is like that!"

She glared at the city around her, at its tall, hard unfriendly walls, the jangling trolleys down below, the trucks and drays and the crowds rushing by her. For all their hurry, some of the men shot glances at Ethel that made her burn. One tall thin man even stopped and turned and she felt his look travel right down to her toes! She walked on and on with her bare fists clenched. She had left her gloves in the office. Go back for them? No! Nor to any office, nor any man!

"Oh, yes, I will, I'll go back to Joe—and hear him say, 'I told you so.'"

She reached the apartment faint and sick. Joe had not come home, thank goodness. She went to her room and to her bed, and had a good cry, which relieved her a little. And so, after an hour or two, looking steadily up at the ceiling, she decided that after a few days' rest she would go to all three of those bureaus and say, "I'm in the market still, if you please, but only for a woman boss."

But later, as she was dressing for dinner, her eye was caught by the photograph of her sister Amy. And the face appeared to her suddenly so strong and wise with its knowledge of life. She remembered Amy's smiles at all new "movements" and ideas and work for women. She seemed to be smiling now, with a good-humoured pitying air, and to be saying:

"Now will you believe me? It isn't what you say to men, it's how you look and what you wear."

And Ethel stared at it and frowned, in a disillusioned, questioning way.

CHAPTER VII

Joe did not say, "I told you so." It was after eight that evening when he came home from his office, and she was annoyed at the delay, for she wanted to have her confession of failure over and done with. As she waited restlessly, she envied him his business life. How much simpler everything was for a man! Her nerves were on edge. Why didn't he come! At last she heard his key in the door and sharply pulled herself together. "How I detest him!" she thought to herself.

"Hello, Ethel." His voice from the hallway had a gruff and tired sound; but a moment later when he came in, it was with his usual friendly smile. "Sorry I kept you waiting. I've had a mean day at the office."

"So have I," said Ethel, and with a frown she plunged right in. The sooner this was over the better. But when she had finished and looked up, she detected no triumph on his face. He was watching her so queerly.

"Well," he said, "I ought to be sorry, I suppose—but I can't exactly say I am."

"Why not?" At her sharp challenge he grimly smiled.

"Because this kind of puts us—in the same boat—two of a kind."

"What on earth do you mean?" she demanded. And then with a rueful grimace he said:

"Because I too have bumped my head." As at that she felt a swift little thrill of surprise and liking for Joe, he continued, "I've been a fool. You're always a fool when you take a chance and aren't able to get away with it. You're a fool—because you missed out. I'm a fool—because I missed out. We both of us took chances. And I got very badly stung. We've got to be poor for a little while." Joe drew a deep breath and smiled again. "I've dreaded this. I've put off telling you for a week—I don't like eating humble pie. But it's all right now, God bless you—we can eat it side by side."

"Why, Joe, dear, how nice!" she sighed. "Go on and tell me. What will it mean?" He held up his hand.

"Hold on a minute, can't you? Let me make my little speech. I've made it so many times in my mind."

"All right, you poor dear, just start right in."

"Well," said Joe, "it begins like this." And his face grew a little portentous, with humour and a deeper feeling mingled awkwardly together. "You've been about as good to me as one fellow could be to another. I know what a hell it must have been, and the stiff upper lip was all on your side. I don't want to talk about it, but—when Amy died the life went out—of my business too. Later I got back my nerve, and because my job was all I had left I tried to make it more worth while. I've got a few old dreams in me—I mean I've always wanted to build something better than flats in the Bronx. So I—well, I took a chance and failed. I'm in debt and my only chance to scrape through is to cut down here as low as we can. I've figured out our expenses, and—"

He walked for a moment. She quickly rose, went to him and took his arm and said:

"A very fine speech. We'll go in to our dinner now—and later we'll get a pencil and paper, and we won't stop until everything's right."

There came for Ethel busy days.

The next morning she went to the nursery and told the nurse she would have to go. "I'm sorry," she added and then stopped short, startled by the woman's face. The way her eyes went to Susette made something leap in Ethel's breast. The nurse wheeled sharply:

"What have I done! What's the matter with me?" Her voice was strained.

"Nothing. There has been nothing at all." Ethel found it hard to speak.

"You've been—quite wonderful with Susette. The trouble is that Mr. Lanier has found he must cut expenses."

"Oh. Then why am I the one?" She broke off and grew rigid, but her thought struck into Ethel's mind: "Why am I the one? Why don't you go! What good are *you* here?"

"I'm sorry," Ethel repeated. "I wish I could keep you, but I can't. I'll have to take care of Susette myself—"

"You?"

"Yes, and you'll have to teach me how."

"I won't!"

"You mean you'll let her suffer because you haven't shown me things? No, no, I'm sure you'll be sensible. You'll stay on a few days and help me, and meanwhile I'll do all I can to find you a good position. I only hope I can get you back again in the autumn. You see it may only be for a time." She went to the nurse, who now had her arms about the child. "I'm so sorry. Remember I want you back."

There were tears in Ethel's eyes as she left the nursery. "Whew!" She went into her own small room. "I wonder if I'll ever feel like that about a child?" She stared a moment and added, "That was real enough, poor thing." She drew a resolute breath. "Well, no use in feeling like a criminal, my dear. Now for the cook and the waitress."

She rather took satisfaction in that, for she had disliked both of them keenly. She gave them until the end of the week, and in the meantime telegraphed for Emily Giles, who for over five years had helped her keep house for her father at home. Of medium height, spare, thin chested and thin lipped, her hair

already streaked with grey, Emily had been less a servant than a grimly devoted friend. Since Ethel's departure, she had been head-waitress at the small hotel.

"Emily will come," thought Ethel, "unless she's dead or paralysed."

And Emily came.

"Well, Miss Ethel, here I am," she said on her arrival. She said, "Miss Ethel" quite naturally, although she had always said "Ethel" before. But her tone made it sound like, "Well, kid, here I am. Now let's see what kind of a mess it is you want me to get you out of."

With the aid of a book entitled, "How To Live Well On Little," together they puzzled and contrived.

"The things that have gone on in this kitchen," Emily muttered more than once, as her sharp grey eyes peered here and there, now into drawers and closets, now at the many unpaid bills. "When that cook of yours wasn't grafting she must have been getting drunk on your wine." As the record was unfolded of years of careless extravagance, Ethel would frown and turn away, for it seemed disloyal to pry so deep. Poor Amy was dead and buried.

With Emily she went marketing, and they beat down and bullied mankind. Emily was so good at that. And at home they worked out a schedule of housekeeping on a rigidly economical scale, dividing the work between them. All this was rather pleasant. The trouble came in the nursery, where more than once the face of the stricken woman there made it hard to keep one's mind keen and clear for all the intricate details of the careful mothering in this room, from which barely a sound had ever gone out to disturb the peace of Amy's home.

But it was soon over. The nurse had taken her departure and Ethel had moved to the nursery. And now the routine of her day brought such a change in Ethel's life as deeply affected her future course—though at first she had but little time to stop for self-analysis. At five in the morning she was roused by the low, sweet chirrup of Susette, who was peering over the edge of the crib. And her day from that time on was filled with a succession of little tasks, which at first puzzled and wearied her, made her often anxious and cross, but then attracted her more and more. What a change from the month before, from Mr. Greeshimer to Susette! She became engrossed in the washing and dressing and feeding of her tiny charge. Anxiously she watched Susette for the slightest sign of illness; and in this watching she grew to know the meaning of certain looks and gestures, baby talk. Susette became a person, wee but very intimate.

In the park on those lovely days of May, Ethel liked to feel herself a part of the small world of nurses and mothers who chatted or sewed while children played and motor cars went purring by. There were little distractions; for Susette was a sociable creature, and the small friends she discovered brought Ethel into conversation with the women who had them in charge. Several of the mothers were French—very French in the way they dressed, in the way they sewed, in their quick gestures, shrugs and smiles and their pretty, broken English. They lent a piquant novelty to motherhood in Ethel's eyes.

At times she thought of Amy. Why had Amy missed all this! How had she been able to keep away from this adorable child of hers! Ethel saw in the windows of shops the most tempting garments for small girls. And Amy had had money to spend! Susette's wardrobe was "simply pathetic!" And often, sitting in the Park and watching on the road nearby the endless procession of automobiles and the women like Amy so daintily clad, and puzzling and remembering innumerable little things from her first gay month in town—in Ethel's mind the picture of the sister she had adored began to change a little, and to lose its hold upon her. Amy beautiful, indolent toward Susette and the household; Amy tense, with a jealous, vigilant light in her eyes, when it was a matter of Joe and her love or the money so passionately desired.

But these recollections she would dismiss with excuses for her sister. "There are two kinds of women," Ethel sagely told herself. "Mothers and wives. And she was a wife. It may be I'm a mother." And little by little, in spite of herself, her worship of her sister changed to a pitying tolerance. The question, "Shall I ever be like that?"—once so full of eagerness—had already been answered unconsciously. "Poor Amy, she's dead. She lived her life. I'm going to live another."

Just what life it was to be was as unsettled as before. For as she grew used to this mothering, the old adventurous hunger for life welled up again within her. For long periods she forgot the child and sat frowning into space, her mind groping restlessly for ways and means to find herself and get friends of her own, independence, work and gaiety, a chance to grow and "be somebody here!" She had her angry, baffled moods.

But from these Susette would bring her back. "What's your life to be, you poor little dear? And if you

don't worry, why should I!" And resolutely she would turn to the small, absorbing life of the child.

This went on for many months. It changed her feeling toward the town, for now she had a foothold here. It changed her feeling toward Amy, whose picture had begun to blur. But that queer sensation of intimacy, of being in her sister's place, was even deeper than before. For now she was mothering Amy's child—her child and her husband.

CHAPTER VIII

For a time she had seen little of Joe. She had been absorbed in her new work; and Joe, in his business troubles. But as he began to see light ahead, again he took notice of things at home; and rather to his own surprise he enjoyed the change that had been made. The simpler ways appealed to him. He and Emily got on famously. And he began to notice Susette, to come home early now and then, in time to see her take her bath or to sit on the floor and build houses of blocks, he knew about building houses, and he could do fascinating things which made his small daughter stare at him in grave admiration.

"How dear he is with her," Ethel thought. Although she was barely aware of the fact, her own new tenderness for the child had tightened the bonds between her and its father. His blunt, affectionate kindness appealed to her often in a way that even brought little qualms of doubt. She would look at Joe occasionally in a thoughtful, questioning manner.

He stayed home again in the evenings now; and while she sat at her sewing, often he would look up from his paper or his work to make some brief remark to her; and the conversation thus begun would somehow ramble on and on while his work lay forgotten. But almost always, unknown to them both, the spirit of Amy was in the room, and the influence of her memory was shown in Joe's attitude toward his home. For in spite of his enjoyment of the simpler régime, he revealed a feeling of guiltiness at not being able to give to Ethel the easy lot he had given his wife. As business improved he began to suggest getting back a nurse and a waitress. And it was all that Ethel could do to dissuade him.

"His idea of being nice to a woman," she told herself impatiently, "is to give her expensive things, and above all keep her idle." She did not add, "Amy taught him that." But it was in the back of her mind.

He often talked of his business, he tried to explain to her the details of speculative building, real estate values and the like. And listening and watching his face, she felt his force and vitality, his doggedness, the fight in him. She recalled Amy's eager faith in Joe as a man who was "simply bound to make money." And at times she said to herself, "What a pity." Still, it was all rather puzzling. For his talk of the growth of the city, his view of its mighty pulsing life, restless, heaving, leaping on, gripped her more than ever before. And moreover, now that Amy was dead, Ethel soon began to feel another Joe emerging out of some period long ago. With a new and curious eagerness to find in him what her sister had never known (an eagerness she would have disclaimed with the utmost indignation), she began to probe into Joe's past. And in answer to her questions he threw out hints of old ideals in which the making of money had played only a second part. He had meant to be an architect, a builder of another kind. Instead of putting up "junk in the Bronx," he had meant to do something big and new, something bold and very French, "to make these infernal New Yorkers sit up and open their cold grey eyes." At times he rather thrilled her with hints of his early bachelor life in New York and Paris, his student days.

About this time, one evening, he brought his partner home to dinner, but the experiment proved even more of a failure than it had in the past. Nourse made Ethel feel as before his surly, jealous dislike of her presence in Joe's home. And Ethel's hostility redoubled. She recalled what Amy had told her of his tiresome worship of work, its routine and its dull detail. No wonder Joe's ideals had died, with such a man in his office.

"What a pity you're his partner," her manner plainly said to him, for she was not good at hiding dislikes. And to that his gloomy eyes rejoined, "What a damned shame it you were his wife."

But Nourse did not come again. And with business dropped out of their talk, she and Joe turned to other things—small happenings of the household, amusing incidents of the day, and little problems to be solved. They were well into the summer by now, and Susette ought to go to the seashore. They began to discuss seaside hotels, and chose a place along the Sound. It was decided that Emily should stay here to look after Joe, and that he should run up for his week-ends. In the meantime, as his business improved, he began to bring Ethel little surprises, candy or spring flowers, and to take her out in his car at night. They went to the theatre several times. And everything which was said or done upon such occasions gave Ethel food for thinking.

At the seashore, with Susette on the beach, hour after hour, she thought about Joe and about herself. This thinking was long and curious. It was confused, barely conscious at times, all mingled with the long bright waves that came rolling in from the shining sea. The picture of her sister's face kept rising up before her there—of Amy in her bedroom good-humouredly talking and smiling, and teaching Ethel how to get on; of Amy with her husband, throwing swift, vigilant glances at him, kissing him, nestling in his arms. In her thinking Ethel grew hot and cold, with jealousy, swift self-reproach and a new, alarming tenderness. She thought of Joe, of his every look, his smile and the tones of his gruff voice; of Joe grief-stricken and half crazed, of Joe awakening, coming back. Again with a warm rush of feelings, not unmingled with dismay, she would go over in her mind their talks and the queer, almost guilty expression that had often come in his eyes. For Amy had always been in the room.

For this thinking, fresh fuel was given by Joe's weekly visits here. There was not much talk of Amy now, her name had subtly dropped away, but Ethel could feel it behind the talk. "It would always be there!" she would cry to herself. "Well, and why not?" she would demand. "Why be such a jealous cat? Would you let that hold you back?" It was all so involved, this Amy part, with Ethel's own earlier visions of happiness and a love of her own. Was this really love—this queer, leaping feeling, up and down, hot and cold, uncertain, tense, unhappy, hungry, undecided?

"Oh, if I could only make up my mind!"

When with Joe, she had many moods. In some she grew resentful toward him for forcing this upon her. But soon she would grow repentant. Her manner, from cool friendliness, would change in a few moments; and her eyes would grow absorbed, attentive, now to Joe and now to herself, grave, wistful, sad, and then suddenly gay—though they only talked of little things, of Susette, the beach, the city, the coming winter, household plans, his work, half spoken aspirations. Any one watching them in these talks might have thought she was his wife.

Again came that disturbing sense of intimate relationship to her sister who was dead. "I'm stepping into Amy's shoes." But this feeling began to be left behind. It was back in the past; she was looking on. One day, when Susette had bumped her head and her aunt was comforting her, suddenly in a revealing flash came the thought, "I love you, oh, so hard, my sweet! But I want another one all my own!"

When in September she and Susette went back to Joe in the city, all this grew more intense and clear. For he would not give her much longer now; she saw that he had made up his mind. She felt his strength and tenderness, his hunger for her growing. Sometimes it was frightening, the power he was gaining. A touch of his hand and she would grow cold. One evening when she had a headache, Joe bent over and kissed her.

"Good-night," he said, and left the room—left her burning, trembling. She pressed both hands tight to her cheeks, pressed the hot tears from her eyes.

At other times, she told herself, "Yes, I'm going to marry him. But there's nothing to be so excited about—or scared like this. I know him now, I know just what he is and what he is not. He is not a good many things I had dreamed of, but he's so dear and kind and safe. And I want to have children." Gravely wondering, she would look ahead. "You're no longer a child, my dear. Be strong and sensible. This is real. . . . It's getting rather cold tonight. I must run in and see if Susette is warm."

She still felt Amy's presence. Out of the various rooms certain pictures, chairs and vases forced themselves upon her attention. For some time past she had disliked them. It seemed to her at moments as though she could not have them here.

She knew what they were waiting for now. It was nearly the end of October, and the day which both dreaded was nearly at hand, the anniversary of her death. They spoke not a word to each other about it, except once when Joe said gruffly:

"There's a bad time coming for both of us. Let's try not to be morbid about it." As it drew nearer she felt, she must speak. She felt how this unspoken name of her sister would keep rising, rising, between them for the rest of their lives. It was uncanny, it was like a spell, the force of this unspoken name; and she thought, "I must break it!"

And yet she did not speak. She had little opportunity, for she saw very little of Joe that week. When the dreaded night arrived, he did not come home until very late. From her room she heard him come in, and presently by the silence she knew he had settled himself to work. She barely slept, rose early and dressed herself with a resolute air. But already Joe had gone.

It was a beautiful morning. With Susette she went to a florist's shop and had the child pick out some flowers. Then they went out to Amy's grave. And a moment came to Ethel there, an overwhelming

moment, when something seemed bursting up in herself and crying passionately:

"I can't!"

But a little miracle happened. For Susette, who was only three years old and understood nothing of all this, took half the purple asters from Amy's grave, and turning back confidently she put the rest in Ethel's hand—and then saw a sparrow and chased it, and laughed merrily as it flew away.

At night when Joe came home, although he did not speak of the flowers, she knew that he too had been at the grave. He appeared relieved, the tension gone.

"Now is the time to speak of her." And Ethel looked up with a resolute frown. . . . But once again she put it off. Soon they were talking naturally.

Weeks passed, and the memory of that day dropped swiftly back behind them. And there came a night when Joe, close by her side, had been talking slowly for some time, his voice husky, strained and low, and she had been sitting very still. She turned at last with a quick little smile, said:

"Yes, Joe, I'll—marry you—and—oh, I'm very happy! Please go now, dear! Please go—go!"

And when he had gone she still sat very still.

From that night the name of her sister was not spoken between them—was not spoken for nearly two years.

She grew used to being held in Joe's arms, to his kisses and to his voice that had changed, to the things he said and the way his eyes looked into hers. That hunger, it was always there, and growing, always growing! The feeling she'd never had before, that—"We're to be parts of one another!"—deepened, thrilled her with its depth, dazzled and confused her mind.

One day she went to Amy's room, and slowly began looking over the clothes. From the closet and the drawers, in a careful, tender way she took the shimmering little gowns and dainty hats and slippers, silk stockings, filmy night-gowns—and packed them into boxes. All were to be given away. "I couldn't!" Her throat contracting, she turned away with a sharp pang of pity and of jealousy and of a deep, deep tenderness.

She lavished her love upon Amy's child. What adorable little garments she bought for Susette, those autumn days. And at night, bending over her cradle, Ethel would whisper to her, "Oh, I'm dreaming, dreaming, dear!" And to Susette this was a huge joke, and they would laugh at it like mad. "Oh, my precious loved one! What a fine, happy life we'll lead!"

CHAPTER IX

They were married early in December. There were no preparations to be made, for a wedding is nothing without friends, and they had none but Amy's and though Joe said nothing to Ethel about it, she knew he had not sent them word. "It's better," she thought. She herself wrote to a few girl friends, but they were scattered all over the country. No one of them would be coming East. And at times she felt very lonely. With memories of weddings at home and of her dreams for one of her own, which she had planned so often, she begged Joe to let her be married in church, and Joe gave in good-naturedly. He did not go to the minister who had buried Amy a year before, but to one who had a small Presbyterian church on the next street. There he soon arranged to be married. But then, in his ignorance of such matters, Joe said, in his blunt, off-hand way:

"I like to settle these things ahead. So if you'll just name the amount—" he stopped. For the clergyman straightened up as though at an insult. Joe reddened. "Look here," he blurted, "I didn't mean —"

"Oh, that's all right." The other man was smiling queerly. "How long have you been in New York?" he asked.

"Nine years."

"Ever been inside of a church?"

"No, I can't say that I have."

"Then why do you want to get married here?"

Joe smiled frankly. "The bride's idea."

"I thought so," said the preacher. A glint of humour came into his eyes. "You asked me what it would cost to get married. If you'll go down to City Hall, it will cost you exactly two dollars. But if you care to be married here—well, there's an old scrub-woman I know who for nine years every Sunday has come to this church and put a quarter in the plate to keep this institution going for you. And if you care to use it now it will cost you just what it has cost her. Figure it out and send me a check, or else go down to City Hall."

"I'll pay up," was the prompt reply.

At home he told Ethel about it with keen relish at the joke on himself. And Ethel smiled rather tensely and said:

"Don't let's make a joke of it, dear. Let's make it as much of a one as we can."

But there was little or nothing to do. And the next afternoon in church it felt so queer and unreal to her as she stood with Joe in front of the pulpit. Behind her in the shadowy place were only Susette and Emily and the building superintendent's wife. No long rows of faces—caring. Only the hard murmur of the busy street outside. No excited whispers here, no music and no flowers, no bridesmaids and no wedding gown.

"I pronounce you man and wife."

Then what?

She took Susette tight in her arms for a moment. Then Emily—thank God for her!—was whispering fiercely in her ear:

"It's going to be all right, my dear! In a minute you're going to laugh or cry! Laugh! It's better! Laugh! . . . That's right!"

Joe had his small car waiting outside; and waving good-bye to Emily, who was taking Susette to the park, they sped away to the river and off into the country. Soon they were talking excitedly.

It was after dark when they returned, and as had been already planned they went to a café to dine, a gay place crowded full of people, music throbbing, voices humming. Ethel wanted it like that. She wanted to be lifted through. Joe alarmed her now. "Oh, don't—don't be so considerate!" she wanted to exclaim to him. "What good does it do?" As they smiled at each other, again and again she had to fight down an impulse to cry—or shiver. She would bite her lips and turn away and watch people, then turn quickly back and start talking rapidly.

At home, alone in Amy's room, she sat at the dressing table there, her movements swift and feverish. She had often looked at herself of late in her mirror in the nursery, but now she did not look into the glass. Her hands were cold. In a very few minutes she called to Joe.

And a little later, on her old bed by the cradle in the nursery, she lay violently trembling and staring intently up at the ceiling.

"What has happened?" she asked. "Whose fault was it? Mine?" With a strange thrill of fear and repulsion, she clenched her teeth and held herself until the fit of trembling passed. "Is this real, Ethel Knight? Do you mean to say this is what love is—just this, just this?" She shook her head and bit her lips. She asked, "Am I tied to this man for life? I am not! I can't be! This isn't real—it isn't me!"

The night was a blur, like a bad dream. Once she remembered jumping up and quickly locking the nursery door. But that was the beginning of a return to her senses. "I needn't have done that," she thought. "It wasn't fair. It was even rather insulting." This thought made her quieter. And later, as the night wore on, a feeling of having been unjust and foolish little by little emerged from the chaos and began to steady her. But again the old dismay and dread and loathing would come back with a rush. All at once her body from head to foot would grow cold and rigid. And the power which a year ago with her sister she had excitedly sensed as the driving force of this whole town, now loomed brutal, savage! The thought rose suddenly in her mind, "Amy. She was his wife! Five years!" And then in a revealing flash, "Her love was like that! She taught him!"

With a bound that feeling of intimacy with her sister leaped to a climax—burned!

It was long till she could quiet herself. She had to do it by walking the floor. . . . Thank heaven for the daylight and the small, round face of Susette peering over the edge of the crib. Soon she had the child

in her bed and they were looking at pictures.

Later she went back to her husband. It cost her no slight effort of will, and it was a relief to find him gone. On her dresser he had left a note:

"I am sorry, dear—it was all my fault. I was a fool—a clumsy fool. But remember there is plenty of time—and be certain absolutely that everything will be all right."

She read it more than once that day, and it helped her prepare for the evening. When Joe came home and took her in his arms, she knew at once that he meant her to feel there was nothing to be afraid of.

"I've got to be down at the office tonight," was all he said. But in his voice, low, kind and reassuring, like that of a big brother, there was a promise which gave her a thrill of gratitude and deep relief. With it came some self-reproach, which caused her again to struggle, alone, and then go to Amy's room to sleep. She lay listening there for hours, carefully holding herself in check. When she heard his key in the hall door, she sharply stiffened, held her breath. . . . She heard him go into the small guest room which had been hers a year before. . . . And then she cried softly to herself. With the blessed relief of it, her love for Joe was coming back.

CHAPTER X

One evening about two months later Ethel was dressing for dinner. As usual they were dining alone, but long ago she had taken the habit of dressing each night as though there were people coming. Amy had taught her to do that; and after the death of her sister she had always made a point of "keeping up" for Joe's sake, although often it had been an effort. But it was no effort now. She had been here for nearly an hour, absorbed in this pleasant, leisurely art that had such a new meaning and delight. To keep being different, revealing her beauty in new ways, to see if he'd notice, to laugh in his arms and feel her power over Joe, had brought back her old zest for pretty clothes, and she had been wearing all the things she had bought when she first came to town. Last year's clothes, for they still smilingly called themselves "poor," although Joe was doing much better now. Last year's clothes, and the styles had changed, but in ways which Joe, poor dear, was too blind to notice.

The room in which she was dressing had somehow assumed a different air. Although in the main it was the same as when Amy had been here, and her picture was still on Joe's chiffonier—still subtly by degrees it had changed. Some of Ethel's clothes were lying about, her work-bag and a book or two; the dressing table at which she was sitting had been covered in fresh chintz, and Ethel's things were on it. Joe's picture and Susette's were here, and a droll little painted bird was perched above the mirror.

As she glanced into the glass, gaily she thanked herself for the charms which she was deftly enhancing—in the glossy black hair, smooth and sleek, in the flushed cheeks and the red of her lips and the gleaming lights in her brown eyes. She nodded approvingly at herself. "You're a great help to me, Mrs. Lanier."

In the glass she could see her husband; she felt his glances from time to time. This evening after dinner they were going out somewhere. To what, he would not tell her. There had been many of these small surprises. . . . Now her pulse beat faster, for he had come behind her. A sudden bending, a quick laugh, a murmur and a silence. Then at last he let her go; but as she drew a deep, full breath and shot a side look up at him, he laughed again, low, tensely, and bent over as before.

Left alone, she smiled again into the glass. It was hard to believe—too wonderful—this amazingly intimate feeling, this living with somebody, body and soul. And what a child she had been before, a child in that solemn young resolve to marry Joe, this good, safe man, and raise a large family carefully. It had been like a small girl thinking of dolls. And like a small girl she had been in her panic on the night of her wedding, she thought. How silly, ignorant, funny! No—she frowned—it had been real, pretty ugly while it lasted. But like a bug-a-boo it had gone. And this good, safe man had become transformed in this amazing intimacy and had become a wild delight: a man to laugh at, tease, provoke, and cling to, silent, in a flame; a man to mother, study out, probe into deep with questions; a man to plan and plan with.

"This love is to be the love of his life! It's to make us work and grow, make us fine and awake and alive to everything worth living for! No laziness for you, my dear, no soft, cosy kitten life! You're to be a woman, a real one! Don't let there be any mistake about that!"

In the other room Joe was at his piano, and the music he was playing had nothing to do with—any one else. She did not say, "with Amy." She frowned a little and cut herself short, as she so often did in her thinking, these days, when it touched upon her sister. She could feel Amy here at so many points, and

she did not want to be jealous.

"I wonder where we're going tonight."

What was it Joe was playing? Music she had heard before. She did not like to ask him and so betray her ignorance. "I ought to know this! What is it?" she asked herself impatiently. "Why, of course! It's from 'Bohême!'" She smiled as she felt he was playing to her. With the thrill now so familiar, she felt her power over him. She remembered little tussles in which she had been victorious. They had all been over his business. Joe, the poor darling, had formed the idea (she did not say from his first wife) that if a man is in love with a woman he must express it by loading her down with things which cost a lot of money, that he must work for her, slave for her! But Ethel was putting an end to that. They had taken back Susette's old nurse, for it was unfair to one's husband to be a child's slave if there was no need. But she had refused to get other servants. Emily Giles was still in charge, and though Emily of her own accord had gone to a shop on Fifth Avenue and purchased caps and aprons, "the nattiest things this side of France," she wore them with a genial air and spoke of them as "my uniform." Ethel took care of her own room and helped Emily with the cleaning. She had kept expenses firmly down, and she had refused to be loaded with gifts. When Joe had urged that his affairs were going so much better now, she had said in her new decisive voice:

"I'm so glad to hear it, my love, for it simply means you've no earthly excuse for staying late at your office. I don't mean I want you to loaf, you know," she had gone on more earnestly. "I want you to work and do, oh, so much, all the things you dreamed of doing—over there in Paris. But I'm not going to have you make your business a mere rush for a lot of money we don't need!" She had gone to him suddenly. "And just now I want you so."

By these talks she had already worked a change. No more hasty breakfasts to let him be off by eight o'clock. They had breakfasted later and later each day; she had made an affair of breakfast. And as at last he kissed her and tore himself away from his home, she had smiled to herself delightedly at the guilty look in his eyes. This kind of thing would cause a decided coolness, no doubt, between Joe and his partner. So much the better, she had thought, for she detested that man Nourse, and in his case she could quite openly admit, "I'm jealous of you and your business devotion! Your time is coming soon, friend Bill!" The office was half way uptown, and several times in the last few weeks she had gone there for Joe at five o'clock, and once at four-thirty, as though by appointment. She chuckled now as she recalled the black look of his partner that day. Yes, four-thirty had been a blow!

"Where are we going this evening?"

It was delightful to be so free, she told herself repeatedly. Friends? They didn't need any friends. For the present they had each other—enough! "Yes, and for some time to come!" But there always came to her a little qualm of uneasiness when her thinking reached this point. How were friends to be found in this city?

"Oh, later—later—later!"

And rising impatiently with a shrug, she went into the nursery. The nurse had been so glad to get back that most of her old hostility toward Ethel had vanished. Still there were signs now and then of a sneer which said, "You'll soon be paying no more attention to this poor bairn than her mother did before you." And it was as well to show the woman how blind and ignorant she was—to make her see the difference.

"Bohême" was the surprise that night. It was Ethel's first night at the opera. And looking up at the boxes, at the women she had read about, the gorgeous gowns and the jewels they wore, and watching them laugh and chatter; or looking far above them to the dim tiers of galleries reaching up into the dark; or again with eyes glued on the stage feasting upon Paris, art, "Bohemia," youth and romance; squeezing her companion's hand and in flashes recollecting dazzling little incidents of the fortnight just gone by—her mind went roving into the future, finding friends and wide rich lives shimmering and sparkling like the sunlight on the sea. As that Italian music rose, all at once she wanted to give herself, "To give and give and give him all!" The tears welled up in her happy eyes.

"However! To be very gay!"

Later that evening in a café she leaned across the table and asked excited questions about "Bohême" and Paris. What was Paris really like? The Latin Quarter, the Beaux Arts? What did he do there, how did he live? In what queer and funny old rooms? Did he live alone or with somebody else? Something was clutching now at her breast. (Farrar had sung "Mimi" that night). "Don't be silly!" she told herself. "Oh, Joe!" she said, and she looked down at the fork in her hand which she was fingering nervously. Then she looked quickly up and smiled. "What man did you room with? Any one?" He was smiling

across the table still. "You inquisitive woman," said his eyes.

"No, I lived alone," he replied. "And I sat at a drafting board—with a sweater on—it used to be cold."

"Oh, you poor dear!"

"And I worked," he continued, "like a bull pup. And along toward morning I tied a wet towel around my head—"

"Oh, Joe!" Ethel's foot pressed his, and they laughed at each other. "But there must have been," she cried, "so much besides! Joe Lanier, you are lying! There were cafés—and student balls and fancy dress—and singing—and queer streets at night!"

"That's so," he answered solemnly, "the city of Paris did have streets. You walked on them—from place to place."

"Joe Lanier—"

"First you put the right foot forward, then the left—you moved along."

"Joe! For goodness sakes!"

"Look here. Do you know what I want to do with you?"

"No." And Ethel shook her head. She did know, precisely, and it was her motive for all this talk.

"Take you there—and get rooms in the Quarter—not too far from the Luxembourg—"

"Oh, Joe, you perfect darling!"

He went on describing all they would do, in the cafés and on the streets, in old churches and at plays and at the Opera Comique, where she must surely see "Louise." They began excitedly planning ways and means, expenses, his business and when he could get away. He sobered at that, and she cried to herself, "Now he's thinking of his friend Bill! Oh, what a detestable, tiresome worm!"

Then a man who was passing their table stopped in surprise as he recognized Joe, bowed, smiled and said something and went on, and joined a hilarious group down the room. And Ethel saw him speak to them and she felt their glances turned her way. Joe had grown suddenly awkward, his face wore a forced, unnatural smile, and he was talking rapidly—but she heard nothing that he said. The whole atmosphere had changed in an instant.

For those people over there were some of Amy's friends, no doubt, amused at Joe and his young second wife, amused that Joe had not had the nerve to ask them to his wedding. Ethel could feel herself burning inside. A mistake not to have asked them? No! What had they to do with it? What right had they, what hold on Joe? They had been a mighty poor lot of friends, with empty minds and money hearts, just clothes and food, late hours and wine! They had been decidedly bad for him, had drawn him off from his real work and plunged him into the rush to be rich! A voice within her, from underneath, was asking, "Or was it Amy?" But she paid no heed to that. It asked, "Are you sure they are all so bad? Have you taken the trouble to find out?" But angrily she answered that she wanted friends of her own, that she couldn't be just a second wife. "I've got to be all different, new! I've got to be—and I will, I will!" She swallowed fiercely. Besides, it was what Joe needed, exactly! He showed already what it had meant to be rid of such friends! Had he ever talked of Paris before, or his dreams and ambitions or anything real? But the voice retorted sharp and clear:

"Why hide it then? Why let this foolish dangerous habit of never mentioning Amy's name keep growing up between you and your husband? It may do a lot of harm, you know. What are you afraid of?"

Nothing whatever, she replied. She decided to speak of it then and there. She would be perfectly natural, and ask him, "Who are your friends over there? Some people Amy used to know?" And she grew rigid all at once. Her throat contracted and felt dry. Angrily she bit her lip . . . But the habit of silence was too strong. . . . Soon, with a carefully pleasant smile, she was attending to his talk and by her questions drawing out more and more of his life abroad.

"His work," she thought, "that's the strongest thing to hold his mind away from those people." And soon she had him talking of the Beaux Arts, architecture, plans and "periods" and "styles," things she was quite vague about, but she did not have to listen now. That was always so safe, she told herself. She was even a little jealous of this puzzling, engrossing work, which could so hold her husband's mind.

She frowned. That was as it should be; a man's work was his own concern. But his living, his home, what he did at night?

"This can't go on," she decided. "There will have to be friends for both of us. I need them, too. Oh, how I need one woman friend! And where shall I find her? Somewhere in this city there must be just the people I want—if only I could reach them!"

And presently she was saying aloud in a lazy careless tone of voice:

"Sometimes I get wondering, Joe, if there isn't a Paris in New York."

CHAPTER XI

It was a few weeks later. A doctor had been there and gone, and returning into the living-room Ethel sank down on a chair with a quiet intensity in her eyes. For some time she had not been feeling herself, but she did not want to worry Joe, and so at last she had telephoned to the clergyman who had married her.

"You may not remember me," she had said, "but you married me in December. Perhaps you'll recall it if I say there were only three friends at the church."

"Oh, yes, I remember it—perfectly."

"Thank you. I'm not quite well and I have no friends to turn to, so I'm wondering if you could recommend a good doctor I could see."

The doctor recommended had just paid his visit. And now as the dusk deepened she had the strangest feelings. Her year and a half in the city seemed hurried and feverish as a dream. Her mind ran back into the past and on into the future. Only a few days before, the round robin letter had come again. In it the girl who had married the mining engineer out West had told of having a baby in a little town in Montana. Ethel had thought of the doctor then.

She rose now and got the letter and re-read it slowly. Presently she put it down and began crying softly, though she felt neither sad nor frightened. Her life had so completely changed. All those girl friends, so scattered; all those years, so far behind. It was like getting on a ship, she thought, to start across the ocean. "You can't get off, you must go across. Oh, Ethel Lanier, how happy you'll be." But the happiness seemed a long way off.

How quiet it was. The nurse came in with Susette from the park. Ethel went into the nursery and kneeling down she began to unbutton Susette's little jacket. The child's plump face was so rosy and cold. She kissed it suddenly.

"Martha," she said, "I'll need you here for a long time now. I'm going to have a baby."

She reddened then and held her breath. Queer, how she had blurted it out! She had not meant to tell any one yet. But the look of dawning joy and relief in Martha's eyes made her glad she had spoken. Plainly the nurse had been dreading the time so fast approaching when she would have to leave Susette, who was now nearly four years old. But all she said to Ethel was this:

"I'm glad to hear it, Mrs. Lanier. I hope you'll be very careful now." She shot a look as keen as a knife, which asked, "Do you really want a child? Or are you like her? Was it a mistake?"

And Ethel went quickly out of the room. In the living-room her eye was caught by Amy's photograph on the table. She had always kept it there. In her cleaning she had put it back. Emily, too, had put it back. They had never spoken Amy's name. But Ethel faced the picture now for some moments steadily. Somehow it had lost its beauty, it looked weak and soul-less, without power any longer over Ethel's future. "Poor Amy. Oh, how much you missed." And she added, "I'll never be like that." For an instant she let her mind dwell on the past, on how Susette's coming must have been—unwelcomed by her mother.

"But this one will be welcomed! Our love is so—so different! This will bind us, oh, so close! It's done now, you're tied for life!" She had never felt it so before. The months of her marriage had been so exciting, and even in the long summer's thinking her love had seemed always a little unreal. "But this is real—inside of me!" Her fancy went careering ahead, with joy and wonder, a thrill of dismay. "I was so free, with my life to choose! I could have been almost anything! But now it is settled. This is my life. We talk and we talk about being free—and then all at once—a baby."

In the days which followed and grew into weeks and months, the feeling of quiet remained with her. The pang of uneasiness as to how she was to find friends for Joe and herself, was allayed and put off to the future. He would not expect anything of her just now. And because it was pressing upon her no longer, it became a pleasure to dream and plan for herself and Joe and the children.

She was only twenty-four, and although Joe was thirty-six he looked years younger. They could grow. Now she began asking him to read aloud in the evenings, nor was the reading all "mere fluff." Though she picked out amusing things to vary the monotony, she insisted on magazines and books which had been recommended by the little history "prof" at home, to whom Ethel wrote long letters. The books rather appalled her husband at times; but using her new hold on him, she said:

"Go on, dear, now begin." And she picked up her sewing with a look which said, "We've got to grow, you know, if we're ever to get friends worth while or have a life worth living."

But again she would shut out all that, and smile to herself and grow absorbed. And this habit grew to such a degree that by the beginning of summer their reading bees had come to an end. In June she took Martha and Susette and went to the seashore for three months. She came back in September, and now the time was drawing near. Her husband's love grew anxious and there came troubled gleams in his eyes.

The trained nurse had arrived. The doctor kept coming. Martha was plainly "in a state." And Emily Giles, for all her grim ways, had moments almost tender. All centering, swiftly centering, as the long voyage neared its end.

CHAPTER XII

What deep relief and blessed peace. She lay on her bed, now smiling, now inert, eyes closed, weak and relaxed, but already aware from time to time of the beginnings within herself of new vitality, food for her child. Her body felt profoundly changed, and so it was with her spirit. Again the thought rose in her mind that this had settled and sealed her life. But she was glad of the certainty. Slowly, as her strength returned, all the vague desires and dreams of the last few months came back, grew clear; and she planned and planned for the small boy whom the nurse kept bringing to her bed. At such moments the new love within her rose like some fresh bursting spring.

The city, though so vast, complex, came to be like a place full of miracles. The voices of its ceaseless life came into her window day and night, the hoots and distant bellows of ships, the rattle of wheels, the rush of cars, the long swift thunder of the "L," and bursts of laughter from the streets, and animated voices. She remembered her first night in New York; she recalled her earlier visions of the city as a place of thrilling aspirations, wide, sparkling, abundant lives. And Ethel smiled and told herself:

"All the glory I dreamed of is here."

The thought came to her clearly that Amy it was who had hidden it all, who had stood smilingly in the way and had said, "All this is nothing." But she felt a rush of pity now for the woman who was left behind, cut off so completely by the birth of this small son. The nurse was bringing him into the room, and Ethel smiled at her and said:

"Ask Susette if she doesn't want to come, too."

It was only a day or two later that her husband broke his news. He had been so dear to her, his visits had been such a joy, and although behind his tenderness vaguely she had sensed some change, some new excitement in his mind, in her own absorption in their boy she had attributed it to that. But early one evening he came in with a sheaf of roses in his arms, and when she had exclaimed at them and breathed deep of their dewy fragrance, Joe bent over and kissed her, and said a little huskily:

"I've got some big news for you, little wife. It's big. It's going to mean so much."

"What is it, Joe?"

She stared up intently into his eyes. He was telling her he had made money. He was telling how the approaching birth of their small son had made him feel he must put an end to these ups and downs, and how he had worked and racked his brains. He told of heavy borrowing, of anxious weeks, of a wonderful stroke of luck at last which not only made him rich for the moment but opened the way to wealth ahead. He was speaking of what this would mean to them here. He knew how hard it had been

for her and how pluckily she had come through without ever asking for anything. But all that was over now. He had made money! What was the matter? She heard it all in fragments, topsy turvy. What was wrong? "Here is a Joe I've never known!" Still staring up into his eyes, she saw their strange exultant light; the excitement in his husky voice struck into her sensitive ear and jarred; and she nearly shrank from the clutch of his hand. She lay wondering why she was not glad, till suddenly she saw in his face his sharp disappointment at the way she was taking his news. With a pang of alarm she roused herself and said:

"Oh, Joe, it's too wonderful! It's so sudden it strikes me all of a heap!" And she laughed unsteadily, seized his hand and kissed it, talking rapidly, her eyes glistening all the while with foolish tears. Fiercely then she asked herself, "Why can't you enter in and be gay?" But though she was doing better now and had him talking as before, again and again she felt he was thinking how different Amy would have been—how in an instant, laughing and crying, she would have thrown herself into his arms!

Yes, indeed, a Joe she had never known, shaped and moulded by the wife who had had him in those early years when a woman can do so much with a man, can do what sets him in a groove in work and living, tastes, ideals. "And I thought I had done so much!" But Amy's hand had still been there; he had been her husband, all the time!

It was a relief to have him gone. Alone she could think more clearly. "What are you so frightened about? Of being rich, you little fool?" No, she had always wanted that, money enough to forget it existed, money to open all the doors. "But this money is coming too soon! I'm not ready. I'm too young! And he'll expect so much of me now. There'll be no excuse for holding back, for going slow till I find what I want. He'll expect me to find friends at once! But where shall I find them all of a sudden? It isn't as though we were millionaires, really big ones, all in a minute. The newspapers won't be very excited; the town will take it quite calmly, quite! And for the life of me I don't see any friends rushing at us! And yet he'll expect it! So much he'll expect! He'll give and give and give me things and then wonder why I don't get anywhere!" The angry tears leaped in her eyes. "Because he's different now, he's changed! All bursting with his big success, his 'strike,' his business—money mad! Oh, how I hate his business—and that detestable partner, too!"

A wave of rebellion swept over her at the way she had been caught, tangled into the life of a man and the fortunes of his business. But then she thought of the son she had borne him, and this brought quick remorse and tears, from which she fell into a deep sleep. And when she awoke she found the nurse was waiting with the baby.

And the days which followed with their peace, their slow return of health and strength, brought assurance, too, and she laughed at herself for having been such a foolish child. She recalled her panic on her wedding night. Then, too, she had found a Joe unknown. But had that turned out so dreadful? He came often to her bedside now; and although she could feel how changed he was, it no longer frightened her. She had her wee boy; and Emily Giles and Susette and her nurse kept coming in; and the room grew very gay, as they had little parties there.

"Who needs friends so all of a sudden!"

But one day Emily came in and grimly remarked, "There's a woman outside who owns this apartment."

"What?"

"She acts that way. She's walking 'round that sitting-room—picking things up and putting things down—" Emily's voice was rising in wrath.

"Emily! Sh-h! She'll hear you! Who is she? Didn't she give her name?"

"Here's her name!" And Emily poked out a card, at which Ethel looked in a startled way.

"Fanny Carr! Now why has she come here?"

"Will you see her or shall I tell her the flat is already rented?"

"No, no! Emily—don't be rude! She's a friend of my—my husband's!"

And a few moments later, propped up in bed with a pretty lace cap on her head, Ethel was smiling affably at her visitor, who was exclaiming:

"My dear girl, I'm so glad to see you again! So good of you, letting me in like this! I didn't have the least idea! I didn't know of your baby—I hadn't even heard you were married! I've been abroad for over a year. I got back to New York only last week and heard from one of Joe's men friends of the luck he

has had—how his business is simply booming along! It's perfectly gorgeous, Ethel dear, and I'm so glad for you, my child! When I heard the news—"

She talked on vivaciously. And Ethel lay back, her gaze intent on Fanny's handsome features, on her rich lips, pearl earrings, her eyes with their curious color, grey green, that were so sparkling and alive. And Ethel thought to herself in dismay: "How much more attractive she is! Was my first feeling about her all wrong, or is it that I'm getting used to these New Yorkers? I thought she was just hard—all brass! She isn't! She's—she's dangerous! What is she poking 'round here for? What does she want? Is she married again? No, her name was the same on her card. Still single—yes, and looking around—for somebody with money!"

By the questions Fanny was asking, plainly she was trying to find what friends Ethel had made in New York. And although the girl on the bed talked of the town in glowing terms, in a few moments Fanny was saying:

"I'm afraid you've been rather lonely here."

"Oh, no!" And Ethel laughed merrily. "If you knew how my time is filled—every hour! My small boy—" and she went eagerly on to show how full her life had become.

"Oh, you darling!" Fanny laughed. And then with an envious sigh she said, "You make me feel so old and forlorn. With all your beauty, Ethel Lanier, and youth—your whole life starting—well, you've just got to let me in and take you about. Oh, I know, I know, it's so wonderful here, and fresh and new, and you're quite contented and all that. But after all, it's a city, you know—a perfectly good one, full of life—and people you'll like—old friends of Joe's." She went on in a crisp gay tone to paint the pleasures of the town. And meanwhile glancing at Ethel she thought, "What a perfect devil she thinks me, poor child, a bold bad creature on Joe's trail—when all I want is to take her around and help her spend her money. I need it badly enough, God knows!"

At last she rose.

"I mustn't tire you. Good-bye, dear. You'll let me come again, of course."

"Oh, yes, do." At Ethel's tone, Fanny smiled to herself, as deftly she adjusted her furs. She turned to look in the mirror and her eye was caught by the photograph of Amy over on Joe's chiffonier. She moved a step toward it, paused, turned back, and with a good-bye to Ethel went out.

Ethel's eyes went back to the photograph. How strong and alarming, all in an hour, Amy's picture had become. As she looked, it seemed to take on life, to be saying, "Money! Money at last!" And with dismay she told herself:

"Now they'll come in a perfect horde!"

CHAPTER XIII

"Shall I tell Joe! Most certainly."

But she did not tell him all, that night. She did not say, "One of Amy's friends was here today, and she's coming again, and more are coming—and I hate them, every one!" She simply remarked:

"Oh, Joe, dear—Fanny Carr was here today."

"She was, eh?" he gave a slight start. "Where has she been all this time?"

"Abroad." And Ethel answered his questions. "She'll be here a good deal, I fancy," she ended. Joe looked annoyed and uneasy. But he did not speak, that evening, of the memories rising in his mind. For on both the old spell of silence was strong. Subtly the spirit of the first wife came stealing back into the room, pervaded it and made it her own. But her name was still unspoken.

The next day brought an exquisite baby's cap with Fanny's card tucked inside. And in the fortnight after that, Fanny herself came several times. She talked in such a natural way, and her smile and the look in her clever grey eyes was so good-humoured and friendly. "She's doing it beautifully," Ethel thought. But she pulled herself up. "Doing what beautifully? What do I mean? One would think we were millionaires, and Joe a perfect Adonis! Is she trying to eat us? And aren't you rather a snob, my love, to be so sure you hate the woman before you even know her?"

At such moments Ethel would relax and grow pleasantly interested in Fanny's talk of Paris and Rome,

or of New York. In each city Fanny seemed to have led very much the same existence. In each there had been Americans, and hotels, cafés and dances, motor trips and lunches, gossip and scandal without end. But she told of it all in a humorous way that made it quite amusing. And it was a good deal the same with the two women, Amy's friends, whom Fanny brought to tea a bit later. Their gossip and their laughter, their voices breaking into each other and making a perfect hubbub at times, their smart suits and hats and dainty boots, their plump faces, lively eyes, all were quite exciting to Ethel, when she threw off her hostility and the uneasiness they aroused. It felt good to be gossipy once more.

But how they chattered! How they stayed! Joe would be coming home soon now, and she wanted them to go. But they did not go, and Ethel guessed that it was Joe they were waiting for. She was sure of it when he appeared. The way they all rushed at him with little shrieks of laughter, talking together, excited as girls! "Though they're all years older than I am!" Ethel angrily exclaimed, as she sat there matronly and severe. She eyed her husband narrowly, and at first with keen satisfaction she saw how annoyed and embarrassed he was. But the moments passed, and he grew relieved, more easy and more natural, his voice taking on its usual tone, blunt and genial. And she thought, "He's going to like it!" For a moment she detested him then. "They'll flatter him, make a tin god of him! No, I mean a money god! That's what they want, his money!" She positively snorted, but no one seemed to notice it. Now they were turning back to her and she was in the hubbub, too. And how amiably she smiled!

When they were gone, there fell a silence which was like a sudden pall. "He can break it! I—won't!" she decided viciously. He had gone to their room, she had followed him there, and he was not having an easy time. He washed and dressed without a word. But at last he came to her.

"Look here." His arm was about her, she jerked away, but he would not release her.

"You're the most adorable little wife that ever made a man happy," he said. "But you're young, you know—"

"Is that a crime?"

"No, it's something those other women would all give their eye-teeth for."

"Go on."

"But you're human, you know, and you've got to grow older—and as you do you'll find, my dear, that it takes all kinds to make a world."

"How original!" He went on unabashed:

"And if you are to get any friends, you've got to get out and meet all kinds—many you don't like at all—and then little by little take your choice." He paused, and although he did not add, "After all, they're Amy's friends, and you might at least give 'em a chance"—Ethel knew he was thinking that, though he only ended gently, "But I guess I'll leave it all to you. Do as you like. I'll be satisfied."

"He won't be, though," she told herself. She knew he would be distinctly annoyed if she did not enter in. "No, I've simply got to be nice to them. There's no keeping them away!"

And in this she was right. Flowers and gifts for the baby came, and several more women friends; and one of them brought her husband. Nearly always they stayed until Joe came home; and in his manner, with dismay, she saw the hold they were getting. It was not only flattery they used, they appealed to his loyalty to his first wife. "Don't drop us now," they seemed to say. "We were your friends when you were poor—when she was poor. If she had lived, just think how welcome we should be."

Early one evening when Ethel and Joe were dressing for dinner, Emily Giles came in with a long box of roses. Ethel thought they were for herself.

"No," said Emily, "they're for your husband."

"For me?" Joe laughed. "There's some mistake."

"No—there's no mistake," said Ethel, in a low unnatural voice. In an instant she had grown cold. What a fool, to have forgotten that this was Amy's birthday! Inside the box was Fanny's card and on it she had written, "In memory of the many times I helped you buy a birthday gift."

Ethel went quickly out of the room. It was an awkward evening.

Fanny gave a dinner soon after that to celebrate Ethel's recovery. It was in a hotel grill room, and it was large and noisy—and noisier and noisier—till even above the boisterous hubbub at the tables all about, the noise of their party could be heard. At least so it seemed to Ethel's ears. And what were they

saying? Anything really witty, sparkling? No—just chatter, peals of laughter! They were just plain cheap and tough! how red were their faces, warm and moist their lips and eyes!

"You're not vivid enough, that's the trouble with you! You've got to be vider!" she thought. "You ought to have taken that cocktail!" She drank wine now, a whole glass of it, and tried to be very boisterous with the man on her right, who was smiling back as though he could barely hear her voice. "He has had too much!" she told herself. "Oh, how I loathe you—loathe you all!"

But later, when they began to dance, she found with a little glow of relief that she could do this rather well. Thank Heaven she had taken those dancing lessons a year ago; and she was younger than most of these creatures, and more lithe and supple. The men were noticing, crowding around her. She caught a glare from one of their wives. And that glare helped tremendously, it came like a gleam of light in the dark. She caught Joe's admiring glances. She danced with him, then turned him down for somebody else, kept turning him down. She threw into her dancing an angry vim; but joy was coming into it, too. This was not so bad, after all. "You may even grow to like all this!" But most of her thinking was a whirl.

She went home in a taxi, in Joe's arms. She thought, "This is how he and Amy came home. Never mind, I'm not half so weak as I thought. I can play this game—"

And play it she did.

The next morning they slept very late. They had breakfast in bed, and when Joe had gone she lay thinking. Her mind was marvellously clear. It went swiftly over the night before. Yes, most of it had been simply disgusting, the eating and drinking, those warm moist eyes. "The way the men looked at you, held you! This is no life for you, Ethel Lanier!" The dancing was all she cared about. She wanted that, but with other men whom she would like to be friends with—"men who would treat you as something more than a, than a—I don't know what!" Yes, she must get away from these creatures, and get Joe away, too; but to do it she must show him first that she was really willing to do her best to like them all. The next thing was to ask them here. "It's the only way to break their hold. Show him you're no jealous cat. And how do I know that among them all, as I go about, I won't find a few that aren't so tough? And through them I'll find others."

But she put off entertaining Joe's friends, for she had her hands full now in managing just Joe alone. Amy's husband was coming to life in him. Of that there could be no mistake. Under the spell of his success, and still more perhaps through his pride and delight in his handsome young wife, Joe was showing his love for her as Amy had taught him long ago. He showered gifts upon her. He delighted in surprises. One was a smart little town car, and this was a very pleasant surprise. But in it he insisted upon her shopping busily. No more wearing last year's clothes! And when she was a bit slow to move, to her dismay he went himself with Fanny Carr, and bought for Ethel's birthday a costly set of furs and a brooch. He nearly bought pearl earrings, too, but Ethel took them back at once. "Fanny knows as well as I do myself that I can't wear pearls!" she thought angrily. She exchanged them for opal pendants. And then, in order to put a stop to Fanny's detestable attempts "to make me look like a perfect fright," Ethel did start in and shop. And as soon as she got well into it, what a fever it became! Sternly eyeing herself in the mirrors of shops, she studied and made mistakes by the score, and corrected and went on and on. "I'll look right if kills me!"

One night she learned what Fanny Carr had had in mind when she came "poking into our lives!" For Fanny was poor—she had long guessed that; and Fanny had a house on Long Island, and only by a hair's—breadth now did Ethel keep her from selling it to Joe as a surprise for his wife.

"Well, Fanny, what next?" thought Ethel that night. She had been awake for hours, perfectly still and motionless, not to disturb her husband. "For you are not through yet, Mrs. Carr. So long as we're rich and you are poor and have no immediate husband, you're going to act like a ravening wolf—aren't you, my own precious. You mean to break my hold on him by keeping him thinking of her, of her! Now what am I to do about it?" She frowned. She knew that she ought to talk frankly to Joe, and get over this silly habit of never mentioning Amy's name! She grew determined, but then weak. For what could she say to him about Amy? What did she really want to say? "Do I know poor Amy was anything bad? Wasn't she good to me? Would I care to try to talk against her? No. And even if I did, you see, it would only hurt me with Joe—as it should."

So she went on in different moods. And now she saw her sister's face smiling out of clear violet eyes, and again she felt a small gloved hand on her husband drawing him gently back—back and back into the past. Why was Amy so much stronger now? "Because Fanny Carr has been clever enough to take me out of the life I was making and pitch me into Amy's life, where her hold on Joe was strongest. I'm in her setting. That's the trouble!"

But she had Amy's friends to dine one night, as in her calmer moods she knew was the only sensible course. And as they began arriving, by swift degrees amid the buzz of talk which rose, Ethel could feel the room each moment change and become Amy's home. And it was Amy's dinner, too. No cooking of Emily's that night, for Joe had suggested a caterer. "The one we've always used," he had said. And so the cocktails and the wines and the food in many courses, the two waiters in evening clothes, and the talk and the shrieks of mirth, were just as they must have been before so many, many times in this room. Ethel sat affably rigid there.

And later at the piano Joe was not Ethel's husband. Nor was it her room when they stripped up the rugs and began to dance, nor her photograph their eyes kept seeking from time to time! She even thought she could hear them whisper about the hostess who was dead!

And when very late they had departed, and last of all Joe had gone with Fanny downstairs to put her in her taxi, Ethel, left alone in the room, turned to her sister's photograph.

"I won't be like you," she tensely declared. "I won't live in your home—with your husband—"

The picture smiled good-naturedly back

"All right," it seemed to answer, "then what do you expect to do?"

CHAPTER XIV

By the next day she had made up her mind to look for another apartment. The move had several points in its favour. It would not only take her away from this place where she felt the spell so strong; it would also give her something to do. "And I need it, heaven knows!" she thought. And besides it would provide an excuse for not seeing Amy's friends. "I'll be worn out every evening," she decided with grim satisfaction.

She found Joe more than ready for the change. He himself had suggested it, some weeks before, and Ethel made the most of that. "I've been thinking over your idea of moving," she began one night. And in the talk which followed, the intent little glances she threw at him made her sure that in her husband's mind was a half-conscious deep relief at the idea of getting away from these rooms and their memories.

"Poor dear," she reflected tenderly, "what a place for a tired business man—a home with two assorted wives waiting for him every night."

But when it came to looking about, to her surprise Ethel found it hard, on her own account, to make the move. For with all its faults and drawbacks, this was the place where she had struggled, groped and dreamed, had married Joe and discovered him in hours she would never forget, and here her baby had been born. The place had grown familiar. Even the huge building, for all its appearance of being exactly like every other on the street, had in some curious fashion taken on for Ethel a special atmosphere of its own; and coming back from a bleak succession of apartments she had inspected, this did at least seem more like a home.

Joe came to her rescue. He was a part owner here, and with delight she learned from him that a large and sunny apartment at the top of the building was to be free the first of May. Ethel went up to see it at once. And the arrangement of the rooms, and the way the sun flooded into each one, made her exclaim with pleasure.

The present tenants were a young widow and her companion, a most respectable elderly dame. The widow was about Ethel's age and excessively pretty and stylish, and in her low sweet voice and her manner was a peculiar attractiveness that Ethel could not analyse. She explained that she was going abroad, possibly to be gone a year, or she never would have given up this gem of an apartment. She seemed more than glad to show Ethel about, and displayed a friendly interest in her visitor's eager planning. When Ethel left at the end of an hour, the widow smiled at her and said, with a charming little hesitation:

"I don't think you have my name. It's Mrs. Grewe. I do hope you'll come up whenever you like, and let me help you all I can. I shall so love to feel when I go that you and your kiddies will be here. I've noticed them so often, down-stairs and in the elevator. And they're both such darlings."

And at that, with a thrill of pride, Ethel felt almost as though she had found a friend in the city at last.

They saw each other frequently, for Ethel was always running in to look through the various rooms and puzzle and decide on curtains, rugs and portieres. In this she was aided more than she knew by the

taste displayed in the furnishings, rich, subdued and yet so gay, that young Mrs. Grewe had collected here. The two had animated talks, and once when her new acquaintance suggested, "I'd be so glad if I could be of some help in your shopping," Ethel replied, "Oh, you could! I'd love to have you!" And they started in that day.

And yet how curious, even here. For whenever Ethel endeavoured to get the conversation upon a little more intimate terms, Mrs. Grewe would almost instantly become evasive and remote. And once when Ethel asked her to "drop down and have dinner with us some night," she declined almost with a start, as though she were saying, "Ha! Look out! I'm in danger of letting you be a real friend!" And thinking this over, Ethel reflected, "The only New Yorker I've met so far, whom I'd like to know, is nice to me simply because she is going abroad in a month and so it's safe! Has she offered to introduce me to a single friend of hers? Well, then, don't! Keep your old friends! I don't want to eat them!" And for days together she would leave the young widow alone.

But the latter would make pleasant advances, and soon they would be shopping again. This acquaintance was one of the few bright spots in a season which for Ethel was full of anxious worries. For it was by no means easy. Amy had been a shopper who simply could not resist pretty things, and so her apartment was crowded with furniture and bric-a-brac. "How much can I get rid of without offending Joe?" asked Ethel. He was the kind of man who says nothing. He would not object, but he would feel hurt. It took the most careful probing to find how far she could safely go. And she was tempted by the shops. In her smart town car, with plenty of money and with young Mrs. Grewe at her side, it was almost impossible to resist the adorable things she discovered. "No wonder Amy bought too much." But there they were, all Amy's belongings, and to be rid of each table, each chair, each rug, meant the most careful thinking.

"Nevertheless," she told herself. "That apartment upstairs is to be my own home."

In the meantime her new occupation was working out wonderfully as an excuse for not going about in the evenings. She was so dead tired every night. No need to feign fatigue, it was real. She even had to call in her physician, in the first "draggy" days of Spring; and he warned her that she was doing too much, it was too soon after the birth of her child. She was glad when Joe happened to come in and overhear the doctor. He became the same old dear to her that he had been a year ago. And with eagerness, tired though she was, she took pains every evening to dress in ways that she knew he liked. And at times it was almost like a second honeymoon they were having. She used the baby, too, and Susette; she often persuaded Joe to come home in time for Susette's supper, or better still for the baby's bath. And all this was so successful that even when her spring fever was gone she still stayed at home in the evenings.

But in the meantime, what about friends? "I'm lazy," she thought, "I'm not facing it! I'm just putting it off—and it's dangerous!" For Joe was out so much at night. Over half the time he did not get home until the children were in bed, and often after a hurried dinner he would leave by eight o'clock—for business appointments, he told her, at some club or some café. He was putting through another big deal. At times, despite her efforts, angry suspicions would arise. He was dealing with some men from the West. No doubt they had to be entertained. She had heard a little of such entertaining from travelling men she had known at home. "Oh, Ethel Lanier, don't be so disgusting!" But after all, a man so tense all day in his office needed some gaiety at night.

She began to suggest going out in the evenings. They went to "Butterfly" and "Louise," and each evening was a great success. But within a few days Fanny Carr called up and asked them to dinner and the play. Ethel made some excuse and declined. She did not mention it to Joe, but that night he said gruffly, "Sorry you turned Fanny down." And Ethel looked at him with a start. So Joe was seeing her these days!

"I haven't been feeling very strong, Joe," she said in an unnatural tone.

"You've been to the opera twice this week," was her husband's grim rejoinder.

And this was only one little instance of many that made Ethel sure that Fanny Carr was still about. She was getting at Joe through his business side, going to his office. She had asked him to sell her house on Long Island, and through this transaction she had tangled him into her affairs. A lone woman, defenceless in business, needing the aid and advice of a man. "Oh, I can almost hear her lay it on—her helplessness!" And Ethel fairly ground her teeth. For Fanny, only the day before, having called and noticed that a sofa and a rug were missing, had asked to what dealer Ethel had sold them. "Now," thought Ethel, "she'll buy them herself, and then she'll ask Joe to drop in for tea at her hotel apartment—'on business,' of course—but the rug and sofa will be there! Poor Amy's things! Oh, yes, indeed, Fanny is clever enough! If only she would take his money—and get out and leave us alone!" Ethel had some lonely grapples with life. She was right, she angrily told herself, in wanting to go slowly until she could

discover real friends; but on the other hand she admitted that Joe had reason for being impatient. At thirty-seven it is hard for a man to change his habits, and Amy had accustomed Joe to crave excitement every night. Even Ethel herself, in some of her moods, felt restless to go about and be gay. And again and again the youth in her rebelled against the trap into which she had fallen.

"The minute I even propose a play, I show him I'm well enough to go out. And then he asks, 'Why not Amy's friends?' And he remembers the mean little things that Fanny Carr must have told him—the beast!—and so he says, 'I see it all. Ethel is only bluffing. Now that I'm rich she's trying to make me drop the friends and the memory of the wife who stood by me when I was poor.'"

Ethel even went out twice to their detestable parties, in the faint hope of finding one woman at least she would care to know. But if there had been any such, Fanny was careful to leave them out.

Friends, friends, friends of her own! Where to find them? On the streets, as she went about at her shopping, she saw so many attractive people, and she drew their glances, too. She had developed since her marriage; she had a distinctive beauty, and she had learned how to foster that. Almost always she felt the hungry eyes of men, good, bad and indifferent, rich men, beggars, Christians, Jews. But that of course was only annoying. Ethel wanted women friends. On the street, from her elegant little car, she could see women who were walking glance at her with envy, just as she herself had done in her first year in the city. The thought brought a humorous smile to her lips. And looking at the constant stream of motors passing, she inquired, "How many of us are there, in this imposing procession, who haven't a single friend in town?" How they all passed on. How coolly indifferent, self-absorbed! Was there no entering wedge to their lives?

But her youth would rise with a sudden rush in her warm body, so smartly dressed, so tingling with ardent health, and glancing into the glass in her car and making a little face at herself, she would exclaim:

"Oh, fiddlesticks! All this is going to have a nice fine happy ending! Nothing awful is to happen to me!"

At one such time, as though interrupted, she leaned quickly and graciously forward, as she had seen women do in the Park, and bowed with a cordial little smile—to a vacant lot—and then turning back to the imagined friend at her side, she said sweetly, "Excuse me, dear. What were you saying? Why yes, we'd love to. Thursday night? What time do you dine?" A lump rose in her throat. "Now, Ethel, Ethel, you soft little fool—you're only twenty-five, you know. And of all the adorable babies waiting in a nursery—"

One day she found Fifth Avenue crammed and jammed with a huge parade. She had her chauffeur get as close as he could, and with intent and curious eyes she watched the suffragists march by. What hosts and hosts of women, how jolly and how friendly. Oh, what a lark they were having together! Why not join them, then and there? For an instant she thought of leaving her car and falling right in with some marching group. "But how do I know they won't turn me down?" She waited and lost courage. Soon she saw marching ahead of one section a smartly dressed woman whose photograph she had often seen in the papers. At this Ethel's courage oozed again, and with a pang of envy she thought:

"Oh, yes, this is all very fine for you! You're so safe and settled here; you've got position—everything!"

In a moment she felt this was small and mean. The envy and the bitterness passed. She watched other women, such confident, easy, bright-looking creatures—not at all like Amy's set—who looked as though they could preside at big meetings or at their own tables at home, and be gracious and say witty things to the clever men at their sides. Behind them came whole regiments of women and girls of a simpler kind. Some of them earned their own living, no doubt—yes, and had to work hard to do it.

"Wouldn't they do? Look at that one! Wouldn't I like her for a friend?"

In a flash Ethel remembered the little history "prof" at home, who had begged her girls to live and grow.

"Now, Ethel Lanier, you're going to get right out of this car and fall into line—friends or no friends!"

In a moment, scowling to keep up her nerve, she was pushing through the standers-by right out into the Avenue; and feeling like a public sight, she tried quickly to get into line.

"You can't march here! Our line is full!" a voice said sharply. Ethel gasped and reddened, turned blindly to the file behind.

"Do you want to march with us?" somebody asked.

"Yes! Oh, thank you!"

"Fall right in. That's right, my dear—here, take one of my flags."

"You're awfully kind!"

"Hooray for the vote!"

Through eyes a little misty Ethel saw striding along at her side a sturdy little old lady in black. And she blessed her fervently. It was a thrilling marvellous time. In less than ten minutes she felt herself boon companions with every one in her line. But then, before she realized what it was that had happened, her group had reached the end of their march and had melted suddenly into a throng of chattering laughing women. Ethel stared about her blindly.

"Never mind," she decided, "I'm going to see more of this!"

And the next day she presented herself at suffrage headquarters.

"I want to work," she said to a girl at a desk. The girl looked up at her busily.

"All right, go to that table," she answered. And at a long oak table, one of a dozen women and girls, Ethel folded envelopes and addressed them for about three hours. Down at the end, two girl companions chatted and laughed at their labour. But the rest were just busy. "Hand me those envelopes, if you please." And so it was all through the room. She came back the next morning and the next; and as she worked, her expression was grim. "It isn't their fault," she decided. "They want the vote, they don't want me."

And she turned forlornly back to the work of moving up to her new apartment.

The first of May was drawing near, and she saw signs of restlessness, as thousands of New Yorkers prepared to change their quarters. Moving, always moving. Did they never stop in one place and make it a home? The big building in which Ethel lived took on an impersonal air, as though saying, "What do I care? I'm all concrete, with good hard steel inside of that." What a queer place for people's homes! People moving in and out! Curiously she probed into its life. She had long ago made friends with the wife of the superintendent, and through her Ethel collected bits about these many families so close together and yet so apart; all troubles kept strictly out of sight, with the freight elevator for funerals, cool looks and never a word of greeting. "Keep off," writ clear on every face.

"It isn't real, this living! It can't last!" she exclaimed to herself. "They'll have to work out something better than this—something, oh, much homier!" She thought of the old frame house in Ohio. "That's gone," she declared, with a swallow.

Her acquaintance with young Mrs. Grewe was still the one bright spot at such times. When Ethel felt blue she would go upstairs to the sunny new home that was to be hers; and there the blithe welcome she received restored her own belief in herself. Mrs. Grewe would often lead her to talk of her home in Ohio, the eager dreams and plans of her girlhood; and on her side, the young widow gave pictures of life in London and Paris as she had seen it so many times. They still shopped together occasionally.

But one afternoon about six o'clock, as Ethel's car drew up at the door and she and her one friend got out, Joe came along—and with one quick angry look he hurried into the building. Quite furious and ashamed for him, Ethel turned to her companion—but Mrs. Grewe smiled queerly and held out her small gloved hand.

"Good-bye, my dear, it has been so nice—this afternoon and all the others." Her tone was a curious mixture of amused defiance and real regret. Ethel stammered something, but in a moment her friend was gone.

Upstairs she met Joe with an angry frown, but to her indignant reproaches he replied by a quizzical smile.

"Look here, Ethel." He took her arm, in a kind protecting sort of way which made her fairly boil. "Look here. I can't let you go about with a shady little person like that. I didn't know you'd picked her up. Now, now—I understand, of course—you met her up there in the new apartment. What a fool I was not to have thought of it."

"Thought of what? For goodness sake!"

"She won't do, that's all."

"Why won't she?" Ethel's colour was suddenly high and her brown eyes had a dangerous gleam. Joe looked at her, hesitating.

"Yes," he said, "you're the kind of a girl who has to be told the truth now and then. She's the mistress of one of our big millionaires."

Ethel stared at him blankly.

"I don't believe it!" she cried. "Her taste! The way she dresses! Her—her voice—the things she says!"

"I know, I know," he answered. "That sort is rare and they come high. I've talked to her—"

"Oh, you have, have you! Then why shouldn't I?"

"Because, my dear, I'm one of the owners of this building. My talks were brief—just business."

"What business had you letting her in?"

"Because times were bad three years ago and tenants weren't so easy to find. What harm has she done? This isn't a social club, you know—"

"I know it isn't! Nobody speaks—or even smiles!" A lump rose in Ethel's throat. "And she was so nice and friendly!"

"I'll bet she was—"

"I won't believe it!" Now her face was reddening with self-mortification. "Do you mean to tell me—living like that—with a companion, even—a prim old maid who looks as though she had left Boston only last night—"

A twinkle came into her husband's eyes: "My dear, the friend of a big millionaire always keeps some one from Boston close by." His arm went around her. "Poor little girl. I guess I won't have to say any more—"

"Perhaps you will and perhaps you won't!" Now again she was nearly choking with rage and with hurt vanity. Her one and only companion! The only woman she had been clever enough to find! That kind! Oh-h! Suddenly she turned to Joe to tell him that if he could give her no friends she'd pick and choose just where she liked! But quickly she remembered that he would answer, "Haven't I tried?" She turned away, broke into tears and left the room.

Out of the little storm that followed, she emerged at last with the thought, "Well, I must see her, anyway, in the work of moving into her apartment. And am I sorry? Not at all! She was good to me—at least she was that! And besides," reflected Ethel, with the same caution and relief which she had so despised in New Yorkers, "she's going soon. It's safe enough."

The talk occurred the next morning, up in the new apartment. There were no awkward preliminaries, for Mrs. Grewe's whole manner had changed. Quite a bit of its careful refinement was gone, and in its place was a rather bitter frankness.

"I quite understand—you needn't explain," she said at once. "Your husband has made a fuss, hasn't he? And this is good-bye. Too bad, isn't it?"

"Yes—it is." Ethel hesitated, then all at once she beamed on her friend. "I want you to know," she stoutly declared, "that neither is my husband my boss nor am I a prig! Back in school, we girls—we used to talk—and read and discuss things—Bernard Shaw—" Her hostess smiled:

"Oh, Shaw, my dear, is a dear, witty man—and he's so funny and so fair. But to live with him—ugh!—rather icy!" She laughed. "See here. No matter what you have read, you've never met me until now. I mean the big Me that thrills all girls—who speak about me in whispers. Well, then, just for a minute, meet me—look at me and see what I am." On her piquante little face was a look of friendly challenge. "We've had such fine little shopping bees, and I'd like you not to be sorry. And what I want to say is this:

"I was just like you. I came from a small town—I had my dreams—I reached New York—I married." She smiled. "Not once but twice. I was divorced. And my second was a love of a man, and we had such a blissful honeymoon. It lasted a year and a half, and then—he got taking things—dope—and that made

it hard. It ended in another divorce. The next man didn't marry me. Meant to, you know, but hadn't time. Then he passed on—" with a wave of her hand—"and now I'm here." A humorous smile came over her face. "And for the life of me I can't see how changed it is from when I was married. The same sort of apartment, only it's nicer—the same ocean liners and hotels—the same cafés where one can dance exactly as one did before." Again she wrinkled up her brows. "The only real difference I can see is that when I was married like you, my husband only told me the truth once in a while—as yours did last night—while now they tell it all the time. Oh, I'm wise, I'm wise, my dear—for one so young. I'm twenty-eight. How old are you?"

"I'm twenty-five."

"Three years behind. Well, on the whole I guess I'd stay married if I were you. It's so nice, if he's still in love with you. But the minute he isn't, or makes any fuss, or gets ugly or mean, remember this." And her sweet, clear voice grew impressive. "Remember then you can never be sure what he's really doing in this town. I know—because they tell me—and most of them are married men. And second, and last and always—remember, my dear, that with your figure and your face and your lovely hair which you do so well, you don't have to put up with any man! You can get right out whenever you please! And the only trouble will be to choose your next from all the others who will come crowding about you! And whether you make him marry you—well—I honestly think there's not much choice." She rose and said, with a strange little smile.

"Now that I've had my little revenge on your beast of a husband for spoiling it all, when I wasn't doing the least bit of harm and was leaving anyhow this week—let's say good-bye and each get to our packing."

"She was once like me. I could be like her," thought Ethel late that night. She had been lying awake for hours. "I could be—but I won't!" she declared. "She had read Shaw. How funny! . . . I think it's a mighty big mistake to let young girls read Bernard Shaw. Susette certainly shan't!" Her lips compressed. In a moment she was frowning.

"How easily Joe changed about from loving Amy to loving me. Here he lies asleep at my side. Where was he today? What do I know? . . . Oh, Ethel Lanier, don't be a fool and let every cheap little woman you meet get you thinking things! Such silly things! . . . I do wish that odious Fanny Carr would get out of my life and stay out! . . . You'd better be very careful, Joe." She had risen on her elbow now, and by the dim light from the window she could just see her husband's face. "Because if you're not very good to me—remember that a person whom you yourself consider one of the very best of her kind—told me that I—"

She dropped back. All at once her face was burning.

"Oh, how I loathe all this!" she thought. "And how silly and untrue! Do you want to know where you and I are different, little Mrs. Grewe? I'll tell you! I have a baby! And when he grows up he's going to have this same man still for a father! So there! I'm not sure about anything, even God, any more in this town—it's all a whirl! But I've got a baby, and Susette, and for them I'm going to have a real home—keep wide awake, make friends I'll love—and grow and learn and march in parades—and go to the opera in a box—and go to concerts, go abroad, shop in Paris—love my husband—be very gay—make friends, friends—I will, I will—I won't be downed—I'll beat this cat of a city—"

"However. Now I'll go to sleep-."

CHAPTER XV

She did not see Mrs. Grewe again, she did not want to see her. It was not until from the telephone girl she learned that the charming young widow was gone, that Ethel went up to her new home. In a little while her furniture would begin to pour in, but as yet the rooms were empty, flooded with warm sunshine. She looked about and thought of the life which had been here, and then of Mrs. Grewe's advice and her last smiling admonition. She could almost hear the voice.

"Is every place I live in to be haunted?" Ethel asked herself. And then with a humorous little scowl: "Now see here, young woman, the sooner you learn that every apartment in this city has a complete equipment of ghosts, the better it will be for you. I don't care who lived here, nor how she lived nor what she said. I don't need her advice, and her life is not to affect mine in the slightest!" She stopped short. Of whom was she speaking, Mrs. Grewe or Amy? There were two of them now! Both had given her advice, and in each case the life portrayed had been very much alike, so much so as to be rather disturbing. Things were certainly queer in this town!

"Very well, my dears," she said amiably, "if I must be haunted, it's much more gay and sociable to have two instead of one. Remember tea will be served at five, and from the present outlook there's little chance of our being disturbed by the intrusion of any live woman in New York."

"At least the ghosts are friendly." She suddenly compressed her lips and looked about: "However!" She went to the telephone in the hall: "Please hurry up those porters! I'm up here waiting to begin!"

And in the days that followed, she was far too engrossed in "settling" to spare any time for brooding on phantoms. "A home of my own and a life of my own, to be lived with my own husband!" But when at last they were settled, and Joe in a dear, genial mood had gone about admiring, and taking no notice apparently of the scarcity of Amy's things—he turned to Ethel with an air which was meant to be easy and natural:

"Well, now that we're taking a fresh start, the time has come for a little talk."

"What about?" she asked, endeavouring to make her smile as easy as his.

"It will take about one minute." His gruff voice was low and kind. "I'm not going to force my friends on you. If you want to make friends of your own, go ahead. And when you get them let me know—and they'll be mine, too, if I have to break a leg in the effort. I'll dance in front of them, so to speak, until they're all enchanted. But in the meantime, on your side, I want you to let me down easy with these people I once knew. I don't want to hurt them or be a cad. A few I may keep in touch with for years."

"Fanny!" flashed into Ethel's mind.

"And all I ask of you is this. You'll soon be going away for the summer. Let's do the decent thing—just once—and have a little party here. I give you my word we won't do it again."

"All right, Joe—that's fair, of course—and I'll do my best to make it exactly what you want."

And in the dinner that she gave, Ethel lived up to her bargain. The dinner was large; there were twenty guests. The caterer was as before, and so were the food and the flowers. And all through the evening Ethel was gracious and affable. But behind her affability, hidden but subtly conveyed to each guest, was a serene good-bye to them. This was their dismissal. Did they all feel it, every one? To her at least it seemed so. Again and again she caught the men throwing looks of regret at Joe, and the women glancing about the rooms as though in search of what was gone. Amy's things! Oh, more than that. The whole atmosphere was gone. This was the home of the second wife.

"Well, dear, did I live up to our bargain?" she asked her husband when they were alone.

"You did," said Joe. He looked at her then in such a puzzled, masculine fashion. What she had done and how she had done it was plainly such a mystery to him. "You did," he repeated loyally. She slipped her arms about his neck.

"Thank you, love," she answered. And in a moment or two she murmured, "Have them again in the Fall if you like."

"No," said Joe. "Once was enough."

"Now," she asked herself the next day, "let's try to see what all this means." She was almost speaking aloud. She was growing so accustomed to these sociable little chats with herself. "It means that I am getting on. But Fanny Carr will still be about. She won't come here except just enough to keep up appearances, but she'll still have her business dealings with Joe in the management of her property. He means to keep in touch, he said, 'with a few of them'—meaning her, of course—and his tone conveyed quite plainly that I am to leave him alone in that until I can produce friends of my own. Whereupon, my dear," she threw up her hands, "we come back to exactly the same point at which we have been all along. Where am I going to find friends?" And she gave an angry, baffled sigh. "Oh, damn New York!"

As she glared viciously about the pretty, sunny living room, the image of its former tenant rose up in her memory. And Ethel's expression changed at once, became intent and thoughtful. How much more attractive was Mrs. Grewe than were any of Amy's set. Immoral? Yes, decidedly. But what did "immoral" mean in this town? Who was moral? Fanny Carr? Did these wives and divorcees do any good with their "moral" lives? She recalled what Mrs. Grewe had said: "And whether you marry or whether you don't, for the life of me I can't see any difference." And again: "With your face and figure, my dear, you don't have to put up with any one man." Ethel sat frowning straight before her.

"What kind of a life am I going to find? I'm going to stay with my husband—that's sure. I'm in love

with him and he with me. That much is decided."

She rose abruptly, and walking the floor she firmly resolved to "be wholesome" and look on the bright side of things. In the next few weeks she busied herself with the small affairs of her household. There was plenty to occupy her mind. There were finishing touches to give to the rooms; there were Spring clothes to buy for Susette; and the baby was ready for short dresses and a baby carriage. There was the life in the nursery, a cheerful little world in itself. There was Martha, grown more friendly now, and Emily and the new waitress, Anne, and the telephone girl and the chauffeur and the clerks in various shops who had become acquaintances—altogether quite a circle of people who greeted Ethel on her rounds. One day as she passed a laundry shop she spied this sign in the window: "Fine linen respectfully treated." And Ethel chuckled at the thought that she herself was treated like that. On the whole it was rather pleasant, though, and she made the most of it. She was being carefully "wholesome."

Now it was well along in June, time for the children to go to the seashore, so she began to hunt for a place. At the traveller's bureaus she visited she found the clerks more than ready to give advice by the hour to this gracious young creature so stylishly clad. And she had soon selected a quiet little resort in Rhode Island.

But what was Joe doing all this time? She did not mean to keep prying, but for the life of her she could not help throwing out casual inquiries. His reply was always, "Business"; and he would go on to give her details—all of which were tiresome. How much was he seeing of Fanny Carr and her detestable money affairs? His manner, engrossed as it had grown, and even irritable at times, made Ethel feel he was putting her further and further out of that part of his existence which now interested him most, the part that lay outside his home. Was it all business, all of it? "And when I go to the seashore, he'll be here five nights a week!" Sometimes he came in so late at night! Business? At such an hour? "Now carefully, carefully, Ethel Lanier." But in spite of herself the smiling words of young Mrs. Grewe recurred to her mind: "Most of them are married men."

Ethel's doubts, however, were all ended late one night, when at the sound of his key in the door she got out of bed and came into the doorway of her room. Joe was standing in the hall. He did not see her. In fact, his eyes, when he switched on the light, seemed to see nothing in the world but the package of business papers he took from his overcoat. His face was haggard but intent. He turned and went into his study to work. And any suspicion of Fanny Carr, or of any other friend of Joe's, was swept at once from Ethel's mind. Her rival was his business.

And later at the seashore, where she had so many hours alone, she thought about this work of his with deepening hostility. Her mind went back into the past. How his office had always absorbed him. What a refuge it had been in the months that followed Amy's death. "I wasn't the one who first made him forget. Oh, no, it was his business!" And now, as it had weaned him once from his grief for the woman who had died, it was at him again to draw him away from the woman who was living.

There had been a time when it was not so, when she could keep him late at breakfast and make him come home early at night, still fresh enough to read and talk, discuss things, go to the opera, take up his music, plan a trip to Paris. "Oh, yes! Then we were making a start!" But now this wretched work of his had got him worse than ever before—and she blamed his partner for that. She recalled how Nourse had disliked her, she remembered what Amy used to say about the man's worship of business. Yes, with his detestable greed for money, only money, Nourse was doubtless driving Joe. "You're making him just a business man, without a thought or a wish in his head for anything beautiful, really fine, ambition, things he dreamed of and told me about when he was mine—things that would have led us both to everything I wanted—"

She set her lips and whispered:

"All right, friend Bill, then it's you or it's me!" And all the rest of the summer she set herself determinedly to breaking up the partnership.

"Joe, dear," she said pleasantly, when he had come out for the week end, "why don't you ever bring your partner with you over Sunday?" And at his quick look of surprise, "It seems too bad, I think," she added, "never to have him with us."

"I thought you didn't like him," he said. Ethel gave a frank little smile.

"I didn't—but that was a year ago. And besides, he didn't like me, you see. But people do change, I suppose—and as long as he means so much to you, I should so like to be friendly."

It turned out just as she had expected. Nourse declined the invitation. "I'm sorry," she said when her husband told her. She felt her position strengthened a bit. At another time she suggested that Joe's

partner be asked to spend the rest of the summer with him in the apartment back in town. It was doubtless so much cooler at night than Nourse's bachelor quarters. And Emily Giles could take care of them both. But this overture, too, Bill Nourse declined. She could just imagine him doing it, the surly, ungracious tone of his voice, the very worst side of the man shown up. Joe often now looked troubled when Ethel talked of his partner.

But toward the end of the summer in one such talk he gave her a shock. It was after Nourse had again refused an invitation to come to the seashore.

"He's queer," said Joe, "and he can be ugly. Being polite is not in Bill's line. I told him so myself today—and we had quite a session.

"Oh, Joe, I'm sorry," Ethel said.

"You needn't be. Bill Nourse and I will stick together as long as we live." Ethel looked at him sharply, but he did not notice. "Because," he said, "with all his faults, his queerness and his grouches, Bill has done more than any man living to—well, to keep something alive in me—in my work, I mean—that I want later on—as soon as I've made money enough." She stared at him.

"You mean that he—your partner—wants something more than money?" It was a slip, but she was stunned. He turned and looked at her and asked, in a voice rather strained and husky:

"Do you think Bill cares about money alone?"

"Why, yes!"

"That's funny." But Joe's laugh was grim. "If Bill had had his way with me, I'd have had a name as an architect that would have been known all over the country—instead of being what I am, a gambler in cheap real estate."

She questioned him further, her manner alert, her eyes with a startled, thoughtful look. But he did not seem to want to talk.

"Then why," she asked herself in a daze, "if Bill is so against this business, does he keep at it day and night? Oh, yes, we'll have to look into this—as soon as I get back to town! You've got to come and see me, and explain yourself, friend Bill." She frowned in such a puzzled way. "You, a friend? How funny!"

CHAPTER XVI

The week after Ethel's return to town, she was surprised one afternoon when in response to a note she had sent him her husband's partner came to see her. She had thought it would be more difficult.

"Joe won't interrupt us," he said. "I put work in his way. He'll be home late."

Tall, gaunt and angular, somewhat stooped, Nourse stood looking down at her; and as, perplexed and excited, Ethel scanned his visage, so heavy in spite of its narrow lines, she saw an expression in which contempt was tempered by a sort of regret and weariness. And of course he was awkward, too. She said to herself, "Be careful now."

"Won't you sit down?" she asked him.

"Thank you." And he took a seat.

"I wanted to see you," she began, but Nourse interrupted her.

"Would you object," he asked her, "if I do the talking for a while? I've got it fairly clear in mind, just what I want to say to you."

"Why, yes, of course, if you prefer," she said, a little breathlessly.

"Well, Mrs. Lanier, I think I know about what you want—and I'm here to say that I'll help you to get it—if in return you will leave us alone." He stopped for a moment, and went on: "In the last few months, it has seemed to me, you've been doing your best to bring on a clash between me and your husband. Every week in the office is worse than the last. I don't blame you for that, from your point of view. You felt I was trying to make him eat and sleep in his office. I was—and I am. But my point to you is that it won't be for long, and I'm doing this really on your account—to get money enough to satisfy you." She looked up in a startled way, but he went on unheeding. "You and I must understand each other. Tell me how much you really need—and we'll get it, Joe and I. And then I'll give him back to you nights—and in

the daytime you leave him to me."

He glanced at her with a weary dislike which gave her an impulse to say to him, "Isn't this rather insulting?" But she did not speak. For looking at him sharply, she caught in the man's heavy eyes a certain grim, deep wistfulness which drew her a little in spite of his speech. And she felt very curious, too.

"What do you think I really want?" she asked him, then. Her voice was low.

"Money," he said.

"Where did you get that idea?"

"From your sister," he replied. "She sent for me, too—long ago."

"What for?"

"Money. She told me that we were not making enough—that I was holding her husband back—from 'his career' she called it. She said that if I kept him out of a certain job that meant money quick, she would break up our partnership. She said she could do it, and she was right. My hold on Joe wasn't in it with hers."

"What was your hold on him? What do you mean?" asked Ethel. Again her voice was low. Nourse looked down at his big hands and answered very quietly:

"I'm afraid you wouldn't understand." She bit her lip.

"But until I do learn what you want of Joe," she retorted sharply, "I'm afraid that I can't tell you how much money I shall need." He glanced up at her, puzzled. "Suppose you try me," she went on. And as the man still frowned at her, "I learned the other day," she said, "that you knew Joe long before he was married. I want you to tell me about that."

Little by little she drew him out. And as in a reluctant way, in sentences abrupt and bald, he answered all her questions, again and again did Ethel feel a little wave of excitement. For Nourse was speaking of Joe's youth—of college and later of Paris, and then of a group of young men in New York, would—be architects, painters and writers who had lived near Washington Square; of long talks, discussions, plans, and of all night work in the architect's office where he and Joe had worked side by side. Joe had been a "designer" there; he had been the brilliant one of the two, and the more impassioned and intense and bold in his conceptions. There was a feeling almost of reverence in the low, rough voice of Joe's friend. He told how Joe had risen, until in a few years he became the chief designer for his firm; and of how from other firms offers had come. To keep him his employers had been forced to raise his salary, and to do much more than that, for money didn't appeal to him then. They had given him more important work—"job after job, and Joe made good." The climax of this rising had come one night in the rooms they shared, when Joe told his friend he had made up his mind to set up an office of his own, though he was only twenty-nine.

"And he offered me a partnership." The big man's voice was husky now, as, in a little outburst with a good deal of bitterness in it, he spoke of the glory of the work of which he and Joe had once been a part. He seemed appealing to Joe's wife to see, for God's sake, what it was in Joe that had been lost. Then he stopped and frowned and stared at her. "Oh, what's the use?" he muttered. But Ethel's voice was sharp and clear:

"Oh, if you only knew," she cried, "how much good this is doing! I won't stop to explain but—please—go on!" Her brown eyes threw him a fierce appeal. And again she had him talking. He told of a plan for apartment buildings Joe had conceived in those early days. "I don't say it was practicable, I give it just to show you what the man had in him," he said. "Big ideas that strike in deep, the kind that change whole cities." Instead of a street like a canyon with sheer walls on either side, the front of each building was to recede in narrow terraces, floor by floor, so letting floods of sunlight down into the street below and giving to each apartment a small terrace garden. As she listened, Ethel grew intent. It was not the mere plan that excited her, she was giving small heed to the details. But this had in it what she had craved ever since she had come to the city—beauty and creative work—and this had been in Joe's "business"!

"There was only one point against it," she heard Nourse saying presently. "Those terraces took a lot of space. Each one meant so much rent was lost. For years, till the plan took hold of the town, it was a money loser. . . . And Joe met your sister then." The voice had changed, and its hostile tone brought Ethel back with a sharp turn. The man, as though uneasy at the revelations he had made, was looking at her as at first, with suspicion and dislike. "I won't go into details of how she got her hold on Joe. You

know how that's done, I suppose. I'm speaking of the effect on his work. He soon put off that plan of his—and any others of the kind. For now he had to have money. And he has been putting it off ever since—not dropping it, he'll tell you, only putting it off till he's rich. But if he isn't rich enough soon, it'll be too late. For that part of him is nearly dead.

"But to go back to your sister. It was not only his money, it was his time she needed. First it was a wedding trip, and after that late hours—a short day in his office. And he wasn't half the man he had been. He was thinking of the night before, and then of the night that was coming. She came for him at five o'clock." He saw Ethel start, and he added, "Just as you did later on.

"And when he did wake up to work, it was different—it was for money alone. He began to throw over his ideals, and very soon there was only me to hold him back. You see, he had had so many friends before he met your sister, men and even women, too, who had been a spur to him. But when he brought his wife around, they wouldn't have her, turned her down—and that made her bitter against them all and she kept Joe from them. All but me. I stayed in the office, and now and then I got some of his friends and we would take him out to lunch. But then even that stopped. Joe hadn't time. He was too busy getting the cash.

"He had dropped all pretence of any work that was really worth while, and had turned his art into a business. He became a real estate gambler and an architect, all in one. He got to speculating in land—and what he built on it he didn't care, so long as it produced the cash. Oh, it wasn't all at once, you know, you can't strangle the soul of a man in a hurry—but by the time your sister died, the buildings Joe was putting up were just about as common and cheap as the average play on Broadway—crowd pleasers. He had lost his nerve. Everything had to be popular. Play safe each time, on the same old flats that every woman seems to love. A woman is conservative. To have and to hold, to get and keep, to stand pat with both eyes shut—that's the average woman in this town. And Joe had to play her.

"And because he still had a soul in him—and a stomach that turned—he began to vary the dulness of it by becoming sensational. He did daring things, cheap daring things—no real originality in it, but it took on and caught the eye. Pictures of his buildings got into the real estate pages of the Sunday papers. He hired a press agent then and went after the publicity. And all I need to tell you of that, is that just the other day the press agent came into the office with a scheme for a string of buildings up on the new part of the Drive. They were to be patriotic—see?—named after the presidents of our country—cheap and showy terra-cotta—main effect red, white and blue." Ethel leaned back with a little gasp. But Nourse added relentlessly, "And Joe didn't turn him down."

She stiffened sharply in her chair and looked at Nourse with indignant eyes, as though he alone were to blame.

"You mean to say my husband could even consider such a plan?"

"Why not? There's money in it—big—the publicity value would be immense. It would make his name a joke of course, with every architect in town—but think of all the talk, free ads! And that means tenants pouring in—and money! Don't you like it? She would have—your sister would, I mean. It was just such a scheme on a smaller scale that made her send for me one day and tell me I could keep hands off or else get out of the office. I gave in because I couldn't go—I couldn't quite make up my mind to the fact that Joe was done for. So I stuck—and she tried to break me—again and again. But Joe, for all the change in him, had a loyal streak not only for me but for all he had once meant to do. Even still he kept saying he'd just put it off, and that when he'd got the money he'd turn back and we'd begin.

"And when his wife died, I began to have hope. The only blot on her funeral was the fact that you were there—and you told me you intended to stay. Her sister—the same story. I soon shook that off, however—for I saw the way he turned to his work as a refuge from his grief for her. I had my chance and I took it. When his mind was dull and numb I began to slip in changes. And each change meant better work and less easy money. And soon I was making headway fast; for Joe had never cared for money for himself, but only for her—and she was dead. So he let our profits go down and down, while what we did got more worth doing. It even began to take hold of him—of the old Joe that was still there.

"But after nearly a year of that, I had to laugh at myself for a fool. For Joe began wanting money again, and I knew he was thinking of marrying you. I fought, of course, and for a time I had some hope of beating you. I remembered you as you had been at the time of your sister's funeral. You had seemed so young and weak to me. But later, when you were his wife and began taking half his time, keeping late hours, draining him—for you women can drain a man, you know—then I knew that you were strong, your sister's sister. I gave in. Or I should say I took the only chance that was left. I threw over the things we had dreamed of and got him to work for money hard—harder than he'd ever done. I drove him! Why? Because I got him back that way. By making him work for money for you I began to get him away from you. In time I even got him to stay in the office late at night. I got him to keep away from you

nights. And there was more than that in my scheme. For now we're making money enough to satisfy even you, I think. I'm not sure—I'm never sure—your sister taught me never to be. Perhaps you can't be satisfied. But if you can, I see a chance. Tell me how much you really need. We'll get it. And then for the love of God leave us alone before it's too late—before what's in the man is dead!"

Nourse finished and rose, looking down at her. She sat rigid, keeping herself in hand. Again and again she had been on the point of bursting out, for the sheer brutality of so much he had told her had made it very hard to sit still. But then as he had spoken of Amy, Ethel had kept silent, watching his face intensely. How much Amy must have done to have aroused such bitterness! A sense of reality in his talk, a clear and sudden consciousness of having the real Amy held up here before her eyes, had gripped Ethel like a vise. Till now she had no clear idea of how much Joe had sacrificed. But all that finer side of him, that early life, those dreams, those friends, had all been known to Amy. And Amy had been willing to lose them all, to crush them out, for money, only money, and money for such an empty life! Ethel shivered a little. Her sister's picture was complete.

"No," she said, looking up at Nourse, "I'm not going to leave you alone. What I've got to do now is to try my best to make you feel what I really want, and what a mistake you've been making. Please listen, while I try to be clear." Her expression was strained as she looked at him. She smiled a little. "I am not like my sister. I'd rather not say much about her now. She—had her good points, too—she's dead. And all you need to know is this. You were wrong about me in those first months—I was trying to get away from Joe. I had my own dreams and I wished to be free. I even tried to earn my living. I worked for a while. But the man I worked for—frightened me—and that threw me back on Joe. He was poor then, so I nursed his child and ran his home on very little. And I liked that. Believe me—please! I liked that! And I think the main reason for it was that I was falling in love, not with her husband but with the man whom you were bringing back to life. It was that in him, that kind of ambition and that kind of life and friends, that I wanted—oh, so hard! I was groping about to get them—but it's not easy in New York. And meanwhile we were married, and about that part of it you were right. I was selfish, I did want him all. I let everything go, kept everything out—especially his business. I was jealous of you as I was of his wife—of everything past—I wanted him new!

"Then my baby came, and it was a time when I did a good deal of thinking. I—thought out my sister. I saw how different we were. What she wanted I didn't want at all. So I set to work to change him—and I thought I was doing it all by myself—just as you thought you were doing it. Each of us was working alone—and we thought we were working in spite of each other—against each other. I was against you in his office, you were against me in his home. And because you hadn't any idea of what I was trying, you made him work for money for me—to buy me off! But I don't want money—alone, I mean! And when he came and said he was rich, it frightened me—I wasn't ready—I had no friends! And so the money only brought back my sister's friends in a perfect horde—and with them her memory—her influence—her husband!

"Oh, can't you understand what I mean—and how I'm placed and what it's like? Can't you believe that I want in him exactly what you want yourself? But it hasn't been easy! Don't you see? I am only a second wife! She's here—she has been—all the time—like a ghost—and we never speak her name! But if you will only work with me—"

She stopped with a quick turn of her head. They listened, and heard Joe's key in the door. In a moment he had entered the hall.

"Hello. Who's here?" he asked at once.

"It's I," said his partner, quietly, going out to meet him. And sitting there rigid, she heard him continue in gruff low tones, "Something I'd forgotten—a point in those Taggart specifications. I want to clear it up tonight."

CHAPTER XVII

What impression had she made? How far had she overcome the heavy weight of dislike and suspicion Amy had rolled up in his mind? As Ethel's thoughts went rapidly back over the things Nourse had told her, again and again with excitement she felt what a help he could be if he would. Here lay the gate to her husband's youth.

"If only he'll believe in me! Shall I send for him? No," she decided. "If there's any hope, he'll come again."

She waited three days. Then he telephoned, "Can I see you today at four o'clock?" She answered,

"Yes, I'll be very glad." And she felt a little faint with relief as she hung up the receiver.

When he came in, that afternoon, one glance at him made her exclaim to herself, "He half believes! He's puzzled!"

"Well, Mrs. Lanier," he began at once, with more friendliness now in his heavy voice, "if I've made any mistake about you, I'm sorry. But you must show me first. If you're real about this, you look to me like a woman who would have thought it all out in the last few days and formed a plan. What is it?"

His abruptness rather took her breath for a moment. Then she said, "Yes, I have a plan, but so have you. What is it?" At her quick retort she saw a smile of grim relish come over his large features.

"My plan is simple," he replied. "Leave Joe to me. Keep him quiet at night so he can work, and I'll show you another husband." She shook her head.

"He'd only make more money."

"Tell him you don't want it, then!" She smiled at him.

"Too simple," she said. He looked at her.

"I thought it would be too simple for a woman," was his answer.

"It's worse than that," she replied. "It's blind. You've never been married—apparently—not even to one woman—while Joe, you see, has been married twice. To you a man's life is all in his office—but half of Joe's is in his home—and you'll have to change that half of him, too. I told you her friends are about—and they have her memory on their side—and so I can't get rid of them until I get some friends of my own."

"Then get them."

"How? Go out on any street and call up, 'Heigh there' at the windows?" She leaned forward quickly and sternly: "The friends I want are the people he knew—the ones you told me of. That's my plan. Put me in touch with some of them, and let me bring them in touch with Joe. And I'll show you a different partner." He looked at her.

"Well, that's too simple, too," he said.

"Why is it?" she demanded.

"Because in those first years of his marriage I went to them so often, in just the way you're thinking of. I got some of the men he used to know to come to his office and take him to lunch. And it did so little good they quit. They all got sick of it—and they're through."

Ethel leaned forward intensely:

"But it will be different now! Before, they had Amy here working against them! I'm here now, and I'll be on their side!" He frowned, and she cried impatiently, "You don't believe me, do you! You don't believe I can do anything—or even that I want to!"

He looked at her for a moment.

"Yes," he said, "I almost do."

"Then please give me a chance," she said, very low. And by her eager questions she began to draw out of Nourse the information she wanted. It did not come easy, for the past seemed buried deep in his memory. As one by one he spoke of Joe's friends he would add, "But he's dead," or, "He's gone West." He had kept track of them, after a fashion, but he had seen them little of late. What a lonely life he had led, she thought. She wondered if he had grown too old and hopeless to be of any help. She fought down her discouragement.

"There was Crothers," he was saying. "He's an architect, and he's doing good work. He never had Joe's boldness, but he always had a fine sense of things, and at least he has stuck to his ideals. He could do more to bring Joe back than any other man I know."

"Then we must get him!"

"That will be hard."

"Why will it?"

"Because some years ago I tried to get Crothers into our firm. The two of us together might have kept Joe from the mere money jobs and made it a firm to be proud of. Crothers was ready to come in, and I had nearly succeeded in bringing Joe to agree to it."

"Then what was the matter?"

"Your sister. Joe had told her he was thinking of some move in his business which would keep him poor awhile. And she flew into quite a rage. That was another time she sent for me." Nourse leaned grimly back in his chair. "She told me that if I ruined her husband's 'career,' as she called it, she'd break us apart once and for all. She wouldn't have Crothers in the firm—not only because it meant money lost, but because Crothers' wife had turned her down." Ethel looked at him sharply.

"Oh—he has a wife," she said.

"Yes, and she wasn't your sister's kind. She was a college woman who wanted to be a great painter—and when the painting petered out, she shut her jaw and said, 'Never mind. If I can't paint landscapes I can make them.' And she took up landscape gardening. She married Burt Crothers soon after that, but she stuck to her work and in course of time it fitted in with her husband's. He and Sally have struggled along up-hill, and though they've never made much money they've had a lot of fun out of life."

"She sounds so nice," Ethel hungrily murmured.

"Oh, yes, she's nice enough," he said, "until you go against her. Then Sally gets mad, and stays that way. And she got that way," he added, "when we turned her husband down. She hadn't liked your sister. In fact, when Joe married and brought his wife and the Crothers together, it wasn't a go. She called your sister 'hopeless.' And when Joe's wife came back at her by keeping Crothers out of our firm, then war was declared."

Nourse broke off and looked at Ethel.

"So you see what you're up against," he said. "Yes, I see," said Ethel. At every door to her husband's youth, Amy seemed to be barring the way. She gave an impatient little shrug. "If I could only show them!"

"What?"

"That I'm different! And the hole I'm in! And what it is I want in Joe! . . . Can't you go and talk to them?" There was impatience again in her eyes. He saw it and smiled wearily.

"You think I'm mighty weak," he said, "with not much fight left in me. You're right, I guess. But you don't know what I've been through in the last seven years. I stuck to Joe—and they didn't like that. Sally said I had knuckled down to Joe's wife. So she hasn't asked me there in years. And if I were to go to her now, I'm afraid my opinion of you wouldn't count."

There was another silence. Again that dull weight of discouragement fell, and again she shook it from her.

"Nevertheless," she said quietly, looking him full in the face, "I mean to have Crothers in our firm." She saw the mingled liking and compassion which came in his eyes, and she bit her lip to keep down the wave of self-pity which arose in her.

"Perhaps you will," she heard him say. His voice sounded a long way off. She brought herself back to him with a jerk.

"Of course I will! We will, I mean! You and I are to work together, you know. Now will you please tell me," she continued grimly, "one person who knew my husband and who will be so very kind as not to call for the police the minute I come into view?" A moment later she started forward. "Oh, please!" she cried. "Do that again! You chuckled! Don't deny it! Go on and really laugh with me!" Her voice, unsteady and quivering, broke into a merry laugh, and in this Joe's partner joined. Then she said sternly. "You give me a friend!"

Nourse thought for a moment. "There's only one left on the list," he replied.

"His name, please—"

"Dwight."

"Business?"

"Music. He shows rich girls how to sing. She stared at him.

"But look here," she said emphatically. "I'm a rich girl—I'm very well off—and I certainly propose to sing! I used to, in the choir at home—and I was told I had quite a voice! And I meant to take lessons in New York—of a tall dark man with curly hair—"

"Dwight," said Nourse, "is fair and fat."

"Never mind. Then he probably has blue eyes. And they twinkle at you—in the friendliest way—"

"Young woman, I'm your husband's friend."

"Never mind if you are. You're not enough. I want more of his friends. Now tell me—where did the fat man study? Abroad?"

"In Paris."

"Oh!" she cried. "Were he and Joe together there?"

"They were, for a while—"

"Oh, how nice!" She laughed at him. "What a dear you've been to me," she said. "You like me, don't you!"

"Yes—I do."

"Quite a good deal!"

"All right," he said. She was watching his face. "This is new to him," she was thinking.

"You believe I don't want money!"

"Yes—"

"Nor friends like Amy's!"

"You don't seem to."

"And I don't. I want friends like you and this Mr. Dwight—and that odious Sally Crothers who won't even let me in at her door. And her husband—yes, he'll do. Why how the circle widens!"

"So far," Nourse reminded her, "I'm the only circle you've got."

"Yes, and a very nice one. And now you're going to be a dear, and go to this man Dwight and say what a remarkable voice I have—and tell him all my other points, and the hole I'm in and the money I have. Don't forget that—the money I have—for my acquaintance with Mr. Dwight leads me to believe that wealth is a great inducement with him. It makes his blue eyes twinkle so."

"Very well," Nourse answered grimly. "But when you get them twinkling, what are you going to do with him?"

"Sing with him," was her firm reply. "And between songs *talk* with him—of Paris and my husband, and the great ideals I have—and the delicious dinners I have—for he's fat, you know, and he loves his meals—and then ask him to come to dinner, of course." She scowled. "That," she said severely, "is all I can tell you at present. My plans for resurrecting Joe will have to be made as I go along—step by step and friend by friend." All at once she turned on him fiercely. "There's that pity again in your eyes! 'Oh, how young,' you are thinking. Then let me tell you, Mr. Bill Nourse, that you are not to pity me! If you do," she cried, "the time will come when you will be pitying yourself—for being cast off like an old leather shoe—from one of the most brilliant and attractive circles in this town! Do you know what you almost do to me—you, the one friend I have in New York? You make me feel you've almost lost your faith and hope in everything—that you're nearly old! You make me wonder if I'm too late—whether my husband is nearly old, and the dreams he had in him cold and gone! You scare me—and you've got to stop! You've got to be just exactly as young as I am—this very minute! You've got to borrow some youth from me—for I have plenty to go around—and help me make this fight for friends! It may not come to anything—for the soul of this city is hard as nails! This music man may turn me down—or be perfectly fat and useless! Who knows? But how can I tell till I meet the man? And when will you go and see him? Today or tomorrow? I haven't very much time, you know, for any more shilly-shallying! I want some action out of you—"

She faced him flushed and menacing, and he took her hand and said:

"You'll get it. Where's your telephone!"

"Right there in the hall!"

"I'll call up Dwight."

"Wait! Is he married?"

"No."

"Thank God!"

CHAPTER XVIII

The next morning at eleven o'clock she met Dwight in his studio, and in a brisk pleasant businesslike way she began to tell him of her voice—what singing she had done at home and how she had always meant to take lessons when she should come to New York to live.

"To find out how much of a voice I really have, you know," she said. Her manner was more affable now. "But my husband and my baby have kept me rather busy, you see, and so I've put it off and off—until just lately I began to look about and make inquiries. And then by good luck I learned of you—from my husband's partner."

"You're Joe Lanier's wife, aren't you?" he asked.

"His second," she said with emphasis. And a moment later she told herself, "Yes, his eyes do twinkle, and he seems to be quite nice. He isn't so excessively fat, and he has a big wide generous mouth, and I like his eyes. But he thinks my coming like this a bit queer, and he's wondering what's behind it." She downed her excitement and went on in the same resolute tone she had used with such success on Nourse. No personal conversation just yet, she would show him she meant business. And so she stuck to the lessons.

"If you'll take me as a pupil," she said, "I'd like to begin immediately."

"Let me try your voice," he proposed. He went to the piano, and there his manner had soon changed. From genial and curious it grew interested. He spoke rather sharply, asking her to do this and that, and she felt as though she were being probed. "You have a voice," he said, at the end. "Not a world shaker," he added, smiling, "but one that interests me a lot." She beamed on him.

"You'll take me, then?"

"Assuredly."

"Oh, that's so nice." They decided on the time for her lessons. Then she glanced at her wrist watch. "Will you see if my car is waiting!" she asked. "I had him take the nurse and baby up to the Park—and he ought to be back by now, I think." But as Dwight went to the telephone, she added excitedly to herself, "Now if that idiot of a chauffeur is as late as I told him to be, you and I will have quite a talk, Mr. Dwight."

"It isn't here yet," he informed her.

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I'll have to walk." She smiled and held out her hand to him. "Will you send the chauffeur home!"

"If you like," he replied good-humouredly. "But I'd much rather you'd wait here—if you have nothing pressing." And as she hesitated, "It's not only your voice, you know—I used to be quite a friend of Joe's."

"Oh, yes, I remember his telling me. Over in Paris, wasn't it?"

Soon they were talking easily. Dwight had lit a cigarette, and Ethel could see he was studying her. She tried to look unconscious.

"I've wanted to go to Paris all my life," she told him. "How long is it since you left?"

"Only a year." She looked at him.

"Is there a Paris in New York?"

"I'm not sure yet—I'm new, you see."

"So am I," she confided frankly. And at that he gave her a swift glance which made Ethel add to herself, "Yes, he could be very personal."

She asked him what he had found in New York as a contrast, coming from abroad. She spoke of the high buildings here, and from that she passed quite naturally to her husband's business.

"It isn't the work I'd like for him," she said with a regretful sigh. "Joe is getting to be like all the rest—he's making too much money." She waited a moment and added, "I should so like him to be as he was when you knew him."

"I'll be curious to see how he has changed. You must let me see him," Dwight replied.

"Why yes, of course."

"Over in Paris he had so much. He was such a wonderful lad for dreams—with the most exuberant fancy in the way he used to talk of New York and what he wanted to do back here—to use the backyards and the roofs and turn them into gardens. This town, when Joe got through with it—well, from an aeroplane it was to look more or less like a bed of roses—or a hill town in Italy. But that was only his lighter vein. When his fancy was really, working hard, he took department stores, hotels and huge railroad terminals and jammed them all together into one big building. How deep in the earth it was to have gone I really can't remember, nor how far up into the skies. But there was a garden at the top—or a meadow or prairie or something."

"Yes," thought Ethel, "I'm going to like him."

"Joe could talk of his plans all night," Dwight went on good-naturedly. "And keep a poor lazy musician like me from my piano where I belonged."

"Was it you who taught him to play?" she asked.

"On the piano? It was," he replied. "Isn't his touch amazing? And so thoroughly Christian, too."

"Christian?"

"Yes. He doesn't let his right hand know what his left hand is doing." They laughed. And from that laugh she emerged with eagerness in her brown eyes.

"Oh, please go on," she begged him. "I had no idea you knew him so well. Did he do nothing but talk over there?"

"He did—he worked like a tiger. Joe could stand more hard labour in one consecutive day and night than any fellow I ever met. And he could do it night after night. I remember dropping in on him for coffee and rolls one morning. A chap named Crothers and myself—" Ethel started at the name—"had just come home from the 'Quatres Arts Ball.' We found Joe in his room with the curtains drawn—he didn't know it was morning yet. He had a towel bound round his head and was building an opera house for Chicago—or Kansas City—I'm not sure which. And he wasn't just dreaming of building it in his successful middle age—he was building it now, in a terrible rush, as though Kansas City were pushing him hard. Joe didn't live in the future, you see—he took the future and made it the present, and then lived in the present like mad."

Dwight tossed away his cigarette.

"But you say it's money now."

"Yes," she replied. "It's money." He smiled at her dejected tone.

"I wouldn't be so sad," he remarked. "Money isn't as bad as it seems."

"Oh, yes, and I want it," Ethel declared. "But I want the others so much more!"

When her car had come, she rose and said, "You and Joe must get together some time. Couldn't you call him up some day and get him to lunch with you?"

"Gladly." They went to the door.

"But don't be disappointed," she said, "if you find him changed even more than you think. Money has such a pull on a man."

"I know, but I rather like it."

"What?"

"Oh, don't be so indignant, please. I am an artist—honestly. But some of these men I've met over here—well, they fascinate me. Such boundless energy and drive ought to go into a symphony. Plenty of drums and crashing brass. Good-bye, Mrs. Lanier," he added. "This has been a lucky day for me."

"Thank you. Don't forget about Joe. And meanwhile—till next Tuesday."

As she settled back in her car she thought,

"All right, Ethel, very good."

Twice a week, that autumn, she went to Dwight for lessons. But until some time had passed, she did not mention it to Joe.

"When you meet him," she said to Dwight, "I'd rather you wouldn't speak of my lessons. I want my singing to be a surprise. And besides, I'd so much rather that any old friends of my husband's come to him through his partner. It seems so much more natural."

"I see," said Dwight. "But he doesn't," she thought, "and I'll have to explain."

"Later, of course, I'll tell him," she said, "But just now, in the state he's in, if you or any one else of his friends who knew him as he used to be should come and say, 'Sent by your wife, with her compliments and fervent hopes of your speedy resurrection'—oh, no, it wouldn't do at all." Dwight was watching her curiously.

"How many of us are there!" he asked. She looked at him in a questioning way.

"Of us," he explained, "Joe's old friends, who are to dig him up, you know."

"Only you, at present—and of course his partner. He smiled:

"Bill Nourse is not a very brisk digger."

"Well," she remarked, in a casual tone, "if you know of brisker diggers about—people who knew him —"

"Say no more. I'll search the town." Their eyes had met for an instant.

"Yes," she thought, "I'm getting on."

Dwight lunched with Joe soon after that, and later in the studio he and Ethel had a talk.

"In a good many ways," he assured her, "he struck me as the same old Joe—friendly and hospitable—he insisted on ordering quite a meal. But we didn't eat much of it. We talked."

"Of Paris!"

"Very much so. There's a lot of Paris in him yet." And he told of their long conversation.

"Now," she said, when she rose to leave, "if you'll just keep at him occasionally—while his partner does the same at the office, and I do what I can at home—"

"You insist on his being home every night?"

"That depends," said Ethel gravely.

"Suppose I take him some night to my club. We have quite a number of architects there."

"Oh, wonderful! How good of you!"

"Mrs. Lanier," said her teacher, "I'm under your orders—digging for gold."

He took Joe to his club on the following night, and later several times for lunch.

"Joe likes it," he reported. "And he has already met some chaps who knew of him and his earlier work, not only in Paris but over here, he was one of the most brilliant designers in the city, I find—and a good many men were disappointed when he threw over his true profession and went after ready cash. How would you like me to put up his name?"

"For club membership?"

"Precisely."

"I'd like it, sir."

"And I obey."

"This is getting rather intimate," Ethel told herself that night. "Never mind, my love, you've been perfectly honest. He knows very well what you're after. And if he likes you and wants to help, so much the better."

Some days in the studio she stuck severely to her voice and showed him she meant business. She was practising quite hard, and her progress was by no means slow. But on other days half the hour at least was spent in learning from her new friend about "a Paris in New York." Dwight was already finding one, although he had been here less than a year. In this teeming city of endless change he had found a deep joy of creation, of newness, youth and boldness that made even Paris seem far behind. "It's all so amazingly big," he said, "with such revealing chances opening up on every side!" How simple it was for him, she thought, with a little pang of envy. A young musician with plenty of talent, easy manners, single, free. As he spoke of his club friends and some of their homes that were open to him, the glimpses exasperated her. Here were the people she wanted to know, a little world of artists, architects and writers, and goodness only knew what else. She was still rather vague about them. To her surprise she discovered that many were after money, too. "Decidedly," her teacher said. "Excessively," he added.

"But at least," she rejoined, defending them, "when they get the money they know how to spend it on something better than food and clothes! They really live—I'm sure they do—and have ideas and really grow!" She caught her breath. What an idiot, to have said so much! "I'm so glad," she added lamely, "that you got my husband into your club. It's bound to do so much for him." She threw a sharp little glance at Dwight, and scowled, for she thought she detected a smile.

"He's doing something for the club," Dwight was saying cheerfully. "Some of those chaps are a bit too refined and remote for this raw crude city of ours. And Joe is getting back enough of his old vim and passion, his wild radical ideas of what may still be done with the town, so that he jars on such sensitive souls—makes 'em frown and bite their moustaches like the husbands in French plays. On the other hand some are decidedly for him. I hear them discuss him now and then."

"Oh, how nice!" sighed Ethel.

At times she grew so impatient to get Joe into this other world. But she had to be very careful. Repeatedly she warned herself that Dwight, for all his Paris past and his present friendliness, was very fast becoming a New Yorker like the rest: making his way and climbing his climb, and wanting no climbers who had to be carried. "Ethel Lanier, the first thing you know you'll be dropped like a hot potato," she thought. "There's nothing unselfish about this man. Don't make him feel he has you on his hands." And she would grow studiously abstract and detached in her talk about the town. But it kept cropping up in spite of her, this warm eagerness to "really live."

"It's funny," she said to Dwight one day. "I had thought of music and all that I wanted as being so different from Joe's work. But now in this city that you seem to know, I find that what I've wanted most is just what he ought to want in his work! The two go together!"

"Exactly!"

"The city Joe once lived in." She frowned. "There are so many cities in New York. But I don't want to try to get into his, until I can do it through Joe himself. People will have to want me because I'm the wife of Joe Lanier."

"I think they'll want you more than that." His tone was most reassuring. "But I like the way you are going about it. It's so delightfully novel, you see—conspiring to make your husband find his friends all by himself—so that when he has found them he'll come to you with a beaming smile and say, 'Woman, I bring you wealth and fame and friends in abundance. Take them, love, and bless me—for I have done all this for you.'"

Ethel smiled. "I don't like you to joke about it," she said.

"Very well," he agreed, "let's get back to the serious work of his resurrection. You asked me to recruit other brisk diggers, and I've hunted about quite a bit. There's that chap Crothers and his wife, but so far they're the best I can do—and the Crothers pair seem rather blind. They can't see the old Joe for the

new."

"You mean they think he's hopeless," Ethel scornfully put in.

"Oh, we'll make them open their eyes in time. I drop in on them every now and then. I had Crothers to the club last week, and let him hear some of the gossip about the emerging Joe Lanier."

Often he talked of the early group of students over in Paris, of their ideas, ambitions, and their youthful views of life, which for all their gaiety had been so fervid and intense. But to Ethel, because she herself was still young, their dreams seemed very wonderful. Some she had hungrily read about long ago with the history "prof" at home. But the world which the little suffragist had revealed to her pupils had been more heroic and severe. This was warmer, dazzling, this had beauty, this was art! And yet not weak nor tame nor old—this was gloriously new in the way it jabbed deep into life and talked of really changing it all. This was youth! And her own youth responded and she made it all her own. She was reading now voraciously, with a sparkle and gleam of hope in her eyes. She was coming so very close to her goal, or rather the gate of her promised land.

At times she grew impatient at her teacher's calm, and the good-natured easy smile with which he looked upon all this. "Oh, why not get excited!" she thought. She felt the old dreams a bit cold in him, as they had been in her husband. And in dismay she would ask herself:

"Are they all too old? Is just the fact that I'm ten years younger than Joe and his friends going to mean that I'm too late—to bring back what was in him!"

CHAPTER XIX

But all this was as nothing compared to the intensity, the ups and down, in her relations with Joe himself. He often looked tired and harassed. "What's the matter with me?" he seemed to ask. And she felt his two sides combatting each other. On the one hand were the influences of Nourse and Dwight and the men at the club, to which he went nearly every day. He took part in discussions there, long rambling talks and arguments. And his old ideals were rising hungrily within him. But meanwhile the business man in Joe kept savagely putting the dreamer down, and for days he would plunge into his work and the fever of the money game. Joe had been so successful of late; and she knew that in his office that odious press agent was for ever at him. From Nourse she learned that her husband was even still considering the scheme for a row of buildings named after the presidents. And Ethel had a sinking of heart.

"If he does that, I'm lost," she decided. But she would shake off such fears, as she felt again the old Joe emerge, the Joe of dreams and startling plans. And she grew excited as she thought:

"Oh, if he'll only let himself go! I don't want him just nice and tame and refined! I don't want only friends like that! I want—I want—"

What she wanted was still exceedingly vague, and Ethel could not put it in words. It had something to do with the teachings of the little history "prof" at home. She wanted the artist in him to rise, the creative soul of him! Cautiously she probed his thoughts—now tender and maternal toward him in his tired moods, now alive and interested as she got him talking. Bits came out. Joe was so plainly tortured by the struggle going on inside. She felt at once pity and admiration, and was deeper in love with him than she had ever been before. She felt the excitement of a fight with hope of victory close ahead. She took care in her dress and manner to give him little surprises at night, and by her cheery comradeship and her warm beauty of body and soul, Ethel drew him on and on. At such times she would often lose all memory of her scheming and would give up to her love, which had become a passion now.

But always she came back to her plan. Not openly, for she had to be careful; she worked at him in little ways. She stirred his youth and his cast-off dreams by her own youth and zest for it all. She got him to tell her of Nourse and Dwight, the old friends she herself had put on his trail, and of new friends he had met in his club—"the club I elected you to," she exulted. But the next instant she would add, "Oh, Ethel, you're so ignorant! If you only knew about his work!" And knitting her brows she would listen hard while he talked of steel construction. As with her encouragement he talked on rapidly, absorbed, Ethel would clutch at this and that. She learned of books and magazines on architecture here and abroad. Stealthily she noted them down, and those she could not purchase she hunted up in libraries. Nourse was a great help to her here. He came to see her now and then; and though he still had his discouraging moods, at other times he was friendly and kind. Enjoying this conspiracy with the charming young Mrs. Lanier, he expressed his gallantry by bringing her books of appalling size. But some had beautiful illustrations that set her to imagining. Eagerly she groped her way deep into the

history of the building of cathedrals and palaces in times gone by. And the long majestic story of man's building on the earth thrilled her to the very soul. Joe must make his place in it all!

When on coming home at night he dumped a pile of work on the table, she would unobtrusively slip some book beside it. She grew to know which ones tempted him most. He had been surprised and amused at first at her interest in architecture—and secretly a little disturbed, suspecting what lay behind it. But as autumn drew on he read more and more of the books she kept putting in his way. While he read she would sit with a novel or sew. She would glance up with some remark, and they would talk and then read on. Subtly she made the atmosphere. She often brought Paris into their talks. She spoke longingly of the shops and plays, and all she wanted to see over there. And she almost succeeded in making him promise to take her over the following spring.

Joe was happy at such times, when she could make him leave business alone. And although he had many relapses, when night after night he would sit by the table planning more horrible "junk for the Bronx," with an inner smile she saw how often her husband scowled at such labour now. She heard of changes in the office.

"We 're still building junk," Nourse confided one day, "but it isn't quite as bad as before. Joe wants the money just as hard, but he's plainly jarred by some of the jobs. He even fought his press agent last week!"

One night Joe suggested awkwardly:

"Suppose we try Bill Nourse again. Let me bring him home to dinner, I mean. He isn't especially cheery, God knows—but he seems so damnably lonely this fall."

"Very well, dear—if you want to," she sighed. She had told Nourse to hint he was lonely.

When Nourse came to dinner that Saturday night, Joe was surprised and delighted at the way his partner seemed to get on now with his wife. The visit indeed was such a success that it was not long before Joe proposed bringing home "an old pal of mine—fellow named Dwight." To this, too, Ethel assented, and when Dwight arrived one night she greeted him very graciously.

"I feel as though I knew you," she said. "I've heard Joe talk of you so much."

To Joe's delight they got on like old friends. And when Dwight spied the piano there and learned of her interest in music, he insisted on trying her voice, and was loud in his praise of its promise. Before he left, it was arranged that she should come to his studio and take lessons twice a week. Openly his pupil now, she could speak of him to Joe, and he came to dine with them often.

How smoothly things were working out. If there were any cloud upon the horizon it was the occasional presence of Amy's old friend, Fanny Carr. Fanny had been abroad through the summer, but in October she had returned. She had come to see Ethel several times, in the same determinedly friendly way; and Nourse reported that she was going frequently to see Joe at his office about her eternal money affairs. And the fact that Joe never spoke of it only made the matter worse. For Joe still had his money side, and Fanny knew how to flatter him so. He still had his loyalty to his first wife, and Fanny so cleverly played to that. "And he likes her, too—clothes, voice, perfumery and all!" Ethel would declare to herself in anger and vexation. Oh, these women who used sex every minute! how could men be so easily fooled?

"You can't change a man in a minute," she thought. "Remember Amy had him five years." Amy had planted so deep in him the feeling that money is everything; she had got the fever into his blood. And Fanny was there to keep it alive by her flattery of his money success. And for Ethel, even still, it was decidedly unsafe to criticize Joe in some of his moods. As autumn changed to winter, these moods grew much more frequent. What was worrying him? She couldn't find out. She sent for Nourse and asked him, "What's going on in the office?"

"The press agent is pushing him hard," was Nourse's gloomy answer, "for that row of patriotic atrocities up on Riverside Drive." Ethel squirmed.

"But he won't!" she cried. "He couldn't!"

"Oh, yes he could," Joe's partner growled. "There's so much money in it!"

"If he puts that through I'm done for!" Ethel told herself that night. "His name will be a perfect joke—among all the people I want to know! And they'll all keep away from us as though he were running a yellow journal! And then her friends will crowd about—because we'll be so rich, you see! Oh, damn money! Damn! Damn!"

She was lying sleepless on her bed, and Joe was sleeping by her side. She sat up now and looked at his face in the dim light from the window.

"If you get very rich," she thought, "and middle-aged and very fat in body and soul, get to care only for building 'junk' and for going about with Amy's friends—I wonder what would I do then." Again the words of young Mrs. Grewe came up in her mind: "You can get out whenever you choose." She frowned. "But there are the children. And besides, I love you, Joe—yes, more than ever, and in a queer way! I'm fighting for what I love in you, but at the same time I love you all—every bit of you!" Breathing quickly now, she sank back on her pillow, and there she soon grew quiet again. "So we'll fight it out once and for all. You've got to drop this plan of yours." One evening that same week when Nourse had come to dinner, she led the talk by slow degrees to that other plan of Joe's—the one with terrace gardens. Soon she had Nourse talking about it, and seeing her husband grow morose she grew cheerily interested.

"Oh, I'm very dull, I suppose," she said at the end with a quizzical smile, "but I'm afraid I can't get it clear. Couldn't you draw it?" Nourse smiled at this, for he saw what she was driving at.

"No, I'm poor at that," he said.

"Then, Joe, you sketch it out for me."

Joe put down his paper and began in surly fashion. But as he sketched more and more rapidly, she saw the thing take hold of him. With little exclamations and questions Ethel drove him on. She thought it a fascinating plan but the details puzzled her still, she said, and the rough sketch he had drawn was very unsatisfactory. She begged him to draw it on a large scale, and he set out to do so. But his hand was inexpert. Although once the most brilliant designer in town, for years Joe had stuck to the business side, and his hand had grown clumsy, his memory cold. Ethel had known of this from Nourse. And now probing by her questions as to details here and there, with Nourse helping at her side, she revealed Joe's weakness to himself. A scared angry look came into his eyes. Stubbornly he worked on and on, but the thing would not come as it used to!

And this revealing process continued until Nourse with masculine pity dropped out of the torturing and went home. But Ethel gently encouraged Joe, and in his dogged persistency he kept at it half the night. The more tired he grew, the worse was his work. And again and again, as she glanced at his face, she saw that frightened look in his eyes. It almost brought the tears in her own, but steadily she kept thinking:

"I'm scaring him badly, and that's what he needs. For years he has been telling himself that first he would make money and then he would work out his ideals. But he's frightened now. He's wondering if he has put it off too long?"

Pitilessly she goaded him on. Then at last she relented and began to persuade him to go to bed. How white and haggard and queer he looked. Again a lump rose in her throat. Soon she was saying quietly:

"I should think that some day, dear, you'd want to go back to Paris and work."

He made no answer.

But in the weeks that followed, she dropped this thought again and again into his mind. Paris, study, work, old dreams—she played these against his business, against Amy and her friends and the flattery of Fanny Carr, against that odious press agent and the plan for Riverside Drive.

"Has he turned it down?" she inquired of his partner.

"Not yet," was the answer. "It's still in the air."

"I wish this were over," Ethel thought. Joe's face had grown so queer and drawn that sometimes as she looked at him a sickening dread stole into her mind. "Is he really too old?" she asked herself.

One Saturday night when he came home, with a sudden leap of compassion she saw what a day he had been through. "But he is through! Something has happened!" she thought. And she treated him very tenderly—both because of the state he was in, and more perhaps because she knew how bad it would be for both of them if he had decided against her.

"How has the work been going?" she asked. He looked at her almost with dislike.

"For a month," he said, "you've been trying to make me give up that Riverside scheme." He paused, and her heart was in her mouth.

"I haven't said so, have I?"

"No—you haven't said so," he growled.

"Well?"

"It's off. I've dropped it."

She started to embrace him, but saw at once it would be a mistake.

"Thank you, Joe," she said softly, and went into the nursery. It was so dark and quiet there. She had a cry.

CHAPTER XX

The next morning Emily Giles returned from a visit back in Ohio.

"How have things been going?" she asked. "Very well indeed," said Ethel, with a scarcely perceptible smile. She and Emily understood each other, though very little had ever been said.

"Mr. Lanier still working hard?"

"Yes, poor dear," said Ethel, "but it has been so good for him." And at that a look of grim relish came on Emily's sallow face.

"You know I'm getting to like this town," she remarked with a genial air. "I wonder what'll the winter be like?"

"Oh, I think we'll do nicely, Emily. I've quite a few plans in my head."

"I'll bet you have," said Emily. And she went to don her "uniform."

In these days, again and again a sense of being just on the eve of something very exciting gave Ethel a new zest in life.

One day in the hall downstairs she came upon young Mrs. Grewe. Ethel gave a little start and then swiftly reddened. And she saw the young widow smile at that, and it made her annoyed with herself for having been so clumsy. "I'll show her I'm not such a prude," she thought. And having learned that Mrs. Grewe had taken another apartment here, Ethel went to see her—with a safe little feeling that Mrs. Grewe would have too much sense to return the call. This would end it—pleasantly.

The visit was a decided success. Mrs. Grewe was back from Europe sooner than she had expected—for reasons she did not explain. "And now I'm looking about," she said, "for another old lady from Boston. I rent a new one every year." Ethel stayed for tea. For nearly eight months she had had no woman to talk to, but Fanny Carr and Emily Giles. And she found it very pleasant to be chatting here so cosily. Not that she meant to keep it up. This sort of woman? H'm—well, no. But on the other hand, why not? After all, New York was a very big city.

"I'm never going to shut myself up in one little circle of people," she thought. "I mean to keep rubbing up against life."

There was an added pleasure, too, in the vague warm self-confidence which the young widow gave to her. "You can take care of yourself, my dear," said Mrs. Grewe's small lustrous black eyes.

"Well? Is he treating you better?" she asked.

"Yes," said Ethel.

"He's very wise." They smiled at each other.

"He's becoming quite sensible," Ethel said.

"And have you found those friends you wanted?"

"They're in sight," was Ethel's answer. Her hostess smiled good humouredly.

"You won't be able to keep me," she said. "He won't stand that—"

Ethel knit her brows.

"He'll stand a good deal," she answered, "when once I know where I stand myself."

"In the meantime you'd better leave me alone."

The two parted in affable fashion.

"There," thought Ethel in relief. "I got through that rather nicely. I needn't go again, of course."

She had started out for a brisk walk, and she drew a deep breath of the frosty air. The air in New York was often so—gay! And Mrs. Grewe had given her such a feeling of independence. She saw a man turn and look at her—the beast! But she smiled as she hurried on toward the Park.

Still, the brief visit had been rather daring. Joe would not have liked it at all. He would have been perfectly furious!

"However!" She walked briskly on. "What's the difference between Mrs. Grewe and his own dear friend, Fanny Carr?" she asked. "Nothing whatever—except that Fanny, so far as we know, has taken the trouble with each man to have a wedding and a divorce. The only other difference is that Fanny has no taste at all, while Mrs. Grewe has heaps of it! And she reads things—even Shaw; and she likes good music, too. She is going tonight to 'Salome.'" . . . For a moment Ethel let her mind run over all the operas she herself was going to hear, and the concerts, and the plays she would see and the dinners she would go to, the talks in which she would take part. She could see herself—just scintillating! . . . With a jerk she came back to Mrs. Grewe. "Oh, I guess it isn't very defiling to turn to her from Fanny Carr! I'll do as I please!" she impatiently thought.

Still, it had been rather daring. It fitted in exactly with several talks she had had of late with Dwight, her music teacher: talks in which each one of them had taken rather a challenging tone that had grown distinctly intimate. One night when Joe was out of town she had gone with Dwight to the opera. And she had not mentioned it to Joe—not that she felt guilty at all, she had simply dropped it out of her mind. In love with her husband? Yes, indeed. And let Dwight or any other man try to go the least bit too far—"As Fanny doubtless does with Joe," she suddenly added to herself. For a moment she walked viciously. Then she thought again of Dwight. He had told her she really had voice enough with which to go on the stage if she chose.

"Though I hope you won't," he had added.

"Why not?" she had asked. In reply he had hinted at perils that made it all sound rather thrilling.

"Joe wouldn't like it," Dwight had said.

"I might sing in concerts—"

"Joe wouldn't like it."

"Oh, bother Joe!"

Dwight had smiled a bit. "I wonder what you will do," he had said, "if Joe flivvers!"

"If he what?"

"Flivvers—drops back and makes money—turns to those other friends of his."

"He won't do that." But her voice had been tense, for the intimate feeling in Dwight's tone had made her a bit uneasy.

"Well," he had told her in a low voice, "I'm a friend of Joe's, you know, and I don't propose to play the cad. But if you and Joe ever should have a break—don't drop me, too. Do you understand?"

She had hesitated a moment upon just how to answer. Her heart had pounded rapidly.

"That isn't going to happen," she had told him gravely.

"Sure of that?"

"Yes, and you would be—if you understood me better."

"How?"

"I'm in love with that husband of mine for life," she had informed him impressively.

"You're very old-fashioned," he had smiled.

"Not at all!"

"Suppose I understand you better than you do yourself?"

She had glanced at him, seen the gleam in his eyes as he had drawn closer. And then very suddenly she had found it hard to breathe. What to say to stop him?

"At this moment," she had nearly gasped, "you appear to me so very—fat!"

That had bowled him over—naturally! In the next few moments the atmosphere had become chilly and depressed, and with a sudden rush of shame the certainty had grown upon her that she had made a fool of herself, that he had meant to do nothing at all. And from blushing furiously she had turned a little white, and had said to him:

"Please forgive me. I didn't mean that. I was—just a silly fool. Let's go on with my lesson."

"Now that I've learned mine, you mean."

And then regaining control of herself she had turned upon him quickly:

"Oh, be sensible, for goodness' sake! How are you and I to be friends if you act like this, you silly boy? You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

So she had got out of that all right, and had felt tremendously relieved. It was not only that she liked the man, he was besides her only hope, the one who could bring friends to her. "Women friends! That's what I need!" All this was so unsafe at times. Her husband's business, his two sides, Fanny Carr and her scheming, Dwight and his blue, twinkling eyes, Mrs. Grewe and her smiling good-fellowship—were all very nice and exciting. But safe? Oh, by no means!

But today as Ethel walked on through the Park, she smiled to herself expectantly. For Dwight had promised the next week to bring Sally Crothers to see her. "If only I can get on with her! She's my kind—I know she is—she's just exactly what I want. I don't want to be anything wild—not Mrs. Grewe nor Fanny Carr. I want to be myself, that's all, and happy with my husband!"

She turned abruptly toward her home. "In the meantime I am going back to give the baby his bath," she thought. She glanced at the watch on her gloved wrist. And a man who looked like a detective, or a villain in the "movies," looked after her in an envious way.

"Who's her date with!" he wondered.

CHAPTER XXI

The days dragged by. She had anxious times. What would Sally Crothers be like? "And what in the world will she think of me? If she doesn't like me—very much—the very first time, I'll have lost my chance. For she's busy, her life is full of things—planning gardens and running about with her friends. And she won't so much as bother her head!" Ethel felt a dismal sinking. In vain she strove to assure herself. Joe, Nourse and then Dwight, one after the other, had all bowed down before her. "Oh, that was very simple!" she thought. "They're only men!" It would be a woman this time, and one of the most brilliant kind. "What a dull little fool she'll find me, in spite of all I do or say!" It would be all the more difficult because Mrs. Crothers was older. "That will count against me. No doubt she's beginning to show her age; and I'm young, and she doesn't want any young things to come snooping about her husband! Then there's Amy and the quarrel they had, and she'll put me and Amy in the same class! I'll have all that to fight against!" The idea of settling everything all in one brief encounter. Oh, it was too maddening!

"Now, Ethel Lanier, for goodness' sake stop fidgeting like a nervous old maid! This isn't the minister coming to call!"

On the day before the expected call, Ethel was just on the point of going out for the afternoon to do some shopping and shake off these silly fears, when the telephone rang and a few moments later the maid came in and told her there was a visitor downstairs. In an instant with a rush of excitement Ethel knew it was Sally at last. Dwight, in his easy, careless way, had mixed his dates and was bringing Sally a day ahead! How stupid of him! "What have I on?"

"Did she come up?" she breathlessly asked.

"No, Mrs. Lanier, she's waiting below."

"Did she give her name?"

"Yes—Mrs. Carr."

"Oh." Ethel gasped and sank down in a heap. "All right, ask her to come up," she said, in a tone of indifference.

When the maid had gone, she almost called her back. She did not want to see Fanny Carr. Still—why not? Oh, let her come. And in the two or three minutes that followed, Ethel passed from a mood of depression to one of easy good-natured contempt. She was no longer afraid of Fanny, for Ethel was getting Joe in hand. "And as soon as I do," she reflected, "and my husband makes a name as an architect doing great big things, what harm can Fanny do me?" As she thought of the brilliant people who were so soon to be her friends, she looked upon Fanny Carr and her like with no more hatred but only compassion. What stupid lives they were leading.

And so when Fanny came into the room Ethel received her kindly.

But Fanny rather smiled at that. She looked a bit seedy as to her dress, and yet she had a confident air. She took in the fine clothes of her handsome young hostess, and Ethel's very gracious air and the almost pitying tone of her voice—and then with a hard little smile, "My, what a change," said Fanny softly. Ethel frowned at her tone. This might be rather awkward.

"You mean this way of doing my hair?" she rejoined good-humouredly. "I was hoping you would notice it."

"Does he?" asked Fanny.

"What do you mean? Oh, Joe never—"

"No. Dwight, my dear." The hard voice of her visitor had become suddenly low and clear. Ethel looked at the woman then and slowly reddened to her ears. And the consciousness of blushing made her all the angrier.

"What on earth do you mean!" she demanded. Her voice too was very low, and it trembled only a little; but there was a glint in her brown eyes. Fanny gave a tense little laugh.

"Look here," she said. "Don't let's waste time. Joe may be coming home, you know, and we must get this over first."

"We'll soon get it over." Ethel's voice was shaking ominously. Fanny noticed and spoke fast.

"Well, then, it's just this," she said. "You've made up your mind to cut Joe off from all his old friends, including me. And I might have stood for that—"

"How kind!"

"If I hadn't learned of the raw deal you're giving him. Strip him of friends and then treat him like this? Oh, no, not if I can help it!" Plainly Fanny was working herself into a rage to match that of her hostess.

"You'd better be very clear, Mrs. Carr," Ethel exclaimed, leaning forward. Her visitor looked straight back at her, and answered:

"Very. I mean Dwight."

Ethel rose abruptly.

"That will be enough, I think."

"Oh, will it?"

Ethel wheeled upon her:

"What a—loathsome mind you have! Will you leave me, please!"

"No, I'll show you this. And then we'll get to business." And Fanny produced a large envelope, from which she took out a few typewritten pages. "Just look these over," she advised, "and then tell me

whether I shall go." And as Ethel hesitated, "You'd better. They're very important."

Ethel took them and read them, and as she did so her rage and scorn changed first into bewilderment and then into a sickening fright. She felt all at once so off her ground. She had always heard of detectives and their reports of shadowed wives, but that sort of thing had just been in the papers and had never seemed very real. "This is about me!" she thought. It told of every meeting she had had with Dwight, in his studio and in other places, once at the Ritz where they had dined and gone to the opera, twice in the Park where they had walked. Such clean times, all three of them, but how cheap and disgusting they now appeared! For here were bits about Dwight's past, his record with women—two were named. He had been a co-respondent once! And his studio was described in detail, with emphasis on a big lounge in one corner! . . . Suddenly it was laughable! And so she laughed at Fanny! And Fanny replied:

"You mean he won't believe it!"

Ethel went on laughing. Joe wouldn't believe it. She wished he would come and turn this woman out on the street. She felt relief unspeakable.

"You've forgotten," Fanny added, "that you lied to him about your friend."

"How dare you say that?"

"Because I have the facts. On the second of December Joe brought Dwight to dine with you, and you acted as though you'd never met. I gathered that from Joe himself when I saw him the next day. While the truth of it was you'd been seeing Dwight ever since the first of October."

"Yes? That will be easy enough to explain." But Ethel felt herself turning white. She sank down and thought, "Now you'll need all your nerve. Don't get faint, you've got to think clearly." But she was not given time.

"And all that had been going on while you were supposed to be home with the baby." Mrs. Carr leaned forward briskly. "Now the thing for you to do is exactly what I tell you. But before I do that, there's just one thing I wish you to understand about me. If you want to keep Joe, keep him. I don't want him—I never did. I've laughed at you again and again for what you thought I was trying to do. All I want is to be let alone to go on with Joe as I always have. What I mean by that you won't understand, because you don't understand my life. A woman like me in this city needs one man who'll be her friend—the big brother idea—to help and advise her, carry her through when she's down a bit. And Joe has always been like that.

"Why? Because of Amy. When she first came to New York, you remember, it was on a visit to me. I had known her back in boarding school. Well, the visit lengthened out. I saw how crazy she was for the town, and I was fairly well off then, so I let her stay and gave her a home—let her meet my friends, Joe included. I had a husband at the time who was in the real estate business. He knew Joe. So I took Joe and handed him over to Amy. And though she would have been glad enough to forget the debt, Joe wasn't that kind. So that's my hold on him—perfectly clean and above-board. And I need him in my business. There are times when I'm down and need his money, other times when I need his name. But that is all. And if he has been fool enough to marry a giddy young girl like you, that's his own look-out—I won't interfere. I mean I won't interfere with you so long as you don't interfere with me. You let me go on with Joe as before, and he'll never see these papers."

With a sudden fierce impulse, in spite of herself, Ethel crumpled them up in her hands.

"Don't be a fool," said Fanny. "They're only copies. Give them back." Ethel did so, mechanically. "Now what will you do? Which way will you have it? He may be here any minute now."

She waited, but got no reply. She saw the girl shiver a little.

"What's the use of being so solemn and scared?" she impatiently asked. "You're running no more risk than before. So far as I'm concerned, my dear, you can go right on with Dwight if you wish. All I'm asking is a square deal."

"But she'll ask and ask," thought Ethel. "She'll ask of me anything she wants. And she'll get me so tangled in other lies that then I wouldn't have even a chance of making Joe see how things really are."

This thought cleared her mind a little.

"No," she said. "You can tell him."

"What!"

Ethel looked down at her hands in her lap, and noticed how tightly they were clenched. She smiled at them.

"Tell him."

"You're sure of that?"

Ethel nodded.

"Very well!"

"She's uneasy," thought Ethel, "and disappointed—not sure of herself. I've done the right thing."

But as in almost perfect silence they sat waiting for Joe to come home, her decision wavered again and again, and it took all her courage to hold herself in. She made occasional trite remarks, and received replies of the same kind. On them both the tension was growing.

"This means everything to you, too, Fanny, dear!" Ethel reflected viciously. "If Joe believes me—you're done for!"

At each slight stir that Fanny made, Ethel hoped she had lost her courage and was getting ready to go. But Fanny stayed. And as she sat there motionless, what a strong figure she grew to be, moment by moment, in Ethel's eyes—strong in spite of the life she led, of clothes, rich feeding, drinking, dancing, old age swiftly coming on. Strong nevertheless, in an odious way, in the loathsome point of view of her world toward love and marriage. It had set her to prying and handed her here—with these papers in her hands! That was her way of looking at life, and a mighty strong way it appeared!

Suddenly Ethel's eye was caught by Amy's photograph on the table. By degrees in the last few months Joe had ceased to notice it there. But how he would notice it now, very soon, as soon as he'd read what Fanny had brought. For Amy had taught Joe long ago to be jealous, never too sure of a wife.

"So Amy is here again, after all. . . . I wonder what I shall say to Joe? . . . Oh, rubbish! Use more common sense! All I've got to do is to make him see why I never told him about Dwight. It was only part of that plan I had. But what a fool! Oh, what a fool!"

When at last Joe's key was heard in the door, both women leaned slowly forward, as though the strain were unbearable. And then as Joe came into the hall, Fanny said suddenly, sharp and clear:

"No, I won't keep quiet! Joe has got to be told of this!" Ethel wheeled on her:

"How odious!"

"I can't help it—he's my friend!"

And the next moment, with Joe in the room, both women were talking to him at once—angrily, incoherently, almost shoving each other away. But only for a moment. It was too disgusting! Ethel left off and stood rigid there, while Fanny talked on rapidly. She was speaking of how Ethel had cut off Joe from Amy's friends. Ethel heard only bits of this, for it all seemed so confused and unreal. But she noticed how nervously tired he looked, all keyed up from his day at the office. She remembered that his partner was out of town on business, that Joe had been running the office alone. "He will be hard to manage," she thought. He interrupted Fanny in a sharp, excitable tone.

"What's it all about?" he asked.

"It's time you saw where you stand, Joe Lanier. Look at this girl. I don't blame her, God knows. Look how young she is, and then look at yourself. Here, take a look at yourself in that mirror. Are you still young? Can't you see the lines, the gray hairs, Joe? They're coming—oh, they're coming! Can you supply all the love she wants?"

"Fanny?" he snapped out her name in so ugly a voice that she lost no time. She shoved those papers into his hands and began to tell him what they were. But Joe refused to read them and grew each moment angrier.

"Joe!" cried Fanny sharply. "When you brought Dwight to dinner here, he met your wife as though for the first time. Did you know they had been friends for months?" And at his startled look, she added, "If you didn't, you'd better read all this!" There fell a sudden silence.

"I'll explain everything—when we're alone," Ethel managed to put in. How queer and thick her own voice sounded.

Now Joe had gone into the hall with Fanny. Curtly he said good-night to her. The door closed, and there was silence again. Why didn't he come? He must be standing there in the hall trying to get hold of himself. Oh, how terribly hurt he must feel! But she checked the sudden lump in her throat. "Remember now—just common sense!" This was a time for keeping clear! But Joe had come back into the room, and passing the gilt mirror into which Fanny had told him to look, he stopped a moment.

"Don't do that, Joe!" In an instant, in spite of herself, her love for him rose up in a wave, with fear and pity and anger, too. She came to him, and her voice was shaking. "Oh, Joe—Joe! Can't you see it's all lies? It's so loathsome—every word! And so cheap—so cheap and mean!"

As she spoke, his eyes were rapidly scanning the report he still had in his hands. Again she noticed how tired he was. He looked up at her:

"I know it is! But why didn't you treat it like that? Why did you try to make her keep quiet? Weren't you trying, when I came in?"

"No! No! It was just her odious trick—her pretending!"

"Pretending? How about you? Why did you pretend, when I brought Dwight here, that you'd never laid eyes on him before? Had you or hadn't you? Careful, now! Fanny says it is all here!"

"I'll explain in one word!"

"What's the word? Say it, please—and for God's sake clear this up!"

She was breathing hard, frightened, her mind in a whirl. Oh, to be able to think clearly! Use a little common sense!

"Just a minute!" she gasped. "You'll see in a minute—"

"I see a good deal! It's right in your eyes! What are you looking so scared about! And what did she say about my being old! I am old—and you're young, young! And a beauty—just the kind for Dwight! Don't I know of his love affairs? Wasn't he at it way back in Paris? Hasn't he been—ever since?"

"Be careful, Joe," she cried angrily. But in his condition, nerves on edge, he paid no heed and went rapidly on:

"I'm just a business man! And you've made me feel your contempt for all that! And he's a musician, he's different—he has exactly what you want! So you went to his studio twice a week—for months and months—without letting me know—although he was a friend of mine! And you went to the Ritz and the opera! And then I brought him here to dine! God, how you two must have smiled at each other—when I wasn't looking!"

"Joe! Joe!"

"You lied to me, didn't you, when he came! You say you'll explain it in a word! Well, what's the word? I'm waiting!"

"There isn't any!" Her face was white. "I don't care to explain to you now!" she cried. He looked at her. She could see he was trembling, and she nearly changed her mind. But her anger came again. "I won't!" she thought. "Not tonight!"

"Then you and I are through, you know," he said very huskily. He turned and went into the hall, and a moment later the outer door closed. Ethel sat down and stared blankly.

"I acted like an idiot!"

CHAPTER XXII

As she sat there she grew furious with herself for having bungled so. Why hadn't she explained to him? Why hadn't she simply told him her plan for giving him back his friends? All at once she could hear herself saying what she should have said to Joe:

"I may have been wrong about it, Joe, but I thought the best way to bring you back to all the things you used to love was to let you think *you* were doing it. So I let you and Dwight come together alone. I kept in the background, as I did about getting you into that club of yours. I was afraid to show my hand." On and on she talked to him. Oh, how simple and convincing, strong, and sensible and true. "Why didn't you say it, you little fool? You acted just like a scared young girl found out in doing

something wrong!" She was ready to cry, but checked herself. "At least don't be a baby now. What are you to do about it?" She bit her lip. Now it was too late. She had made it worse—a hundred times! All at once she rose and began to walk. "Oh, rubbish!" she thought, impatiently. "You're not to give up, when everything else in your whole life was going so perfectly splendidly! . . . Why, of course. That's it. I'll call up Nourse, and have him come and explain to Joe how I went to him at the very start."

With a swift feeling of relief Ethel went to the telephone.

"Mr. Nourse is out of town."

"Oh, yes. Thank you. I'd forgotten. When do you expect him back?"

"Not until the end of the week."

As Ethel hung up the receiver she felt a little faint and queer. When Joe came back this evening she would have to face him alone! In vain she angrily told herself that it only needed common sense. The picture of his tired face, nerves all on edge, rose in her mind. The way his jealousy had flared up! No, it would not be easy! She might even—fail with him! At the thought, a foolish panic came. More walking was required. . . . She heard Susette beginning her supper, and she went in and sat with the child. And at first that worked out very well. Soon she was smiling and listening to the ceaseless chatter of the small girl. But suddenly Ethel exclaimed to herself, "Suppose I do fail, after all! If there's a divorce he'll take them both!" She jumped up in a frightened way, and went into her bedroom. She threw herself sobbing on the bed—but in a few minutes regained control with an effort and lay there motionless. The tangle was growing clearer now.

The very best she could hope was to make Joe half believe her, she thought. And that would mean she would have to drop Dwight and all chance of meeting those people he knew. She would live with a Joe so suspicious that she would be under his friend, Fanny Carr. "She'll be my friend, and bring me in touch with whatever other people she likes. I'll have to be nice to them—every one. And I'll live her life. Amy's life." She looked at the large photograph over on Joe's chiffonier. "Perhaps after all I shall be like her. How do I know what she was at my age? As I grow older, all hemmed in, why not stop caring for anything else?"

"Oh, now do let's be sensible!" With an impatient movement of her lithe beautiful figure Ethel was up off the bed and walking the room with grim resolution in her brown eyes. Soon she was much quieter. She felt the warm youth within her rise. There must be a way! So far, so good. But the moment she tried to think what way, again at once she was off her ground. What could she do or say to Joe? Her failure to manage him that afternoon had shaken her confidence in herself. Ethel was only twenty-five, and now she felt even younger than that. All at once in a sickening way her courage oozed; she felt herself ignorant and alone. Why did not Joe come back, she asked. Was he going to stay away all night? And if he did, what would it mean? She remembered what he had said when he left: "Then you and I are through, you know." All right, then what was he going to do! "I don't even know how a man goes about it, if he wants to get a divorce!" And panic seized her as before. "I can't do this all by myself! I can't talk to him as I've got to talk—not till I know just what to say! I bungled it so! I need sound advice! Oh, for somebody to help me!" She thought of Dwight, but she would not go near him! She loathed the very sight of him now! Why had not he told her of those other affairs of his that could rise in this way against herself? Why had he allowed her to do those few little daring things, which looked so cheap and disgusting in the detective's typed report? And besides, if she did want to see him, could she, without being watched by some wretched detective? For the whole town seemed bristling with detectives and police. And the city of New York felt cold. As she lay on her bed, a sudden gay laugh from a neighbouring window recalled to her mind that night long ago, her first in New York, when she had listened excitedly and thought of all the stories here, both sad and comic.

"Well, I'm a story now," she thought. "And I suppose I'm comic!" The angry tears rose in her eyes. Oh, for a real friend! There was Emily Giles, of course, but this was Emily's night out; and besides, in matters of this kind she would be worse than useless. "What I need is a woman who knows this town—and all its ways—and what to do!" As the evening drew on and still Joe did not come, again and again she felt ready to scream. And though she savagely held herself in, each time was harder than the last.

"Something has simply got to be done!" she told herself after one outbreak like that. Then all at once came the recollection of young Mrs. Grewe downstairs. "I must have some one or I'll go mad!" And she hurried to the telephone. But in the hall she stopped and frowned. "No, I won't call her up," she thought. "That inquisitive telephone girl downstairs would begin to gossip about it at once." For the same reason Ethel did not take the elevator. She ran quickly down two flights and rang at Mrs. Grewe's door. There was silence. She waited some moments, then rang again. "Oh, she's out—I know she is!" The thought brought a sickening empty feeling. She would have to face this night alone!

But abruptly the door opened, and a sleepy startled maid looked at her in dull surprise.

"Is she out tonight? Is Mrs. Grewe out?" Ethel asked impatiently.

"Yes—she's out," the girl replied.

But glancing behind her Ethel saw a high hat and an overcoat on a chair, and with a quick little "Oh!" of dismay, she turned and hurried away down the hall. She heard the maid's chuckle behind her. "Oh-h!" She could feel her cheeks burning. And when she got back to her bedroom upstairs, out of the shame and humility rose a fierce anger which downed all her fears at the thought of this night or of anything else. "I'll never be like her!" she exclaimed. "There'll never be a high hat in my hall at this time of night—nor a Boston old maid—nor a snickering telephone girl downstairs! Never! I'll make myself ugly first! For I'm not like you, I'm not like you! I've had a child, to begin with—and I'm going to keep him, he's mine!"

There came again a period of swift determined thinking. And at last with a quick thrill of relief she remembered Mrs. Crothers was coming with Dwight to call the next day. Sally Crothers—Joe's old friend! "If she believed in me—really believed in all that I was trying to do—she could give me just the advice I need! It may be I'm just silly—and she could give me her common sense! She might even talk to Joe herself—and make him realize my whole plan! If only I can get her to help me!"

Ethel went at once to her desk and rapidly wrote a note to Dwight, saying she thought it would be better to let Mrs. Crothers come alone.

"For I could do nothing, with him around. And I've got to do everything!" she thought as she folded the envelope.

In the morning she heard from Joe. When a messenger came with a note, she tore it open and read this:

"Please give this man my suit-case and put in what things I need. I shall stay here at the club awhile—it will be better all around. I am sorry for the scene I made and I don't want another. If you have any real explanation, send me word and I will come. But understand it has got to be real. If it is not we can't go on. I guess you see that."

She read it again. Then glancing up at the messenger, who was plainly curious at the expression on her face, she frowned at him impatiently.

"Will you wait downstairs!" she said. "It will take some little time to find the things my husband wants."

Rid of him, she began again and read the letter with desperate care. Yes, Joe was trying to be fair. To have said he was sorry for that scene was rather decent in him. "Oh, yes, but he'll make another!" she thought. "Don't I know how he is—all tired and nervous and unstrung? If my explanation doesn't seem real he'll fly up and leave me, and then we'll be through!" She clenched the letter and told herself that her explanation must be real. It was her one chance—she must take time, and get good sensible advice. Joe had Fanny Carr about. That was certain. She'd never leave him alone. She was busily bolstering up her side. And Ethel needed somebody, too, on her side—right behind her. Sally Crothers—Joe's old friend!

She packed Joe's things and sent them to him with a little letter: "I am glad you said you were sorry, Joe, for the way you acted was very unfair. You are quite right in waiting now—it is better for both of us to cool down. But my explanation is simple and real—as you will see. I shall send for you in a few days. I love you, dear. I love you."

After that, she spent hours in anxious reflection. Now about Sally Crothers, she thought. Should she tell her the trouble she was in? No, not at once. New Yorkers hate trouble and always fly from it—so she must lead to it gradually. "When she comes I've got to make her like me—very much—so much she's surprised!" To begin with, looks—for looks did count. That much of what Amy had said was true. "But what I must do is not to look like her. Sally Crothers detested her, and I've got to overcome all that. I must show her I'm quite different." For a time Ethel's mind dwelt on details. It must all be so simple, yet not too severe. "For Sally is gay, I understand. What I want is to look halfway between Mrs. Grewe and Emily Giles. Black? No. Dark blue, with that old Rhinestone pin. Wave my hair? No, that's Amy again!"

But from such thoughts about her dress, or her tea table, flowers, the lights in the room, her mind kept darting anxiously off. All this was nothing! What should she say? "It's a woman of brains who is

coming to call. Think of all she knows—and she earns her living—she has a profession of her own! How in the world shall I talk to her? She thinks me like Amy—there's Amy again! Oh, Amy, Amy, I don't want to hate you! You helped me once, you were dear to me, and you had heaps and heaps of good points! But please, please stop coming up in my life!

"Don't get into another panic, my dear. When she comes you must be natural. Your natural self—that always counts. Don't try to show off what you haven't got. Show her only what you have. Make her feel you're young and ready to learn—half mad to learn! No, that won't do—not mad, but keen for everything—interested in her life—in all she does and thinks and feels." She frowned. "No, that's too personal. And you can't be personal in New York—not very—they don't like it here. Every one's too busy. You must be interested in things—the town in general—music—books—people in a general way.

"Here's the kind of a girl who will grow,' she must say, 'and who is worth my taking up!' But will she! Now here's that panic again! And can't you see, you little goose, this is just what may spoil everything? If you're scared, you'll lose! You've got to keep cool every minute she's here! Who is this Sally anyhow? What has she done that you won't do when you're as old as she is? . . . Yes, but don't you strike that note! No woman likes to be reminded that she is ten years older than any other woman on earth. She'll put me down as a cute young thing who has a dangerous way with men. Dwight has praised me to her, of course—but she'll put his liking down to that—the—the—the sex side! I must show her it isn't, that I've got more, that I don't want men but women now! But not too hard or eager, you know. Oh, I must watch her all the time, to see if I'm getting any hold. And then, the minute I see my chance, I must tell her my trouble—no, my big chance—all I was just on the point of doing with Joe, and could do now—if only I had her for a friend!"

Such thinking was spasmodic and often disconnected. Thoughts of Joe kept breaking in, and of what she should do if she failed with him. And again, putting down with an effort all such thoughts and fancies, she took Susette and the baby and went out for a walk in the Park. It was one of those balmy days that come in winter now and then, and Ethel sat down on a bench for a while.

But then she looked around with a start. Who was that on a bench nearby? A fat man with a black moustache, his derby hat tipped over his forehead, and his two small piggish eyes morosely and narrowly watching her. A detective—working for Fanny Carr! Ethel angrily rose and called to Susette and wheeled the baby carriage away. But just as she passed the fat man, a small fat boy ran up to him.

"Say, Pa," whined the urchin. "Buy me a bag of peanuts."

"Like hell I will," the fat man growled.

And Ethel blushed. How absurd she had been!

CHAPTER XXIII

In reply to her note, Dwight had telephoned that Sally would be there at five. Mrs. Crothers arrived at a quarter past. She was a small alert looking woman of thirty-five, slender, almost wiry, dark, with black hair worn over her temples. Her small mouth was strong and willful, but she had nice pleasant eyes. She was wearing a pretty tan hat and grey furs that she put back on her shoulders as she smiled and held out her hand.

"I'm so glad to meet you at last, my dear."

"Oh, thank you," said Ethel quickly. And then, because that sounded too grateful, she added, "Won't you sit down?" in rather a stilted little voice. This woman made her feel so young. "Now don't act like a school-girl!" With an appearance of lazy ease she turned and poked the small logs in the fire. "I do so love wood fires. Don't you?" she said, in carefully easy tones, but she did not hear the answer.

Mrs. Crothers was wearing a trim street suit of brown and dark green. "She dresses as I do, so *that's* all right," thought Ethel. "She's taking me in. So much the better. I'll do the same." And as they talked, she kept throwing glances at the dark face, rather narrow, the small and rather mischievous mouth, amid the grey eyes which looked as though they could be so very good-humoured and friendly. But with a little pang of dismay Ethel saw that these eyes were preoccupied and only half attending. "She has a hundred things on her mind, and she's asking, 'Now let's try to see if there's really anything here worth while.'" The preliminaries were already over. That part at least had gone smoothly enough. "We're off!" thought Ethel excitedly.

"How will you have your tea?" she asked.

"Clear with lemon."

"One lump or two?"

"Three or four."

"Oh, how funny," Ethel laughed. And then she reddened. "You little goose," she exclaimed to herself, "why did you say, 'how funny'?" She poured the tea with a trembling hand and proffered it with a plate of cakes and small toasted crumpets, dainties she had purchased with care at a smart little shop in the neighbourhood. And meanwhile she was answering the questions, pleasant but searching, though thrown out in a casual voice.

"Yes, my home was in Ohio. Such a dear old town," she said. But the next moment she bit her lips, for she had come so near to adding, "I wish I were back this very minute!" What was her visitor saying? She frowned and leaned forward attentively. Something about a small town in Vermont and the funny local politics there. "Where is she leading by that remark?" Oh, yes, suffrage! That was all right!

"Yes, indeed," declared Ethel eagerly, "I'm for suffrage heart and soul! I marched in the parade last Fall! Wasn't it glorious? Were you there?"

"Yes, I marched—"

"With the gardeners?" Ethel blushed again. "Landscape, I mean!" And her visitor smiled.

"Yes, with the gardeners," she said. "There were only four of us, but we felt like the Four Hundred." Ethel giggled excitedly.

"Wasn't it glorious?" she exclaimed. "You ninny!" she thought. "You said that once!" And she hastened to add, "And isn't it perfectly silly for men to try to keep us from marching?"

"You mean your husband doesn't approve?"

"Approve!" Ethel echoed with a sniff. "I'd like to see him disapprove. I have him in fair control, I think." And she knitted her brows in an eager way, for this was a chance to tell how she had done it.

"How long have you been married!" her visitor was asking.

"Let me see. Four years? No, two," she replied, with a quick smile.
"Time does so fly along in this town!"

"It does indeed. It seems hardly any time at all since the days when your husband and I were friends."

"Oh, yes, he has often told me about you!" And Ethel shot a swift anxious look. "I know you don't like him," she wanted to add. "But if you'll only give me a chance I'll show you what I have made of this man—or was making, at least, till all of a sudden right out of the clouds there dropped a fat detective!" She laughed at the thought and then grew rigid. How silly and pointless to laugh like that! Mrs. Crothers was telling now of the old group down about Washington Square, and Ethel was listening hungrily.

"What gorgeous times you must have had," she exclaimed, "in those old days!" The next moment she turned crimson. "I've said it now. 'Old!' I knew I should!" She caught Sally's good-natured smile and felt again like a mere child.

From this moment on she would take care! She avoided personal topics, and growing grave and dignified she turned the conversation from Joe to music, concerts, the opera, "Salome," "Louise." She carefully showed she was up to date, not only in music but in other things, books she had discussed years ago in the club of the little history "prof," and others she had been reading since—Montessori, "Jean Christophe." Hiding her tense anxiety under a manner smooth as oil, she talked politely on and on, and she felt she was doing better now. So much better! No more stupid breaks or girlish gush, but a modern intelligent woman of parts. And a glow of hope rose in her breast. A little more of this, she thought, and she would be ready to break off, and with a sudden appealing smile take her new friend into her confidence, tell of her trouble and ask for advice.

But the smile came from her visitor. Mrs. Crothers had risen and was holding out her hand. And as Ethel stared in dismay at that smile, which displayed such an easy indifference to her and all her view of life, her only woman friend in New York said:

"I'm so sorry I've got to run. I hope you'll come and see me."

From the door in the hallway Ethel came back in a sort of a daze—till her eye lit on the blue china clock on the mantel.

"Seventeen minutes!" she exclaimed. And then after one quick look around, she flung herself on the sofa in tears. "I bored her! How I bored her! How stupid I was, and comic—a child! And then solemn—too solemn—all music and art—and education and—how in the world do I know what I said? Or care! I hate the woman! I hate them all! Seventeen minutes! Isn't that just like New York?"

But from this little storm she soon emerged. Grimly sitting up on the sofa, she reached out a hand icy cold, took the tea-pot and poured out a cup. It was strong now, thank Heaven! And frowning gravely into space, Ethel sat and drank her tea.

CHAPTER XXIV

"Now the one thing," she told herself, "is to keep your nerve and be sensible. For this may decide your whole life, you know. . . All right, what next? What's to be done?"

"I hate Sally Crothers," she began, "but I may go to see her, nevertheless. She asked me to. Didn't mean it, of course, she was plainly bored! No, I won't do it! I loathe the woman! . . . All right, my dear, but who else can you go to? Mrs. Grewe? She's doubtless at home—but there may be that detestable hat, tall, rich and shiny, in her hall. It looked as though it owned her soul! No, thanks—not yet—not for me! . . . Though she told me you soon get used to it. . . ."

"Well, how about going back to Ohio, to the little history prof, and hating all men—one and all! That sounds exceedingly tempting! . . . I won't do it, though—because if I do, it means I'm beaten here—and I'd lose Susette and the baby!— . . . Quiet, now. . . . And then there's Dwight. He will probably call up soon and ask how Sally and I got on. I could go to him this very night! How perfectly disgusting! And yet it's just what Joe deserves! What right had he to believe that of me? . . . Now please keep cool. If I go to Dwight I become exactly like Mrs. Grewe—and I'd have to give up the children.

"No, it's back to Joe on my knees, to beg him to let me stay right here. And I'll succeed—I know I will! But won't I be under Fanny's thumb? And won't I take back Amy's friends? Like a good repentant scared little girl! And eat their rich meals and chatter as they do, and dance and grow old—and push Joe on to make more money—more and more—so that I can get fat and soft—like the rest of these cats!"

Again her face was quivering. But with an effort controlling herself, she went into the nursery. And on the floor with her wee son, slowly rolling a big red ball back and forth to each other, soon again she had grown quiet, almost like her natural self. She took supper alone, and then read a novel, page after page, without comprehending. An hour later she went to bed, and there lay listening to the town—to its numberless voices, distinct and confused, from windows close by and from the street, and from other streets by hundreds and from a million other homes, and from the two rivers and the sea—voices blurred and fused in one. And its tone, to Ethel's ears, was one of utter indifference—good-humoured enough but rather bored with "young things" weeping on its breast.

"Be Mrs. Grewe, if you like," it said, "or Sally Crothers or Fanny Carr. Or go back home to your history prof. Each one of these things has been done before by so many thousands just like you. Nobody cares. You have no neighbours. Do exactly as you like."

"Thank you very much," she said. "I choose to be Sally Crothers first. And if that fails—well, between Fanny Carr and Mrs. Grewe there isn't much choice. Do you think so?"

"Oh, no," said the city. And it yawned. But Ethel lay there thinking.

"Excuse me," she spoke presently. "Sorry to annoy you again—but is there any God about?"

"None," came the sleepy answer. "Do as you like, I tell you."

She opened her eyes and sat up in bed.

"Now I've been getting morbid again! For goodness' sake let's try to be healthy and clear about this!"

And she tried to be. But for some time she made little headway. It was easy to grimly shut her teeth and resolve, "I've got to do this by myself, talk to Joe and simply make him believe me!" But as soon as she came to the details of what she should say to her husband, his face as she had seen it last—worn and nervous, overwrought—kept rising up before her. Could she convince him! "It's my last chance!" If only she knew how to go about it! She wanted to be heroic and face this crisis all alone—but she had been alone so much. Tonight it seemed to Ethel as though she had struggled alone for years. Was it all worth while, she asked herself. She could feel her courage ooze again. Her thinking grew vague and

uneven. . . . And more and more the picture rose of the woman friend she had counted on having—Sally Crothers, who was so clever, an older woman who knew New York, knew what to do in such tangles as this, knew Joe, had known him back in that past which Ethel was trying to raise again. And it was exasperating! "If I could only get at her!" she thought.

Carefully, almost word by word, she went over in her mind her talk with Mrs. Crothers that day, in order to find out her mistakes.

"Do you know what I think?" she said at the end. "I think in the first part you did pretty well. You made breaks and were clumsy, and she was amused—but she rather liked you, nevertheless. At least you were a novelty. But then you went and spoiled it all by making solemn fool remarks about the world in general. And thereupon Sally arose and went. . . . All right, next time I'll be different. I won't be solemn, nor afraid of saying anything incorrect. In fact I'll revel in it! She asked me to come and see her, in a tone which added, 'Don't.' But I'll be incorrect right there. I will go to see her; and what's more, I'll go tomorrow afternoon! And I won't call up first, for she'd say she was out. I'll get into her house and get her downstairs—and I'll break right through all smoothnesses and tell her exactly how and why I've got to have a woman friend! I'll give you the chance of your life, Sally Crothers, to throw out the life-line!

"If you don't I'll—just swim about for awhile. No use in thinking of that, though."

And suddenly she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXV

Mrs. Crothers lived in a small brick house on a side street close to Washington Square. As Ethel looked out from her automobile, how dear and homey it appeared, with such a quiet friendly face. "Now for the plunge." She went up the low steps and rang the bell. Thank Heaven it was a rainy day, for when the maid came Ethel went right in, and the rain made that seem natural. At least no door had been shut in her face. She wanted to get inside this house!

"Is Mrs. Crothers at home?" she asked. The maid was not sure. Ethel gave her a card and was shown into a long cosy room with an old-fashioned air, where a small coal fire looked half asleep. She began to look around her. The walls were lined with book-shelves, with only a picture here and there. No wall-paper. "How funny." She frowned and added, "But it's nice." There was but little furniture, and plenty of room to move about. "What a love of a mirror." It was of gilt, and it reached from floor to ceiling between the two front windows. Gravely she looked at herself in the glass. "Oh, I'm not very excited."

The maid reappeared, and said, "Mrs. Crothers asks you to excuse her. She's sick with a headache this afternoon."

"Oh, what a lie!" thought Ethel. She stood for a moment irresolute, her heart in her mouth. "I will, though!" she decided, and took out another card. "Then take her this little note," she said. And she wrote: "I know I am being quite rude—but if the headache is not too severe will you see me just for a little while! I would not bother you—honestly—but it is something so important—and it must be settled today." It took two of her cards, and even then it was horribly crowded and hard to read. "Never mind," she thought. "That's as far as I'll go. If she can't read that I'm done for!"

The maid had taken the message upstairs.

"Now I've done it, I've gone too far. I'm done for—oh, I'm done for! Well, look about you, Ethel, my love—it's the last look you'll ever get at this room! How dear it is, what taste, what a home. Books, pictures, a piano of course—and the very air is full of the things that have been said here after dinner, over coffee and cigarettes, by all the people you want to know. Not rich nor 'smart' like Newport—just people with minds and hearts alive to the big things that really count, the beautiful things! . . . Good-bye, my dears—you're not very kind."

"She'll be down in a moment," said the maid.

"Thank you!" Ethel had wheeled with a start; and again left alone, she stood without moving. "Well, here you are—you've got your chance! And how do you feel? Plain panicky! Never mind, that's just what will catch her attention! Be panicky! Oh, I am—I am!" And her courage oozed so rapidly that when her hostess came into the room, and with a smile that was rather strained, said "I am so glad to see you—" the girl who confronted her only stared, and suddenly shivered a little. Then she forced a smile and said, "How silly of me to shiver like that."

"Come here by the fire and sit down." Mrs. Crothers' voice was suddenly kind. "Now tell me how I can help you," she said.

"Thank you. Why, it's simply this. I've had trouble with Joe, my husband—just lately—in the last few days. And the trouble is so serious that—it's my whole life—one way or the other. At least it—certainly feels so! And I have no women friends I can go to. They're all his—hers, I mean."

"Hers!"

"Yes. My sister's. She is dead—but very much alive at times—through the friends she left behind her. I've been fighting them all my life, it seems—ever since I married Joe!"

"Why were you fighting them?" Ethel frowned:

"Because they—well, they were all just fat—in body and soul—the women, I mean—and the men were just making money for food and things to keep them so. Do you know what I mean—that kind of New Yorker?"

"I do," said Mrs. Crothers. "Was that the cause of your trouble with Joe!"

"Partly—yes. You see when I tried to shake them off, they wouldn't be shaken—they hung on—because Joe was growing rich all of a sudden. Oh, I got pretty desperate! But then I learned of other friends that Joe had had here long ago—before he married *her*, you know. And I hunted for them—one by one. I could feel they were just what he needed, you see. I mean that back among such friends I hoped he'd stop just making money and get to work—on things he had dreamed of! You understand?"

"I think so—but not fully. Go on in your own way, my dear. Don't try to think. Keep talking."

"Thank you. I was in love with him. There was nobody else, man, woman or child—except Susette. She was Amy's little girl. You see, Mrs. Crothers, when Amy died I was there—I had just come to town. So I stayed with Joe to look after Susette. Then later on I began to feel that he was beginning to care for me. And I didn't like that—on Amy's account, for I worshipped her then. So I broke away and took a job. . . . Oh, what in the world am I getting at!"

"Don't try to think. Just tell me. You took a job. What was it?"

Ethel told of Greesheimer, and then of coming back to Joe, of his poverty and of her nursing Susette, of dreaming of children, of falling in love, of marriage and the birth of her boy.

"But all the time Amy had been there. Do you understand! Like a spirit, I mean! She had Joe first! She had shaped him!"

"Yes—"

"And so when he loved me even more, I do believe, than he ever loved her—still he did the thing she would have wanted. Amy had taught him to show his love by loading money on his wife. And that was what started everything wrong. For he got rich—for my sake—and the money brought Amy's friends back in a horde! Oh, now I'm repeating! I've said all that—"

"Please say it again! You're doing so well!" Ethel told about Fanny and the rest. "I tried to like them—honestly! But I simply couldn't!" she cried.

"Why couldn't you? Tell me plainly just what it was you wanted."

"What I wanted? Plainly? Oh, dear—I can't exactly—"

"What kind of people?"

Ethel frowned.

"Not just eaters!" she exclaimed. "I wanted men and women who—well, who were seeing something big—and beautiful and real in life! Life is so hard and queer in this town—so awfully crowded and mixed up—and empty, somehow. You know how I mean? But they see something in it all. Not clearly—it's way off, you know. And they're busy of course, and by no means saints. They have their worries and their faults and pettiness—they're human, too, But they're looking for something really worth while! Oh, I can't express it—I really can't!"

"Oh, yes you can, you've done quite well," said Mrs. Crothers steadily. "And now to narrow this down to Joe, you wanted him to be like that—in his work and so in his life with you. Was that it?"

"Yes! And he used to be! You must know that!"

"Yes—I knew that. Your husband and I were once very good friends."

"That's it, and I guessed it!" Ethel cried. "I was making wild guesses in the dark. And at last I put my finger on his partner, and we had a talk. It was a talk, a hard one—but I made him believe me in the end. And he told me a little about you—and I wanted to meet you, oh, so much! But he seemed to be out of touch with you, so he took me to Mr. Dwight instead. I had always wanted to sing, you know—and the rest of it—well, Mr. Dwight must have told you."

"Only a little," was the reply. "I don't yet fully understand. How did all this bring trouble with Joe? It's something serious, you said—"

"It's something very nasty." And Ethel began telling of Fanny's revelations. In the midst of it the door-bell rang.

"One moment." And Sally went into the hall. "Whoever it is, say I've a headache," Ethel heard her tell the maid. "The same old headache," Sally remarked as she grimly pulled the portieres. They waited in a tense little silence till the visitor had gone. "And Alice," Sally called to the maid. "If any one else comes, say I'm out." She turned back to Ethel, smiling:

"Suppose you stay to supper. I'll telephone my husband to dine at his club—and we'll go right on with this talk of ours. We'll go on," she added determinedly, "until we have Joe so in our toils that he'll be yours so long as he lives."

Ethel suddenly sniffed and swallowed hard, and said, "Oh, what a dear you are to me!"

Sally looked at her queerly.

"This is to be a talk without tears, but much good sensible planning," she said. "I don't blame you a bit for having been frightened—you've been through an ugly time. But I think with a little common sense—"

"I know," said Ethel, "that's just what I need. And that is why I came to you."

"Thank you," Sally smiled again. "Now go on about Mrs. Carr."

The talk went on, with interruptions for supper and Sally's two small children, far into the evening. And Mrs. Crothers did her share—filling in for Ethel the picture of Joe's old life, his work and dreams, and his first marriage. She told of several meetings with Amy. And all the time she kept watching, probing into this young second wife, skilfully raising Ethel's hopes, her vivid freshness and her youth, her hunger for a life she saw only in dazzling glimpses.

"Do you want my advice about meeting Joe! Then here it is," she said at the end. "I needn't say don't go on your knees—"

"You needn't!"

"I thought so—you're not that kind. And I wouldn't explain too much about Dwight, and those little things you did with him. Make Joe take you on faith or not at all. Have a long talk and make him listen—don't give him a chance to say a word. Talk right on and give him the picture of his two wives, and then let him choose—between letting you go, while he takes her friends, or dropping them and keeping you and finding what he had before. I can help you in that—but before I do, I think you've got to lay a ghost. She's in the way of everything. She has been in your home long enough. And her strength is the fact that you and Joe never mention her name to each other. I wonder if you realize how great a danger that has been. At any rate I'm very sure that you must break the silence now. It has been like a spell between you."

CHAPTER XXVI

The next afternoon she sat waiting for Joe. She had come home the night before feeling so strong and sure of her course. But beginning at the moment when she came into the empty apartment, subtly and by slow degrees again her home had cast its spell, as though the rooms were haunted. "I've got to lay the ghost," she thought. She had telephoned to Joe to come, and he had replied abruptly, "All right, I'll be there about four o'clock." It was just that now. Ethel poked the logs in the fireplace until there was a cheerful blaze. As she straightened up she caught sight of her face in the mirror over the mantel. Even in the firelight how gaunt and strained it looked to her.

"Not very attractive," she grimly thought. "This has got to be done by brains, my dear."

In a moment she heard Joe's key in the door. She heard him taking off his coat and then coming slowly into the room. With an effort she turned and looked at him. His face appeared even more tense and grey than it had two days before; the nerves seemed quivering under the skin. And she felt a pang of pity. "He wasn't to blame for the way he acted, it was his wretched nerves," she thought. "He'll have a break-down after this."

"Well, Ethel!"

"Oh, Joe, I'm so glad you're here." All at once she felt herself change. She had meant to be so firm with him; but now, after one quick anxious look, in a low eager voice she said, "I'm not going to talk much of myself. It won't do any good—I'm sure it won't. I love you, Joe, and I can see you still love me. We need each other. And if we can just be sensible now—and you can only believe in me—"

"God knows I want to, Ethel!" His tone was low, but so sharp and tense that she drew suddenly closer. He turned from her and sank into a chair, with his hands for a moment pressed to his eyes. "I'm sick of this—I'm not myself. Maybe I acted like a fool. . . . Some of that stuff from Fanny Carr doesn't hold together—it's too thin." He looked up at her. "But some of it does. And what you'll have to clear up now is why you never let me know."

"The reason I didn't," she answered quickly, "goes way back into the past. And it's not only about you and me—it's about—about somebody else." She stopped and her throat contracted. She set her teeth. "We must talk about Amy for a while."

There! At last she had brought it out! And she had seen her husband flinch. For a moment both were silent.

"Why!" he asked. She swallowed hard.

"Because we never have before. We've—gone two years without speaking her name. I had no idea how bad that might be." She broke off, for her voice was trembling so. "I don't know how much you've learned in that time—about Amy, I mean—but I've learned a lot, and—I think I'd better tell you. I must, you see, or you won't understand what I've been doing lately. I couldn't have explained before, without speaking of her—and I didn't do that. But I should have, Joe, and I will now—if only you'll be patient and let me do the talking."

"Well!"

"Some of it goes so very far back." She leaned forward with a queer little smile: "Amy was good to me when I came—and I had always worshipped her—I thought she was nearly everything. She made me feel how she—loved you, Joe—she had ambition, urged you on. But—oh, I've got to try to be clear. What kind of ambition was it, Joe! What did you have before you met her? How did you used to look at your work! You were coming up to do big things—but you married her and your work all changed. You threw over ideals to make money for her. And when your partner tried to hold you, Amy tried to break up the firm. Didn't she? Don't you remember?" She waited, but he did not speak. "How hard it is for him," she thought, "to admit a thing against her. This won't be easy." But she felt a little thrill of pride in him.

"So Bill has been talking, has he," he said.

"Yes, I made him." She went on. "Amy set herself against him—and against all your other old friends. Not at first—I want to be fair to her, Joe—don't think I'm blaming just her for all this. I'm sure that at first she was different—she wanted your friends to take her in. Remember those dinners you took her to, and that week-end party up in Vermont!"

Joe looked at her sharply:

"Who told you that?"

"Sally Crothers," said Ethel. "She was there."

"Sally Crothers? You know her!" he demanded. She smiled at the startled look on his face.

"Why, yes," she replied "You see I've been hunting so hard for you, Joe, among those friends you used to have. And I did it without ever letting you know. Dwight, too—he was only one of them." She frowned, and added briskly, "Just incidental, so to speak. But I don't care to talk of him now—I'm speaking only of Amy. And from what Sally Crothers has told me, poor Amy must have had some hard times. They weren't fair to her. If they'd given her time and a real chance, everything might have been different. But they didn't, they turned her down. And feeling hurt and angry—and feeling besides how

she'd have to grow—in her mind, I mean, and her interests, to take any place among people like that—I think she hesitated. You might have helped her then, perhaps—but you didn't—and Amy was lazy, Joe—that had always been a part of her. So she wouldn't make the effort. Instead of coming up to you, she made up her mind to pull you down!"

"That isn't true!" he said harshly. "And if you've been taking for God's own truth what Sally Crothers told you—"

"Stop! Please!" cried Ethel eagerly. "I didn't mean what I said just then—I put it badly—oh, so wrong! She didn't say, 'I'll pull him down.' She told herself your friends were snobs! And she said, 'I have friends who are human, and they're quite good enough for me!' So she went on with Fanny Carr. And others came, the circle grew. And it was all done day by day, and week by week. It happened—and you never knew. Nor did she. It was all so natural. But within a year she was going with people, and so were you, who cared for nothing you had wanted—women with no growth at all. They were all—oh, so common, Joe!"

"That's a bit snobbish, isn't it?"

"You can call it what you like! But I say you can find them all over town—richer and poorer, better and worse—women who want only common things—just clothes and food and what they call love—with not a wish that I can see except for money to live like that! I'm no prig, Joe! I want pretty clothes, and I want to be gay and have nice things. But you can get all I want of that and still get what is so much more!" Her voice dropped; she hurried eagerly on: "Real work you love and which makes you grow, and friends that keep you growing! Ideas and things to know about—and beauty, music, pictures—the opera—books and people, plays—and buildings! The new library—the station—the—the tower down on Madison Square! Your work, Joe! And your old friends! Men and women who really think and feel—not just alive in their bodies! I don't know much about all that. Do you, these days! Mighty little! Because she kept you away from it!"

"No!" But she caught the uncertain look in his eyes.

"Are you so sure? Why didn't she ever go to Paris? She must have been dying to go there and shop, but she never let you take her there. She was afraid to let you go near it again—the Beaux Arts work, the student life—afraid that you'd get thinking! So she kept you here and away from your friends. She even kept Crothers out of your firm. You partner fought her hard on that—and you held out—until one day Crothers came to your office and told you he had changed his mind. You remember?"

"Yes—"

"Did he give you his reason!"

"Yes—he did—"

"Did he bring Amy into it!"

"He did not—"

"He should have, Joe. For just the afternoon before, Amy had made a call on his wife—and had said things insulting enough so that her husband had to break off!"

"Sally told you that!"

"Why should she lie?" Ethel threw a quick glance into Joe's eyes. "He believes it!" she thought, and hurried on: "I've talked to her, Joe, in a way that was bound to get the truth. Oh, I've been hunting hard for you, dear! If Fanny Carr had told her detectives to follow me everywhere I've been, and not just hunt for the nastiness that was in her own mind about me—they could have shown what a hunt it has been! I had so little time, you see! You were all in the balance—you'd waited so long! Even now you've found you can't draw the plans—the ones you used to dream about! I know because I made you try! And I went to Nourse, to your old friend Dwight, and then to Sally Crothers—and asked them all to help me. And as I went on and learned about you as you used to be, I fell in love all over again with the man I found—not Amy's husband—mine, all mine!"

"And I had almost got you back—when Fanny Carr, with her nasty view of me and what I was doing, brought you those perfectly rotten reports? And if you believe them, Joe, I'm through! Go to Nourse or to Sally Crothers, and they'll tell you I have spoken the truth. If you won't believe either them or me, go on alone without me—or else marry Fanny Carr. But if you do believe me and we're to go on together now, you'll have to drop Fanny for good and all, and leave Amy way behind. You'll have to take up your old friends and try to get Crothers into your firm. You may think your business is yours and not mine—"

but if it's my life, it's my business, too! It's like four walls around me now, and I want to break out and so do you—away from mere money! I've watched you, dear—seen what a struggle has gone on inside of you—it has worn you out! haven't you made money enough? Let's leave it, go to Paris, and get to work before it's too late for you to get back what you had! And if there's no money, never mind. It will come later on—but don't let's be afraid if it doesn't. Don't let's be afraid of pain—of fighting hard and suffering, Joe! I want more children! I want you! I want you mine, all mine, my dear—not her husband. Don't you see?"

She had been eagerly leaning toward him. Joe was staring into the fire; the look in his eyes had frightened her and made her hurry to be through.

"What is it?" she asked. And she waited a moment. "Don't you believe what I've told you, Joe?"

"Yes," he said, "I believe all that. I believe a good deal more than that." There was a little silence, and then suddenly he reached for her hand, held it tight and smiled into the fire in a twitching sort of way. "I haven't been quite as blind as you think. I've seen a good deal of what you were doing. But—" he frowned—"I'm older than you are. I know this job of mine clear through—way back to those dreams you spoke of. I've had some hard mean tussles about it—lately—and that's my only excuse for acting like a damn fool as I did—the other day. No use in talking of that any more—or of—Amy either. She's—dead."

"Joe!" Ethel whispered. Tears came in her eyes. He went steadily on:

"She had some fine points—you'll never know. There were things we needn't talk about now. But you've made me see things, too. I don't think she'll be in the way any more—I think we'll be able to speak of her."

"Of course! We must! I want to, dear!" Ethel's voice was shaking.

"Not now." With an effort he rose. "There's something else to worry about. You don't quite know me yet, you see."

"What do you mean?" She had risen, too, and caught his arm. "You're not well, Joe! You're white as a sheet!" He laughed a little.

"I'm not quite right. Something wrong in here, I guess." He pressed one hand to the base of his brain and scowled as though it hurt him. "Nothing serious, probably. But before it goes too far, I want you to know that when I get well I'm going to have a try at all that—the work you spoke of. I'm going to try—but *I may be too late! I may be older than you think!*" The tone of his voice was sharp and strained. "I don't know," he said. "The doctor may. About him—that's another point! It's a nerve specialist we need! Telephone your doctor and have him send one here tonight! I'm sorry, Ethel—damnably!"

CHAPTER XXVII

She got him to bed. The specialist came, and when he had examined Joe he had a talk with Ethel that left her very frightened. After that came days and nights, when Joe, as, though in delirium, said things in a jumble which revealed to her the inner chaos he had gone through in the last few weeks. He talked of Amy loyally, even pleading for her at times, excusing her. And he talked of Ethel in many moods. Now he was angry at her interference; again he saw her side of it, and then his love for her would rise. More often still, he talked about work, and here again the struggle went on. Money, money, money—figures, calculations, schemes and rivals, heavy chances. But suddenly all this was gone, and in a pitiful anger at his own futility he would storm at himself for not being able to put on paper his early dreams.

But the weeks dragged by, and at last she felt he was coming back to sanity. With his partner, then, she conspired to take Joe over to Paris in April, to stay for a year if he would agree. And as part of the conspiracy, Ethel had several meetings with Nourse and Sally Crothers, in the hope of bringing Sally's husband into the firm to be there in Joe's absence. This was far from easy, for Crothers naturally held back; he did not care to commit himself until he knew that Joe would agree. And whether Joe would agree or not was by no means certain. Watching him as his health came back, Ethel wondered how he would be when he returned to the office. How much of what he had said to her, the first night of his illness, had come only from a mind keyed up? How much of his promise would he remember? Men sick and men well are in separate worlds. She could not speak of it to Joe, for the doctor had forbidden it.

At the end of another month, however, Joe was up and about again; and soon, in spite of the doctor's instructions, he was back at his office hard at work. This of course looked ominous. What was he doing? She could not discover. For his partner, over the telephone, was far from satisfactory. Now that he had

Joe back again in that beloved office of theirs, his manner toward Ethel seemed to her to be gruff and unfriendly, to say the least. "Stand-offish to the last degree—as though he believed he could handle Joe all by himself!" she thought in annoyance. At last she sent for him one day and gave him quite a piece of her mind; and although not fully successful, she at least made him acquiesce in the plan she and Sally had concocted for a little gathering to take place one night the following week. It was nearly seven o'clock upon the evening in question; and in her room, at her dressing-table, Ethel was completing her toilet. They were going to dine with the Crothers', and Joe was nervous about it.

"Come on, Ethel, hurry up!"

"Yes, love, I'm almost ready now. Are you sure the car is at the door?"

"It's been there nearly half an hour!"

"That's good. Just a minute more."

As he angrily lit a cigarette, she looked in the glass at him and smiled. "How he dreads it, poor dear," she was thinking, as he strode into the living-room, "meeting Sally and all his old friends." She frowned. "Heaven knows I dread it myself. What am I going to say to them all? And suppose they don't care for me in the least? . . . Well, it will soon be over." Presently Joe popped in at the door:

"Look here! If you're not dressed enough—"

"I'm all ready now," was her placid reply. "Don't you think I look rather nice?"

"Oh, yes. You'll do."

"Thank you, dear. Aren't you going to kiss me!"

"No! Yes! . . . Now come on!"

She threw back her head and laughed at him.

"It's beginning so well," murmured Sally to Ethel, as they went in to dinner. "Steady, my child."

"Oh, I'm all right!" was the reply, and Ethel smiled excitedly. The chorus of exclamations that had greeted Joe and herself had been so warm and gay and real. There had been no time for awkwardness. In a moment after their entrance, the hubbub of talk and laughter had gone right on as though nothing had happened. At table it continued still, and she felt herself borne along on the tide. She looked at Joe, who was on Sally's right, and she thought he was doing exceedingly well. And as for these old friends of his, as she rapidly scanned their faces, they looked far from formidable. On her left side Sally's husband, a tall dark creature with nice eyes, was telling her about the men—two or three writers, an architect and a portrait painter rather well known, whose pictures she had read about. She had already learned from Sally what the women did with themselves. They worked, they went to women's clubs, they dined and did the social side. One of them spoke for suffrage, another was a sculptress, one sang, one had a baby. They did not look solemn in the least. Everything went so naturally.

"Well, here I am at last," she thought. She kept throwing quick little glances about. Was it all so much worth while, she wondered. Yes, they were very pleasant and nice. But she had expected—well, something more, a kind of a brilliancy in their eyes and the things they were saying. For here were Art and Music, Movements, Causes and Ideas, and goodness only knew what else! Here were the people who really saw something richer and deeper in life than the sort of existence Amy had led—great bright vistas leading off from the city as it was today to some dazzling promised land. She thought of the little history "prof." They were so cosy about it here! She did not want them to be "highbrows"—Heaven forbid! But they took it all so easily!

She thought of the struggles she had been through in order to get where she was tonight, the ardent hopes and the despairs, and all the eager planning. And just for a moment there came to her some little realization of those other women still outside, in this city of so many worlds, each with her particular world, her bright and shining goal, her shrine, and pushing and scheming to get in. She recalled the fierce light in Amy's eyes and the tone of her voice: "I may be too late!" Amy had wanted only money, and people like that. But how hard she had wanted it! . . . These people took it so pleasantly; they seemed so snug in their little group. She wondered if she would become like that. No, she decided, most certainly not! And suddenly she realized that this was only one more step in the life she was to lead in this town. These people? For a time perhaps.

Then others—always others! That was how it was in New York.

Ethel gave a queer little laugh—which at once she pretended had been caused by something Sally's husband had said. And she listened to him attentively now. "There's so much time for everything! I'm only twenty-five!" she thought. She turned to the painter on her right, and was soon talking rapidly.

The moments seemed to fly away. Now they had left the men to smoke. But soon the men had followed them, and every one was smoking, and Ethel was trying a cigarette. The talk ran on, about this and that. But over on her side of the room, Sally had led the conversation back to Joe's old student days, to the Beaux Arts and life in the Quarter. Ethel heard snatches from time to time, and she kept throwing vigilant glances over at her husband's face. He seemed to be responding, with a hungriness that thrilled his wife. Again he would fall silent, with an anxious gleam in his eyes. "He's wondering if he's too old!" she thought, and she crossed the room and joined them.

Sally was cleverly drawing him out about some of those early plans of his. And though awkward at first, he was warming up. In the room the hubbub died away. "They're listening to Joe!" thought Ethel. Joe kept talking on and on. Every few moments some one would break in to ask him something, or to raise a little laugh. Ethel tingled with pride in him, and with hope for the success of her scheming.

Now the crucial time arrived. For one by one the guests had gone, till only she and Joe and Nourse remained with Sally and her husband. The moment for springing the great idea had come at last. Nourse was to do the talking. That had been arranged ahead, at a meeting of Nourse and the two wives. But all at once in a panic now, Ethel knew that Nourse would bungle it. Why had she entrusted so much to this man? Had he ever shown tact in his whole life? And why so soon? Oh, it had been rash! The evening had passed so gorgeously. Why not have waited and had other evenings to pave the way and make it sure! She tried to signal to Nourse to stop him, but he could or would not hear! Now he was getting ready to speak.

"Well," he said, rising and turning on Ethel a curious smile, "I guess it's time I was going home."

She stared at him in blank relief. So he had some sense about things, after all.

"But look here, Bill," said her husband, "before you go, let's give these scheming women of ours to understand we don't want 'em to meddle in our affairs."

"Right," growled Nourse. And a moment later the three men confronted two astonished wives, and Bill was gravely announcing, "We've done this thing all by ourselves. The firm is 'Nourse, Lanier and Crothers.' And from this night on we propose to do business without any interference from wives. Understand!" He frowned menacingly. "We settled that this afternoon. And the next thing we decided was that Joe packs up this wife of his, whether she happens to like it or not, and takes her over to Paris. See? And if she tries to keep him from work by yanking him all around to the shops—"

While Nourse growled on in his surly way, Ethel slipped quietly into the hall—where presently Sally with one arm about her was proffering a handkerchief and murmuring.

"Use mine, dear."

CHAPTER XXVIII

On the night before they sailed for France, long after she had gone to bed Ethel came out in her wrapper into the warm dark living-room. There was something she had forgotten to do, and she wanted to get it off her mind. She switched on the light by the doorway, and looked about her smiling, but with a little shiver, too.

The ghost was gone—or nearly so. Already the room had been stripped bare. Only Ethel's desk was left, and a chair or two and the long, heavy table with a lamp at either end. Amy's picture was still on the table, but it lay now on its back and looked up at the ceiling as though it knew it must soon depart. Tomorrow the movers would finish their work. Soon somebody else's things would be here, and somebody else's life would pour in and fill the room and make it new. Somebody else. What kind of a woman? Another Amy, or Fanny Carr, or Sally Crothers or Mrs. Grewe? What a funny, complicated town. On her return a year from now, Ethel had already decided to take a small house near Washington Square. How long would that experiment last! Doubtless in the years ahead she would try other homes, one after the other. "Why do we move so in New York!" She thought of that plan of her husband's for the future city street, with long rows on either hand of huge apartment buildings with receding terraces, numberless hanging gardens looking into the street below. And she wondered whether the city would ever be anything like that? "In New York all things are possible." . . .

"However." Ethel went to her desk and rummaged for paper, pen and ink. Then she took out of a cubby-hole a bulky letter and read it through. It was the "round-robin" come again on its annual journey over the land. It had been in a lonely mining camp, on a cattle ranch, in a mill town and in cities large and small. There were many kinds of handwriting here, and widely different stories of the growth, the swift unfolding, of the lives of a new generation of women. "Girls like me." She read it through.

Then she took up her pen and began to write swiftly:

"I have been here for over three years—but it was hard to write before, because everything was far from clear." She stopped and frowned. "How much shall I tell them?" An eagerness to be frank and tell all was mingled with that feeling of Anglo-Saxon reticence which had been bred in Ethel's soul back in the town in Ohio. "Besides, I haven't time," she thought.

"I feel," she wrote, "as though I were just out of danger—barely out. In danger, I mean, of nervously dashing about after nothing until I got wrinkled and old at forty—nerves in shreds. I might have done that. I have met a nerve specialist lately—and the stories he has told me about women in this town!

"However! I want to make myself clear. Am I a high-brow? Not at all. I want good clothes—I love to shop—and I propose to go on shopping. If you do not, let me tell you, my dears, that the men in New York are like all the rest—and you would soon be leading a very lonely existence! And I don't want that, I want bushels of friends—and some of them men—decidedly! I want to dance and dine about—but I don't want to be religious about it! Nor frantic and get myself into a state!

"Well, but I did start out like that. When I came here to live—" She hesitated. "No, I'd better scratch that out."

"Thank Heaven I got married," she wrote, "and fell in love with my husband." Again she stopped with a quick frown. "And I had a baby. And I began to find something real." Another pause, a long one.

"I had quite a struggle after that. I was all hemmed in—" she stopped again—"by the city I found when I first arrived. But I huffed and I puffed and I hunted about—and at last I discovered our New York—the town we girls used to dream about at home in all those talks we had! Oh, I don't mean I have found it yet—but I've felt it, though, and had one good look. I dined with some people. How silly that sounds. But never mind—the point is not me, but the fact that this city is really and truly crammed full of the things we girls used to get so excited about—Art, you know, and Music of course, and people who make these things their God. The town opens up if you look at it right—and you find Movements—Politics—you hear people talk—you see suffrage parades—I marched in one not long ago feeling like Joan of Arc! And you find men, too, who are doing things. Big schemes for skyscrapers and homes! I mean that our New York is here!"

Again there came a pause in the writing. Her eyes looked excited. She smiled and frowned. Now to finish it off!

"What I want of it all I am not yet sure—for me personally, I mean. But there is my husband, to begin with, and his work that I can help grow—and his old friends. And they are not all. I keep hearing of new ones I must meet—and they are mixed in with all those things I have discovered in the town. A few of these people were born here—but most have come from all over the country. Sometimes I shut my eyes and ask—'Where are you now, all over the land, you others who are to come to New York and be friends of mine and of my children?'

"I want children—more than one. How many I am not quite sure. That's another point—you decide these things." She frowned and scratched this sentence out. "And children grow—and the idea of bringing them up makes me feel very young and humble, too. But in that we are all in the same boat—for the whole country, I suppose, is a good deal the same. What a queer and puzzling, gorgeous age we are just beginning—all of us! I wonder what I shall make of it? What shall I be like ten years from now? How much shall I mean to my husband—and to other men and women? But most of all to women—for we are coming together so! I wonder what we shall make of it all? I wonder how much we women who march—march on and on to everything—are really going to mean in the world!

"Oh, how solemn! Good-night, my dears! A kiss to every one of you!"

She folded her letter with the rest, and then she quickly squeezed them all into a large envelope, which she addressed to Miss Barbara Wells, Bismarck, North Dakota. Ethel's eyes were very bright. She sniffed a little and smiled at herself. "Oh, don't be a baby! It's all over now, you know—I mean it's just beginning!"

She stopped for a moment by the table, with the letter in her hand, and looked down at Amy's picture.

"That is all any one needs to know."

Her look was pitying, tender, but a little curious, too.

"I wonder what you were like at my age! I wonder what you went through, poor dear? . . . But it's over now—all over. All we don't like will fade away, and you'll grow so beautiful again. Susette will love her mother. . . . But she won't be just like you, my dear."

Ethel went slowly out of the room. At the doorway she switched off the light, and the bare, empty room was left in the dark. The photograph was invisible now. On the street below, a motor stopped; and there was a murmur of voices, a laugh. Tomorrow somebody else would be here.

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HIS SECOND WIFE ***

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