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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ONE WOMAN'S LIFE ***

ONE WOMAN'S LIFE

BY ROBERT HERRICK

AUTHOR OF "TOGETHER," "THE HEALER," ETC.

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PART ONE

THE WEST SIDE

I

THE NEW HOME

"Is *that* the house!" Milly Ridge exclaimed disapprovingly.

Her father, a little man, with one knee bent against the unyielding, newly varnished front door, glanced up apprehensively at the figures painted on the glass transom above. In that block of little houses, all exactly alike, he might easily have made a mistake. Reassured he murmured over his shoulder,—"Yes—212—that's right!" and he turned the key again.

Milly frowning petulantly continued her examination of the dirty yellow brick face of her new home. She could not yet acquiesce sufficiently in the fact to mount the long flight of steps that led from the walk to the front door. She looked on up the street, which ran straight as a bowling-alley between two rows of shabby brick houses,—all low, small, mean, unmistakably cheap,—thrown together for little people to live in. West Laurence Avenue was drab and commonplace,—the heart, the crown, the apex of the commonplace. And the girl knew it.... The April breeze, fluttering carelessly through the tubelike street, caught her large hat and tipped it awry. Milly clutched her hat savagely, and something like tears started to her eyes.

"What did you expect, my dear?" Grandmother Ridge demanded with a subtle undercut of reproof. The little old lady, all in black, with a neat bonnet edged with white, stood on the steps midway between her son and her granddaughter, and smiled icily at the girl. Milly recognized that smile. It was more deadly to her than a curse—symbol of mocking age. She tossed her head, the sole retort that youth was permitted to give age.

Indeed, she could not have described her disappointment intelligibly. All she knew was that ever since their hasty breakfast in the dirty railroad station beside the great lake her spirits had begun to go down, and had kept on dropping as the family progressed slowly in the stuffy street-car, mile after mile, through this vast prairie wilderness of brick buildings. She knew instinctively that they were getting farther and farther from the region where "nice people" lived. She had never before been in this great city, yet something told her that they were journeying block by block towards the outskirts,—the *hinterland* of the sprawling city. (Only Milly didn't know the word *hinterland*.) She had gradually ceased to reply to her father's cheerful comments on the features of the West Side landscape. And now she was very near tears.

She was sixteen—it was the spring of '86. Ever since her mother's death, two years before, the family had done "light housekeeping" in three rooms in St. Louis. This 212 West Laurence Avenue, Chicago, was to be her first home—this slab of a dirty yellow wall!

"There!" her father muttered with satisfaction, as, after a last twist of key and thump of knee, he effected an entrance. Grandma Ridge moved up the flight of steps, the girl following reluctantly.

"See, mother," little Horatio Ridge said, jingling his keys, "it's fresh and clean!"

The new varnish smelt poignantly. The fresh paint clung insidiously to the feet.

"And it's light too, mother, isn't it?" He turned quickly from the cavernous gloom of the rear rooms and pointed to a side window in the hall where one-sixteenth of the arc of the firmament was visible between the brick walls of the adjoining houses.

"The dining-room's downstairs—that makes it roomier," he continued, throwing open at random a door. "There's more room than you'd think from the outside."

Milly and her grandmother peered downwards into the black hole from which came a mouldy odor.

"Oh, father, why did you come 'way out here!" Milly wailed.

"Why not?" Horatio retorted defensively. "You didn't expect a house on the lake front, did you?"

Just what she had expected from this new turn in the family destiny was not clear to herself. But ever since it had been decided that they were to have a house of their own in Chicago—her father having at last secured a position that promised some permanence—the girl's buoyant imagination had begun to soar, and out of all the fragments of her experience derived by her transient residence in Indianapolis, Kansas City, and Omaha—not to mention St. Louis—she had created a wonderful composite—the ideal American home, architecturally ambitious, suburban in tone. In some of the cities where she had lived the Ridges had tarried as long as three years, and each time, since she was a very little girl in short dresses and had left Indianapolis crying over the doll in her arms, she had believed they were permanently settled: this was to be their home for always.

Her mother had had the same forlorn, homesick hope, but each time it was doomed to disappointment. Always they had had to move on,—to make a new circle of temporary acquaintances, to learn the ropes of new streets and shops and schools all over again. Always it was "business" that did the mischief,—the failure of "business" here or the hope of better "business" somewhere else that had routed them out of their temporary shelter. Horatio Ridge was "travelling" for one firm or another in drugs and chemicals: he was of an optimistic and sanguine temperament. Milly's mother, less hopeful by nature, had gradually succumbed under the perpetual tearing up of her thin roots, and finally faded away altogether in the light housekeeping phase of their existence in St. Louis.

Milly was sanguine like her father, and she had the other advantage of youth over her mother. So she had hoped again—overwhelmingly—of Chicago. But as she gazed at the row of pallid houses and counted three "To rent" signs in the cobwebby front windows opposite, she knew in her heart that this was not the end—not this, for her! It was another shift, another compromise to be endured, another disappointment to be overcome.

"Well, daughter, what d'ye think of your new home?" Little Horatio's blustering tone betrayed his timidity before the passionate criticism of youth. Milly turned on him with flashing blue eyes.

"I think, my dear," her grandmother announced primly, "that instead of finding fault with your father's selection of a home, you had better look at it first."

Grandma Ridge was a tiny lady, quite frail, with neat bands of iron-gray hair curling over well-shaped ears. Her voice was soft and low,—the kind of voice which her generation described as "ladylike." But Milly knew what lay beneath its gentle surface. Milly did not love her grandmother. Milly's mother had not loved the little old lady. It was extremely doubtful if any one had ever loved her. Mrs. Ridge embodied unpleasant duties; she was a vessel of unwelcome reproof that could be counted upon to spill over at raw moments, like this one.

"You'll like it first rate, Milly," her father continued robustly, "once you get settled in it. It's a great bargain, the real estate man said so, almost new and freshly painted and papered. It's close to the cars and Hoppers"—Hoppers' was the Chicago firm that had offered Horatio his latest opportunity. "And I don't care about travelling all over Illinois to get to my work...."

Curiosity compelled Milly to follow the others up the narrow stairs that reached from the hall to

the floor above. Milly was a tall, well-developed girl for sixteen, already quite as large as her father and enough of a woman physically to bully the tiny grandmother when she wished to. Her face was now prettily suffused with color due to her resentment, and her blue eyes moist with unshed tears. She glanced into the small front chamber which had been decorated with a pink paper and robin's-egg blue paint.

"Pretty, ain't it?" Horatio observed, seeking his crumb of appreciation.

"It's a very nice home, Horatio—I'm sure you displayed excellent taste in your choice," his mother replied.

"Pretty? ... It's just awful!" Milly burst forth, unable to control herself longer. She felt that she should surely die if she were condemned to sleep in that ugly chamber even for a few months. Yet the house was on the whole a better one than any that the peripatetic Ridges had thus far achieved. It was fully as good as most of those that her acquaintances lived in. But it cruelly shamed Milly's expectations.

"It's perfectly horrid,—a nasty, cheap, ugly little box, and 'way out here on the West Side." Somehow Milly had already divined the coming degradation of the West Side. "I don't see how you can tell father such stories, grandma.... He ought to have waited for us before he took a house."

With that she turned her back on the whole affair and whisked down the narrow stairs, leaving her elders to swallow their emotions while inspecting the tin bath-tub in the closet bath-room.

"Milly has her mother's temper," Mrs. Ridge observed sourly.

"She'll come 'round all right," Horatio replied hopefully.

Milly squirmed, but on the whole she "took her medicine" as well as most human beings....

Meantime she stood before the dusty window in the front room eyeing the dirty street, dabbing the tears from her eyes with her handkerchief, welling with resentment at her fate.

Years later she remembered the fierce emotions of that dreary April day when she had first beheld the little block house on West Laurence Avenue, recalling vividly her rage of rebellion at her father and her fate, the hot disgust in her soul that she should be forced to endure such mean surroundings. "And," she would say then to the friend to whom she happened to be giving a vivacious account of the incident, "it was just as mean and ugly and depressing as I thought it.... I can see the place now—the horror of that basement dining-room and the smells! My dear, it was just common West Side, you know."

But how did Milly Ridge at sixteen perceive all this? What gave her the sense of social distinctions,—of place and condition,—at her age, with her limited, even if much-travelled experience of American cities? To read this mystery will be to understand Milly Ridge—and something of America as well.

II

A VICTORY FOR MILLY

The lease for the house had been signed, however, and for a five years' term. The glib agent had taken advantage of Horatio's new fervor for being settled, as well as his ignorance of the city. The lease was a fact that even Milly's impetuous will could not surmount—for the present.

Somehow during the next weeks the Ridge furniture was assembled from the various places where it had been cached since the last impermanent experiment in housekeeping. It was a fantastic assortment, as Milly realized afresh when it was unpacked. As a basis there were a few pieces of old southern mahogany, much battered, but with a fine air about them still. These were the contributions of Milly's mother, who had been of a Kentucky family. To these had been added here and there pieces of many different styles and shades of modern inelegance. One layer of the conglomerate was specially distasteful to Milly. That was the black-walnut "parlor set," covered with a faded green velvet, the contribution of Grandma Ridge from her Pennsylvania home. It still seemed to the little old lady of the first water as it had been when it adorned Judge Ridge's brick house in Euston, Pa. Milly naturally had other views of this treasure. Somewhere she had learned that the living room of a modern household was no longer called the "parlor," by those who knew, but the "drawing-room," and with the same unerring instinct she had discovered the ignominy of this early Victorian heritage. She did not loathe the shiny "quartered oak" dining-room pieces—her father's venture in an opulent moment—nor the dingy pine bedroom sets, nor even the worn "ingrain" carpets, as she did these precious relics of her grandmother's home.

Over them she fought her first successful battle with the older generation for her woman's rights—and won. She directed the colored men who were hired to unpack the household goods to put

the green velvet horrors in the obscure rear parlor. In the front room she had placed the battered mahogany, and had just rejected the figured parlor carpet when her grandmother came upon her unawares. The old lady had slipped in noiselessly through the area door.

"My dear!" she remarked softly, a deceitful smile on her thin lips. "Why, my dear!" Milly hated this tender appellation, scenting the hypocrisy in it. "Haven't you made a mistake? I *think* this is the parlor."

"Of course it is the parlor," Milly admitted briskly, wheeling to meet the cold gray eyes that were fixed on her.

"Then why, may I ask, is the parlor furni—"

"Because I am doing this to suit myself," the girl promptly explained. "In *this* house, I mean to have things suit *me*, grandma," she added firmly. It was just as well to settle the matter at once.

"But, my dear," the old lady stammered, helpless before the audacity of the revolt. "I'm sure nobody wants to cross you—but—but—where's the carpet?"

"I'm not going to have that ugly green rag staring at me any longer!"

"My dear—"

"Don't 'my dear' me any more, grandma, please!"

Mrs. Ridge gasped, closed her thin lips tightly, then emitted,—

"Mildred, I'm afraid you are not quite yourself to-day," and she retreated to the rear room, where in the gloom were piled her rejected idols.

After an interval she returned to the fight, gliding noiselessly forth from the gloom. She was a very small and a very frail little body, and as Milly put it she was "always sneaking about the house like a ghost."

"I see that the kitchen things have not been touched, and the dining-room furniture—"

"And they won't be—until I have this room to suit me.... Sam, please move that desk a little nearer the window.... There!"

It was characteristic of Milly to begin with the show part of the premises first and then work backwards to the fundamentals, pushing confusion slowly before her. The old lady watched the colored man move the rickety mahogany back and forth under Milly's orders for a few more minutes, then her thin lips tightened ominously.

"I think your father may have something to say about this, Mildred!"

"He'll be all right if you don't stir him up," the girl replied with assurance. She walked across the room to her grandmother. "See here, grandma, I'm 'most seventeen now and big for my age—"

"Please-say 'large,' Mildred."

"Large then—'most a woman. And this is my father's home—and *mine*—until he gets married again, which of course he won't do as long as I am here to look after him.... And, grandma, I mean to be the head of this house."

The old lady drooped.

"Very well, my dear, I see only too plainly the results of your poor mother's—"

"Grandma!" the girl flashed warningly.

"If I'm not wanted here—"

"You're not—now! The best thing for you to do is to go straight back to the boarding-house and read your *Christian Vindicator* until I'm ready for you to move in."

"At the rate you are going it will be some days before your father can have the use of his home."

"A week at least I should say."

"And he must pay board another week for all of us!"

"I suppose so—we must live somewhere, mustn't we?" Milly remarked sweetly.

So with a final shrug of her tiny shoulders the little old lady let herself out of the front door, stealthily betook herself down the long flight of steps and, without a backward glance, headed for the boarding-house. Milly watched her out of sight from the front window.

"Thank heaven, she's really gone!" she muttered. "Always snooping about like a cat,—prying and fussing. She's such a nuisance, poor grandma."

It was neither said nor felt ill-naturedly. Milly was generous with all the world, liked everybody, including her grandmother, who was a perpetual thorn,—liked her least of anybody in the world because of her stealthy ways and her petty bullying, also because of the close watch she kept over the family purse when Milly wished to thrust her prodigal hand therein. She made the excuse to herself when she was harsh with the old lady,— "And she was so mean to poor mama,—"

that gentle, soft, weak southern mother, whom Milly had abused while living and now adored—as is the habit of imperfect mortals....

So with a lighter heart, having routed the old lady, at least for this afternoon, Milly continued to set up the broken and shabby household goods to suit herself. She coaxed the colored boys into considerable activity with her persuasive ways, having an inherited capacity for getting work out of lazy and emotional help, who respond to the personal touch. By dusk, when her father came, she had the two front rooms arranged to her liking. Sam was hanging a bulky steel engraving—"Windsor Castle with a View of Eton"—raising and lowering it patiently at Milly's orders. It was the most ambitious work of art that the family possessed, yet she felt it was not really suited, and accepted it provisionally, consigning it mentally to the large scrap-heap of Ridge belongings which she had already begun in the back yard.

"Well, daughter," Mr. Ridge called out cheerily from the open door, "how you're getting on?"

"Oh, papa!" (Somewhere in the course of her wanderings Milly had learned not to say "paw.")

She flew to the little man and hugged him enthusiastically.

"I'm so dead tired—I've worked every minute, haven't I, Sam?"

"She sure has," the boy chuckled admiringly, "kep us all agoin' too!"

"How do you like it, papa?"

Milly led the little man into the front room and waited breathlessly for his approbation. It was her first attempt in the delicate art of household arrangement.

"It's fine—it's all right!" Horatio commented amiably, twisting an unlighted cigar between his teeth and surveying the room dubiously. His tone implied bewilderment. He was a creature of habits, even if they were peripatetic habits: he missed the parlor furniture and the green rug. They meant home to him. Looking into the rear cavern where Milly had thrust all the furniture she had not the courage to scrap, he observed slyly,—*"What'll your grandmother say?"*

"She's said it," Milly laughed.

Horatio chuckled. This was woman's business, and wise male that he was he maintained an amused neutrality.

"Ain't you most unpacked, Milly? I'm getting dead tired of boarding."

"Oh, I've just begun, really! You don't know what time it takes to settle a house properly."

"Didn't think we had so much stuff."

"We haven't *anything* fit to use—that's the trouble. We must get some new things right away. I want a rug for this room first."

"Isn't there a carpet?"

"A carpet! Papa, they don't use carpets any more. A nice, soft rug, with a border 'round it...."

Horatio retreated towards the door. But before they had reached the boarding-house, the first advance towards Milly's Ideal of the New Home had been plotted. The rug was settled. Milly was to meet her father in the city at noon on the morrow and select one. Arm in arm, father and daughter came up the steps,—charming picture of family intimacy.

"So nice to see father and daughter such friends!" one of the boarding-house ladies observed to Grandma Ridge.

"Oh, yes," the old lady admitted with a chilly smile. She knew what these demonstrations cost in cash from her son's leaky pockets. If she had lived later, doubtless she would have called Milly a cunning grafter.

Milly smiled upon the interested stranger, good humoredly, as she always smiled. She was feeling very tired after her day's exertions, but happily content with her first efforts to realize her ambition,—to have "some place for herself." What she meant by having a place for herself in the world she did not yet understand of course. Nor what she could do with it, having achieved it. It was an instinct, blind in the manner of instincts, of her dependent womanhood. She was quite sure that something must happen,—a something that would give her a horizon more spacious than that of the West Side.

Meantime she ate the unappetizing food put before her with good grace, and smiled and chatted with all the dreary spinsters of the boarding-house table.

MILLY GOES TO CHURCH

The ugly little house was at last got to rights, at least as much so as Milly's limited means permitted. Horatio's resources were squeezed to the last dollar, and the piano came in on credit. Then the family moved in, and soon the girl's restless gaze turned outwards.

She must have people for her little world,—people to visit with, to talk to. From her doll years Milly had loved people indiscriminately. She must have them about her, to play with, to interest, to arouse interest in herself. Wherever she derived this social passion—obviously not from Grandma Ridge—it had been and would always be the dominant note of her life. Later, in her more sophisticated and more introspective phase, she would proclaim it as a creed: "People are the most interesting thing in life—just humans!" And she would count her gregariousness as a virtue. But as yet it was unconscious, an animal instinct for the herd. And she was lonely the first days at West Laurence Avenue.

Everywhere the family had put foot to earth in its wanderings, Milly had acquired friends easily,—at school, in church, among the neighbors,—what chance afforded from the mass. She wept even on her departure from St. Louis, which she had hated because of the light housekeeping, at the thought of losing familiar faces. A number of her casual friends came to the station to see her off, as they always did. She kissed them all, and swore to each that she would write, which she promptly forgot to do. But she loved them all, just the same. And now that the Ridge destiny seemed to be settled with fair prospects of permanency in this new, untried prairie city,—a huddle of a million or more souls,—she cast her eager eyes about for the conquest that must be made....

The social hegira from the West Side of the city had already begun: the more prosperous with social aspirations were dropping away, moving to the north or the south, along the Lake. Some of the older families still lingered, rooted in associations, hesitant before new fashions, and these, Milly at once divined, lived in the old-fashioned brick and stone houses along the Boulevard that crossed West Laurence Avenue just below the Ridge home. These seats of the mighty on Western Boulevard might not be grand, but they alone of all the neighborhood had something of the aristocratic air.

This spacious boulevard was the place she chose for her daily stroll with her grandmother, taking the old lady, who had betrayed an interest in a cemetery, up and down Western Boulevard, past the large houses where the long front windows were draped with spotless lace curtains. She learned somehow that the old-fashioned brick house, with broad eaves and wooden pillars, belonged to the Claxtons. The grounds about the house ran even to the back yards of the West Laurence Avenue block,—indeed had originally included all that land,—for the Claxtons were an old family as age went in Chicago, and General Claxton was a prominent man in the state. She also knew that the more modern stone house on the farther corner was occupied by the Walter Kemps; that Mrs. Kemp had been a Claxton; and that Mr. Kemp was a rising young banker in the city. How Milly had found out all this in the few days she had lived in the neighborhood would be hard to explain: such information she acquired unconsciously, as one does the character of the weather....

On the next corner north of the Claxton place was a large church, with a tall spire, and an adjoining parish house. They were built of the same cream-colored stone, which had grown sallow under the smoke, with chocolate-brown trimmings, like a deep edging to a mourning handkerchief. Its appearance pleased Milly. She felt sure that the best people of the neighborhood worshipped here, and so to this dignified edifice she led her father and grandmother the first Sunday after they were installed in their new home.

It proved to be the Second Presbyterian Church. The Ridges were orthodox, *i.e.* Congregational: the judge had been deacon in Euston, Pa., and Mrs. Ridge talked of "sending for her papers" and finding the nearest congregation of her old faith. But Milly promptly announced that "everybody went to the Presbyterian church here." She was satisfied with the air and the appearance of the congregation that first Sunday and made her father promise to take seats for the family. The old lady, content to have the wayward Horatio committed to any sort of church-going, made slight objection. It mattered little to Horatio himself. In religion he was catholic: he was ready to stand up in any evangelical church, dressed in his best, and boom forth the hymns in his bass voice. The choice of church was a matter to be left to the women, like the color of the wallpaper, or the quality of crockery,—affairs of delicate discrimination. Moreover, he was often out of the city over Sunday on his business trips and did not have to go to church.

It was impossible that Milly, dressed very becomingly in her new gray suit, should escape notice after the first Sunday. Her lovely bronze hair escaped from her round hat engagingly. Her soft blue eyes looked up at the minister appealingly. She had the attractive air of youth and health and good looks. The second Sunday the minister's wife, prompted by her husband, spoke to Mrs. Ridge and called soon after. She liked Milly—minister's wives usually did—and she approved of the grandmother, who had an aristocratic air, in her decent black, her thin, gray face. "They seem really nice people," Mrs. Borland reported to her husband, "but a very ordinary home. He travels for the Hoppers'. Her mother was a southerner." (Milly had got that in somehow,—"My mother's home was Kentucky, you know.")... So, thanks to the church, here was Milly at last launched on the West Side and in a fair way of knowing people.

She began going to vespers—it was a new custom then, during Lent—and she was faithful at the

Wednesday evening prayer meetings. The Borlands had a daughter, of about Milly's age,—a thin, anæmic girl who took to Milly's warmth and eagerness at once. As Milly succinctly summed up the minister's family,—“They're from Worcester, Mass.” To come from New England seemed to Milly to give the proper stamp of respectability, while Virginia gave aristocracy.

Mrs. Borland introduced Milly to Mrs. Walter Kemp after the service one Sunday. Milly knew, as we have seen, that Mrs. Kemp had been a Claxton, and that the general still lived in the ample mansion which he had built in the early fifties when he had transferred his fortunes from Virginia to the prairie city. They were altogether the most considerable people Milly had ever encountered. And so when Eleanor Kemp called at the little West Laurence Avenue house, Milly was breathless. Not that Milly was a snob. She was as kind to the colored choreman as to the minister's wife, smiling and good-humored with every one. But she had a keen sense of differences. Unerringly she reached out her hands to the “best” as she understood the best,—the men and women who were “nice,” who were pleasant to know. And Mrs. Kemp, then a young married woman of twenty-seven or eight, seemed to the enthusiastic girl quite adorable. She was tall and slender, with fine oval features and clear brown skin and dark hair. Her manner was rather distant at first and awed Milly.

“Oh, you're so beautiful,—you don't mind my saying it!” she exclaimed the first time they were alone in the Kemp house.

“You funny child!” the older woman laughed, quite won. And that was the phrase she used invariably of Milly Ridge,—“That funny child!” varied occasionally by “That astonishing child!” even when the child had become a woman of thirty. There would always be something of the breathless, impulsive child in Milly Ridge.

After that first visit Milly went home to arrange a tea-table like Eleanor Kemp's. She found among the discarded remnants of the family furniture a small round table without a leg. She had it repaired and set up her tea-table near the black marble fireplace. The next time the banker's wife came to call she was able to offer her a cup of tea, with sliced lemon, quite as a matter of course, after the manner that Mrs. Kemp had handed it to her the week before. Milly was not crudely imitative: she was selectively imitative, and for the present she had chosen Mrs. Kemp for her model.

For the most part they met at the Kemp house. The young married woman liked her new rôle of guide and experienced friend to Milly; she also liked the admiration that Milly sincerely, copiously poured forth on all occasions. When Milly praised the ugly house and its furniture, she might smile in a superior way, for she was “travelled,” had visited “the chief capitals of Europe,”—as well as Washington and New York,—and knew perfectly well that the solid decoration of her library and drawing-room was far from good style. The Kemps had already secured their lot on the south side of the city near the Lake. The plans for their new house were being drawn by a well-known eastern architect, and they were merely waiting before building until Mr. Kemp should find himself sufficiently prosperous to maintain the sort of house that the architect had designed for a rising young western banker.

“Oh, dear,” Milly sighed, “you will be moving soon—and there'll be nobody left around here for me to know.”

Eleanor Kemp smiled.

“You know what I mean!... People like you and your mother.”

“You may not live here always,” her friend prophesied.

“I hope not. But papa seems perfectly content—he's taken a five years' lease of that horrid house. I just knew it wasn't the right place as soon as I saw it!”

The older woman laughed at Milly's despair.

“There's time yet for something to happen.”

Milly blushed happily. There was only one sort of something to happen for her,—the right sort of marriage. Milly, as Mrs. Kemp confided to her husband, was a girl with a “future,” and that future could be only a matrimonial one. Her new friend good naturedly did what she could for Milly by putting her in the way of meeting people. At her own house and her mother's, across the street, Milly saw a number of people who came into her life helpfully later on. General Claxton was still at that time a considerable political figure in the middle west, had been congressman and was spoken of for Senator. Jolly, plump Mrs. Claxton maintained a large, informal hospitality of the Virginia sort, and to the big brick house came all kinds of people,—southerners with quaint accents and formal manners, young Englishmen on their way to the wild northwest, down-state politicians, as well as the merchant aristocracy of the city. Thus Milly as a mere girl had her first opportunity of peeping at the larger world in the homely, high-studded rooms and on the generous porches of the Claxton house, and enjoyed it immensely.

The church had thus far done a good deal for Milly.

For some time it remained the staple of her social existence,—that sallow, cream-colored pile, in which the congregation had already so shrunken by removals that the worshippers rattled around in the big building like dried peas in a pod. Milly became a member of the pastor's Bible class and an ardent worker in the Young Women's Guild. She was looked upon favorably as a right-

mindful and religious young woman. She had joined the church some years before, shortly after the death of her mother. Her first religious fervor lasted rather more than a year and was dying out when the family moved from St. Louis. Its revival at the Second Presbyterian was of a purely institutional character. Although even Grandma Ridge called her a "good girl," Milly was too healthy a young person to be really absorbed by questions of salvation. Her religion was a social habit, like the habit of wearing fresh underclothes and her best dress on the seventh day, having a late breakfast and responding to the din of the church bells with other ceremonially dressed folk. She believed what she heard in church as she believed everything that was spoken with authority. It would have seemed to her very dreadful to question the great dogmas of Heaven, Hell, the Atonement, the Resurrection, etc. But they meant absolutely nothing to her: they did not come into practical relation with her life as did the ugly little box of her home and the people she knew, and she had no taste for abstractions.

Milly was "good." She tried to have a helpful influence upon her companions, especially upon young men who seemed to need an influence more than others: she wanted to induce them not to swear, to smoke, to drink—or be "bad,"—a vague state of unrealized vice. She encouraged them to go to church by letting them escort her. It was the proper way of displaying right intentions to lead good lives. When one young man who had been a member of the Bible class was found to have taken money from Mr. Kemp's bank, where he was employed, and indulged in riotous living with it, Milly felt depressed for several days,—accused herself of not having done her utmost to bring this lost soul to the Saviour.

Yet Milly was no prig,—at least not much of a one. For almost all her waking hours her mind was occupied with totally mundane affairs, and she was never much concerned about her own salvation. It seemed so far off—in the hazy distances of stupid middle age or beyond. So, like thousands upon thousands of other young women of her day, she appeared at the Second Presbyterian every Sunday morning, looking her freshest and her best, and with engaging zest, if with a somewhat wandering mind, sang,—

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord!"

It was a wholly meaningless social function, this, and useful to the girl. Later charity might take its place. Horatio Ridge, who had never qualified as a church member while his wife lived, knowing his own unregenerate habits and having a healthy-minded male's aversion to hypocrisy, now went to church with his daughter quite regularly. He felt that it was a good thing,—the right thing for the girl, in some way insuring her woman's safety in this wicked world, if not her salvation in the next.

They made a pretty picture together, father and daughter,—the girl with the wide blue eyes and open mouth, standing shoulder to shoulder with the little man, each with one gloved hand grasping an edge of the hymn-book and singing, Milly in a high soprano,—

"Nearer, my God, to Thee!"

and Horatio, rumbling behind a little uncertainly,—

"Nearer to Thee—to THEE!"

IV

MILLY COMPLETES HER EDUCATION

"Milly," Mrs. Kemp remarked thoughtfully, "aren't you going to complete your education?"

Milly translated this formidable phrase in a flash,—

"You mean go to school any more? Why should I?"

It was a warm June day. Milly had been reading to Mrs. Kemp, who was sewing. The book was "Romola." Milly had found quite dull its solid pages of description of old Florence sparsely relieved by conversation, and after a futile attempt to discover more thrilling matter farther on had abandoned the book altogether in favor of talk, which always interested her more than anything else in the world.

"Why should I go to school?" she repeated.

"You are only sixteen."

"Seventeen—in September," Milly promptly corrected.

Mrs. Kemp laughed.

"I didn't finish school until I was eighteen."

"School is so stupid," Milly sighed, with a little grimace. "I hate getting things out of books."

She had never been distinguished in school,—far from it. Only by real labor had she been able to

keep up with her classes.

"I guess the schools I went to weren't much good," she added.

She saw herself behind a desk at the high school she had last attended in St. Louis. In front of her sat a dried, sallow, uncheerful woman of great age, ready to pounce upon her and expose her ignorance before the jeering class. The girls and the boys at the school were not "refined"—she knew that now. No, she did not want any more school of that sort.... Besides, what use could an education be, if she were not to teach? And Milly had not the faintest idea of becoming a teacher.

"Do you think a girl needs to know a lot of stuff—stupid things in books?" she asked.

"Women must have a better education than they once did," Eleanor Kemp replied with conviction. She refrained from explaining that a girl like Milly, with no social background, might marry "to advantage" on her looks, but she would need something more to maintain any desirable position in the world. Such ideas were getting into the air these days.

"I'm going to take some music lessons," Milly yawned.

"You have a good mind," her friend persisted flatteringly. "Do you know French?"

"A little," Milly admitted dubiously.

"German?"

Milly shook her head positively.

"Latin?"

"Latin! What for?"

"I had two years of Latin. It's ... it's cultivating."

Milly glanced at the load of new books on the library table. She knew that the Kemps read together a great deal. They aspired to "stand for the best things" in the ambitious young city,—for art, music, and all the rest. She was somewhat awed.

"But what's the use of a girl's knowing all that?" she demanded practically.

If a woman knew how to "write a good letter," when she was married, and could keep the house accounts when there were any, and was bright and entertaining enough to amuse her wearied male, she had all the education she needed. That was Milly's idea.

"French, now, is so useful when one travels," Mrs. Kemp explained.

"Oh, if one travels," Milly agreed vaguely.

Later Mrs. Kemp returned to the attack and extolled the advantages, social and intellectual, that came with a Good Education. She described the Ashland Institute, where she had completed her own education and of which she was a recently elected trustee.

"Mrs. Mason, the principal, is a very cultivated lady—speaks all the modern languages and has such a refining influence. I know you would like her."

Milly had always attended public school. It had never occurred to her father that while the state was willing to provide an education he should go to the expense of buying one privately for his daughter. Of course Milly knew that there were fashionable boarding-schools. She wanted to attend a Sacred Heart convent school where one of her intimates—a Louisville girl—had been sent, but the mere idea had shocked Mrs. Ridge, senior, unutterably.

It seemed that the Ashland Institute, according to Mrs. Kemp, was an altogether superior sort of place, and Milly was at last thoroughly fired with the idea that she should "finish herself" there. Her grandmother agreed that more schooling would not hurt Milly, but demurred at the expense. Horatio was easily convinced that it was the only proper school for his daughter. So the following September Milly was once more a pupil, enrolled in classes of "literature" (with a handbook), "art" (with a handbook), "science" (handbook), "mental and moral philosophy" (lectures), and French (*La tulipe noire*). Milly liked Mrs. Mason, a personable lady, who always addressed her pupils as "young ladies." And Milly was quickly fascinated by the professor of mental and moral philosophy, a delicate-looking young college graduate. She worked very hard, studying her lessons far into the night, memorizing long lists of names, dates, maxims, learning by rote whatever was contained in those dreary handbooks.

Even in those days this was not all there was to education for girls like Milly. There were a few young women, east and west, bold enough to go to college. But as yet their example had no influence upon the general education dealt out to girls. Most girls whose parents had any sort of ambition went through the high school with their brothers, and then went to work—if they had to—or got married. Even for the privileged few who could afford "superior advantages" the ideas about women's education were chaos. Mrs. Mason solved the problem at the Ashland Institute as well as any, with a little of this and of that, elegant information conveyed chiefly in handbooks about "literature" and "art"; for women were assumed to be the "artistic" sex as they were the ornamental. There were, besides, deportment, dancing, and music, also ornamental. The only practical occupations were keeping house and nursing, and if a girl was obliged to do such things, she did not seek the aristocratic "finishing school." The "home" was the proper place for

all that. In Milly's case the "home" was adequately run by her grandmother with the help of one colored servant. So Horatio, being just able to afford the tuition, Milly was privileged to "finish herself."

Of course she forgot all the facts so laboriously acquired within a short six months after she read her little essay on "Plato's Conception of the Beautiful" at the graduation exercises. (That effort, by the way, lay heavy on the neighborhood for weeks, but was pronounced a triumph. It was certainly a masterpiece of fearless quotation.)... Learning passed over Milly like a summer sea over a shining sandbar and left no trace behind, none whatever. It was the same way with music. Milly could sing church hymns in a pleasant voice and thumped a little heavily on the piano after learning her piece.... She used to say, years afterward,—"I have no gifts; I was never clever with books. I like life, people!" and she would stretch out her hands gropingly to the broad horizon.

This year at the Ashland Institute helped to enlarge that horizon somewhat. And one other thing she got with the absurd meal of schooling,—a vague but influential something,—an "ideal of American womanhood." That was the way Mrs. Mason phrased it in her eloquent talks to the girls.

The other teachers, especially the pale young professor of mental and moral philosophy, referred to it indirectly as the moving force of the new world. This was the "formative influence" of the school,—the quality that the Institute prided itself on above all else.

It was of a poetic shade, composed in equal parts of art, literature, and religion. Milly absorbed it at church, where the minister spoke almost tearfully about "the mission of young womanhood to elevate the ideals of the race," or more colloquially in Bible class as the duty of "being a good influence" in life, especially men's lives. She got it also in what books she read,—especially in Tennyson and in every novel, as well as in the few plays she saw. There it was embodied as Woman of Romance,—sublime, divine, mysterious, with a heavenly mission to reform, ennoble, uplift—men, of course,—in a word to make over the world. The idea of it had come down from the darkness of the middle ages,—that smelly and benighted period,—had inflamed all romance, and was now spreading its last miasmatic touch over the close of the nineteenth century. All this, to be sure, Milly never knew.

She merely began to feel self-conscious, as a member of her sex,—a being apart from men and somehow superior to them, without the same appetites and low ideals, and with her own peculiar and sacred function to perform for humanity. Ordinarily this heavy ideal of her sex did not burden Milly. She obeyed her thoroughly healthy instincts, chief of which was "to have a good time," to be loved and petted by people. But occasionally in her more emotional moods, when she was singing hymns or watching the sun depart in golden mists, she experienced exalted sensations of the beauty and the glory of life—of *her* life—and what it all might mean to Some One (a man).

When she undressed before the tiny mirror, she considered her attractive young body with a delicious sense of mystery that would some day be revealed, then plunged into bed, and buried herself chastely beneath the cover, her heart throbbing.

If Milly had had any real education, she might have recalled the teaching of science in such moments and realized that her soft tissue was composed of common elements, her special function was but a universal means to a universal end; that even her long, thick hair with its glint of gold, her soft eyes, her creamy skin and rounding breasts and sloping thighs were all designed for the simple purpose of continuing the species. (But in those days they did not talk of such things even in the handbooks, and Milly would have called any one who dared mention them in her presence a "materialist"—a word she had heard in the philosophy class.) Having no one to mention to her such improper truths, she remained in the pleasant illusion of literature and religion that she was altogether a superior creation,—something mysterious to be worshipped and preserved. Not colored Jenny in the kitchen, who had three or four illegitimate children! Not even all the girls in her Sunday-school class, some of whom worked in stores, but the cultivated, refined women who made Homes for Heroes. This belief was like Poetry: it satisfied and sustained—and it gave an unconscious impulse to her whole life, that she was never able wholly to escape....

And this was what they called Education in those days.

V

MILLY EXPERIMENTS

Of course Milly had "beaux," as she called them then. There had never been a time since she was trusted to navigate herself alone upon the street when she had not attracted to herself other little persons—chiefly girls, to be sure. For as Milly was wont to confess in her palmiest days when men flocked around her, she was a "woman's woman" (and hence inferentially a man's woman, too). Milly very sincerely preferred her own sex as constant companions. They were more expressive, communicative, rational. Men were useful: they brought candies, flowers, theatre parties.

But now the era of young men as distinguished from girls had arrived. Boys in long trousers with dark upper lips hung about the West Laurence Avenue house on warm evenings, composing Milly's celebrated "stoop parties," or wandered with her arm in arm up the broad boulevard to the Park. And at the Claxtons and the Kemps she met older men who paid attention to the vivacious, well-developed school-girl.

"Milly will take care of herself," Mrs. Claxton remarked to her daughter when the school question was up, and when the latter deplored the unchaperoned condition of her young friend, she added,

"That was the way in Virginia. A girl had a lot of beaux—and she got no harm from it, if she were a good girl."

Milly was a good girl without any doubt, astonishing as it may seem. Milly Ridge had passed through the seventeen years of her existence and at least four different public schools without knowing anything about "sex hygiene." That married women had babies and that somehow these were due to the presence of men in the household was the limit of her sex knowledge. Beyond that it was not "nice" for a girl to delve, and Milly was very scrupulous about being "nice." Nice girls did not discuss such things. Once when she was fifteen a woman she knew had "gone to the bad" and Milly had been very curious about it, as she was later about the existence of bad women generally. This state of virginal ignorance was due more to her normal health than to any superior delicacy. As one man meaningly insinuated, Milly was not yet "awake." He apparently desired the privilege of awakening her, but she eluded him safely.

When these older men began to call, Milly entertained them quite formally in the little front room, discussing books with them and telling her little stories, while her father smoked his cigar in the rear room. She was conscious always of Grandma Ridge's keen ears pricked to attention behind the smooth curls of gray hair. It was astonishing how much the old lady could overhear and misinterpret!...

Almost all these young men, clerks and drummers and ranchers, were hopelessly, stupidly dull, and Milly knew it. Their idea of entertainment was the theatre or lopping about the long steps, listening to her chatter. When they took her "buggy-riding," they might try clumsily to put their arms around her. She would pretend not to notice and lean forward slightly to avoid the embrace....

Her first really sentimental encounter came at the end of a long day's picnicking on the hot sands of the lake beach. Harold—ultimately she forgot his last name—had taken her up the shore after supper. They had scrambled to the top of the clayey bluff and sat there in a thicket, looking out over the dimpled water, hot, uncomfortable, self-conscious. His hand had strayed to hers, and she had let him hold it, caress the stubby fingers in his thin ones, aware that hers was quite a homely hand, her poorest "point." She knew somehow that he wanted to kiss her, and she wondered what she should do if he tried,—whether she should be offended or let him "just once." He was a handsome, bashful boy, and she felt fond of him.

But when he had got his courage to the point, she drew off quickly, and to distract his attention exclaimed,—*"See! What's that?"* They looked across the broad surface of the lake and saw a tiny rim of pure gold swell upwards from the waves.

"It's just the moon!"

"How beautiful it is," Milly sighed.

Again when his arm came stealing about her she moved away murmuring, "No, no." And so they went back, awkwardly silent, to the others, who were telling stories about a blazing camp-fire they had thought it proper to build.... After that Harold came to see her quite regularly, and at last declared his love in a stumbling, boyish fashion. But Milly dismissed him—he was only a clerk at Hoppers'—without hesitation. "We are both too young, dear," she said. He had tried to kiss her hand, and somehow he managed so awkwardly that their heads bumped. Then he had gone away to Colorado to recover. For some months they exchanged boy and girl letters, which she kept for years tied up with ribbon. After a time he ceased to write, and she thought nothing of it, as her busy little world was peopled with new figures. Then there came wedding cards from Denver and at first she could not remember who this Harold Stevens about to marry Miss Glazier, could be. Her first affair, a pallid little romance that had not given her any real excitement!

Afterwards in moods of retrospection Milly would say: "However I didn't get into trouble as a girl, with no mother, and such an easy, unsuspecting father, I don't know. Think of it, my dear, out almost every night, dances, rides, picnics, theatres. Perhaps the men were better those days or the girls more innocent."

There was one episode, however, of these earlier years that left a deeper mark.

VI

MILLY LEARNS

The friend who at the opportune moment had offered Horatio his point of stability at Hoppers' was Henry Snowden,—a handsome, talkative man of forty-five. He was manager of a department in the mail-order house, with the ambition of becoming one of the numerous firm. It was he who had put Horatio in the hands of the real estate firm that had resulted in the West Laurence Avenue House. Snowden, with his wife and two grown children, lived up the Boulevard, some distance from the Kemps. Mrs. Snowden was a rather fat lady a few years older than her husband, with a mid-western nasal voice. Milly thought her "common,"—a word she had learned from Eleanor Kemp,—and the daughter, who was in one of the lower classes of the Institute, was like her mother. During the first months in Chicago the Snowdens were the people Milly saw most of.

Horatio liked to have the Snowdens in for what he called a "quiet rubber of whist" with a pitcher of cider, a box of cheap cigars, and a plate of apples on the table. Grandma Ridge sat in the dining-room, reading her *Christian Vindicator*, while Milly entertained her friends on the steps or visited at the Kemps. Occasionally she was induced to take a hand in the game. She liked Mr. Snowden. He was more the gentleman than most of her father's business friends. With his trim, grizzled mustache and his eye-glass he looked almost professional, she thought. He treated Milly gallantly, brought her flowers occasionally, and took her with his daughter to the theatre. He seemed much younger than his wife, and Milly rather pitied him for being married to her. She felt that it must have been a mistake of his youth. Her father was proud of the friendship and would repeat often,—"Snow's a smart man, I can tell you. There's a great future for Snow at Hoppers'."

The Snowdens had an old-fashioned house with a stable, and kept a horse. Mr. Snowden was fond of driving, and had always a fast horse. He would come on a Saturday afternoon or Sunday and take Ridge for a drive. One Saturday afternoon he drove up to the house, and seeing Milly in the front window—it was a warm April day of their second year—motioned her to come outside.

"Papa is not home yet," she said, patting the horse.

"I know he isn't," Snowden remarked jerkily. "Didn't come for him—came for *you*—jump in!"

Milly looked at him joyously with her glowing, child's eyes.

"Really? You want me! But I'm not dressed."

"You're all right—jump in—it's warm enough." And Milly without further urging got into the buggy.

They went out through the boulevard to the new parkway, and when they reached the broad open road in the park, Snowden let his horse out, and they spun for a mile or more breathlessly. Milly's cheeks glowed, and her eyes danced. She was afraid that he might turn back at the end of the drive. But he kept on into a region that was almost country. Snowden talked in nervous sentences about the horse, then about Horatio, who, he said, was doing finely in the business. "He'll get on," he said, and Milly felt that Mr. Snowden was the family's good genius.

"He's a good fellow—I suppose he'll marry again, one of these days."

"No, he won't!" Milly replied promptly. "Not so long as he has me."

"What'll he do when he loses you?"

"He won't lose me."

"Oh, you'll be married, Milly, 'fore you know it."

She shook her head.

"Not until I meet the right man," she said, and she explained volubly her lofty ideals of matrimony.

Snowden agreed with her. He became personal, confiding, insinuated even that his marriage had been a mistake—of ignorance and youth. Milly, who was otherwise sympathetic, thought this was not nice of him, even if Mrs. Snowden was pudgy and common and old. A woman gave so much, she felt, in marriage that she should be insured against her defects.... Snowden said that he was living for his children. Milly thought that quite right and tried to turn the conversation.

The horse looked around as if to ask how much farther his master meant to go over this rough country road. It was getting late and the sun was sinking towards the flat prairie. Milly began to feel unaccountably worried and suggested turning back. Instead the man cut the horse with his whip so that he shot forward down the narrow road. The buggy rocked and swayed, while Milly clung to the side. Snowden looked at her and smiled triumphantly. His face came nearer hers. Milly thought it handsome, but it was unpleasantly flushed, and Milly drew away.

Suddenly she found herself in the grasp of her companion's free arm. He was whispering things into her ear.

"You make me mad—I—"

"Don't, Mr. Snowden,—please, please don't!" Milly cried, struggling.

The horse stopped altogether and looked around at them.

"Let me go!" she cried. But now abandoning the lines he held her in both his arms, his hot breath

was close to her face, his lips seeking hers. Then she bit him,—bit him so hard with her firm teeth that he drew away with a cry, loosening his grip. She wriggled out of his embrace and scrambled to the ground before he knew what she was doing and began to run down the road. Snowden gathered up the lines and followed after her, calling,—“Milly, Milly—Miss Ridge,” in a penitent, frightened voice. For some time she paid no attention until he shouted,—“You’ll never get anywhere that way!” The buggy was abreast of her now. “Do get in! I won’t—touch you.”

She turned upon him with all the fire of her youth.

“You—a respectable man—with a wife—and my father’s friend—you!”

“Yes, I know,” he said, like a whipped dog. “But don’t run off—I’ll get out and let you drive back alone.”

There was a cart coming on slowly behind them. Milly marched past the buggy haughtily and walked towards it. Snowden followed close behind, pleading, apologizing. She knew that he was afraid she would speak to the driver of the cart, and despised him.

“Milly, don’t,” he groaned.

She walked stiffly by the cart, whose driver eyed the scene with a slow grin. She paid no attention, however, to Snowden’s entreaties. She was secretly proud of herself for her magnanimity in not appealing to the stranger, for the manner in which she was conducting herself. But after a mile or so, it became quite dark and she felt weary. She stumbled, sat down beside the road. The buggy stopped automatically.

“If you’ll only get in and drive home, Miss Ridge,” Snowden said humbly, and prepared to dismount. “It’s a good eight miles to the boulevard and your folks will be worried.”

With a gesture that waved him back to his place Milly got into the buggy and the horse started.

“I didn’t mean—I am sorry—”

“Don’t speak to me ever again, Mr. Snowden,” Milly flamed. She sat bolt upright in her corner of the seat, drawing her skirt under her as if afraid it might touch him. Snowden drove rapidly, and thus without a word exchanged they returned. As they came near the corner of West Laurence Avenue, Snowden spoke again,—

“I know you can’t forgive me—but I hope you won’t let your father know. It would hurt him and—”

It was a very mean thing to say, and she knew it. Afterwards she thought of many spirited and apposite words she might have spoken, but at the moment all she could do was to fling herself haughtily out of the buggy as it drew up before the curb and without a word or glance march stiffly up the steps, where her father sat smoking his after-dinner cigar.

“Why, Milly,” he exclaimed, “where’ve you been?”

She stalked past him into the house. She could hear her father ask Snowden to stop and have some supper, and Snowden’s refusal.

“You’ll be over for a game later, Snow?”

“Guess not, Horace,” and the buggy drove off.

Then for the first time it came over her what it would mean if she should follow her first impulse and tell her father what had happened. Mr. Snowden was not merely his most intimate friend, but in a way his superior. If she should make things unpleasant between them, it might be serious. So when her grandmother came tiptoeing into Milly’s room to see why she did not come down for her supper, Milly merely said she was too tired to eat.

“What’s happened?”

“That nasty Snowden man,” Milly spluttered, “tried to kiss me and I had to—to fight him.... Don’t tell father!”

The little old lady was very much disturbed, but she did not tell her son. Her policy was one of discreet silence about “unpleasant things” if they could be covered up. And this was the kind of event that women were capable of managing themselves, as Milly had managed....

Milly lay awake long hours that night, her heart beating loudly, her busy mind reviewing the experience, and though her resentment did not lessen as the hours wore on and she murmured to herself,—“Horrid, nasty beast!” yet she became aware of another sensation. If—if things had been different—she—well—it—might, and then she buried her head in the pillow more ashamed than ever.

At last she had learned something of the real nature of men, and never again in her long experience with the other sex was she unaware of “what things meant.” Whenever a man was concerned, one must always expect this possibility. And she began to despise the weaker sex.

For some days the Snowdens did not come for cards. Horatio seemed depressed. He would sit reading his paper through to the small advertisements, or wander out by himself to a beer garden near by. When the social circle is as small as the Ridges’, such a state of affairs means real deprivation, and Milly, who did not approve of the beer garden any more than did her

grandmother, wondered how she could restore the old harmony between the two families.

But before anything came of her good-natured intention fate arranged pleasantly to relieve her of the responsibility.

VII

MILLY SEES MORE OF THE WORLD

The Kemps had a cottage at one of the Wisconsin lakes, and Eleanor Kemp invited Milly to make them a month's visit. The girl's imagination was aflame with excitement: it was to her Newport or Bar Harbor or Aix. There was first the question of clothes. Although Mrs. Kemp assured her that they lived very quietly at Como, Milly knew that the Casses, the Gilberts, the Shards had summer homes there, and the place was as gay as anything in this part of the country. Mrs. Kemp might say, "Milly, you're pretty enough for any place just as you are!" But Milly was woman enough to know what *that* meant between women.

Her allowance was spent, four months in advance as usual, but Horatio was easily brought to see the exceptionality of this event, and even old Mrs. Ridge was moved to give from her hoard. It was felt to be something in the nature of an investment for the girl's future. So Milly departed with a new trunk and a number of fresh summer gowns.

"Have a good time, daughter!" Horatio Ridge shouted as the car moved off, and he thought he had done his best for his child, even if he had had to borrow a hundred dollars from his friend Snowden.

Milly was sure she was about to have the most wonderful experience of her life.

Afterwards she might laugh over the excitement that first country-house visit had caused, and recall the ugly little brown gabled cottage on the shore of the hot lake, that did not even faintly resemble its Italian namesake, with the simple diversions of driving about the dusty, flat country, varied by "veranda parties" and moonlight rows with the rare young men who dared to stay away from business through the week. All of life, the sages tell us, is largely a matter of proportion. Como, Wisconsin, was breathless excitement to Milly Ridge at eighteen, as she testified to her hostess in a thousand joyous little ways.

And there was the inevitable man,—a cousin of the Claxton tribe, who was a young lawyer in Baltimore. He spent a week at the lake, almost every minute with Milly.

"You've simply fascinated him, my dear," Eleanor Kemp reported, delightedly. "And they're very good people, I assure you—he's a Harvard man."

It was the first time Milly had met on intimate terms a graduate of a large university. In those days "Harvard" and "Yale" were titles of aristocratic magic, as good as Rome or Oxford.

"He thinks you so unspoiled," her friend added. "I've asked him to stay another week."

So the two boated and walked and sat out beside the lake until the stars grew dim—and nothing ever came of it! Milly had her little extravagant imaginings about this well-bred young man with his distinguished manner; she did her best to please—and nothing came of it. Why? she asked herself afterward. He had held her hand and talked about "the woman who gives purpose to a man's life" and all that. (Alas, that plebeian paw of Milly's!)

Then he had left and sent her a five-pound box of candy from the metropolis, with a correct little note, assuring her that he could never forget those days he had spent with her by the lake of Como. Years afterward on an Atlantic steamer she met a sandy-haired, stoutish American, who introduced himself with the apology,—

"You're so like a girl I knew once out West—at some lake in Wisconsin—"

"And you are Harrison Plummer," she said promptly. "I shouldn't have known *you*," she added maliciously, surveying the work of time. She felt that her plebeian hands were revenged: he was quite ordinary. His wife was with him and four uninteresting children, and he seemed bored.... That had been her Alpine height at eighteen. The heights seem lower at thirty-five.

Even if this affair didn't prove to be "the real, right thing," Milly gained a good deal from her Como visit. Her social perspective was greatly enlarged by the acquaintances she made there. It was long before the day of the motor, the launch, the formal house party, but the families who sought rural relief from the city along the shores of the Wisconsin lake lived in a liberal, easy manner. They had horses and carriages a plenty and entertained hospitably. They did not use red cotton table-cloths (which Grandma Ridge insisted upon to save washing), and if there were few men-servants, there was an abundance of tidy maids. It gave Milly unconsciously a conception of how people lived in circles remote from West Laurence Avenue, and behind her pretty eyes there formed a blind purpose of pushing on into this unknown territory. "I had my own way to make socially," she said afterwards, half in apology, half in pride. "I had no mother to bring me out in society—I had to make my own friends!"

It was easy, to be sure, in those days for a pretty, vivacious girl with pleasant manners to go where she would. Society was democratic, in a flux, without pretence. Like went with like as they always will, but the social game was very simple, not a definite career, even for a woman. Many of these good people said "folks" and "ain't" and "doos," and nobody thought the worse of them for that. And they were kind,—quick to help a young and attractive girl, who "would make a good wife for some man."

So after her month with Mrs. Kemp, Milly was urged to spend a week at the Gilberts, which easily stretched to two. The Gilberts were young "North Side" people, and much richer than the Kemps. Roy Gilbert had the rare distinction in those days of describing himself merely as "capitalist," thanks to his father's exertions and denials. He was lazy and good-natured and much in love with his young wife, who was unduly religious and hoped to "steady" Milly. Apart from this obsession she was an affectionate and pretty woman, rather given to rich food and sentimental novels. She had been a poor girl herself, of a good New York family, and life had not been easy until one fine day Roy Gilbert had sailed into Watch Hill on his yacht and fallen in love with her. Some such destiny, she hoped, would come to Milly Ridge....

When at last, one drearily hot September day, Milly got back to the little box of a house on West Laurence Avenue, home seemed unendurably sordid and mean, stifling. Her father was sitting on the stoop in his shirt-sleeves, and had eased his feet by pushing off his shoes. Discipline had grown lax in Milly's absence. Her first sensation of revolt came at that moment.

"Oh, father—you oughtn't to look like that!" she said, kissing him.

"What's the harm? Nobody's home 'round here. All your swell friends are at the seashore."

"But, father!"

"Well, Milly, so you decided to come home at last?"

Grandma Ridge had crept out from the house and was smiling icily. Secretly both the older people were pleased with Milly's social success, but they tempered their feelings in good puritan fashion with a note of reproof.

That evening the Snowdens came in for the game of cards. Snowden was plainly embarrassed at meeting Milly. "Good evening, Mr. Snowden, how are you? and Mrs. Snowden?" she asked graciously, with her new air of aloofness, as if he were an utter stranger. "You've come to play cards. I'm so glad—papa enjoys having you so much!"

She felt that she was handling the situation like a perfect lady, and she no longer had any real resentment. She even consented to take a hand in the game. They were much excited about an atrocious murder that had happened only a few doors away. Old Leonard Sweet, who had grown rich in the contracting business, had been found dead in his kitchen. His son-in-law—a dissipated young man whom Milly knew slightly—was suspected of the crime. It was thought that the two had had a quarrel about money, and the young man had shot his father-in-law. Milly remembered old Sweet quite vividly. He used to sit on his stoop in his stocking feet, even on Sundays when all the neighborhood was going by to church,—very shocking to Milly's sense of propriety. And the boy had hung around saloons. Now where was he?

"Well, daughter, can't you tell us what you did at Co-mo?" Horatio urged....

No, decidedly, this sort of thing would not do for Milly!

VIII

MILLY'S CAMPAIGN

Almost at once Milly began the first important campaign of her life—to move the household to a more advantageous neighborhood. One morning she said casually at breakfast,—

"The Kemps are going to their new house when they come in from the Lake.... Why can't we live some place where there are nice people?"

"What's the matter with this?" Horatio asked, crowding flannel cakes into his mouth.

"Oh!" Milly exclaimed witheringly. "My friends are all moving away."

"You forget that your father has two years more of his lease of this house," her grandmother remarked severely.

And the campaign was on, not to be relaxed until the family abandoned the West Side a year later. It was a campaign fought in many subtle feminine ways, chiefly between Milly and her grandmother. Needless to say, the family atmosphere was not always comfortable for the mild Horatio.

"It all comes of your ambition to go with rich people," Mrs. Ridge declared. "Since your visit at the Lake, you have been discontented."

"I was never contented with *this!*" Milly retorted quite truthfully. What the old lady regarded as a fault, Milly considered a virtue.

"And you are neglecting your church work to go to parties."

"Oh, grandma!" the girl exclaimed wearily. "Chicago isn't Euston, Pa., grandma!"

As if the young people's clubs of the Second Presbyterian Church could satisfy the social aspirations of a Milly Ridge! She was fast becoming conscious of the prize that had been given her—her charm and her beauty—and an indefinable force was driving her on to obtain the necessary means of self-exploitation.

It was true, as her grandmother said, that more and more this autumn Milly was away from her home. Mrs. Gilbert had not forgotten her, nor the other people she had met at the Lake. More and more she was being asked to dinners and dances, and spent many nights with good-natured friends.

"She might as well board over there," Horatio remarked forlornly, "for all I see of the girl."

"Milly is a selfish girl," her grandmother commented severely.

"She's young, and she wants her fling. Guess we'd better see if we can't give it to her, mother."

Horatio was no fighter, especially of his own womenkind. Even the old lady's judgment was disturbed by the dazzle of Milly's social conquests.

"She'll be married before long," they said.

Meanwhile Milly was learning the fine social distinctions between the south and the north sides of the city. The Kemps' new house on Granger Avenue was very rich and handsome like its many substantial neighbors, but Milly already knew enough to prefer the Gilberts' on the North Drive, which, if smaller, had more style. And in spite of all the miles of solid prosperity and comfort in the great south side of the city, Milly quickly perceived that the really nicest people had tucked themselves in along the north shore.

Somewhere about this time Milly acquired two lively young friends, Sally and Vivie Norton, daughters of a railroad man who had recently been moved to Chicago from the East. Sally Norton was small and blonde and gay. She laughed overmuch. Vivie was tall and sentimental,—a brunette. They came once to the West Laurence Avenue house for Sunday supper. Horatio did not like the sisters; he called them in his simple way "Giggle" and "Simper." The Nortons lived not far from the Lake on East Acacia Street, and that became for Milly the symbol of the all-desirable. She spoke firmly of the advantages of East Acacia Street as a residence—she had even picked out the house, the last but one in the same row of stone-front boxes where the Nortons lived.

It made Horatio restless. Like a good father he wished to indulge his only child in every way—to do his best for her. But with his salary of three thousand dollars he could barely give Milly the generous allowance she needed and always spent in advance. Rise at Hoppers' was slow, although sure, and the only way for him to enlarge Milly's horizon was by going into business for himself. He began to talk of schemes, said he was tired of "working for others all his life." Milly's ambitions were contagious.

After one of the family conflicts, Grandma invaded Milly's bedroom, which was quite irritating to the young woman.

"Mildred," she began ominously. "Do you realize what you are doing to your father?"

"The rent is only thirty dollars a month more, grandma," Milly replied, reverting to the last topic under discussion. "Papa can take it out of my allowance." (Milly was magnificently optimistic about the expansiveness of her allowance.) "Anyhow, I don't see why I can't live near my friends and have a decent—"

The old lady's lips tightened.

"In my days young girls did not pretend to decide where their parents should live."

"These aren't your days, grandma, thank heaven!... If a girl is going to get anything out of life—"

"You've had a great deal—"

"Thanks to the friends I've made for myself."

"It might be better if you cared less to go with folks above you—"

"Above me!" the exasperated girl flashed. "Who's above me? Nelly Kemp? Sally Norton?—Above me!"

That was the flaming note of Milly's intense Americanism. As a social, human being she recognized no superiors. There were richer, cleverer, better educated women, no doubt, but in this year of salvation and hope, 1890, there were none "above her." Never!...

Mrs. Ridge discreetly shifted the point of attack.

"It might be disastrous for your father if you were to break up his home."

"You talk so tragically, grandma! Who's thinking of breaking up homes? Just moving a couple of miles across the city to another house in another street. What difference does it make to a man what old house he comes home to after his work is done?"

"You forget his church relations, Milly."

"You seem to think there are no churches on the North Side."

"But he's made his place here—and Dr. Barlow has a good influence upon him."

Milly knew quite well the significance of these words. There had been a time when Horatio did not come home every night sober, and did not go to church on Sundays. When the little old lady wished to check the soaring ambition of her granddaughter, she had but to refer to this dark period in the Ridge history. Milly did not like to think of those dreary days, and was inclined to put the responsibility for them upon her dead mother. "If she'd only known how to manage him—" For with all men Milly thought it was simply a question of management.

"Well," she announced at last. "I'm tired and want to go to bed. Come, Cheriki, darling!" Cheriki was a fuzzy toy spaniel, the gift of an admirer. Milly poked the animal from her bed, and the old lady, who loathed dogs, scuttled out of the room. She had been routed again. Knowing Milly's obstinate nature, she felt that she must battle daily for the right.

But Milly did not return to the attack for some time. She stayed at home for several evenings and was very sweet with her father. She ostentatiously refused some alluring invitations and was quite cheerful about it. "She must give up these parties—she could not always be accepting the Nortons' hospitality, etc." But Milly was not a nagger, at least not with men. Hers was a pleasant, cheerful nature, and she bathed the West Laurence Avenue house in several beams of sunshine.

"She's a good girl, mother," Horatio said proudly. "And she's all we've got. It would be a pity not to give her what she wants."

A complete expression of the submissive attitude of the new parent!

"It may not be good for her," Grandma Ridge objected, after her generation.

"Well, if she only marries right."

More and more it was in their minds that Milly was destined to make "a great match." Purely as a business matter that must be taken into account. So Horatio thought harder about getting into business for himself, and his little corner of the world revolved more and more about the desires of a woman.

Fortunately for the peace of the Ridge household, the Kemps invited Milly to go to New York with them in the spring. They were still furnishing the new house and had in mind some pictures. Mr. Kemp had rather "gone in for art" of late, and the banking business had been good.... To Milly, who had never been on a sleeping-car in her life (the Ridge migrations hitherto having been accomplished in day coaches because of economy and because Grandma Ridge dreaded night travel), it was a thrilling prospect. Her feeling for Eleanor Kemp had been dimmed somewhat by the acquisition of newer and gayer friends, but it revived into a brilliant glow.

"You dear thing!... You're sure I won't be in the way?... It will be too heavenly for words!"

To her husband Mrs. Kemp reported Milly's ecstasy laughingly, saying,—

"If any one can enjoy things as much as Milly Ridge, she ought to have them," to which the practical banker observed,— "She'll get them when she picks the man."

So they made the wonderful journey and put up at the pleasant old Windsor on the avenue, for the era of vast caravansaries had not yet begun. Fifth Avenue in ninety was not the cosmopolitan thoroughfare it is to-day. Nevertheless, to Milly's inexperienced eyes, accustomed to the gloom of smoke, the ill-paved, dirty streets of mid-western cities, New York was even noble in its splendor. They went to the Metropolitan Museum, to the private galleries of the dealers, to Tiffany's, where the banker bought a trinket for his wife's young friend, and the women went to dressmakers who intimidated Milly with their airs and their prices.

Of course they went to Daly's and to hear "Aida," and supped afterwards at the old Delmonico's. And a hundred other ravishing things were crowded into the breathless fortnight of their visit. When she was once more settled in her berth for the return journey, Milly sighed with regret and envisaged the dreary waste of West Laurence Avenue.

"If we only lived in New York," she thought, and then she was wise enough to reflect that if the Ridges lived in New York, it would not be paradise, but another version of West Laurence Avenue.

"Some day you will go to Paris, my dear," Mrs. Kemp said, "and then New York will seem like the West Side."

"Never, that!" Milly exclaimed, shocked.

The approach to Chicago under all circumstances is bleak and stern. But that early April day it seemed to Milly unduly depressing. The squalid little settlements on the outskirts of the great city were like eruptions in the low, flat landscape. Around the factories and mills the little houses were perched high on stilts to keep their feet out of the mud of the submerged prairie. All the way home Milly had been making virtuous resolutions not to be extravagant and tease her father, to be patient with her grandmother, etc.,—in short, to be content with that state of life unto which God had called her (for the present), as the catechism says. But she felt it to be very hard that Milly Ridge should be condemned to such a state of life as the West Side of Chicago afforded. After the cultivated, mildly luxurious atmosphere of the Kemps, she realized acutely the commonness of her home....

Her father was waiting for her in the train-shed, and she hugged him affectionately and went off on the little man's arm, quite gayly, waving a last farewell to Eleanor Kemp as the latter stepped into her waiting carriage.

"Well, daughter, had a good time?"

IX

ACHIEVEMENTS

"But, papa," Milly interrupted her chatter about her marvellous doings in the East, long enough to ask,—*"where are you going?"*

Instead of taking the familiar street-car that would plunge them into a noisome tunnel and then rumble on for uncounted miles through the drab West Side, Horatio had turned towards the river, and they were in the wholesale district, where from the grimy stores came fragrant odors of comestibles, mingled in one strong fusion of raw food product. Horatio smiled at the question and hurried at a faster pace, while Milly, raising her skirts, had to scuttle over the "skids" that lay across the sidewalk like traps for the unwary.

"I've an errand down here," he said slyly. "Guess it won't hurt you to take a little walk."

His air was provocative, and Milly followed him breathlessly, her blue eyes wide with wonder. He stopped opposite a low brick building at the end of Market Street, and pointed dramatically across. At first Milly saw nothing to demand attention, then her quick eyes detected the blazon of a new gilt sign above the second-story windows, which read:—

H. RIDGE & CO., IMPORTERS
TEAS AND COFFEES

Horatio broke into an excited grin, as Milly grasped his arm.

"Oh, papa—is it *you*?"

"It's *me* all right!" And he flung out a leg with a strut of proprietorship. "Opened last week. Want to see the inside?"

"And Hoppers'?" Milly inquired as they crossed the muddy street, dodging the procession of drays.

"Hoppers!—I just chucked it," Horatio swaggered. "Guess I'm old enough to work for myself if I'm ever going to—no money in working for the other feller."

When they had climbed the narrow, dark stairway to the second floor, Horatio flung open the door to the low, unpartitioned room that ran clear to the rear of the building. A man rose from behind the solitary desk near the front window.

"Let me introduce you to the Company," Horatio announced with gravity. "Mr. Snowden, my daughter!"

They laughed, and Milly detected an air of embarrassment as the man came forward. In the clear light of the window his hair and mustache seemed blacker than she remembered; she suspected that they had been dyed. As Milly shook hands with the "Company," she had her first moment of doubt about the enterprise.

"My daughter, Miss Simpson," and Milly was shaking hands with a quiet, homely little woman in spectacles, who might have been twenty-five or fifty, and who gave Milly a keen, suspicious, commercial look. She was evidently all that was left of the "company,"—bookkeeper, stenographer, clerk.

Beside the desk there was a large round table with some unwashed cups and saucers, a coffee boiler, and in the rear sample cases and bundles,—presumably the results of importations. Milly admired everything generously. She was bothered by discovering Snowden as "the company" and considered whether she ought to confide to her father what she knew of the man. "He's no gentleman," she thought. "But that would not be any reason for his being a bad business man," she reflected shrewdly. And in spite of her woman's misgivings of any person who was errant

"that way," she decided to be silent. "He may have regretted it,—poor old thing."

Snowden left the place with them. Drawn up in front of the building was a small delivery wagon, with a spindly horse and a boy. Freshly painted on the dull black cover was the legend: "H. Ridge & Co. TEAS AND COFFEES."

"City deliveries," Horatio explained. Snowden smiled wanly. Somehow the spindly horse did not inspire Milly with confidence, nor the small boy. But the outfit might answer very well for "city deliveries." Milly was determined to see nothing but a rosy future for the venture. She listened smilingly to Horatio, who bobbed along by her side, talking all the time.

Evidently things had been moving with the Ridges since her departure. Milly's insistent ambitions had borne fruit. She had roused the quiescent Horatio. Hoppers' mail-order house offered a secure berth for a middle-aged man, who had rattled half over the American continent in search of stability. But, he told himself, the fire was not all out of his veins yet, and Milly supplied the incentive this time "to better himself." After some persuasion he had hired his friend Snowden, who had not yet been invited to become a partner at Hoppers', and who agreed to put ten thousand dollars into the new business, which Horatio was to manage. And Grandma Ridge had been persuaded to invest five thousand dollars, half of what the judge had left her, in her son's new venture. Then a chance of buying out the China American Tea Company had come. Horatio, of course, knew nothing about tea, and less about coffee; his experience had been wholly in drugs. But he argued optimistically that tea and coffee in a way were drugs, and if a man could sell one sort of drugs why not another? He saw himself in his own office, signing the firm's name, —his own name!

"Father!" Milly exclaimed that evening, throwing her arms boisterously about the little man, in the hoydenish manner so much deplored by her grandmother,—"Isn't it great! Your own business—and you'll make lots of money, lots—I'm perfectly sure."

Her ambitions began to flower. There was a delicious sense of venture to the whole thing: it offered that expansible horizon so necessary to the happiness of youth, though it might be hard to see just why Horatio Ridge's entering upon the wholesale tea and coffee business at the mature age of fifty should light the path to a gorgeous future.

Mrs. Ridge was a rather wet blanket, to be sure, but Grandma was a timid old lady who did not like travelling in the dark.

"I hope it will come out right—I hope so," she repeated lugubriously.

For a few fleeting moments Milly recalled the spindly horse and the scrubby boy of the delivery wagon, but for only a few moments. Then her natural buoyancy overcame any doubts.

"I'm sure father will make a great success of the business!" and she gave him another hug. Was he not doing this for her? Horatio, twisting his cigar rapidly between his teeth, strode back and forth in the little room and nodded optimistically. He was a merchant....

One pleasant Sunday in May, father and daughter took the street-car to the city and strolled north towards the river past "the store." Horatio glanced proudly at the sign, which was already properly tarnished by the smoke. Milly turned to gaze at a smart new brougham that was climbing the ascent to the bridge. There were two men on the box.

"That's the Danners' carriage," she said knowingly to her father, "and Mrs. George Danner."

There were few carriages with two men on the box in the city those days, and they were well worth a young woman's attention. The Danners had come to Chicago hardly a generation before, "as poor as poverty," as Milly knew. Now their mammoth dry goods establishment occupied almost a city block, and young Mrs. Danner had two men on the box—all out of dry goods. Why should not coffee and tea produce the same results? Father and daughter crossed the bridge, musingly, arm in arm.

From the grimy fringe of commerce about the river they penetrated the residence quarter beside the Lake. Milly made her father observe the freshness of the air coming from the water, and how clean and quiet the streets were. Indeed this quarter of the noisy new city had something of the settled air of older communities "back east" that Horatio remembered happily. Milly led him easily around the corner of Acacia Street to the block where the Nortons lived.

"Aren't they homey looking, father? And just right for us.... Now that one at the end of the block—it's empty.... You can see the lake from the front windows. Just think, to be able to *see* something!"

They went up the steps of the vacant house, and to be sure a little slice of blue water closed the vista at the end of the street. Horatio swung his cane hopefully. The pleasant day, the sense of "being his own man" exhilarated him: he dealt lightly with the "future."

"It's a tony neighborhood, all right," he agreed. "What did you say these houses rent for?"

"Eighty dollars a month—that's what the Nortons pay."

"Eighty a month—that's not bad, considering what you get!" Horatio observed largely.

It was a bargain, of course, as father and daughter tried to convince Mrs. Ridge. But the old lady, accustomed to Euston, Pa., rents, thought that the forty dollars a month they had to pay for the West Laurence box was regal, and when it was a question of subletting it at a sacrifice and taking another for twice the sum she quaked—visibly.

"Don't you think, Horatio, you'd better wait and see how the new business goes?"

But the voice of prudence was not to the taste of the younger generations.

"It'll be so near the store," Milly suggested. "Papa can come home for his lunch."

"You've got to live up to your prospects, mother," Horatio pronounced robustly.

The old lady saw that she was beaten and said no more. With compressed lips she contemplated the future. Father and daughter had no doubts: they both possessed the gambling American spirit that reckons the harvest ere the seed is put in the ground.

That evening after Milly had departed Horatio explained himself further,—

"You see, mother, we must start Milly the best we can. She's made a lot of real good friends for herself, and she'll marry one of these days. It's our duty to give her every chance."

It never occurred to Horatio that a healthy young woman of twenty with no prospect of inheritance might find something better worth doing in life than amusing herself while waiting for a husband. Such strenuous ideas were not in the air then.

"She'll always have a home so long as I'm alive and can make one for her," he said sentimentally. "But she'll get one for herself, you see!"

He was vastly proud of "his girl,"—of her good looks, her social power, her clever talk. And the old lady was forced to agree—they must give Milly her chance.

So that autumn the Ridges trekked again from West Laurence Avenue to the snug little house on Acacia Street, "just around the corner from the Drive." At last Milly had won her point and translated herself from the despised West Side to the heart of the "nicest" neighborhood in the city. After the turmoil of moving she went to her bed in the third floor front room, listening to the splash of the lake on the breakwater, dreaming of new conquests.

What next?

PART TWO

GETTING MARRIED

I

THE GREAT OUTSIDE

All this time, while Milly Ridge was busily spinning her little cocoon in the big city, other and more serious life had been going on there, it is needless to say. Out of the human stream Milly was gathering to her attractive individualities, and Horatio was faithfully performing his minor function in the dingy brick establishment of the Hoppers'. Many hundreds of thousands, men and women, were weaving similar webs. For there was hardly a more stirring corner of the earth's broad platter than this same sprawling prairie city at the end of the great lake. All this time it had been swelling, much to the gratification of its boastful citizens,—getting busier, getting richer, getting dirtier. There had been many a civic throb and groan,—rosy successes and dreary failures.

But of all this surrounding life Milly was not faintly conscious. She could tell you just when the custom of giving afternoon teas first reached Chicago, when "two men on the box" became the rule, when the first Charity Ball was held and who led the grand march and why, and when women wore those absurd puffed sleeves and when they first appeared with long tails to their coats. But of the daily doings of men folk when they disappeared of a morning into the smoky haze of the city, and of all the mighty human forces around her, she had not the slightest conception, as indeed few of her sisters had at that time. To all intents and purposes she might as well have lived in the eighteenth century or in the Colorado desert, as in Chicago in the eighties and early nineties of this marvellous nineteenth century.

Horatio often referred to Chicago as a "real live town," and congratulated himself for being part

of it. It was the one place in all the world to do business in. It grew over night, so the papers said each morning, and was manifestly destined to be the metropolis of the western hemisphere, etc., etc. All that was in the opulent future, for which every one lived. Even Horatio, who spent all his waking hours among men, did not in the least comprehend what it might be to live in this centre of expanding race energy. Yet he would point out to Milly appreciatively on their Sunday walks the acres of new building growing mushroomlike from the sandy soil, with the miles of tangled railroad tracks, the forest of smoking chimneys, and the ever widening canopy of black smoke. It was all ugly and dirty, the girl thought. She preferred the drive along the lake shore, and the Bowman's new palace with its machicolated cornice.

It was all business, intensely business: business affected even social moments. Later, when Milly became sophisticated enough to generalize, she complained that the men were "all one kind"; they could "talk of nothing but business to a woman." Even their physique, heavy and flabby, showed the office habit, in contrast with the bony and ruddy Englishmen, who drifted through the city from time to time. That Chicago was a huge pool into which all races and peoples drained,—that was a fact of which Milly was only dimly conscious. "You see so many queer, foreign-looking people on the street," she might observe. "Polacks and Dagoes!... Ugh.... Wish they'd stay at home!" Horatio would growl in response. Milly supposed they came from the "Yards," where hordes of these savage-looking foreigners were employed in the disagreeable task of slaughtering cattle. Their activity was only too evident certain days when the wind veered to the southwest and filled the city with an awful stench.

Of what it all meant, this huddling together of strange peoples from the four quarters of the globe, Milly never took the time to think. She never had the least conception of what it was,—the many miles of bricks and mortar, the tangled railroads, the ceaseless roar of the great city like the din of a huge factory. Here was the mill and the market—here was LIFE in its raw material. When she crossed the murky, slimy river, as she had occasion to do almost daily, after the removal to the North Side, she thought merely how dingy and dirty the place was, and what a pity it was one had to go through such a mess to reach the best shops and the other quarters of the city where "nice" people lived. She saw neither the beauty nor the significance of those grimy warehouses thrusting up along the muddy river amid the steam and the smoke—caverns that concealed hardware, tools, groceries, lumber,—all the raw protoplasm of life. An artist remarked once to Milly, "It's like Hell—and like Paradise, all in one,—this river!" She thought him rather silly.

One evening, however, out of this roaring hive of men and women striving to feed and clothe and house themselves came a flash of vivid lightning in the murky sky,—the bomb of the anarchist. That was enough to startle even the Milly Ridges,—spitting forth its vicious message only a mile or two from where the very "nicest" people had their homes! The sodden consciousness of the city awoke in a hideous nightmare of fear. The newspapers were filled with the ravings of excited ignorance. Nobody talked of anything else. Horatio declaimed against the ungrateful dogs,—those "Polack beasts,"—who weren't fit to enjoy all that America gave them. At dinner parties grave and serious men debated in low tones the awful deed and its meaning. Even women spoke of the bomb instead of discussing whether "you could get this at Field's" or "should try Mandel's." A fearful vision of Anarchy stalked the commonplace streets and peered into comfortable houses. Milly imagined that somehow those evil-looking barbarians had got loose from the stockyards and might descend at any moment upon the defenceless city in a howling mob, as she had read of their doing in her history books. For the first few days it was an excitement to venture into the streets at night, even with a strong male escort. Horatio spoke solemnly, with an aroused consciousness of citizenship, of "teaching the mob lessons and a wholesome respect for the law." Then there were the rumors fresh every hour of plots against leading men and wholesale slaughter by these same bloodthirsty anarchists, and the theatrical discoveries of the police—it was a breathless time, when even Milly seized upon the newspaper of a morning. Then gradually, as the police gathered in the little band of scapegoats, the tension relaxed: people went to the celebrated Haymarket to gape at the spot where the crime against society had taken place....

The excitement flamed up once more when the anarchists were brought to trial. Women fought for the chance to sit in the noisome little court-room, to see the eight men caught like rats in the nets of Justice. When life emerges dramatically in the court-room, it interests the Milly Ridges.... One morning Sally Norton came flying into the Ridge house.

"Get your things on, Mil!" she rippled breathlessly. "We're going to the anarchist trial."

"But the papers say you can't get near the door."

"Father's given me a card to the judge—he knows him. Come on—Vivie's waiting at the corner."

In such heady excitement the three girls raced to the criminal court building and were smuggled by a fat bailiff through the judge's private chambers into the crowded scene. There was not six inches of standing room to be had in the place except beside the judge, and there the bailiff installed the young women in comfortable chairs, much to the envy of the perspiring throng beneath.

There, behold, beside the grave judge, facing the court-room, above the counsel, the reporters, the prisoners, sat Milly Ridge and Sally and Vivie Norton, in their best clothes, with the sweeping plumed hats that had just come into fashion then.... Milly beamed with pleasure and excitement, casting alluring glances from beneath her great hat at the severe judge. It was like a play, and she had a very good seat.

It was a play that went on day after day for weeks, sometimes dull with legal formalities, sometimes tense with "human" interest. And, day after day, the three girls occupied their favored seats beside the judge, listening to the evidence of the great conspiracy against Society, watching the prisoners—a sorry lot of men generally—and staring haughtily down at the jammed court-room. Their presence, of course, was noted by the reporters and mentioned as at a social event "among our society leaders in daily attendance at the trial." Their names and dresses were duly recorded, along with pen pictures of the anarchists. It quite fluttered Milly, this prominence,— "the Misses Norton and Miss Mildred Ridge, etc."

The three girls became deeply interested in the prisoners and picked their favorites among them. Sally was for a German because he looked to be "such an interesting devil," and Vivie was intrigued by the newspaper stories about another. Milly was drawn to the youngest of all,—a mere lad, blue-eyed and earnest, who had evidently "got into bad company" and been led astray. Vivie sent her man flowers,—a bunch of deep red roses,—and the next day he appeared wearing one conspicuously pinned to his coat. Sally coaxed the obliging bailiff to smuggle them all into the jail so that they might see the prisoners and talk to them through the bars. But the great event was when Spies made his celebrated speech of defiance, breathing scorn and hatred of his captors. Sally Norton rose in her seat and threw him kisses with both hands. A bailiff came, put his hand on her shoulder, and forced her to be quiet. It made something of a scene in court. The judge looked annoyed. Then Sally had a fit of the giggles and finally had to leave the room.

But when the turn of Milly's hero came to speak in his own defence, Milly had a choking sensation in her throat and felt the warm tears run over her cheeks. He, too, was brave. He talked of the wrongs of society, and Milly realized somehow that she was part of the society he was condemning,—one of the more privileged at the feast of life, who made it impossible for the many others to get what they wanted. Of course his views were wrong,—all the men she knew said so,—but the pity of it all in his case, so young and handsome and brave he appeared!

While counsel wrangled and pleaded, while this little group of men rounded up by the police to stand sponsors for Anarchy and expiate its horrid creed, so that good citizens might sleep peacefully nights, faced death, the three girls sat and stared at the spectacle. It passed slowly, and the prisoners were condemned by a jury of their peers quite promptly, and the grave judge sentenced them "to hang by their necks until dead." At the dreadful words Milly gasped, then sobbed outright.

No matter what they had done, at least what *he* had done, how wrong *his* ideas about society were, *he* was too young and too handsome for such an awful fate. If he had only had about him from the beginning the right influences, if some woman had loved him and guided him aright,—Milly hoped that he might yet be spared, pardoned if possible. Mopping the tears from her eyes she left the court-room for the last time, with a vague sense of the wretchedness of life—sometimes.

That very night, however, she was as gay and bright as ever at the Kemps' dinner. A fascinating young lawyer was of the party, a newcomer to the city, who dared to raise his voice in that citadel of respectability, the Kemps' Gothic dining-room, and declare that the whole affair was a miserable travesty of justice,—a conspiracy framed up by the police. "They have the city scared," he said, "and nobody dares say what he thinks. The newspapers know the truth, but the big men make the papers keep quiet." It was all quite thrilling, Milly thought. Perhaps, after all, her young man was not a villain. The table of sober diners sat very still, but afterwards the banker pronounced what the young lawyer said to be "loose talk" and "wicked nonsense." And Milly knew one young man who would never be asked again to the Granger Avenue house.

After the verdict came all sorts of legal delays, and Milly largely lost interest in the anarchists. The drama had evaporated, and though she continued to read what the papers printed about the prisoners, more personal affairs crowded in to blot out from her mind that sense of a large, suffering humanity which she had had for a few moments. When the governor was finally induced to intervene and commute some of the sentences, she had a muddled notion that he had deprived Society of its just vengeance, that the well-to-do, well-meaning people had failed to get full punishment for the shocking deeds of the anarchists.

And that was all.

About a year later the young blue-eyed anarchist, in whom Milly had been interested, blew off the top of his head with a bomb. But Milly was very busy just at that time with other matters.

II

MILLY ENTERTAINS

Of much more importance to Milly than the fatal bomb was her first real party. She had long desired to entertain.

What magic the word has for women of Milly's disposition! It conjures the scene of their real triumphs, for woman displays herself when she "entertains" as man does when he fights. She patronizes her friends, worsts her enemies,—then, when she "entertains"....

Milly's party came off that first spring after the Ridges had moved into the Acacia Street house,—in 1890 to be exact. Milly had had it in mind, of course, even before the family moved. She had long been conscious of her social indebtedness, which of late years had accumulated rapidly. Her party should be also an announcement, as well as a review of progress. She had consulted with the Nortons and Eleanor Kemp, who advised giving a "tea,"—a cheap form of wholesale entertainment then in more repute than now. Milly would have preferred to "entertain at dinner," as the papers put it. But that was obviously out of the question. The Ridge household with its shabby appointments and one colored maid was not yet on a dinner-giving basis. Moreover, it would have cost far too much to feed suitably the host that Milly aspired to gather together. The moving and necessary replenishment of the household goods had quite exhausted Horatio's purse, and the increase in the monthly bills more than consumed all the present profits of the tea and coffee business. Grandma Ridge was more vinegary than ever these days over the household bills. Milly called her "mean," and meanness in her eyes was the most detestable of human vices.

The famous "tea" marked another advance in Milly's career. It proved beyond question her gift for the life she had elected. Simple as this affair was—"from four until seven"—it had to be created out of whole cloth and involved a marvellous display of energy and tact on Milly's part. First her father and grandmother had to be accustomed to the idea. "I ain't much on Sassiety myself," Horatio protested, when the subject was first broached. (He had an exasperating habit of becoming needlessly ungrammatical when he wished to "take Milly down.") Mrs. Ridge observed coldly,— "It would be a great extravagance."

That tiresome word, "Extravagance!" Milly came to loathe it most of all the words in the language.

"Oh, grandma!" she exclaimed. "Just tea and cakes!"

Her conception grew before the event. Just "tea and cakes" developed into ices and sherbets and bonbons. Horatio would not permit punch or any form of alcoholic refreshment. After a convivial youth he had become rigidly temperance. "Tea and coffee's enough," he said. "You might tell your friends where they come from—help on the business." (It was one of Horatio's rude jokes.)

Eleanor Kemp, from her conservatories at Como, supplied the flowers and plants that did much to disguise the shabbiness of the little house. The Norton girls collected the silver and china from a radius of eight blocks. There was a man at the door with white gloves, another at the curb for carriage company, and a strip of dusty red carpet across the walk. Milly financed all this extra expense, and that and her new gown made such a deep hole in her budget that she never again caught up with her bills, although Horatio was induced to increase her allowance the next Christmas.

Milly and all her friends worked for weeks in preparation. They wrote the cards, addressed the envelopes, arranged the furniture, and distributed the flowers. She felt "dead" the day before with fatigue and anxiety, and shed tears over one of Grandma Ridge's little speeches.

But it was a triumph! Guests began coming shortly after four,—a few women from the West side,—and by five-thirty the little Acacia Street house was jammed to the bursting point, so that the young men who arrived towards six had to exercise their athletic skill in order to insert themselves into the crush. Afternoon teas still had some allurements, even for young men, in those primitive days, and Milly had an army of loyal friends, who would have come to anything out of devotion to her. And the affair had got abroad, as all Milly's affairs did, had become the talk of the quarter; a good many families were interested through personal contributions of tableware. There was a line of waiting cabs and carriages for three blocks in from the Lake. The stream of smartly dressed people flowed in and out of the house until after eight, when the last boisterous young men were literally shooed out of the front door by Milly and her aides,—the two Norton girls. It was, as the French put it, furiously successful.

Through the heat of the fray Mrs. Kemp and Mrs. Gilbert stood beside Milly under the grille that divided the hall from the drawing-room. Grandma Ridge in her best black gown, with her stereotyped cat-smile, sat near by in a corner. Milly had carefully planted the old lady where she would be conspicuous and harmless and had impressed upon her the danger of moving from her eminent position. For once the little old lady was stirred to genuine emotion as the babble of tongues surged over her. A becoming pink in her white cheeks betrayed the excitement within her withered breast over the girl's triumph. For even Grandma Ridge possessed traces of a feminine nature.... And Horatio! He came in late from his business, scorning to pay attention to the "women's doings," sneaked up the back stairs and donned his Sunday broadcloth coat, then wormed his way cautiously into the press to see the fun. One of the more exquisite moments of the day, preserved by Sally Norton and widely circulated among Milly's friends, was the picture of the little man facing the majestic Mrs. Bernhard Bowman—she of the palace on the shore—and teetering nervously on his heels, with hands thrust nonchalantly into his trousers' pockets, bragging to that distinguished person of "Daughter."

"She's a wonder—mighty smart girl," he said confidently. "Done all this herself you know—her own idee. I'm not much myself for entertaining and all that society business. Give me a friend or two and a quiet game of cards, etc., etc."

The majestic "leader of our most exclusive circle," as the *Star* had it the next Sunday morning, eyed the nervous little man over her broad bosom and across her plate of salad and pronounced gravely her judgment,—

"Your daughter, Mr. Ridge, must have a remarkable social talent."

"They all say it—must be so. Guess she got it from her mother's folks—not from *me*." He laughed confidentially. "Well, I tell her grandmother we must give her some rope—she'll marry one of these days."

"Of course."

"Young folks will be young."

(Afterwards Horatio puffed considerably when he told of his encounter with the great Mrs. Bowman. "I wasn't the least might 'fraid of her,—talked to her like anybody else. Who was she, anyway, when old Joe Bowman married her? Saleslady in a State Street store. I've seen her myself sliding the change across the counter and handing out socks." In this the little man must have exaggerated, for it was long before the Ridge advent in Chicago that the lady destined to become its social leader had withdrawn from the retail trade, if indeed there were any truth in the tale. "And she married a butcher," Horatio added. "Oh, papa!" from Milly. "Yes, he *was* a butcher, too—wholesale, maybe, but he had the West Side Market out beyond Division Street—I've seen the sign." That might well have been. But long before this the honorable Joseph Bernhard Bowman had died,—God rest his soul in the granite mausoleum in Oakwoods,—and left a pleasant number of millions to finance his widow's aspirations. In Chicago, in those days, one never laid the start up against any assured achievement.)

At any rate Mrs. Bowman's presence at Milly's party was the last touch of success. Milly, though she had met the great lady, had not dared to send her a card. But Mrs. Gilbert, who realized what it would mean to Milly, had fetched her in her carriage, coaxingly,—*"It will please the girl so, you know, to have you there for a few minutes!"* And when the leader towered above Milly, whose flushed face was upturned with glistening, childlike eyes, and said in her ear, *"My dear, it's all delightful, your party, and you are charming, really charming!"* Milly felt that she had received the red ribbon.

"She has a very magnetic personality, your young friend," the great lady confided afterwards to Mrs. Gilbert, and repeated impressively several times, "A magnetic personality—it's all in that."

The phrase had not become meaningless then, and it aptly described Milly's peculiar power. Somehow she reached out unconsciously in every direction and drew to her all these perspiring, pushing, eating, talking people. She had drawn them all into her shabby little home. "Magnetic," as the great lady said. It is a power much desired in democratic societies where all must be done by the individual of his own initiative—a power independent of birth, education, money,—with a touch of the mystery of genius in it, of course.

Milly drew all kinds, indiscriminately,—even men, who didn't count for much in this woman's game of entertaining, except for the fact that they came. Yes, Mrs. Bernhard Bowman, who knew that people came to her chilly halls merely to have it known that they *could* come, might well envy poor little Milly Ridge her one magnet gift.

"And so sweet," Mrs. Gilbert cooed fondly, watching her protégé.

At the moment Milly was listening to an elderly lady of the species frump, with two homely daughters of the species bore,—obviously West Side relics,—and she gave them the same whole-hearted interest she had given the majestic one herself. The two older, experienced women gazed at the scene half enviously. This was another magic quality that the girl possessed,—especially feminine, a tricky gift of the Gods, quite outside the moral categories and therefore desired by all—charm. Charm made all that mob so happy to be there in the stuffy quarters, struggling to appease their thirst with the dregs of tepid sherbet; charm compelled the warm, enthusiastic speeches to the girl. As Eleanor Kemp whispered, pinching Milly's plump arm, *"My dear, you are a wonder, just a perfect wonder,—I always said so.... I'll run in to-morrow to talk it over...."*

All the women, richer, better placed in the game than Milly, easily detecting the shabbiness of her home beneath the attempts to furbish up, envied the girl these two gifts. Why? Because they most help a woman to be what civilization has forced her to be—a successful adventuress.

"Milly is such a sweet creature," Mrs. Gilbert purred to her companion, as she sank back into the silky softness of the brougham that Roy Gilbert had provided for her. "I do hope she'll marry well!"

"Of course she must marry properly,—some man who will give her the opportunity of exercising her remarkable social gift," Mrs. Bowman pronounced sagely.

Nettie Gilbert smiled. She felt that she had done a kind act that day.

"The girl has a career before her, if she makes no mistakes," the great lady added.

And that was the universal verdict of all the experienced women who came to bid their young hostess farewell and make their pretty speeches. One and all they recognized a woman's triumph. In this first attempt she had shown what she could do "with nothing, positively nothing—that house!" Hers was a talent like any other, not to be denied. The woman's talent. Obviously Horatio could not finance this career on coffee and tea. Some stronger man, better equipped in fortune, must be found and pressed into service. Who of all the young and middle-aged men that had come that afternoon to take the girl's hand and say the proper things would undertake this responsibility? From the way they hung about Milly, it might be seen that she would not have to wait long for her "working partner."

"Next, Milly's engagement!" Vivie Norton suggested daringly.

"And then!" Sally shouted, waving her arms in abandon at the vision she conjured.

"Did you ever see so many men?... And they never go to afternoon things if they can help it...."

Yes, it was an indubitable triumph! Even Horatio and Grandma Ridge admitted it, as they sat down in the disorder of the cluttered dining-room with the drooping flowers to munch sandwiches and drink cold chocolate for supper. They were plainly excited and somewhat awed by the vistas of the new social horizon that was opening through Milly's little party.

Milly was roused the next morning from a deep sleep to answer a knock at her door.

"What is it?" she said peevishly. "I think you might let me sleep to-day."

"Your father thought you would want to see the papers," her grandmother said, holding out an armful of Sunday literature. "Shall I bring you up a cup of tea?"

"Thanks, Granny." And Milly sank back into her pillows, while her hand skilfully extracted the sheet that contained "Madame Alpha's" social column. Ah, here it was!

"One of the most charming affairs of the post-lenten season.... A quiet five o'clock.... Many of our notable fashionables, etc.... Radiant young hostess, etc. The charm of the young hostess, etc."

Milly's thick braids circled her soft neck and fell on the large sheet while she devoured the words, as a young actress might swallow her first notices, or a young author scan his first reviews. The subtle intoxication of a successful first appearance quickened her pulses. "Quite the smartest bunch of snobs in the village," wrote "Suzette" in the *Mirror*, with a too obvious sneer. (Suzette's pose was a breezy disdain for the "highlights" of Society, an affectation of frontier simplicity and democracy. But Milly, like every woman, knew well enough that there is always a better and a worse socially, and the important thing is to belong to the best wherever you are, democracy or no democracy.)

At last Milly pushed from her the mass of newspapers and lay with upturned face, hands crossed beneath her head, staring out of her blue eyes at the dusty ceiling, dreaming of triumphs to be, social heights to surmount, a flutter of engagement cards winging their way like a flight of geese to the little Acacia Street house; dreaming of men and women—and somewhere at the end of the long vista she saw a very gorgeous procession, herself at the head, with a long veil and an enormous bunch of white roses clasped to her breast, moving in stately fashion up the church aisle. At the extreme end of the vista stood an erect black figure beside a white-robed clergyman. (For Milly now went to the Episcopal Church, finding the service more satisfying.) The face of this erect figure was blurred in the dream. It was full of qualities, but lacked defining shape: it was "manly," "generous," "high-spirited," "rich," "successful," etc., etc. But the nearer she approached in her vision to the altar amid the crash of organ music, the more indefinite became the face. She tried on the figure various faces she knew, but none seemed to fit exactly. No one possessed all the qualities.

Grandma with a cup of lukewarm tea shattered the vision.

III

MILLY BECOMES ENGAGED

"Milly," Nettie Gilbert said impressively, "I've something serious to say to you."

It was a Sunday evening before the fire in the Gilberts' pleasant drawing-room. The other supper guests had taken themselves off, and Roy Gilbert had disappeared to his den, where he smoked many cigars and was supposed to read serious books upon history and political economy.

Milly glanced apprehensively at the pretty, plump lady beside her. The tone in which the words had been pronounced reminded her oddly of that time so far away—so very far back—when Eleanor Kemp had talked to her seriously about completing her education.

"Yes, dear?" she answered, caressing a dimpled hand at her side.

"Milly,"—Mrs. Gilbert leaned forward and frowned slightly. Milly thought, "Nettie's getting fat, like her mother." The Gilberts had awfully good food and a great deal of it, even if they did go in for missions. "Milly, I have you on my mind a great deal these days."

"That's so good of you, dear."

Milly thought it must be religion once more, and prepared herself.

"You ought to settle yourself.... All your friends think you should marry, dear."

"Why?" Milly demanded with some asperity.

"Why, a girl in your position—"

"Yes, I know all that," Milly interrupted quickly.

She knew far better than Nettie Gilbert how necessary it was for her to settle herself somehow. The bills had grown more rather than less the last two years, and the tea and coffee importing business did not seem to be doing what had been expected of it. There were signs of an increasing financial stringency about Horatio. Then there were other signs, more personal, that were not pleasant to recall. That social career which had opened so brilliantly rather more than two years before had been full of pleasures and excitements. For nearly a season Milly Ridge had been the most talked of and invited girl in her special circle. The next season she had still been "popular," but latterly at the opening of the new season there had been a distinct falling off. The fringe of cards about her long mirror, where she kept her invitations tucked into the margins and pinned in pendants, had grown less fresh—not to say stale—and less distinguished. Mrs. Bowman had forgotten altogether to invite her to dinner this fall. There were other stings and mortifications that need not be described.... Yes, Milly had been pondering the matter more or less consciously for some months.

"Well," she said to Mrs. Gilbert, with a brave little smile, "what shall I do about it?"

She recognized Nettie Gilbert's right to broach the subject. Nettie had been her best friend, and thanks to her own experience had a fellow-feeling for her and wished to see her launched upon a similar successful career matrimonial.

"With all your charm, you could have married a dozen times," she said with gentle reproach.

"But I haven't!" Milly retorted despairingly. She did not like to admit that her opportunities had not been as numerous as it was popularly supposed they had been. They never were, as Nettie must know from her own experience. Yet she had had her "chances," and why hadn't she pulled it off before this? Why had all the little flirtations with promising young men come to nothing? Were they afraid of her lavish hand? Or had she been waiting for something else,—"the real, right thing?" She did not know.

Her grandmother said that a penniless girl had no right to be so "particular"—which always maddened Milly.

"I'm afraid you're not serious enough, my dear," Mrs. Gilbert remarked in gentle reproof. She had always felt that was a flaw in Milly's character,—a lack of deep interest in the missionary side of life.

"But men don't like serious women," Milly said flippantly, dangling her slipper on the end of her toes.

"I think the best ones do," Mrs. Gilbert retorted severely. "You were making fun of Mr. Parker at supper to-night, and I'm afraid he understood."

"I know," Milly admitted penitently. "But he has such a funny voice." She imitated amusingly the shrill falsetto of the said Clarence Parker. "And he's so solemn about everything he says."

Mrs. Gilbert laughed in spite of her stern mood, then controlled herself.

"But, Milly, Clarence Parker's very nice. He's related to the best people where he comes from, and he is doing remarkably well in his business, Roy says."

"What is it?" Milly demanded more practically.

"Stocks and bonds, I think,—banking, you know."

"Oh," said Milly, somewhat impressed.

"What is Clarence Parker's business, Roy?" Mrs. Gilbert appealed to her husband, who at that moment happened to enter the room.

"He represents several large estates in the East—invests the money," Gilbert replied, and turning to Milly with a smile asked:—

"Going out for him, Milly? He's all right, solid as a rock."

"Lighthouse," Milly corrected sulkily.

"And he's got plenty of his own money—has sense about investments."

"I haven't any to make!"

"Oh, come—you've got one...."

Nevertheless, when the two friends said their good-bys, kissing each other affectionately on the cheek and saying, "Will you go with me to the Drummonds Tuesday?" and "How about the meeting for the Old Man's Mission?" Milly added, "Your financial rock asked if he might call. I told him he could."

Milly squeaked the words in imitation of Mr. Parker's thin voice. They both laughed.

But Milly trotted home around the corner to the little house in Acacia Street in anything but a gay mood. The angular, white face of Mr. Clarence Albert Parker was far from fulfilling the idea she had visioned to herself in her Sunday morning dream. She knew well enough why Nettie Gilbert had arranged this particular Sunday supper with the intimacy of only four guests—Milly was very much awake now socially—and she had taken pains to examine the new young man with critical care. He was little, scarcely taller than Horatio, and Milly disliked men whose heads she could look across. But with a silk hat it might not be too bad. And he was slightly bald, as well as pale,—on the whole not robust,—but he had keen little gray eyes that seemed to watch one from the side and take in a great deal. He was a precise, neat, colorless man, the sort turned out by a conservative New England family that invests its savings with scrupulous care at four and three-quarters per cent. No, he was not inspiring, this grandson of the Plymouth Rock, with the thin voice. But he seemed substantial. Mr. Gilbert said so, and Roy Gilbert knew.

There were other sombre reflections in Milly's reverie that night. The sense of family stringency was urging her to "make good" in some way. She was aware that she was slipping back in the social sands, might become commonplace and neglected, if she did not do something to revive the waning interest in herself. She realized, as she had not definitely realized before, that outside of the social game her life held little or nothing. To be sure, she helped Mrs. Gilbert with her missionary business and charities: she read to a few old men once a week, and she carried flowers over to St. Joseph's Hospital. But she could not pretend to herself that charities occupied her whole being.... No, the only way out was Matrimony. A marriage, suitable and successful, would start her career once more. With something like a desperate resolve Milly put her latch-key into the hole, and let herself into the paternal home, where a familiar family odor greeted her sensitive nostrils. With a grimace of disgust she swept upstairs. Decidedly it was time for her to settle herself, as Nettie phrased it.

This time Milly arrived, in spite of homely paw or lukewarm inclination for the man. The young financier called at the Ridge home once, twice, and there met Horatio and Grandma Ridge, who both thought very highly of him. "A man with such principles, my dear," Grandma observed. The two young people "attended divine service together," showed up afterwards on the Drive, where Milly noted with satisfaction that Mr. Parker plus a silk hat overtopped her gaze. She also noted that the friends she met smiled and bowed with just an added touch of interest.... They talked—chiefly Milly—on a variety of colorless topics. It appeared that Mr. Parker had positive views only on financial matters. For all the rest,—art, literature, religion, and life,—he began with a cautious,—"Well, now, I don't know," and never got much farther. However, Milly wisely reflected, one didn't marry for the sake of exciting conversation.

The affair progressed quite smoothly; by the middle of winter Milly's friends smiled when they spoke of "Milly's young man" and were ready with their felicitations. On the whole they thought that Milly had "done quite well...."

It happened naturally, in the course of an expedition which the two made to the scene of the great new Exposition. They drove out in a smart carriage with a pair of lively horses which Mr. Parker managed very well, but which took all his attention. They first visited the tumultuous fair grounds, where an army of workmen were making desperate efforts to get the impromptu city in some shape for visitors. They talked of the beauty of the buildings, the grandeur of the whole design, the greatness of Chicago. Then they drove to a vast new hotel in which Mr. Parker had taken a conservative interest, and they still talked of the marvellous growth of the city, its Ultimate Destiny,—terms which had a lugubrious sound in the New Englander's piping voice. As they turned northwards around the great oval of Washington Park, the sun was sinking into a golden haze of dust and smoke. The horses dropped to a peaceful walk, and Milly knew that it was coming and braced herself for it. It came, slowly.

First, by way of preliminary flourish, Mr. Parker declared all over again his faith in the future of the city. He had come to stay, he repeated with emphasis; had thrown in his fate with that of Chicago.

"I'm going to stay," he trilled, "and grow up with the city." (At this point Milly almost upset the boat by laughing: the idea of the little man's growing up with Chicago seemed funny.)

Having struck the personal note, the young man spoke of his own "prospects," and outlined the dignified position he intended to occupy in the forefront of the elect. This implied, of course, an establishment and a suitable wife. Milly made the proper responses in the pauses. At last the fateful words reached her ear, "Will you marry me, Miss Ridge?" As Milly mimicked later his

slow, solemn utterance, it sounded more like, "Will you bury me, Miss Ridge?"

And Milly, with commendable directness, looked him straight in the eye and said without a quiver,— "Yes, I will, Mr. Parker."

Afterwards, as if this effort had exhausted both, there was silence on the way back. When they reached the house, he said impressively, "I will call to-morrow and see your father."

"He'll be delighted to see you, I'm sure," Milly rejoined somewhat flatly. Then she fled up the steps, as if she were afraid he might try to kiss her or hold her hand. She escaped *that*, for the present....

So it was done at last.

IV

CONGRATULATIONS

If Milly had any misgivings or inner revolt that first night, it would have been dispelled by the unfeigned joy of her father and her grandmother the next morning when she told them the news. Little Horatio said robustly as he kissed her:—

"Fine! Daughter! Fine!... He's a smart young man, I know that—the best one of all your beaux.... And *he's* lucky, too," he added apologetically.

Grandma Ridge remarked with a certain malice, "You ought to be happy with him, Milly; he will be able to give you all the things you want."

"I hope so," Milly responded briskly.

A few telephone messages to intimate friends and the news was spread broadcast over the area of Milly's little world. For the rest of the day and for several days afterwards she was kept busy receiving congratulations by telephone and in person,—flowers, letters, invitations,—all the little demonstrations of interest that give importance and excitement to a woman's life.

She had "made good," at last—that was the pleasant sensation she was bathed in from morning to night. She had done the right thing. The congratulations sounded quite sincere. If not much was said of the young man's personal charms, a great deal was made of his substantial qualities, which were indubitable.

Nettie Gilbert was one of the first to arrive and took Milly to her arms affectionately. "My dear," she murmured between kisses, "I'm *so* glad for you."

"You see I did it," Milly replied complacently, marvelling to herself how easy it had been to do, once she had determined upon this way out.

"You must let me give you a party.... Thursday?" Mrs. Gilbert purred, ignoring delicate analysis.

That was the beginning of a joyous whirl of engagements,—luncheons, dinners, suppers, and theatre parties. It seemed as if Milly's little world had been waiting for this occasion to renew its enthusiasm. Milly had the happy self-importance that an engaged girl should have, and to cap her triumphs, Mrs. Bowman gave one of her tremendous dinners, with twenty-four covers, her second-best gold service, and a dance afterward in the picture gallery. All in honor of obscure little Milly Ridge! She had arrived.

She might look down the long, heavily laden table with the men-servants inserting the courses between the guests, and scan the faces of prominent citizens and their wives together with a few minor diplomats—for this was the great summer of '93—and feel a pardonable elation in her position. On her right sat that Mr. George Danner, the wealthy merchant whose equipage with two men on the box she had once admired, and on her left was the kindly, homely face of old Christian Becker, the owner of *The Daily Star*. (You may be sure that the *Star* had a full account of this function. But Milly's name appeared so frequently in Madame Alpha's social column that it had almost lost interest for her.)... At the other end of the table next to the hostess's expansive person sat the Instrument of Accomplishment, like a very refined little white mouse, his keen eyes taking in every gold fork on the table. His mouth was often open, and Milly imagined she could hear the familiar, "Well now, I don't know about that." However, his hostess seemed to treat him with consideration.

It should be said to Milly's credit that she took rather less satisfaction in all this social flattery than in the happiness her engagement brought into the little Acacia Street house. Horatio began to chirp once more, after the interview with his prospective son-in-law. The inspissated gloom of the days of stringency had passed. The golden beams of prosperity seemed to radiate from the white-faced financier.

"I tell you Clarence is a smart one," Horatio announced after the first interview. "He gave me some good pointers." For after the embarrassing formalities of sentiment had been disposed of, the two men had naturally dropped into business, and Parker had suggested a method of inserting the tea and coffee business into the Exposition by getting concessions for "Coffee Kiosks," which should advertise the Ridge brands of harmless stimulants. The scheme had fired Horatio, who began once more to dream dreams of wealth.

So when the ring came, which like everything else about Clarence Albert was plain, costly, correct—and unlovely—Milly put the large diamond on her stubby finger and reflected that even if its giver was not the Idol of her Dreams, he was very good to her, and she ought to be happy. She meant to make him a good wife as she understood that vague term, and thus repay him for all his bounties. As a matter of fact the little Parker man was getting repaid already in social matters for his generous act in selecting a poor girl to share his affluence. The world knew him to be sharp, and was glad to think him kind....

"It's a very handsome one, Clarence," Milly said of the ring, turning it critically to the light. And she sweetly held up her face to be kissed.

That, to be frank, was the part she liked least of the whole affair, "demonstrations," and she dealt out her favors to her lover sparingly. However, her fiancé was not demonstrative by nature: if he had amorous passions, he kept them carefully concealed, so that Milly could manage that side quite easily. It usually came merely to a pressure of hands, a cold kiss on the brow, or a flutter along the bronze tendrils about the neck. Sometimes Milly speculated what it might be like later in the obscure intimacy of marriage, but she dismissed the subject easily, confident that she could "manage" as she did now. And she had the sweet sense of self-sacrifice in doing something personally disagreeable. "If it hadn't been for poor old Dad," she would say to herself and sigh. Which was not wholly sincere. At this period of their lives few mortals can be square with themselves.

All such refinements of thought and feeling were rare because there was no time for revery. Milly was determined to get the most out of her triumph, and drove the peaceable Clarence Albert rather hard. All women, he had supposed in his ignorance, were more or less fragile. But it was astonishing what an amount of nerve-racking gayety Milly could get through in a day and come up smiling the next morning for another sixteen-hour bout with pleasure. Sometimes Clarence protested that he was a working man and must be at his office by nine. But Milly had slight mercy; she let him see plainly the social duty of the American husband. He too reflected, it might be, that things would be different after the wedding and yawned away the hours as best he could at dance or dinner or late supper in Old Vienna on the famous Midway.

It was Chicago's wonderful festal year, the summer of the great Fair. Responsible men of large affairs, who knew what was going on financially behind the scenes, might look grave and whisper their apprehensions among themselves. But the people were resolved to be gay. They were mad with doing, especially the women. All the world was entertained in the lavish western spirit of hospitality. Thus in addition to her own private excitement, Milly shared the general festival spirit, and thanks to her social charm and her young man's reputation for solid achievement the two were part of many an important festivity. They helped to entertain the European notables, dined and did the shows from morning until morning in the best of company. Milly wished it might go on like this forever.

"Chicago will not be large enough for you after this experience," her old friend, Eleanor Kemp, observed, crossing her path at the ball for the French ambassador. "You will have to move on to New York."

"Well, now, I don't know about that," Parker demurred, but Milly cut in with,—

"We're going abroad first, you know."

She smiled graciously on her old friend, divining exactly that kind lady's mixed feelings. "Come on, Clarence!" and she sailed off into the press, bowing and smiling to her right and her left.

In the midst of all this feverish activity there was little time for mutual examination and discovery for the engaged couple,—all the better, Milly thought,—and yet she had already resolved upon certain changes in her husband-to-be, like a competent wife. For one thing she discovered quite early that Clarence Albert was inclined to be close in money matters. He always counted his change carefully, like a good puritan, and gave small tips. He ordered the less expensive dishes and wines, and inquired whether a single portion might do for two when they were lunching out together. He did not like to take cabs when the street-cars were running. Milly had suffered all her life at the hands of Grandma Ridge from such petty economies, and she did not intend that it should continue. It was not so much any intentional meanness—if Milly had but known—as the resultant habit of generations of enforced thrift. Milly's fingers all turned outwards, and money ran through them like sand. She was a born Spender and scattered Cash, her own or other people's, with regal indifference. All her life she had suffered from cramped means, and now that she was about to marry a rich man she meant to get the good of it. What am I doing it for? she would ask herself in her more cynical moments.... As soon as she was Mrs. Parker she would come to an understanding with her husband on this cardinal point and show him what was decent for a man in his position. Meanwhile she gave him a few hints of what he might expect.

"I'm afraid," he remarked in his falsetto voice, not unkindly, "you like to spend money."

"Of course I do! What woman doesn't?" Milly retorted brightly, as she chucked the bunch of violets she had been wearing out of the cab window because they were somewhat wilted, and she added warningly, "I hate mean people!"

He laughed good naturedly.

Their first misunderstanding came over the question where they were to live after their return from the European trip. It seems that Parker had already bought land far out on the north shore of the Lake in a new and promising neighborhood and proposed building a house there. Milly was ready enough to build: she had large plans for her new home. But she had set her mind on a lot on the Drive, a block from the Bowman place and two from the Gilberts—"the most desirable site in the city, every one says," she explained, "and so near all our friends."

Parker tried to make her understand that fifty thousand dollars was altogether too much money to put into an "unproductive investment" like that.

"You've got the money?" Milly demanded succinctly.

He admitted it reluctantly.

"Then I can't see why we shouldn't have the best."

Milly, who had secret plans of running the great Bowman a social race, was thoroughly irritated at his obstinacy. They turned from the vacant lot, which they had been examining for the second time, and walked down the Drive at odds.

"My property at Lakehurst has twice the frontage and only cost me ten thousand," the little man of means observed complacently.

"I don't care if it cost only ten dollars," Milly pouted. "It's in the suburbs."

"The city's growing that way fast."

"It'll reach us when I'm an old woman!"

"Before that I guess...."

She dashed upstairs to her room, leaving her lover to the attentions of Mrs. Ridge. The old lady approved of Clarence Albert. They discussed religion together. They had the same Victorian standards and principles about life. This afternoon he confided to her the real estate trouble Milly and he had had.

"I'm sure, Clarence, you are quite right, and Milly must learn to be more reasonable. The air will be so much cleaner out there."

"And the cars come within a block now."

"I'll speak to Milly about it."

She did.

"If you aren't careful, Milly," she warned her granddaughter, "you'll frighten him. You aren't married yet," she added meaningly.

"He oughtn't to buy land without consulting me," Milly flared, forgetting that this transaction had taken place before her determination to become Mrs. Clarence Parker.

"I think you are a very ungrateful girl," Mrs. Ridge observed, with pressed lips.

"Oh, you always take the men's side, grandma!... Clarence isn't the only man in the world."

"Better take care before it's too late," the old lady repeated warningly. "You don't treat Clarence as a girl should who is going to marry. He's an admirable young man."

Mrs. Ridge ever croaked thus, foretelling disaster.

"If you say anything more, I'll never marry him!" Milly flamed in final exasperation. "You don't understand. Women don't behave as they did when you were a girl. They don't lie down before their husbands and let them walk all over them."

"Perhaps not," grandma laughed icily in reply. "But I guess men aren't so different from what they were in my time."

Grandma had her own understanding of male character.

As events soon proved, Mrs. Ridge's croaking was not without justification. The crash in Milly's affairs came, not until the autumn, a few weeks before the day set for the wedding, and it came on the line of cleavage already described, although quite unexpectedly and over a trivial matter, as such things usually happen.

After the closing of the fairy city gloom had settled down over Chicago. People were exhausted socially from their hectic summer and Panic stalked forth from behind the festival trappings where it had lain hidden. Times were frightfully bad, every one said,—never so bad before in the experience of the country. There were strikes, a hundred thousand idle men walking the cold streets, empty rows of buildings, shops and factories closed—and a hard winter coming on. All this did not mean much to Milly, busy with her own concerns and plans for the wedding, except for the fact that few people entertained and everybody seemed relaxed and depressed. Clarence Albert, like a prudent mariner of the puritan type, dwelt upon the signs of dire storm, and counselled their not building for the present, although he let her understand that his own ventures were well under cover. Milly was less disappointed over not building the house because she still had her mind on that vacant lot on the Drive. Perhaps in the depression Clarence would be able to get it at a bargain....

Then the quarrel came over nothing at all. They were to go to the theatre or opera—later she forgot which—by themselves one evening. Her fiancé came to dinner, and he and Horatio talked dolefully of the business outlook. When they started out, there was no cab before the door. Milly, regarding her light raiment, demurred and telephoned for one herself. When they reached the theatre and she proceeded to sail down the centre aisle, she found that their seats were in the balcony. Clarence, who never dealt with ticket brokers on principle, had not been able to get good floor seats and thought the first row of the balcony would answer, as the theatre was a small one. Where he had been brought up, the balcony seats were considered "just as good," and better if they could be had more cheaply. He did not understand the awfulness of metropolitan standards to which Chicago was aspiring.

Milly, a cloud upon her pretty face, drew her wrap close about her and sat dumb through the first act. Her mortification was increased by discovering Sally Norton in a box below with Ted Leffingwell and some gay folk. Sally's roaming eyes also discovered Milly and her young man before the act was finished; she signalled markedly and communicated the news to her party, who all looked at the glum pair, laughed and smiled among themselves.

Milly's burning ears could hear Sally's jeers. At the close of the act she got up and marched out without a word, followed by the bewildered Clarence.

"What's the matter Milly? Where are you going?"

"Home."

At the entrance there were no cabs in sight at this hour, and they walked to the end of the block where the cars passed. When a car came, Milly got as far as the platform, pronounced it a "filthy box," which it probably was, and made the conductor let her off. Then she marched haughtily northwards, trailed by Clarence Albert, in whose white face a dangerous pink was rising. Fortunately it was a still clear, night, and they covered the mile to Acacia Street without misadventure and without words. When they had reached the small front room and Milly had thrown off her wrap, her eyes still flashing angrily, Parker said in a carefully controlled voice:—

"I'm sorry, Milly, to have given you so much annoyance."

"As if a girl with a decent gown on could ride in a street-car!"

"I'm sorry—"

"If you can't afford—"

"I didn't know you were so dependent on carriages—"

It was a pardonable human revenge, but it was the straw. In a flash Milly stripped the big diamond from her finger and dramatically held it forth to him.

"Here's your ring," she said.

"Milly!..."

It isn't wise to follow such a scene any further. I do not know that Milly finally flung the ring at her lover, though she was capable of doing it like an angry child. At any rate the symbolic circle of harmonious union lay on the floor between them when Grandma Ridge arrived, stealthily coming from behind the portières, her little gray shawl hugged tight about her narrow shoulders.

"Why, Milly—what is this? Clarence!"

"It means that I'm not going to marry a man who cares more for his money than for me," Milly said bluntly, picking up her wraps and stalking out of the room. She paused in the hall, however, long enough to hear her former lover say dolefully,—

"She don't love me, Mrs. Ridge. That's the trouble—Milly don't really love me."

And she added from the hall:—

"Clarence is quite right, grandma. I don't love him—and what's more, I'm never going to marry a man I can't love for all the money in the world!"

With this defiant proclamation of principle Milly ascended to her room.

What passed between Mrs. Ridge and the discarded Clarence, it is needless to relate. Even Mrs. Ridge became convinced after a time that the rupture was both inevitable and irrevocable. Parker at last left the house, and it must be added took with him the ring which had been recovered from the floor.

After he had gone Mrs. Ridge knocked at Milly's door. But an obstinate silence prevailed, and so she went away. Milly was sitting on her bed, tears dropping from her eyes, tears of rage and mortification and disappointment. She realized that she had failed, after all, in doing what she had set out to do, and angry as she still was, disgusted with Clarence's thin and parsimonious nature, she was beginning, nevertheless, to be conscious of her own folly.

"I never liked him," she said to herself over and over, in justification for her rash act. "I couldn't bear him near me. I only did it for Dad's sake. And I could not, that's all there is to it—I just couldn't.... We should have fought all the time—cold, mean little thing."

After a time she undressed and went to bed, calmer and more at peace with herself than for some time. The inevitable does that for us. "I can't live with a man I don't love—it isn't right," she thought, and gradually a glow of self-appreciation for her courage in refusing, even at the ninth hour, to make the woman's terrible sacrifice of her sacred self came to her rescue. Her sentimental education, with its woman's creed of the omnipotence of love, had reasserted itself.

"I tried," she said in her heart, "but I couldn't—it wasn't the real, right thing."

Of course she had known this all along, but she treated it now as a new discovery. And she went to sleep, sooner than one might expect under the circumstances.

VI

THE DEPTHS

But the next day, as the French say, it was to pay. When Milly kissed her father at the breakfast table, his mournful eyes and drooping mouth showed plainly that he knew the disaster.

"I couldn't, father," she murmured weepily.

"It's all right, daughter," the little man responded bravely, fumbling with his fork and knife.

But her grandmother did not mince matters. It was all well enough for a girl to have her own way as Milly had had hers, but now she had made a nice mess of things,—put them all in a ridiculous position. Who was she to be so particular, to consider herself such a queen? etc., etc. Milly took it all in silence. She knew that she deserved it in part.

At last Horatio intervened. He didn't want his daughter to feel forced to marry a man she couldn't be happy with, not for all Danner's millions. Business was bad, to be sure, but he was a man yet and could find something to do to support his daughter.

"I hope it ends all this society business for good," Mrs. Ridge put in with a hard little laugh. "If you don't want to marry, you can go to work."

"I will," said Milly, humbly.

"Don't be hard on her, mother," Horatio whispered into the old lady's ear. "It don't do no good now."

But after he had left, Mrs. Ridge turned on Milly again.

"I don't suppose you know the trouble your father is in."

"We're always hard up.... Anything new?"

She had been so fully preoccupied with her own affairs these past months she had not realized that the tea and coffee business was getting into worse straits than ever. Everything, she had optimistically reckoned, would be smoothed out by her marriage.

"Bankruptcy—that's what's coming," her grandmother informed her, with an acid satisfaction in being able to record the fulfilment of her prophecies. "That comes of your father's trying a new business at his age—and Hoppers' was so sure. He'd have been a department head by now, if he had stayed."

"I thought the fair concession made a lot of money."

Mrs. Ridge gave her the facts. It seemed that Horatio, always optimistic and trusting, had put this new venture in the hands of a man who had talked well, but had cheated him outrageously, and finally absconded after the close of the Fair, leaving behind debts contracted in the firm's

name. The losses had wiped out all the profits of the concession and more, and this, added to the general business depression, was bad enough. But there was worse. Snowden had suddenly demanded his money. Using the defalcation as an excuse he alleged Horatio's bad management, and wanted an immediate settlement of the firm's affairs. That meant the end—bankruptcy, as Mrs. Ridge said. Awful word!

"But it's outrageous of Mr. Snowden!" Milly cried.

"It seems he's that kind. He got ahead of your father in the partnership agreement, and now the lawyer says he can do anything he likes—sell out the business if he wants to.... And we've got this house on our hands for another year," she added sourly, bringing home to Milly her share in the general misfortune.

Then the little old lady gathered up the breakfast dishes, while Milly sat and looked at the dreary wall of the next house. It was pretty bad. Still she could not feel sorry for what she had done....

"I'll see Mr. Snowden myself," she announced at last.

Her grandmother looked at her curiously.

"What good will that do?"

Milly, recollecting the old offence, blushed. Latterly as the prospective wife of a rich man she had assumed certain airs of her putative social position, and thought she could "manage" easily a common sort of person like this Snowden man. Now she realized with a sudden sinking of spirits it was all different. She possessed no longer any authority other than that of an attractive, but poor, young woman with "a good manner."

During the next few days she was destined to feel this change in her position repeatedly. If the news of her engagement to an "eligible" man had spread rapidly, the announcement of the disaster to her engagement seemed miraculously immediate. She had just begun with her grandmother's help to prepare to return her engagement gifts, as her grandmother insisted was the proper thing to do, when in rushed the Norton girls, quite breathless. Sally greeted her with a jovial laugh.

"So you've dropped him! I told Ted, Milly would never stand for those balcony seats!" She rippled with laughter at the humor of the situation. Milly, revived by her attitude, related the cab and car incidents. "He was—horrid."

"They're all like that, those New Englanders—afraid to spend their money," Sally commented lightly.

Vivie took the sentimental view.

"Your heart was never in it, dear," she said consolingly.

"Of course it wasn't—I never pretended it was!"

"That sort of thing can't last."

Milly, now quite reassured, gave a drole imitation of Clarence Albert's last remarks,—*"She doesn't love me, Mrs. Ridge—Milly doesn't really love me!"*

She trilled the words mischievously. Sally roared with pleasure. Vivie said, "Of course you couldn't marry him—not that!"

And Milly felt that she was right. No, she could not do *that*: she had been true to herself, true to her feelings,—woman's first duty,—a little late, to be sure.

But a full realization of her situation did not come until she appeared in public. Then she began to understand what she had done in discarding her suitable fiancé. Nettie Gilbert hardly invited her to sit when she called. She said severely:—

"Yes, Clarence told me all about it. He feels very badly. It was very frivolous of you, Milly. I should not have *thought it possible*."

She treated Milly as the one soul saved who, after being redeemed, had fled the flock. Milly protested meekly, "But I didn't care for him, Nettie, not the least little bit."

Mrs. Gilbert, who remembered her Roy, replied severely, "At least you ought to have known your own mind before this."

"He *is* mean," Milly flared.

"And you are rather extravagant, I'm afraid, my dear!"

That relation ended there, at least its pleasant intimacy. And so it went from house to house, especially among the settled married folk, who regarded Milly as inconceivably foolish and silly. Who was she to be so scrupulous about her precious heart? Even the younger, unmarried sort had a knowing and disapproving look on their faces when she met them. As for the stream of invitations, there was a sudden drought, as of a parched desert, and the muteness of the

telephone after its months of perpetual twinkle was simply ghastly.

So Milly was learning that there is one worse experience in life than not "making good," and that is, giving the appearance of it and then collapsing. This was the collapse. Sympathy was all with Clarence Albert, except among a few frivolous or sentimental souls, like Sally and Vivie. Young women having the means, who found themselves in Milly's situation,—with a broken engagement on their hands at the beginning of the season,—would at once have gone abroad or to California or the South, to distract themselves, rest their wounded hearts, and allow the world to forget their affairs, as it promptly would. At least they would have tried settlement work. But Milly had no money for such gentle treatment. She had to run the risk of bruising her sensibilities whenever she set foot out of doors, and she was too healthy-minded to sit long at home and mope. And home was not a pleasant place these days.

Still, she said to herself defiantly, she was not sorry for what she had done. A woman's first duty was to her heart, etc.

Eleanor Kemp, who had been ill and away from the city, sent for Milly on her return. She proved to be the most sympathetic of all her friends, and Milly decided that Eleanor was her best, as she was her oldest, friend. At the conclusion of Milly's tale, rendered partly in the comic vein, Mrs. Kemp sighed, "It's too bad, Milly." The sigh implied that Milly had damaged herself for the provincial marriage market, perhaps irretrievably. She might marry, of course, probably would, being sobered by this fiasco, but after such a failure, nothing "brilliant" might be expected.

"I just couldn't sit opposite that cold, fishy creature all my life," Milly protested. "He got on my nerves—that was it."

"Yes, I understand—but—"

Milly suspected that banking and bankers might get on a woman's nerves, too, though Walter Kemp was a much more human man than Clarence Albert ever would be.

"And now what will you do?" her friend inquired. (Milly had confided to her Horatio's coming disaster.)

"I don't know—something quick!"

"You might help me with my mail and buying—I never seem to get through with everything—and this New Hospital committee."

"Could I, do you think?" Milly responded eagerly.

So it was arranged that Milly should become a sort of informal lady secretary and assistant to the banker's wife, with unstated hours, duties, and compensation,—one of those flexible, vague business and social arrangements that women were more likely to make with one another twenty years ago than now.

Milly's spirits revived quickly, and she left the Kemps buoyant. It seemed easier than she had expected to "get something to do." She kissed Eleanor Kemp with genuine gratitude.

"You've always been the kindest, dearest thing to me, Nelly."

"I'm very fond of you, dear, and always shall be."

"I know—and you were my first real friend."

Milly had a pleasant sense of returning to old ideals and ties in thus drawing near once more to the Kemps, whom latterly she had found a trifle dull.... Leaving the house, she bumped into old Mrs. Jonas Hagggenash, one of the Kemps' neighbors. The Hagggenashes had made their way in lumber and were among the most considered of the older, unfashionable people in the city. Mrs. H. had a reputation as a wit, of the kind that "has her say" under any and all circumstances. Latterly she had rather taken up Milly Ridge, who fished in many pools.

"So you and your young man had a falling out, Milly," Mrs. Hagggenash rasped nasally.

"Our engagement has been broken," Milly acknowledged with dignity.

"That's a pity. It ain't every day a poor girl can marry a millionaire. They don't grow on every bush."

"When I marry, it will be some one I can respect and love too."

The old lady smiled dubiously at the pretty sentiment.

"Most women want to. But they've got to be fed and clothed first."

She looked at Milly's smart walking costume and smiled again. Milly always managed to have a becoming street dress and hat, even in her poorest days, and lately she had let herself out, as the pile of unopened bills on her dressing-table would show.

"I expect to eat and dress," Milly retorted, and trotted off with a curse near her lips for Mrs. Jonas Hagggenash and all her tribe.

The way home took Milly near the office of the tea and coffee business, and she thought to surprise her father and give him the good news of Mrs. Kemp's offer. She would also get him to walk home with her. Horatio had been very doleful of late and she wished to cheer him up. She had not visited the office for many months, but its outward appearance was much the same as it had been that first time when she had visited it with her father. The sign had become dingy, was almost undecipherable, as if it had anticipated the end of its usefulness. The same dreary little cart for "city deliveries" stood before the door, but the thin horse drooped disconsolately between the shafts, as if he too knew that he was not there for long.

Horatio was not in the office. Snowden stood beside the bookkeeper, looking over a ledger. As Milly opened the door both he and the bookkeeper looked up. Milly recognized the hatchet-faced woman of uncertain age, with the forbidding stare through her large spectacles. This time when Milly came forward with a pleasant smile and "Miss Simpson, how are you?" the stony face did not relax a muscle. Miss Simpson looked her employer's daughter over as if she were about to accuse her of being the cause for the firm's disaster. "Mr. Snowden," Milly continued, ignoring the woman's hostility, "I came for my father.... How are you and Mrs. Snowden?"

"Your father's gone," the bookkeeper snapped with an unpleasant smile. She eyed Milly's fashionable attire unsympathetically. It was the second time that afternoon that Milly was made to feel apologetic for her good clothes.

"Oh," she said hesitantly.

"Anything I can do for you, Miss Ridge?" Snowden asked, glancing down at the ledger indifferently.

Milly had an inspiration.

"Why, yes, Mr. Snowden," she exclaimed pleasantly. "I should like to talk with you a few moments, if I am not interrupting your work," she added, for Snowden made no move.

"Well?" he said gruffly.

Milly turned towards the rear of the loft where there were a number of little tables dotted with unwashed china cups, and grains of tea and coffee. Snowden followed her slowly, and leaned against a table.

"What is it?"

"Mr. Snowden," Milly began gently, "you are my father's oldest friend in the city."

"Guess I know that."

"He's very unhappy."

"Has good reason to be."

She made the direct appeal.

"Why do you do this thing, Mr. Snowden? Why do you want to ruin my father—your old friend?"

"Guess you don't understand—he's pretty nearly ruined *me*!" Snowden emitted with a snort.

"Yes, I understand," Milly replied glibly. "Business had been very bad. My friends tell me all business has been dreadful since the Fair—everybody feels poor. But why make things worse? A little time, and it will be different."

She smiled at him persuasively.

"I want to save my own skin, what there is left to save," he grumbled. "Your father's made a pretty bad mess of things, Milly."

"We won't discuss what my father has done," Milly retorted with dignity. "He's been deceived—he's too trusting with men. He trusted you!"

At this thrust Snowden laughed loudly.

"And you want me to trust him with my money some more? No, thank you."

His tone changed insensibly. No one could be rough with Milly for long. Snowden volunteered some explanations of the tea and coffee business not related by Mrs. Ridge. It seemed that Horatio had made rather a mess of things all around.

"So you see I must try and save what I can before it's *all* gone.... I've got a family of my own, you know."

Milly knew that, and wished she had been nicer to Mrs. Snowden and the uninteresting daughter when she had had the chance. She had never had them to the Acacia Street house in all these years.

"Can't you wait a few months?... Please!..."

Entreaty was all the argument life had given Milly. There was a leap of something in the man's

flushed face that caused the girl to retreat a step or two. She had not meant to rouse his graceless passion, but that was what she had almost succeeded in doing by her coaxing. As she drew back Snowden laughed.

"You see, Milly, people *pay* in this world for what they want—men and women too. They have to *pay* somehow!"

And, this enigmatic taunt ringing in her ears, Milly departed with all the dignity that remained to her. She was conscious of the bookkeeping woman's hostile sneer upon her back as she disappeared. Her face burned with the man's coarse words: "In this world people have to *pay* for what they want."

That was too true! She had not been willing to pay, except with smiles and pretty speeches, the small change, and it seemed that was not enough. She had not been willing to pay the price of a good position in her world which she wanted, nor Snowden's price for mercy to her father. Of course not that! But now she must pay somehow for what she got: for her food and her clothes and her shelter first of all. It had come to that. Thus Milly had her first lesson in the manifold realities of life.

Soberly but bravely she faced the winter wind and made her way home to her father's house.

VII

MILLY TRIES TO PAY

The next months were in some respects the dreariest that Milly was ever to know. It was not long before the illusion about her work for Eleanor Kemp wore thin. It was, in a word, one of those polite, parasitic occupations for women, provided by the rich for helpless friends, and it was satisfying to neither party. A good deal of time for both was wasted in "talking things over," with much discursive chatter on matters in general, and all sorts of consulting back and forth about the job to be done. There were letters to be carefully written, then rewritten after delicately guarded criticisms had been made; shopping to be done where it took hours to decide whether this "matched" or not and whether Danner's or Dround's was a better place for purchasing this or that. Milly still tried to keep up some social life, and so she usually came in at the Kemps rather late in the morning, and after lunching with her friend went back to the city on errands. She was a miracle of un-system, and frequently forgot. But she was so genuinely penitent and abased when her omissions were discovered that her friend had not the heart to be severe. Milly, on the other hand, began to think that the work took a great deal of time and that fifty dollars a month was small pay for her services, yet did not like even to hint that she wanted more.

Walter Kemp summed the matter up in the brutal fashion of man-financier, "Better give Milly her money and let me send you a trained woman from the bank to do your work, Nell."

But Eleanor Kemp was shocked at this evidence of male tactlessness.

"Milly would never take a gift like that!"

That was the trouble: Milly belonged to the class too proud to take charity and too incompetent to earn money. So Mrs. Kemp continued to do as much as she had done before and to pay Milly fifty dollars a month out of her private purse.

"Pity she didn't marry Parker," Kemp said brusquely. "He'll be a very rich man one of these days."

"You see she couldn't, Walter," his wife explained eagerly. "She didn't love him enough."

"Well," this raw male rejoined, "she'd better hurry up and find some one she does love who can support her."

"Yes," Mrs. Kemp admitted, "she *ought* to marry."

For in those days there didn't seem to be any other way of providing for the Milly Ridges.

Milly realized her inadequacy, but naturally did not ascribe it wholly to incompetency. She wanted to give up her irregular job: it could not be concealed from her friends, and it marked her as a dependent. But the stern fact remained that she needed the money, even the paltry fifty dollars a month, as she had never needed anything in life. If she refrained from spending a dollar for several years, she could hardly clear herself of the accumulated bills from her halcyon days of hope.

And the household needed money, too. After that regrettable interview with Snowden, the catastrophe in the tea and coffee business came with the swiftness of long-delayed fate. One morning Horatio did not rise from the breakfast table, as had been his wont for so many years, and throwing out his chest with the sensual satisfaction of the well-fed male shout boisterously:—

"Good-by, folks, I must be off to the office!"

For there was no longer any office to go to.

Instead, Horatio sat glumly at the table reading the want columns of the morning paper, down and up, and then as the morning wore on he silently departed for the city—"to look for something." Hopeless task, when the streets were filled with men out of work, and businesses everywhere were closing down and turning off old employees. Milly, watching Horatio reach gropingly for his hat and coat, like a stricken animal, realized that her father was no longer young and brave. He had passed fifty,—the terrible deadline in modern industry. "Nobody wants an old dog, any way," he said to his mother forlornly.

Then Milly was almost sorry for what she had done. But it was not really her fault, she still thought.

It was a mournful experience, this, of having a grown man—the one male of the family—sitting listlessly about the house of a morning and going forth aimlessly at irregular times, only to return before he should be expected. The habit of her life, as it had been the habit of Horatio's, was to have the male sally forth early from the domestic hearth and leave it free to the women of the family for the entire day... Usually optimistic to a fault, with a profound conviction that things must come right of themselves somehow, Milly began to doubt and see dark visions of the family future. What if her father should be unable to find another place—any sort of work—and should come to hang about the house always, getting seedier and sadder, to be supported by her feeble efforts? Milly refused to contemplate the picture.

One day her grandmother asked money from Milly. The old lady was a grim little nemesis for the girl these days,—a living embodiment of "See what you have done," though never for a moment would Milly admit that she was responsible for the accumulation of disaster. It should be said in behalf of Grandma Ridge that now the blow of fate had fallen, which she had so persistently predicted for four long years, she set her lips in grim puritan silence and did that which must be done without reproach.

Somehow she found the money for the rent from month to month and gave Horatio his carfare and lunch money each morning. But she came to Milly for money to buy food, and Milly gave it generously although she owed all she earned and much more. But food came before bills. If it hadn't been for Eleanor Kemp's luxurious luncheons, the girl would often have gone hungry... And through it all she never took refuge in tears. "What's the use?" she said.

It was during the darkest of these days that a new turn in Milly's fate came unexpectedly. She had been to a Sunday luncheon at the Nortons, and was walking back along the Drive, thinking a little sadly that even her old pals had invited her only at the last moment, "to fill in." She was no more any sort of social "card." She was revolving this and other dreary thoughts in her worried mind when she heard her name,— "Miss Ridge—I say, Miss Ridge!"

She turned to meet the beaming face of old Christian Becker, the editor-proprietor of the *Morning Star*, who was hurrying towards her as fast as his short, fat person would permit him. As he came along he raised his shiny silk hat above his bald head, and his broad face broke into a larger smile than was its wont. Becker was an amusing character, tempting to set before the reader, but as he has to do only incidentally with Milly Ridge it cannot be. Enough to say that after forty years of hard struggle in the land of his adoption, he had preserved the virtues of a simple countryman and the heart of a good-natured boy. Every one in the city knew Christian Becker; every one laughed and growled at his newspaper,—the God of his heart.

"Thought it must be you," he gasped. "Never forget how a pretty woman walks!" (How *does* she walk? Milly wondered.) "How are you, Miss Ridge? Haven't seen you for some time—not since that swell dinner at the Bowman place, d'ye remember?"

Milly remembered very well,—the apex moment of her career hitherto.

He smiled good naturedly, and Milly smiled, too. Then Becker added in a childlike burst of confidence:—

"Let me tell you, you did just right, my girl! Don't tie yourself up with any man you can't run with. It don't work. It saves tears and trouble to quit before you're hitched by the parson."

Milly flushed at the frank reference to her broken engagement, then laughed at the crude phrasing. But her heart warmed with the word of sympathy. Gradually she unburdened herself of all her troubles, and at the conclusion the kindly newspaper man said wisely:—

"Never you mind how folks behave, Miss Ridge. Keep a stiff upper lip—hold up your head—and you'll have all of 'em running after you like hens after corn 'fore you know it. That's what happened to me when I went broke that time."

"But I'm not fit to do anything," Milly confessed truthfully, "and I must support myself somehow."

"Why don't you try newspaper work? You are a clever girl and you know the world... Come to my office to-morrow noon—no, I've got a Washington nob on my hands for lunch—" (Becker was vain of his political influence, which consisted for the most part of entertaining visiting politicians at

luncheon.) "Come in 'bout four, and we'll see what we can do to help you out."

With a fatherly nod he hurried off down a side street, and Milly went home with a new fillip to her lively imagination.

As a matter of fact the proprietor of the *Star* was not entirely disinterested in his kindness. He had been looking for some woman to take "Madame Alpha's" place and furnish the paper with that column of intimate social tittle-tattle about people the readers knew only by name, which every enterprising American newspaper considers a necessary ingredient of the "news." The estimable lady, who signed herself "Madame Alpha," had grown stale in the business, as such social chroniclers usually do. The widow of an esteemed citizen, with wide connections in the older society of the city, she had done very well at first. But she had "fallen down" lamentably, to use Becker's phrase, during the recent period of Chicago's social expansion. She neither knew the new gods and goddesses, nor did she know how to invent stories about their doings.

Becker, who had seen Milly, not merely at the Bowmans, but at many of the more brilliant functions of the Fair season, regarded her as "up-to-date," and further, thought her a nice, lively young woman, who would know the difference between Mrs. Patziki's card party on Garfield Boulevard and a dinner to the French ambassador at the Danner's. It made little difference whether she could write or not, so long as she had the "entry" as he called it. At any rate he would try her.

So Milly began her new career as journalist with much enthusiasm and a sense of self-importance that had been grievously lacking in her enterprises for some time. She thought she had the ability to write—what attractive young American woman doesn't? Her friends thought her clever, and laughed at her little "stories" about people. She set herself industriously to the composition of elaborate articles on "Our Social Leaders," consisting largely of a retrospect and review, for "our social leaders" kept very still during those terrible months of want and panic that followed the gay doings of the great show, or were out of the city. These articles appeared in the Sunday edition, over the *nom de plume* of the "*Débutante*." Other women of the regular staff did the card-parties and club news and the West Side stuff.

There was a city editor, of course, and a ruthless blue pencil, but as Milly was recognized on the paper as "the old man's" present hobby, she was given a pretty free rein. She sailed into the dingy *Star* offices dressed quite smartly, dropped her sprawling manuscript on the Sunday editor's table, and ambled into Mr. Becker's sanctum for a little social chat. In the office she was known as "the Real Thing," and liked as she was almost everywhere, though the youthful reporters laughed at her pompous diction.

The *Star* paid her the handsome sum of fifteen dollars a week.

VIII

MILLY RENEWS HER PROSPECTS

It did not take Milly long to realize that the sort of newspaper writing she was doing was as parasitic in its nature as her first job, and even less permanent. Of course it quickly leaked out who the *Débutante* was who wrote with such finality of "our social leaders," and though friends were kind and even helpful, assuring Milly "it made no difference," and they thought it "a good thing for her to do," she knew that in the end her work would kill whatever social position she had retained through her vicissitudes. The more "exclusive" women with social aspirations liked secretly to have their presences and their doings publicly chronicled, but they were fearful lest they should seem to encourage such publicity. Although they said, "We'd rather have one of us do it if it has to be done, you know," yet they preferred to have it thought that the information came from the butler and the housemaid. Milly soon perceived that a woman must cheapen herself at the job, and by cheapening herself lose her qualification. Nevertheless, she had to keep at it for the money.

That was the terrible fact about earning one's living, Milly learned: the jobs—at least those she was fitted for—were all parasitic and involved personal humiliations. From this arose Milly's growing conviction of the social injustice in the world to women, of which view later she became quite voluble....

Fortunately the summer came on, when "Society" moved away from the city altogether. Becker, who had been somewhat disappointed in Milly's indifferent success, now suggested that she do a series of articles on inland summer resorts. "Show 'em," said the newspaper man, "that we've got a society of our own out here in the middle west, as classy as any in America,—Newport, Bar Harbor, or Lenox." He advised Lake Como for a start, but Milly, for reasons of her own, preferred Mackinac, then a popular resort on the cold water of Lake Superior.

By mid-July she was established in the most fashionable of the barny, wooden hotels at the resort and prepared to put herself in touch with the summer society. One of the first persons she met was a Mrs. Thornton from St. Louis, a pleasant, ladylike young married woman, who had a cottage near by and took her meals at the hotel. She was a summer widow with three children,—a thoroughly well-bred woman of the sort Milly instinctively took to and attracted. They became

friends rapidly through the children, whom Milly petted. She learned all about the Thorntons in a few days. They were very nice people. He was an architect, and she had been a Miss Duncan of Philadelphia,—also a very nice family of the Quaker order, Milly gathered. Mrs. Thornton talked a great deal of an older brother, who had gone to California for his health and had bought a fruit ranch there in the Ventura mountains somewhere south of Santa Barbara. This brother, Edgar Duncan, was expected to visit Mrs. Thornton during the summer, and in the course of time he arrived at Mackinac.

Milly found him on the piazza of the Thornton cottage playing with the children. As he got up awkwardly from the floor and raised his straw hat, Milly remarked that his sandy hair was thin. He was slight, about middle-aged, and seemed quite timid. Not at all the large westerner with bronzed face and flapping cowboy hat she had vaguely pictured to herself. Nevertheless, she smiled at him cordially,—

"You are the brother I've heard so much about?" she said, proffering a hand.

"And you must be that new Aunt Milly the children are full of," he replied, coloring bashfully.

So it began. For the next month, until Milly, having exhausted the social possibilities of Mackinac, had to move on to another "resort" in Wisconsin, she saw a great deal of Edgar Duncan. They walked through the fir woods by moonlight, boated on the lake under the stars, and read Milly's literary efforts on the piazza of the Thornton cottage. Duncan told her much about his ranch on the slope of the Ventura hills above the Pacific, of the indolent California life in the sunshine, with an occasional excursion to Los Angeles or San Francisco. He was not exciting in any sense, not very energetic, like the Chicago men she had known, perhaps not very much alive; but he was gentle, and kindly, and thoughtful for women, of a refined and high-minded race—the sort of man "any woman could be sure of."

Mrs. Thornton, with much sisterly affection and no vulgar ambition, encouraged unobtrusively the intimacy. "Edgar is so lonely out there on his ranch," she explained to Milly, "I want him to come back east. He might now, you know,—there's nothing really the matter with his health. But he's got used to the life and doesn't like our hurry and the scramble for money. Besides he's put all his money into those lemons and olives.... I think a woman might be very happy out of the world in a place like that, with a man who loved her a lot,—and children, of course, children,—don't you?"

Milly thought so, too. She was becoming very tired of newspaper work, and of her single woman's struggle to maintain herself in the roar of Chicago. The future looked rather gray even through her habitually rose-colored glasses. She was twenty-four. She knew the social game, and its risks, better than two years before.... So she was very kind to Duncan,—she really liked him extremely, rather for what he was without than for what he had,—and when she left it was understood between them that the Californian should return to his ranch by the way of Chicago and meet Milly there on a certain day,—Monday, the first of September. He was very particular, sentimentally so, about this date,—kept repeating it,—and they made little jokes of it until Milly even particularized the hour when she could be free to see him,—"Five o'clock, 31 East Acacia Street,—hadn't you better write it down?" But Duncan thought he could remember it very well. "We'll go somewhere for dinner," Milly promised.

That was all, but it was a good deal for the shy Edgar Duncan to have arrived at. Milly was content to leave it just that way,—vague and pleasant, with no explicit understanding of what was to come afterwards. She knew he would write—he was that kind; he would say more on paper than by word of mouth, much more. Then, when they met again, she would put her hand in his and without any talk it would have happened.... He came with the children to see her off at the station, and as the fir-covered northern landscape retreated from the moving train, Milly relaxed in her Pullman seat, holding his roses in her lap, and decided that Edgar Duncan was altogether the "best" man she had ever known well. She surrendered herself to a dream of a wonderful land where the yellow lemons gleamed among glossy green leaves, and the distant hills were powdered with the gray tint of olive trees, as Duncan had described the ranch, and also of a little low bungalow, a silent Jap in white clothes moving back and forth, and far below the distant murmur of the Pacific surges.... Her eyes became suffused: it wasn't the pinnacle of her girlish hope, but it was Peace. And just now Milly wanted peace more than anything else.

He wrote, as Milly knew he would, and though Milly found his letters lacking in that warmth and color and glow in which she had bathed the ranch, they were tender and true letters of a real lover, albeit a timid one. "All his life he had longed for a real companion, for a woman who could be a man's mate as his mother was to his father," and that sort of thing. He implied again and again that not until he had met Milly had he found such a creature, "but now," etc. Milly sighed. She was happy, but not thrilled. Perhaps, she thought, she was too old for thrills—twenty-four—and this was as near "the real right thing" as she was ever to come. At any rate she meant to take the chance.

Ocanseveroc did not prove attractive: it was a hot little hole by a steaming, smelly lake, like Como, only less select in its society and more populous. Milly quickly "did" the resort and fled back to Chicago for a breath of fresh air from the great cooling tub of Lake Michigan. That was the nineteenth of August. She had twelve days in which to get ready her articles before Duncan's arrival. On the hot train she planned a little article on the search for the ideal resort with the result of a hasty return to the city for comfort and coolness. She thought it might be made amusing and resolved to see the editor about it.

Matters at home had scarcely improved during the languid summer. Horatio sat on the stoop in his shirt-sleeves, unchided, or went for long hours to a beer-garden he had found near by. He made no pretence of looking for work. "What's the use—in the summer?" Milly stirred the stagnant domestic atmosphere with her recovered cheerfulness. She told them of her various adventures, especially of the Thorntons and of the new young man. Duncan had given her some kodaks of the fruit ranch in the Ventura mountains, which she displayed. *HE* was coming to see her soon, and she laughed prettily. Grandma maintained her sour indifference to Milly's doings, but Horatio took a lively interest. He had always wanted to go "back to a farm" since he was a young man, he said. It was the only place for a poor man to live these days, and they said those California ranches were wonderful money-makers. A man at Hoppers' had gone out there, etc.

Father and daughter talked ranch far into the hot night.

The next afternoon Milly went to the newspaper office to report and to discuss with the editor her last inspiration for an article. It was the vacation season and a number of the desks in the editorial room were vacant. Mr. Becker's door was closed and shrouded with an "Out of Town" card. At the Sunday editor's table in the partitioned box reserved for this official was an unfamiliar figure. Milly stopped at the threshold and stared. A young man, fair-haired, in a fresh and fetching summer suit with a flowing gauzy tie, looked up from the table and smiled at Milly. He was distinctly not of the *Star* type.

"Come right in," he called out genially. "Anything I can do for you? No, I'm not the new Sunday editor—he's away cooling himself somewheres.... I just came in here to finish this sketch."

Milly noticed the drawing-paper and the India-ink bottle on the table.

"You're not Kim?" Milly stammered.

"The same."

("Kim" was the name signed to some clever cartoons that had been appearing all that winter in a rival paper, about which there had been more or less talk in the circles where Milly moved.)

"So you've come over to the *Star*?" she said with immediate interest.

"The silver-tongued Becker got me—for a price—a small one," he added with a laugh, as if nothing about him was of sufficient consequence to hide.

"I'm *so* glad. I like your pictures awfully well."

"Thanks!... And you, I take it, are *la belle Débutante*?"

"Yes!" Milly laughed. "How did you know?"

"Oh," he replied, and his tone said, "it's because you too are different from the rest here," which flattered Milly.

"Won't you come in and sit down?"

The young man emptied a chair by the simple process of tipping it and presented it to Milly with a gallant flourish. She sat on the edge and drew up her veil as far as the tip of her nose. The young man smiled. Milly smiled back. They understood each other at once, far better than either could ever understand the other members of the *Star* staff. Their clothes, their accents, their manners announced that they came from the same world,—that small "larger world," where they all use the same idiom.

"Been doing Mackinac and Ocara-se-er-oc?" the young man drawled with delightful irony. "Ye gods! What names!"

Both laughed with a pleasant sense of superiority over a primitive civilization, though Milly at least had hardly known any other.

"And they're just like their names," Milly asserted, "awful places!"

"I've not yet had the privilege of seeing our best people in their summer quarters," the young man continued, with his agreeable air of genial mockery.

"You won't see them in those places."

"Or anywhere else at present," the artist sighed, glancing at his unfinished sketch.

Milly asked to see the drawing, and another inspiration occurred to her. She told the young artist of her idea for a comic article on the hunt through the lake resorts for an ideal place of peace and coolness. He thought it a good topic and suggested graciously that he could do a few small pen-and-ink illustrations to elucidate the text.

"Oh, would you!" Milly exclaimed eagerly. It was what she had hoped he would say, and it revived her waning interest in journalism immensely, the prospect of collaboration with this attractive young artist. (She had already forgotten that she was to abandon journalism after the first Monday in September.)

Later they went out to tea together to discuss the article.

Jack Bragdon, who signed his pen-and-ink sketches with the name of "Kim," was one of that considerable army of young adventurers in the arts who pushed westward from the Atlantic seaboard at the time of the World's Fair in Chicago; also one of the large number who had been left stranded when the tidal wave of artistic effort had receded, exposing the dead flats of hard times. After graduation from an eastern college of the second class, where he had distinguished himself by composing the comic opera libretto for his club and drawing for the college annual, he had chosen for himself the career of art. With a year in a New York art school and another spent knocking about various European capitals in a somewhat aimless fashion, an amiable but financially restricted family had declined to embarrass itself further for the present with his career. Or, as his Big Brother in Big Business had put it, "the kid had better show what he can do for himself before we go any deeper." Jack had consequently taken an opportunity to see the Fair and remained to earn his living as best he could by contributing cartoons to the newspapers, writing paragraphs in a funny column, and occasional verse of the humorous order. And he designed covers for ephemeral magazines,—in a word, nimbly snatched the scanty dollars of Art.

All this he sketched lightly and entertainingly for Milly's benefit that first time.

Already he had achieved something of a vogue socially in pleasant circles, thanks to his vivacity and good breeding. Milly had heard of his charms about the time of her Crash, but had never happened to meet him. He had heard of Milly, of course,—many things which might well stir a young man's curiosity. So they smiled at each other across a little table in a deserted restaurant, and sat on into the August twilight, sipping cooling drinks. He smoked many cigarettes which he rolled with fascinating dexterity between his long white fingers, and talked gayly, while Milly listened with ears and eyes wide open to the engrossing story of Himself.

Jack Bragdon was a much rarer type in Chicago of the early nineties—or in any American city—than he would be to-day. Milly's experience of the world had never brought her into close touch with Art. And Art has a fatal fascination for most women. They buzz around its white arc-light, or tallow dip, like heedless moths bent on their own destruction. Art in the person of a handsome, sophisticated youth like Jack Bragdon, who had seen a little of drawing-rooms as well as the pavements of strange cities, was irresistible. (Milly too felt that she had in her something of the artistic temperament, which had never been properly developed.)

Thus far, even by his own account, Bragdon was not much of an artist. He was clever with his fingers,—pen or pencil,—but at twenty-six he might very truthfully state,—"I've been a rotten loafer always, you know. But I'm reformed. Chicago's reformed me. That's what Brother meant.... Now watch and see. I'm not going to draw ridiculous pot-bellied politicians for a newspaper—not after I have saved the fare to Europe and a few dollars over to keep me from starving while I learn to really paint."

"Of course you won't stay here!" Milly chimed sympathetically, with an unconscious sigh....

It is marvellous what a vast amount of mutual biography two young persons of the opposite sexes can exchange in a brief tête-à-tête. By the time Milly and the young artist were strolling slowly northward in the sombre city twilight, they had become old friends, and Milly was hearing about the girl in Rome, the fascination of artist life in Munich, the stunning things in the last Salon, and all the rest of it. They parted at Milly's doorstep without speaking of another meeting, for it never occurred to either that they should not meet—the next day.

The gardens of that California Hesperides were already getting dim in Milly's memory, blotted out by a more intoxicating vision.

IX

MILLY IN LOVE

The next meeting was not farther off than the next noon. They lunched together, to talk further of their collaboration, and from luncheon went to the Art Institute to see the pictures, most of which Bragdon disposed off condescendingly as "old-style stuff." Milly, who had been taught to reverence this selection of masterpieces, which were the local admiration, learned that there were realms beyond her ken.

The next day saw another meeting and the next yet another. Then there was an intermission—Bragdon had to finish some work—and Milly felt restless. But there ensued ten delicious days of music and beer-gardens and walks in the parks, luncheons and suppers,—one starry Sunday spent scrambling among the ravines on the north shore and picnicking on the sandy beach, listening to the sadly soothing sweetness of Omar—(yes, they read Omar in those days, the young did!)—with little opalescent waves twinkling at their feet. Milly never paused to think one moment of all those ten precious days. She was blissfully content with the world as it was, except when she was at home, and then she was plotting skilfully "another occasion." If she had stopped to think, she would have murmured to herself, "At last! This must be the real, right thing!"

He was so handsome, so full of strong male youth and joy, of large hopes and careless intentions,

and he was also exotic to Milly,—a bit of that older, more complex civilization she had always longed for in her prairie limitations. His horizon had been broader than hers, she felt, though he was a mere boy in worldly knowledge. He even dressed differently from the men she knew, with a dash of daring color in waistcoat and ties that proclaimed the budding artist. And above all he embodied the Romance of Art,—that fatal lure for aspiring womankind. The sphere of creation is hermaphroditic: he too was fine and feminine, unlike the coarser types of men. He craved Reputation and would have it, Milly assured him confidently. She was immediately convinced of his high talent. Alas! She sighed when she said it, for she knew that his gifts would quickly waft him beyond her reach on his upward way. Chicago could not hold one like him long: he was for other, beautifuller ports of destiny!

At four forty-five on the afternoon of September first,—a Monday,—a tall, somewhat nervous man rang the bell of 31 East Acacia Street and inquired for Miss Ridge. He came in and waited when he learned from the little old lady who opened the door that Milly was not at home. He waited in the small front room, sombrelly darkened, where the tragedy of Milly's first engagement ring had taken place,—waited until six forty-five, then at the signs of preparation for the evening meal slipped out. But he was back at seven forty-five and again came in. This time Mrs. Ridge introduced herself and invited him politely to await her granddaughter's return. "She's very uncertain in her hours," the old lady explained with a deprecatory little laugh, "since she has undertaken this newspaper work. It seems to keep her at the office a great deal of late...." We may leave Edgar Duncan there in the little front room, being entertained by Mrs. Ridge in her most gracious manner, while we go in search of the truant Milly.

She might have been found at an unpretentious German beer-garden far out on the North Side. Bragdon and Milly had discovered this particular retreat, which was small and secluded and usually rather empty. It seemed to Milly quite "Bohemian" to drop into the garden late in the afternoon and rouse the sleepy proprietor to fetch them cool stone mugs of foaming beer, which the artist drank and which she sipped at.

On this Monday afternoon they had installed themselves in the little arbor at the remote end of the tiny garden, where they were shielded by the dusty vines from any observation, and thus the quarter hours and the halves slipped by unheeded. The artist told her again of his aspirations to paint,—"the real thing," to "go in for the big stunts." Milly listened sympathetically. That was what he should do, of course,—have a career, a man's career,—even if it parted him from her for always. All her life she had wished to be an "inspiration" in some man's life-work. What greater thing than to inspire an Artist to his glorious fulfilment?...

Imperceptibly their words became more personal and more tender. He wanted to paint *her* some day, as she had lain on the beach, with her lovely bronze hair, her wide blue eyes, and the little waves curling up towards her feet.... Dusk fell, and they forgot to eat.... At the moment when Edgar Duncan was describing to Mrs. Ridge for the second time the exact location of Arivista Ranch on the slope of the Ventura hills, Milly's head was resting close to the artist's face and very real tears were in her eyes—tears of joy—as her heart beat wildly under her lover's kisses and her ears sang with his passionate words....

For the one thing that the young artist had sworn to himself should never happen to HIM,—at any rate not until he was old and successful,—the very thing that Milly had laughed at as preposterous—"me fall in love with a poor man!"—had come to pass. Both had done it.

"I shan't spoil all your future for you, shall I, dear?" she whispered, her mouth close to his. He gave her the only proper answer....

"It shan't make any difference," she said later, in a calmer moment. "You shall have your life, dear, and become a great painter."

"Of course!" Youth replied robustly. "And I'll do a great picture of you!"

How wonderful! How wonderful it all was, Milly thought, as they threaded their way homewards through the slovenly, garish Chicago streets, mindful of naught but themselves and their Secret. How could anything so poetically wonderful happen in workaday Chicago? And Milly thought to herself how could any woman consider for a moment sacrificing THIS—"the real, right thing"—for any bribe on earth?...

As they neared the little house, Milly perceived the light in the front room and with an intuition of something unpleasant to follow dismissed her lover peremptorily, with a last daring kiss beneath the street-light, and tripped into the house.

It all came over her as soon as the tall figure rose from the uncomfortable corner sofa: she knew what she had done and she was filled with real concern for the Other One.

"Edgar!" she cried. "Have you been waiting long?"

"Some time," Mrs. Ridge observed with reproof.

"Since four forty-five," Duncan admitted, and added with a touch of sentiment. "I came fifteen minutes before the time."

Milly cast a fleeting glance backward over what had happened to her since four forty-five!

"But it doesn't matter now," he said with intention, "all the waiting!"

Mrs. Ridge discreetly withdrew at this point.

"I'm so glad to see you," Milly began lamely. "Do sit down."

"I've been sitting a long time," Edgar Duncan remarked, patiently reseating himself on the stiff sofa.

"I'm so sorry!"

"Did you forget?"

"Yes, I forgot all about it," Milly admitted bluntly. "You see so much has happened since—"

"Then you didn't get my letters?" he pressed on eagerly, ignoring Milly's last words.

"Oh, yes, I got all your letters," she said hastily, remembering that she had not found time or heart to open the last bulky three, which lay upstairs on her dressing-table. "Beautiful letters they were," she added sentimentally and irrelevantly, thinking, "What letters Jack will write!"

It is useless to follow this painful scene in further detail. Timid as Edgar Duncan was by nature he was man enough to strike for what he wanted when he had his chance,—as he had struck manfully in those bulky letters. And he repeated their message now in simple words.

"Milly, will you go back with me?... I've waited for you all my life."

Touched by the pathos of this genuine feeling, Milly's eyes filled with tears and she stammered,—

"Oh, I can't—I really can't!"

"Why not?"

(She would have been quite willing to make the journey with him, if she might have flown straightway back to the arms of her artist lover!)

"You see—it's different—I can't—" Milly could not bring herself to deal the blow. It seemed too absurd to state baldly that in twelve days a man had come into her life, whom she had never set eyes on thirteen days before, but who nevertheless had made it impossible for her to do what before that time she had looked forward to with serene content. Such things happened in books, but were ridiculous to say!

"You care for some one else?"

Milly nodded, and her eyes dropped tears fast. It all seemed very sad, almost tragic. She was sorry for herself as well as for him....

If he felt it inexplicable that he had not been allowed to suspect this deep attachment before, he was too much of a man to mention it. He took his blow and did not argue about it.

"I'm so sorry!" Milly cried.

"It had to be," he said, hastily putting out a hand to her. "I shall love you always, Milly!" (It was the thing they said in books, but in this case it sounded forlornly true.) "I'm glad I've had the chance to love you," and he was gone.

Milly dropped tears all the way upstairs to her room, where she shut herself in and locked herself against family intrusion. In spite of her tears she was glad for what she had done. A woman's heart seemed to her ample justification for inconsistencies, even if it jammed other hearts on the way to its goal. It was fate, that was all,—fate that Jack Bragdon should have walked into her life just twelve days before it would have been too late. Fate is a wondrously consoling word, especially in the concerns of the heart. It absolves from personal responsibility.

So Milly went to sleep, with tears still on her eyelashes, but a smile on her lips, and dreamed of her own happy fate. At last "the real, right thing" was hers!

X

MILLY MARRIES

She awoke with a sensation of bliss—a never ending happiness to be hers. Yet there were some disagreeable episodes before this bliss could be perfected. For one thing Horatio took the announcement of the new engagement very hard,—unexpectedly so. Grandma Ridge received it in stony silence with a sarcastic curve to her wrinkled lips, as if to say,—"Hope you know your mind this time!" But Horatio spluttered:—

"What? You don't mean that la-di-da newspaper pup who parts his hair in the middle?"

(To part one's hair in the middle instead of upon the slope of the head was Horatio's aversion—it indicated to him a lack of serious, masculine purpose in a young man.)

"I thought you would do better than that, Milly.... What's he making with his newspaper pictures?"

"I don't know," Milly replied loftily.

She might guess that it was in the neighborhood of thirty dollars a week, sometimes increased by a few dollars through a magazine cover or commercial poster. But in her present exalted mood it was completely indifferent to Milly whether her lover was earning twenty dollars or two thousand a week. They would live somehow—of course: all young lovers did.... And was he not a genius? Milly had every confidence.

"You might just as well have married Ted Donovan," Horatio groaned. (Donovan was the young man at Hoppers' whom Milly had disdained early in her West Side career.) "I saw him on the street the other day, and he's doing finely—got a rise last January."

"He's not fashionable enough for Milly," Grandma commented.

"I must say you treated that Mr. Duncan pretty badly," Horatio continued with unusual severity.

"I should say so!" Grandma interposed.

Milly might think so too, but she was serenely indifferent to all the defeated prospects, the bleeding hearts over which she must pass to the fulfilment of her being. It was useless to explain to her father and her grandmother the imperious call of "the real, right thing," and how immeasurably Jack differed from Ted Donovan, Clarence Albert, or even Edgar Duncan, and how indifferent to a true woman must be all the pain in the world, once she had found her Ideal.

Horatio and his mother might feel the waste of all their efforts in behalf of Milly,—the costly removal from the West Side home, the disastrous venture in the tea and coffee business, and all the rest,—to result in *this*, her engagement to a "mere newspaper feller who parts his hair in the middle." It was another example of the mournful experience of age,—the pouring forth of heart's blood in useless sacrifice to Youth. But Milly saw that her artist lover,—and the flame in her heart, the song in her ears,—could not have been without all the devious turnings of her small career. Each step had been needed to bring her at last into Jack's arms, and therefore the toil of the road was nothing—in her eyes. That was the way Milly looked at it.

Could one blame her, remembering her sentimental education, the sentimental ideals that for centuries upon centuries men have imposed upon the more imitative sex? She could not see the simple selfishness of her life,—not then, perhaps later when she too became a mother.

The catastrophe of her first engagement had cut Milly off from her more fashionable friends and the world outside, and this second emotional crisis cut her off from the sympathy of her family. After that first wail Horatio was glumly silent, as if his cup of sorrow was now filled, and Grandma Ridge went her way in stern oblivion of Milly. The girl was so happy—and so much away from home—that she hardly felt the cold domestic atmosphere.

A few short weeks afterwards, however, Mrs. Ridge announced to her that a tenant having been found for the house they should move the first of the month.

"Where are you going?" Milly asked, a trifle bewildered.

"Your father and I are going to board on the West Side," her grandmother replied shortly, implying that Milly could do as she pleased, now that she was her own mistress.

"Why over there?"

"Your father has secured a place in his old business."

From the few further details offered by her grandmother Milly inferred that it was a very humble place indeed, and that only dire necessity had forced Horatio to accept it,—to sit at the gate in the great establishment where once he had held some authority.

"Poor papa!" Milly sighed.

"It's rather late for you to be sorry, now," the old lady retorted pitilessly. She was of the puritan temper that loves to scatter irrefutable moral logic.

It was not until long afterward that Milly learned all the part the indomitable old lady had played in this crisis of her son's affairs. She had not only gone to see Mr. Baxter, one of the Hopper partners who attended the Second Presbyterian Church, and begged him to give her son employment once more, but she had humbled herself to appeal personally to their enemy Henry Snowden and entreat him, for old friendship's sake, to be magnanimous to a broken man. In these painful interviews she had not spared Milly. She had succeeded.

Sometime during the last hurried weeks of their occupancy of the Acacia Street house, Milly managed to have her lover come to Sunday supper and make formal announcement of their intentions to the old people. For long years afterwards she would remember the final scene of her emotional career in the little front room when her father had to shake hands with the young artist on the exact spot where Clarence's glittering diamond had lain disdained, where the faithful ranchman had received his blow, standing, full in the face.

Little Horatio looked gray and old; his lips trembled and his hand shook as he greeted Bragdon.

"Well, sir, so you and Milly have made up your minds to get married?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hope you'll make each other happy."

"We shall!" both chorused.

"And I hope you'll be able to support her."

"We'll live on nothing," Milly bubbled gayly.

"First time then I've known you to," Horatio retorted sourly.

It was the only bitter thing the little man ever said to his daughter, and it was the bitterness of disappointed hopes for her that forced the words from him then. Perhaps, too, Horatio had permitted himself to dream of Hesperidian apples of gold in eternal sunshine on the slopes of the Ventura hills and a peaceful old age far from the roaring, dirty city where he had failed. But when he spoke he was not thinking of himself, only of the dangers for his one loved child.

The meeting was hardly a cheerful one. Milly, in the exuberance of her new joy, could see no reason why everybody should not be as happy and hopeful as she was. But the older people, although they were scrupulously polite to the young artist, let their aloofness be felt in a chilly manner. This was Milly's affair, they implied: she was running her life to suit herself, as American children were wont to do, without advice from her elders. The young man was obviously ill at ease.

Milly felt that he was too large for the picture. She had never been ashamed of her humble home,—not with all her fashionable friends, not with her rich lover. But now she was conscious of the poor impression it must make upon the artist youth, who was so immeasurably superior to it in culture. When the old people had withdrawn after supper, leaving the lovers to themselves in the little front parlor, there were several moments of awkward silence between them. Milly was distressed for him, but she did not try to apologize. She said in her heart that she would make it up to him,—all that she lacked in family background. A woman could, she was convinced.

Possibly she did not fully realize how depressingly his situation had been brought home to him by this first contact with the Ridge household. He knew quite well how far thirty dollars a week went, with one man, and, as has been said, the last intention of his soul was to induce any woman to share it with him. Nor had he meant to seek out a rich wife, although having brought good introductions he had made his way easily into pleasant circles in his new home. Marriage had no part in his scheme of things. But he had been snared by the same tricky sprite of blood and youth that had inflamed Milly. Now his was the main responsibility, and he must envisage the future he had chosen soberly. No more pleasant dallying in rich drawing-rooms, no more daydreaming over the varied paths of an entertaining career. It was Matrimony! No wonder—and no discredit to him—that the young man was somewhat overwhelmed when he contemplated what that meant in material terms. Never for the fraction of a moment, it should be said, did he think of evading the responsibility. His American chivalry would have made that impossible, even if he had desired it. And Milly had his heart and his senses completely enthralled.

"Dearest," she said to him that evening, divining the sombre course of his thoughts, "it will be so different with us when we are married. We'll have everything pretty, even if it's only two rooms, won't we?" And her yielding lips sealed his bondage firmer than ever, though he might know that beauty, even in two rooms, costs money. He shut his eyes and hoped—which is the only way in such cases.

Milly did not tell him that within a fortnight she should be without even this home.

"There's going to be no engagement this time," Milly reported briskly to Sally Norton, when she announced her news, "for I had enough of that before, with all the fuss. Jack and I are both perfectly free. We're just going to be married some day—that's all."

"Milly! Well I never!" Sally gasped, amid shrieks of laughter. "Not really? You don't mean that kid?"

(Sally was conducting a serious affair herself, with a wary old bachelor, whom ultimately she led in triumph to the altar. Ever after she referred to Mr. John Bragdon as Milly's "kid lover").

"I think it splendid!" Vivie pronounced in a burst of appreciation. "It's the real thing, dear. You are both young and brave. You are willing to make sacrifices for your hearts."

Milly was not yet conscious of making any tremendous sacrifice. Nevertheless, she adopted easily this sentimentalized view of her marriage. And Vivie Norton went about among their friends proclaiming Milly's heroism. Some people were amused; some were sceptical; a few pitied the young man. "Milly, a poor man's wife—never! For he *is* poor, isn't he, a newspaper artist?"

"He has a great deal of talent," Vivie Norton asserted with assurance. Milly had so informed her.

"But an artist!" and Chicago shrugged its shoulders dubiously. An artist, at least a resident specimen of the craft, might be a drawing-room lap-dog, unmarried, but married he soon became a seedy member of society, somewhere between a clerk and a college professor in social standing. One of the smarter women Milly knew, Mrs. James Lamereux, exclaimed when she heard the news,—*"It's beautiful,—these days when the women as well as the men are so keen for the main chance in everything."* It was rumored there had been a sentimental episode in this lady's past, the fragrance of which still lay in her heart. Meeting Milly on the street she congratulated the girl heartily,—*"And, my dear, you'll have such an interesting life—you'll know lots of clever people and do unconventional things,—be free, you know, as WE are not"....* But Mrs. Jonas Hagganash remarked when some one told her the news,—*"The little fool! Now she's gone and done it."*

In general the verdict of friends seemed to be suspended: they would wait and see, preserving meantime an attitude of amiable neutrality and good-will towards this outbreak of idealism. But Milly was not troubling herself about what people thought or said. This time she had the full courage of her convictions. The only one of her old friends she cared to confide in deeply was Eleanor Kemp. That lady listened with troubled, yet sympathetic eyes. "Oh, my dear," she murmured, kissing Milly many times. "My dear! My dear!" she repeated as if she did not trust herself to say more. "I so hope you'll be happy—that it will be right this time."

"Of course it *is*," Milly retorted, hurt by the shadow of doubt implied.

"You know it takes so much for two people to live together always, even when they have plenty of money."

"But when they love," Milly rejoined, according to her creed.

"Even when they love," the older woman affirmed gravely.

She could see beyond the immediate glamor those monotonous years of commonplace living,—struggle and effort. She knew from experience how much of life has nothing to do with the emotions and the soul, but merely with the stomach and other vulgar functions of the body.

"I haven't a doubt,—not one!" Milly affirmed.

"That's right—and I oughtn't to suggest any.... You must bring Mr. Bragdon to dinner Sunday. Walter and I want to see him.... When are you to be married?"

"Soon," Milly replied vaguely.

"That's best, too."

Then Milly confessed to her old friend the dark condition of the Ridge fortunes, with the uncomfortable fact that very shortly she herself would be without a home.

"I must find some place to stay—but it won't be for long."

"You must come here and stay with us as long as you will," Mrs. Kemp promptly said with true kindness. "I insist! Walter would want it, if I didn't—he's very fond of you, too."

Thus fortune smiled again upon Milly, and the two friends plunged into feminine details of dress and domestic contrivance. Eleanor Kemp, who had a gift lying unused of being a capable manager, a poor man's helpmate, tried her best to interest Milly in the little methods of economizing and doing by which dollars are pushed to their utmost usefulness. Milly listened politely, but she felt sure that "all that would work out right in time." She could not believe that Jack would be poor always.... The older woman smiled at her confidence, and after she had gone shook her head.

The young artist had his due share of pride. When he realized that the woman he loved and meant to marry was staying with the Kemps because she had no other refuge, he urged their immediate marriage, though he also had a fair-sized package of bills in his desk drawer and needed a few months in which to straighten out his affairs. Milly was eager to be married,—*"When all would come right somehow."* So she opposed no objection.

Indeed as she let her lover understand, she was indifferent about the mere ceremony. She would go and live with him any time, anywhere, if it weren't for the talk it would make and hurting her father's feelings. Milly was, of course, an essentially monogamic creature, like any normal, healthy woman. She meant simply that, once united with the man she really loved, the thing was eternal. If he should cease to love her, it would be the end of everything for her, no matter whether she had the legal bond or not. However flattered her lover may have been by this exhibition of trust, Bragdon was too American in instinct to entertain the proposal seriously.

"What's the use of that, anyway?" he said. "We mean to stick—we might as well get the certificate."

So, as Milly confided to Eleanor Kemp, they determined "just to go somewhere and have it done as quickly as possible, without fuss and feathers."

And Mrs. Kemp, realizing what a sacrifice this sort of marriage must mean to any girl,—without the pomp and ceremony,—felt that it was a good sign for the couple's future, showing a real desire to seek the essentials and dispense with the frills. She and her husband had planned to give the young adventurers a quiet but conventional home wedding, with friends and a reception. But she readily acquiesced in Milly's idea, and one bleak Saturday in January slipped off with the lovers to a neighboring church, and after seeing them lawfully wedded by a parson left them to their two days' holiday, which was all the honeymoon they allowed themselves at this time....

Milly was a fresh and blooming bride in a becoming gray broadcloth suit, and as she stood before the faded parson beside her chosen man to take the eternal vows of fidelity, no woman ever gave herself more completely to the one of her heart. The wonderful song of bliss that had been singing inside her all these last weeks burst into a triumphal poem. She felt curiously exalted, scarcely herself. Was she not giving everything she had as a woman to her loved one, without one doubt? Had she not been true to woman's highest instinct, to her heart? She had rejected all the bribes of worldliness in order to obtain "the real, right thing," and she felt purified, ennobled, having thus fulfilled the ideals of her creed.... She turned to her husband a radiant face to be kissed,—a face in which shone pride, confidence, happiness.

As the older woman, with tear-dimmed eyes, watched the two bind themselves together for the long journey, she murmured to herself like a prayer,—*"She's such a woman! Such a dear woman! She MUST be happy."*

That was the secret of Milly's hold upon all her women friends: they felt the woman in her, the pure character of their sex more highly expressed in her than in any one else they knew. She was the unconscious champion of their hearts.

Again the older woman murmured prayerfully,—*"What will she do with life? What will she do?"*

For like the wise woman she was she knew that in most cases it is the woman who makes marriage sing like a perpetual song or become a sullen silence. All the way to her home she kept repeating to herself,—

"What will she make of it? Milly!"

PART THREE

ASPIRATIONS

I

THE NEW HOME

They took a tiny, four-room apartment far, far out on the North Side. It was close to the sandy shore of the Lake; from the rear porch, which was perched on wooden stilts in the fashion of Chicago apartments, the gray blue waters of the great lake could be seen. In the next block there were a few scrubby oak trees, still adorned, even in January, with rustling brown leaves, which gave something of a country air to the landscape. By an ironical accident the new apartment they had chosen happened to be not far from the spot where Clarence Albert had wished to build his home. There was still much vacant property in this neighborhood, as well as the free lake beach, which attracted the lovers, and though it was a tiresome car-ride to the centre of the city Milly did not expect to make many journeys back and forth.

At first she had had some idea of resuming her newspaper work, but that had become almost negligible of late, since her preoccupation with love, and when she approached Mr. Becker, he showed slight interest. He felt kindly towards the two young adventurers, but he was not disposed to carry his sentiments into the newspaper business. They must "make good" by themselves, like any other Tom and Gill, and Milly married to an impecunious newspaper artist would not be a social asset for the *Star*. So Milly, happily, was relegated to domesticity, and the management of her one raw little maid. Anyway, as she told Eleanor Kemp, her husband did not care to have his wife working—didn't think much of women in the newspaper business. She was proud of his Pride....

The new home was a pretty little nest. Milly had rescued from the last débacle of the Ridge household those few good pieces of old mahogany that had been her mother's contribution to the conglomerate, and kind friends had added a few essential articles. Especially Eleanor Kemp, with a practical eye and generous hand, had taken delight in seeing that all details of the new home

were complete, and that everything was in smiling order on their return from the brief wedding trip. She had even taken pains to have flowers and plants sent in from the Como greenhouses. (The plants speedily died, as Milly forgot to water them.)

So now they were embarked, cosily and cheerily, considering their circumstances. As a shrewd worldly philosopher once put it on a similar occasion: "Your John and my Amy got launched today on the long journey. Poor dears! They think it's to be one long picnic. But we know they are up against the Holy State of Matrimony—a very different proposition." By which he meant, no doubt, that the young couple were to discover that instead of passion and sentiment, verses and kisses, marriage was largely a matter of feeding John and keeping him smoothly running as an economic machine, and of clothing Milly and keeping her happily attuned to the social cosmos,—later on of feeding, clothing, educating, and properly launching the little Johns and Millys who might be expected to put in an appearance....

But our lovers had not struck the prosaic bottom yet, though they reached it sooner than either had expected. There were a good many kisses and verses the first months, passion and temperament. John discovered, of course, that Mrs. Bragdon was quite a different woman from Milly Ridge,—a still fascinating, though occasionally exasperating, creature, while Milly thought John was just what she had known he would be,—an altogether adorable lover and perfect man. What surprised her more as the early weeks of marriage slipped by was to find that she herself had remained, in spite of her great woman's experience, much the same person she had always been, with the same lively interests in people and things outside and the same dislike of the sordid side of existence. She had vaguely supposed that the state of love ecstasy which had been aroused in her would continue forever, excluding all other elements in her being, and thus transform her into something gloriously new. Not at all. She still felt aggrieved when the maid boiled her eggs more than two minutes or passed the vegetables on the wrong side.

When the two first seriously faced the budget question, they found that they had started their sentimental partnership with a combined deficit of over four hundred dollars. Luckily Mrs. Gilbert had sent to their new address a chilly note of good wishes and a crisp cheque for one hundred dollars. It was rather brutal of the good lady to put them so quickly on the missionary list, and Milly wanted to return the cheque; but John laughed and "entered it to the good," as he said. Then miraculously Grandma Ridge had put into Milly's hand just before the wedding ten fresh ten-dollar bills. Where had the old lady concealed such wealth all these barren years, Milly wondered!... And finally, among other traces of Eleanor Kemp's fairy hand, they found in a drawer of Milly's new desk a bank-book on Walter Kemp's bank with a bold entry of \$250 on the first page. So, all told, they were able to start rather to the windward, as Bragdon put it. Much to Milly's surprise, the artist proved to have a sense of figures, light handed as he had shown himself before marriage. At least he knew the difference between the debit and the credit side of the ledger, and had grasped the fundamental principle of domestic finance, viz. one cannot spend more than one earns, long. He insisted upon paying up all the old bills and establishing a monthly budget. When, after the rent had been deducted from the sum he expected to earn, Milly proved to him that they could not live on what was left, he whistled and said he must "dig it up somehow," and he did. He became indefatigably industrious in picking up odd dollars, extending his funny column, doing posters, and making extra sketches for the sporting sheet. In spite of these added fives and tens, they usually exceeded the budget by a third, and when Jack looked grave, Milly of course explained just how exceptional the circumstances had been.

It is not worth while to go into the budgetary details of this particular matrimonial venture. Other story-tellers have done that with painful literalness, and nothing is drearier than the dead accounts of the butcher and baker, necessary as they are. The essential truths of domestic finance are very simple, and invariable: in the last analysis they come to one horn of the eternal dilemma,—fewer wants or more dollars. In America it is usually the second horn of the dilemma that the husband valiantly embraces—it seems the easier one at the time, at least the more comfortable horn upon which to be impaled. Milly was convinced that the first horn was impossible, if they were to "live decently." Bragdon began to think they might do better in New York, where the market for incidental art was larger and the pay better. Milly was eager for the venture. But both hesitated to cut themselves off from a sure, if lean, subsistence. The *Star* raised him during the presidential campaign, when he was quite happy in caricaturing the Democratic ass and the wide-mouthed Democratic candidate. (They always had a tender feeling for the gentleman after that!) All in all, he made nearly twenty-five hundred dollars the first year, and that was much more than he had expected. But he found that even in those years of low prices it was a small income for two—as Milly pointed out.

However, money was not their only concern. The young wife was properly ambitious for her husband.

"It isn't so much the money," she told Eleanor Kemp. "I don't want Jack to sink into mere newspaper work, though he's awfully clever at it. But it leads nowhere, you know. I want him to be a real artist; he's got the talent. And if he succeeds as a painter, it pays so much better. Just think! That Varnot man charges fifteen hundred dollars for his portraits and such daubs—don't you think so?"

(Emil Varnot was one of the tribe of foreign artists who periodically descend upon American cities and reap in a few months a rich harvest of portraits, if they are properly introduced—much to the disgust of local talent.)

"Don't be impatient, Milly," Mrs. Kemp counselled. "It will come in time, I've no doubt. You must

save up to go abroad first."

But the dull way of thrift was not Milly's; it was not American. Improvements there are financed by mortgage, not by savings. They must borrow to make the next step.... Milly had lofty ideals of helping her husband in his work. She was to be his inspiration in Art, of course: that was to go on all the time. More practically she hoped to serve as model from which his creations would issue to capture fame. She had heard of artists who had painted themselves into fame through their wives' figures, and she longed to emulate the wives. But this illusion was shattered during the first year of their married life. When Bragdon essayed a picture in the slack summer season, it was discovered that Milly, for all her vivacious good looks, was not paintable in the full figure. (They had tried her on the sands behind the flat, where they rigged up an impromptu studio out of old sails.) Her legs were too short between the thigh and the knee, and when the artist tried to correct this defect of his model, the result was disastrous.... However, what was of more practical purpose, her head answered very well, and Milly's pretty face adorned the covers of various minor magazines, done in all possible color schemes at twenty dollars per head. "I earn something," she said, by way of self-consolation.

She had another disappointment. She had imagined that her husband would do most of his work at home, immediately under her fostering eye, and that in this way she should have a finger, so to speak, in the creative process; but for the present the sort of "art" they lived on was best done in an office, with the thud of steam presses beneath and the eager eye of the copy-reader at the door. So Milly was left to herself for long hours in her new little home, and Milly was lonely. The trouble obviously was that Milly had not enough to do to occupy her abundant energy and interest in life. They were not to have children if possible: in the modern way they had settled beforehand that *that* was impossible. And modern life had also so skilfully contrived the plebeian machinery of living that there was little or nothing left for the woman to do, if she were above the necessity of cooking and washing for her man. Deliberately to set herself to find an interesting and inexpensive occupation for her idle hours was not in Milly's nature,—few women of her class did in those days. It was supposed to be enough for a married woman to be "the head of her house"—even of a four-room modern apartment—and to be a gracious and desirable companion to her lord in his free hours of relaxation. Anything else was altogether "advanced" and "queer."

So after the first egotistic weeks of young love, the social instinct—Milly's dominant passion, in which her husband shared to some extent—awoke with a renewed keenness, and she looked abroad for its gratification. Their immediate neighbors, she quickly decided, were "impossible" as intimates: they were honest young couples, clerks and minor employees, who had come to the outskirts of the great city, like themselves, for the sake of low rents and clean housing. There were no signs of that "artistic and Bohemian" quality about them which she had hoped to find in her new life. Her husband assured her that he had failed to discover any such circle in Chicago, any at least whose members she could endure. That was where America, except New York possibly, differed from Europe. It had no class of cultivated poor. Occasionally he brought a newspaper man from the city, and they had some amusing talk over their dinner. A few of Milly's old friends persistently followed her up, like the Norton girls, the kindly Mrs. Lamereux, and the Kemps. But after accepting the hospitality of these far-off friends, there was always the dreary long journey back to their flat, with ample time for sleepy reflection on the futility of trying to keep up with people who had ten times your means of existence. It was not good for either of them, they knew, to taste surreptitiously the *bourgeois* social feast, when they were not able "to do their part." Nevertheless, as the spring came on, Milly invited people more and more, and in the long summer twilights they had some jolly "beach parties" on the sandy lake shore, cooking messes over a driftwood fire, and also moonlight swimming parties. By such means the dauntless Milly managed to keep a sense of social movement about them.

She saw her father rarely. It was a day's journey, as she expressed it, to the West Side, and her father was never free until after six, except on Sundays, which Milly consecrated to husband, of course. Really, father and daughter were not congenial, and they discovered it, now that fate had separated them. At long intervals Horatio would come to them for Sunday dinner, when Milly had not some other festivity on foot. On these occasions the little man seemed subdued, as if he had turned down the hill and drearily contemplated the end, at the bottom. He liked best to sit on the rear porch, read the Sunday *Star*, and watch the gleaming lake. Perhaps it reminded him of that vision he had indulged himself with for a few short weeks of the broad Pacific beneath the Ventura hills. Milly felt sorry for her father and did her best to cheer him by giving him a bountiful dinner of the sort of food he liked. She had a faint sense of guilt towards him, as if she might have done more to make life toothsome for him in his old age. And yet how could she have been false to her heart, which she felt had been amply vindicated by her marriage? Pity that her heart could not have chimed to another note, but that was the way of hearts. She was relieved when she had put her father aboard the car on his return. As for Jack, he was always kind and polite, but frankly bored; the two men had nothing in common—how could they? It was the two generations over again—that was all.

Old Mrs. Ridge never made the journey to the Bragdon flat, and Milly saw her only once or twice after her marriage. She was not sorry. Years of living with "Grandma" had eaten into even Milly's amiable soul. The little old lady grimly pursued her narrow path between the boarding-house and the church, reading her *Christian Vindicator* for all mental relaxation, until one autumn morning she was found placidly asleep in her bed, forever.

That was the next event of importance in Milly's life.

II

A FUNERAL AND A SURPRISE

When Horatio telephoned the news, Milly hurried over to the West Side, and was taken to her grandmother's room. The little old lady seemed extraordinarily lifelike in her death—perhaps because there had been so little outward animation to her life. Her thin, veined hands were folded neatly over her decent black dress, as she had sat so many hours, perfectly still. The neat bands of white hair curved around the well-shaped ears, and the same grim smile of petty irony that Milly knew so well and hated was graven on the thin lips.... She was taken to that cemetery on the Western Boulevard which Milly as a girl had prevented her from visiting on her daily walk. There were several old ladies from the boarding-house at the funeral, and one other thin-faced woman, whom Milly vaguely remembered to have seen somewhere.

Milly returned from the funeral with her husband, and they were both silent and thoughtful, occupied not so much with the dead as with the future her going must disturb. They had not dared voice to each other the idea that had been troubling them both since the first news of Mrs. Ridge's death had reached them. At last, when they had left the car and were approaching their own home, Bragdon said,—“I suppose, Milly, we ought to have your father live with us.”

“I suppose so,” Milly sighed. “Poor papa—he feels it dreadfully.... He's done so much for me always, Jack.”

Her husband might rejoin that Horatio had done little for him, but he said instead,—

“We shall have to find a larger apartment.”

Milly sighed. It was difficult enough to get on in the little one.

“You'll go over to-morrow to see him about it?” Bragdon continued courageously.

“Father can't come 'way out here to live—it's too far from his business.”

“We'll have to move nearer the business then.”

“Not to the West Side!” Milly exclaimed in horror.

“What difference does it make?” her husband asked, as he wearily took up his drawing-board.

“You don't know the West Side,” Milly muttered.

“Well, we can't leave him alone in that boarding-house, can we?”

That was exactly what Milly would have liked to do, but she had not the courage to say so in the face of her husband's ready acceptance of the burden. The next day, as she revolved the unpleasant situation on her way to see her father, she said to herself again and again,—“Not the West Side. I won't have that—anything but that!” For to return to the West Side seemed like beginning life all over again at the very bottom of the hill.

When Milly announced her invitation to her father, Horatio exhibited a strange diffidence.

“We'll find some nice little apartment nearer the city where you'll have no trouble in getting to your business,” Milly said in kindly fashion.

“I guess not,” Horatio replied. “Not but that it's real kind of you and John.”

“Why not?”

“Well, you see, daughter, your husband ain't my kind,” he stammered. “He's all right—a good fellow, and he seems to make you happy—but I don't much believe in mixing up families.”

“What will you do?”

And after further embarrassment, Horatio confessed with a red face,—

“Perhaps I'll get married myself soon.”

“Papa—you don't mean it!” Milly exclaimed, rather shocked, and inclined to think it was one of Horatio's raw jokes.

“Why not?... I ain't as old as some, if I'm not as young as others.”

“Who is the lady?”

“A fine young woman!... I've known her well for years, and I can tell you she'll make the right sort of wife for any man.”

"Who can it be?" demanded Milly, now quite excited, and running over in her mind all of her father's female acquaintance, which was not extensive.

"Miss Simpson," Horatio said. "Expect you don't remember Josephine Simpson—she was the young woman who was in the office when I had the coffee business."

"That woman!" Milly gasped, remembering vividly now the sour, keen scrutiny the bookkeeper had given her the last time she had been in the office of the tea and coffee business. It must have been Miss Simpson who had stood a little to one side behind her father at the funeral. The thin-faced woman had a familiar look, but in her best clothes Milly had not recognized her.

Horatio resented the tone of his daughter's exclamation.

"Let me tell you, Milly," he asserted with dignity, "there are few better women living on this earth than 'that woman.' She's looked after a sick mother and a younger sister all her life, and now I mean she shall have somebody look after her."

The little man rose an inch bodily with his intention.

"I think it's very nice of you, papa."

"Nice of me! An old hulks like me?... I guess it's nice of her to let me.... We'll make out all right. Will you come to the wedding?" he concluded with a laugh.

"Of course—and I'm so glad for you, really glad, papa. I hope Josephine'll make you very happy."

And she kissed her father.

On her way back to the city Milly laughed aloud several times with amusement mingled with relief. "Who would have thought it—and with such a scarecrow!" She stopped at the *Star* to tell Jack the news. They had lunch together and laughed again and again at "love's young dream."

"He won't be lonely now!" Milly said.

"I suppose he had to have some woman attached to him," her husband mused; "when a man has reached his age and has had 'em about always—"

"Well, I like that!" Milly pouted.

"Anyway, that let's us out," was the final comment of both upon the approaching nuptials of Horatio.

It was not the only surprise that the little old lady's death provided the young couple with. It was discovered that she had made a will, and, what was still more wonderful, that she had really something to will! Various savings-bank books were found neatly tied up with string in her drawer below a pile of handkerchiefs. The will said, after duly providing for the care of her grave, "To my beloved granddaughter, I give and bequeath the residue of my estate," which upon examination of the bank-books was found to be rather more than three thousand dollars all told.

"To me!!" Milly almost shouted when her father read the slip of paper to her. She was divided in her astonishment between surprise that there should be any money left, and that the little old lady, who had fought her all her life, should give it all to "her beloved granddaughter."

Bragdon could not appreciate the full irony of the situation.

"And why not to you?" he asked.

"You don't know grandma!" Milly replied oracularly, feeling that any attempt to explain would be useless.—And, it may be added, Milly did not know her grandmother, either. She could no more appreciate the steady, stern self-denial that had gone to the gathering of that three thousand dollars than she could the nature of a person who would nag for twenty years the girl she meant to endow. That also belonged among the puritan traits, as well as a sneaking admiration for the handsome, self-willed, extravagant granddaughter.

"She ought to have left it to you," Milly said to her father.

"I guess she thought she had done enough for me already," Horatio said lightly. "She knew about Josephine, too—expect she thought the green parlor furniture would be the right thing for us. Josephine's likely to appreciate that more'n you, Milly!"

Milly was amply content with this division.

Husband and wife lay awake for long hours that night, in a flutter of excitement, discussing Milly's marvellous windfall.

"Just think," Milly cried, snuggling very close to her husband. "We'll go abroad as soon as we can pack up, shan't we? And you will paint! And all thanks to poor old grandma."

"It *is* luck," the artist agreed thankfully.

"And I brought it to you—poor little me, without a *sou!*... Three thousand ought to last a long

time."

(Milly was invariably optimistic about the expansibility of money.)

"It'll be a good starter, anyway," her husband agreed, "and before it's gone I ought to be making good."

So that night two very happy married people went to sleep in each other's arms to dream of a wonderful future.

III

ON BOARD SHIP

At last Milly was tucked up in a steamer chair beside her artist husband, on board the old *Augusta Victoria*, bound for Europe, that exhaustless haven of romance where with or without an excuse all good Americans betake themselves when they can....

The last few weeks had been exciting ones. It had begun with Horatio's wedding to the homely bookkeeper, which Milly dutifully attended with her husband. In spite of the very handsome rug that they had sent the couple, Mrs. Horatio preserved a cold demeanor towards her husband's daughter, as if she still suspected the young woman of designs upon Horatio and had married him for the sole purpose of protecting him for the future from this rapacious creature. Milly, quickly perceiving the situation, mischievously redoubled her demonstration over poor Horatio, who was visibly torn between his loyalties.

"Lord, what a sour face she has!" Milly commented to her husband, when they had left the bride and groom. "Poor old Dad, I hope she'll let him smoke!... Why do you suppose he married her?"

"To have some one to work for," Bragdon, who was not without a sense of humor, suggested.

"He might at least have found somebody better looking."

"She looks capable, at any rate."

Milly made a face. She did not like this appreciation of another woman's capability by her husband....

Then came the farewell visits of old friends, who all wished the two venturers great good luck and sadly prophesied they would never return to the city by the lake. Milly was tearful over their departure, but a delirious week in New York that followed did much to efface this sentimental grief. Jack kept finding old friends at every corner, who welcomed him "back to civilization" uproariously, and Milly felt fairly launched on her new career already. A very good-natured Big Brother-in-law took them to Sherry's for dinner, and, charmed by his new sister, spontaneously offered to increase their small hoard by another thousand, with the promise of still more help, in case their "stake" ran out before the two years of Europe they planned had brought results. Finally an old college acquaintance of Jack's, who had made his *début* in literature successfully and was engaged to provide a woman's magazine with one of his tender stories with a pronounced "heart interest," promised to secure the illustrations for Bragdon. "If I can catch on," the artist told his wife, "it means—anything. Clive Reinhard turns out one of his sloppy stories every six months, and they are all illustrated."

Altogether when they set sail they calculated their resources, if carefully managed, could be made to last three years. Three years of Europe!... Milly had never looked so far ahead in all her life.

Milly, snugly tucked up on the leeward side of the deck, closed her eyes as the boat rolled with heavy dignity, and thought. To be perfectly frank her married life in the four-room flat on the outskirts of Chicago had begun to pall on her. It seemed to lead nowhere. It had not been very different from the lives of the little people about her, from what she would have done and been if she had married Ted Donovan, say. Only, of course, Jack was different from Ted, and with him it could not last in the commonplace rut. They were merely little people, and very poor little people, in the big whirl of the western city—with their hope. Suddenly in the most romantic manner the Hope had taken shape—and Milly, thanks to grandma's surprising gift, arrogated to herself the whole credit of that. She did not pause to think what might have happened to them if they had been obliged to continue in the rut. She did not realize that already "love was not enough."

But now heigho for Venture and the New Life—the life of Art! Milly still thought vaguely that according to Mrs. Lamereux it would mean meeting a lot of interesting people, endless clever talk over delightful meals in queer little French restaurants or in picturesque and fascinating studios. "Art" was the next thing to money or fashion. If one couldn't be awfully rich or a "social leader," the best thing was to be artistic and distinguished, which brought you into contact with all sorts of people, among them "the fashionables," of course. She meant that her husband should

be a successful painter, not a mere illustrator.

Of the real nature of Art and the artist's life Milly had no better conception than when she first fell in love with Jack Bragdon. She knew nothing of the artist's despairs and triumphs, his tireless labor to grasp the unseen, his rare and exalted joys, his strange valuation of life,—in short the blind, unconscious purpose of Art in the terrestrial scheme of things. Nor perhaps did John Bragdon at twenty-eight. The crust of *bourgeois* standards is so thick in American life that it takes a rare and powerful nature to break through, and Bragdon had not yet begun to knock his way.... Milly's idea of Art, like most women's, was Decoration and Excitement. When successful, it made money and noise in the world, and brought social rewards, naturally. She hadn't married Jack for that, or for any reason except because of his own adorable personality, as she told him frequently. But now that she was married she meant to make the most of the Gift. Jack was to be a Creator, and she aspired to be embodied somehow in the creation and share its profits.

At last they were launched: their marriage was really just beginning.... She snuggled closer to her husband under the common rug and murmured in his sleepy ear,—

"Isn't it great, Jack?"

"What?" (Drowsily.)

"Europe! Everything!... That we're really here on the steamer!"

"Um!"

"And you're going to be a great painter—"

"Perhaps." (Dubiously.)

"What shall you do first?"

"Don't know—find a cab."

"Silly!... Don't make fun of me.... Kiss me!... Do you mind, dear, going down into the cabin and looking for my hot-water bottle," etc.

Bragdon recovered first from the Atlantic languor, and in the course of his rambles about the ship discovered an acquaintance in the second cabin,—a young instructor in architecture at a technical school, who with his wife and small child were also on their way to Paris for the winter. He brought Milly to see the Reddons where they were established behind a ventilator on the rear deck. Milly thought they seemed forlorn and pitied them. Mrs. Reddon was a little pale New Englander, apparently as fragile as a china cup, and in her arms was a mussy and peevish child. She confided to Milly that she expected another child, and Milly, whose one ever present terror was the fear of becoming inconveniently a mother, was quite horrified.

"How can they do it!" she exclaimed to Jack, when they had returned to their more spacious quarters. "Go over second-class like that—it's so dirty and smelly and such common people all around one."

"I suppose Reddon can't afford anything better."

"Then I should stay at home until I could. With a baby, too, and another one coming: it's like the emigrants!"

"Reddon is a clever chap: he's been over before, a couple of years at the Beaux Arts. I suppose he wants more work and didn't like to leave her behind."

"She shouldn't have babies, then," Milly pronounced seriously, feeling her superiority in not thus handicapping her husband in his career.

"It is tough," Bragdon admitted....

They saw a good deal of the Reddons during the voyage. They proved to be not in the least down-hearted over their lot, and quite unaware of Milly's commiseration. They were going to Paris for some desirable professional work, as they might go to San Francisco or Hong Kong, had the path pointed that way. They had babies because that was part of the game when one married, and they brought them along because there was nothing else to do with them. It was all very simple from the Reddon point of view.

Milly considered Mrs. Reddon to be a "nice little thing," and they became chummy. Marion Reddon was a college-trained woman, with much more real culture than her husband or either of the Bragdons. She had read her Greek and Latin and forgotten them, liked pictures and music and books, but preferred babies when they came. Sam Reddon was a high-spirited American boy. He had never meant to study architecture and he hadn't intended to marry or to teach; but having done all these things he still found the world a merry place enough. He played the piano a little and sang Italian songs in an odd falsetto and roamed over the ship in disreputable corduroys, which he had preserved from his student days in Paris, making himself thoroughly at home in all three cabins.

They talked Paris, of course, about which Reddon knew a great deal more than any of the others.

"Where are you going to live? In the Quarter?"

Mrs. Kemp had given Milly the address of an excellent pension near the Arc, at which Sam Reddon expressed a frank disgust.

"Americans and English—the rotten *bourgeoisie*—why don't you stay in New York?" He figuratively spat upon the proprieties, and Milly was bewildered. "An *apartement meublée au cinquième*, near the *Boul' Mich* for us, eh, missus?"

Milly had heard that the "Latin Quarter" was dirty, and not "nice." None of her Chicago friends ever stayed there.

"You'll come and call on us, won't you?" the young man said with pleasant mockery. "Nobody will know, but we won't lay it up against you if you don't."

Milly thought he was "fresh" and tried to snub him, but her manner only provoked Reddon the more.

"What's your husband trying to paint for? There are two thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine other chaps like him in Paris, and he'll just be the three thousandth, who thinks he's going to make his fortune painting rich people's portraits. I'd rather break stone than try to live by paint."

"And how about building summer villas for a living?" Bragdon queried.

"Well," the young man replied with a grin. "You see I don't—I can't get any to do!"

It was pleasant enough to joke about the arts, but Milly didn't expect to see much of the Reddons once they were launched in the fascinating life of Paris. She was becoming a little bored with them already, with their sloppy unconventionality and with ship life in general. Most of the first-cabin passengers, she discovered, were from Chilicothe, Ohio, or similar metropoli of the middle west, and as ignorant as she of what was before them.

But when they sighted the green shores of Normandy, her enthusiasm revived at a bound. As they came into the harbor, the gray stone houses with high-pitched red roofs, the fishing smacks with their dun-colored sails, even the blue-coated men on the waiting tender had about them the charm of another world. They were different and strange, exciting to the thirsty soul of the American, so long sodden with the ugly monotony of a pioneer civilization. From the moment that the fat little tender touched the steamer, amid a babble of tongues, Milly was breathless with excitement. She squeezed her husband's arm, like an ecstatic child who had at last got what it wanted. "I'm *so* happy," she chirped. "Isn't it all wonderful,—that we are really here, you and I?"

He laughed in superior male fashion at her enthusiasm, and stroked his small mustache, but in his own way he was excited at sight of the promised land.

"Hang on tight," he said to her, as they began the ticklish descent to the tender, "or it will be still more wonderful."

Milly tripped over the long, unsteady gangway towards the Future, the great adventure of her life. There beyond, in the smiling green country with the old gray houses, lay mysterious satisfactions that she had hungered for all her life,—Experiences, Fame, and Fortune—in a word her Happiness.

IV

BEING AN ARTIST'S WIFE

But it wasn't so different after all! As Sam Reddon had predicted, the Bragdons went to live in the Étoile quarter,—in a very respectable hotel-pension on the Rue Galilée. It was so much healthier in that quarter, every one said, more comfortable for a wife, who must be left to herself for long hours each day. They had lost sight of the Reddons from the moment they entered the Paris train, for the Reddons, having second-class tickets, were forced to wait for a slower train, which they didn't seem to mind as it gave them a chance to see the little town and lunch in a *cabaret* instead of paying for an expensive meal on the wagon-restaurant as the Bragdons did.

Bragdon enrolled himself among the seventy or eighty students at Julian's and also shared a studio near the *Pont des Invalides* with another American, where he worked afternoons by himself. He plunged into his painting very earnestly, realizing all that he had to accomplish. But he lived the life of the alien in France, as so many of his fellow-students did, preserving a stout Americanism in the midst of Paris. Thanks to an education in an American college, after eight years' study of foreign languages he could read easy French, but he could scarcely order a meal in the language. And he did not try to learn French, like most of the young Americans "studying" in Paris. What was the use? he said. He did not intend to live his life there. In truth, he disdained the French, like the others, and all things French, including most of their art. His marriage had emphasized this Americanism. Like most of his countrymen he regarded every Frenchman as a would-be seducer of his neighbor's wife, and every Frenchwoman as a possible wanton; all things French as either corrupt or frivolous or hopelessly behind the times.

He inspired Milly to some extent with these ideas, though she was of a more curious and trusting

nature. He did not like to have her go out in Paris even in the daytime unaccompanied, and as after the first weeks of settlement in their new environment he was very busy all day, Milly found herself more or less secluded and idle from nine in the morning until five in the afternoon. It was worse than in the flat in Chicago! For there she could go out when she pleased, and had some social distraction. Here they knew almost nobody.

The hotel-pension on the Rue Galilée was frequented by the quieter sort of middle-aged English, and a few American mothers with their children, "doing Europe." Hardly a word of French was spoken within its doors, and as far as possible the English habitués of the place had anglicized its food. Milly found few congenial spirits there. She rather liked two invalidish maiden ladies from Boston and went shopping with them sometimes and to see the pictures in the Louvre. But the Misses Byron were quite delicate and took their Paris in dainty sips.

Milly was far from sharing her husband's distrust of all things French, but she supposed being a man and having been there before he must know Paris. She would have liked to spend the lovely late autumn days on the streets, drinking in the sights and sounds. Instead she went with Jack to the picture galleries and did the other "monuments" starred in Baedeker, conscientiously. But these did not stir her soul. The Louvre was like some thronged wilderness and she had no clues. Life spoke to her almost exclusively through her senses, not through her mind, which was totally untrained. She was profoundly ignorant of all history, art, and politics; so the "monuments" meant nothing but their picturesqueness. She picked up the language with extraordinary avidity, and soon became her husband's interpreter, when the necessity reached beyond a commonplace phrase.

Occasionally as a spree they dined in the city at some recommended restaurant and went to the theatre. But these were expensive pleasures—indeed the scale of living was more costly than in Chicago, if one wanted the same comforts; and by the end of the first winter Bragdon became worried over the rapid inroads they were making on their letter of credit. Every time he had to journey to the Rue Scribe he shook his head and warned Milly they must be more careful if their funds were to last them even two years. And he knew now that he needed every day of training he could possibly get. He was behind many of these other three thousand young Americans engaged in becoming great artists. Milly thought their sprees were modest and far between, but as the dark, chilly Paris winter drew on she was more and more confined to the stuffy salon or their one cheerless room. She became depressed and bored. This was not at all what she had expected of Europe. It seemed that Paris could be as small a place as Chicago, or even less!

Sometimes, like a naughty child, Milly broke rules and sallied forth by herself on bright days, wandering down the Champs Élysées, gazing at the people, speculating upon the very pronounced ladies in the smart victorias, even getting as far as the crowded boulevards and the beguiling shops, which she did not dare to enter for fear she should yield to temptation. Once she had a venture that was exciting. She was followed all the way from the Rue Royale to the Rue Galilée by a man, who tried to speak to her as she neared the pension, so that she fairly ran to shelter. She decided not to tell Jack of her little adventure, for he would be severe with her and have his prejudices confirmed. She rather enjoyed the excitement of it all, and wouldn't have minded repeating it, if she could be sure of escaping in the end without trouble....

She read some books which her husband got for her,—those breakfast-food culture books provided for just such people, about cities and monuments and history. She was supposed to "read up" about Rome and Florence, where they hoped to go in the spring. But books tired Milly very soon: the unfamiliar names and places meant nothing at all to her. She decided that, as in most cases, one had to have money and plenty of it to enjoy Europe,—to travel and live at the gay hotels, to buy things and get experiences "first hand." Evidently it was not for her, at present.

What she liked best in her life this first winter were the Sunday excursions they made to Fontainebleau, St. Germain, Versailles, and St. Cloud, and other smaller places where the people went. She liked the mixed crowds of chattering French on the river boats and the third-class trains,—loved to talk with the women and children in her careless French, and watch their foreign domesticities.... Best of all, perhaps, were the walks in the Bois with her husband, where she could see the animation of the richer world. On their way back they would often stop at Gagé's for cakes and mild drinks. All the pastry-shops fascinated Milly, they were so bright and clean and *chic*. The efficiency of French civilization was summed up to her in the *patisserie*. She liked sweet things and almost made herself ill with the delectable concoctions at Gagé's. That more than anything else this first year came to typify to her Paris,—the people, men as well as women, who came in for their cakes or syrop, the eagle-eyed *Madame* perched high at the *comptoir*, holding the entire business in her competent hand, and all the deft girls in their black dresses, nimbly serving, "*Oui, Madame! Voici, Monsieur! Que desirez-vous?*" etc. She admired the neat glass trays of tempting sweets, the round jars of bonbons, the colored *liqueurs*, the neat little marble-topped tables. Apparently the *patisserie* was a popular institution, for people of all sorts and conditions flocked there like flies.

"If you ever die and I have to earn my living," she would say jokingly to her husband, "I know what I should do. I'd run a cake-shop!"

"You'd eat all the cakes yourself," Bragdon rejoined, tearing her away after the eighth or tenth.

She went there by herself sometimes, and became good friends with the reigning *Madame*, from whom she learned the routine of the manufacture and the sales, as well as the trials and tribulations with *les desmoiselles* that the manager of a popular pastry shop must have. This

Madame liked the pretty, sociable *Americaine*, always smiled when she entered the shop with her husband, counselled her as to the choicest dainties of the day, asked her opinion deferentially as that of a connoisseur, and made her little gifts. Through the cake-shop Milly came to realize the French, as her husband never did.

So the winter wore away somehow,—the period that Milly remembered as, on the whole, the dullest part of her married life. Her first season in Paris! They might read a little in one of the culture books in their room after dinner, then would take refuge from the damp chill in bed. Jack was less gay here in Paris than he had ever been in Chicago, preoccupied with his work, frequently gloomy, as if he foresaw the failure of his ambitions. Milly felt that he was ungrateful for his fate. Hadn't he the dearest wish of his heart—and her, too?...

Something was wrong, she never knew quite what. The trouble was that she had no job whatever now, and no social distraction to take the place of work. She was the victim of ideas that were utterly beyond her knowledge, ideas that must impersonally carry the Milly Ridges along in their momentum, to their ultimate destruction.

"I ought to be very happy," she said to herself piously. "We both ought to be."

But they weren't.

V

WOMEN'S TALK

One day something dreadful happened. Milly realized that she was to have a child. A strange kind of terror seized her at the conviction. *This*, she had felt ever since her marriage, was the one impossible thing to happen: she had promised herself when she married her poor young artist it should never be. One could be "Bohemian," "artistic"—light and gay—without money, if there were no children. And now, somehow, the impossible had happened, in this unfamiliar city, far away from friends and female counsellors.

She wandered out into the street in a dull despair, and after a time got on top of an omnibus with a vague idea of going off somewhere, never to return, and sat there in the drizzle until she reached the end of the route, which happened to be the Luxembourg. She recognized the place because she had visited the gallery with her husband and also dined at Foyot's and gone to the Odéon on one of their expansive occasions. She walked about aimlessly for a while, feeling that she must get farther away somehow, then wandered into the garden and sat down near one of the fountains among the nurses. The sun had come out from the watery sky, and it was amusing to watch the funny French children and the chattering nurses in their absurd headdresses. The graceful lines of the old Palais made an elegant frame for the garden, the fountains, and the trees. Milly couldn't brood long, but after a time the awful fact would intrude and pull her up with a start. What should she do? There was no room in their life for a child, especially just now. She could never tell Jack. What useless things women were anyway! She didn't wonder that men treated them badly, as they did sometimes, she had heard.

A familiar small figure came towards her. It was Elsie Reddon, the two-year-old girl she had played with on the steamer.

"Where's Mama, Elsie?" Milly asked. The child pointed off to a corner of the garden near by, and Milly followed her small guide to the bench where Marion Reddon was seated. The other child hadn't yet come, but evidently was not far off. Milly felt strangely glad to see the little woman again, and before long confided in her her own trouble.

"That's good!" Marion Reddon said quickly and with evident sincerity.

"You think so!" Milly cried pettishly. "Well, I don't."

"It simplifies everything so."

"Simplifies?"

"Of course. When you're having children, there are some things you can't do—just a few you can—and so you do what you can and don't worry about the rest."

"It spoils your freedom."

The pale-faced little woman laughed.

"Freedom? That's book-talk. Most people do so much more when they aren't free than when they are. Sam says it's the same with his work. When he's free, he does nothing at all because there's so much time and so many things he'd like to try. But when he's tied down with a lot of work at the school, then he uses every spare moment and gets something done—'just to spite the devil.'"

She smiled drolly.

"You'll see when it comes."

Milly looked unconvinced and said something about "the unfair burden on women," the sort of talk her more advanced women friends were beginning to indulge in. Mrs. Reddon had other views.

"It's the natural thing," she persisted. "If I didn't want children for myself, I'd have 'em anyway for Sam."

"Does he like babies?"

"Not especially. Few men do at first. But it trains him. And it makes a hold in the world for him."

"What do you mean?"

"Children make a home—you have to have one. The man can't run away and forget it."

She smiled with her droll expression of worldly wisdom.

"Sam would be in mischief half the time, if it weren't for us. He'd be running here and there, sitting up all hours, wasting his energies smoking and drinking with everybody he met—and now he can't—very much."

"But—but—how about you?"

"Oh," the little woman continued calmly, "I don't flatter myself that I could hold my husband long alone, without the children." She looked Milly straight in the eyes and smiled. "Few women can, you know."

"I don't see why not."

"They get used to us—in every way—and want change, don't you see that? They know every idea we have, every habit, every look good and bad—clever men, especially."

"So we know them!"

"Of course! But women don't like change, variety—the best of us don't. We aren't venturesome. Men are, you see, and that's the difference.... I don't know that we mightn't become so if we had the chance, but we've been deprived of it for so long that we have lost the courage, the desire for change almost. What we know we cling to, isn't that so?"

She rose to capture the wandering Elsie.

"I must go back now to get Sam's *déjeuner*. Won't you come? He'd love to see you—he often speaks about you and your husband."

Milly accepted readily enough. Although she did not agree with all that Marion Reddon had said, she was soothed by the talk, and she had a curiosity to see the Reddon *ménage* in operation.

"So," she remarked, as they passed through the great gilt gate out to the noisy street, "you think a woman should have children to keep a man true to her."

"Tied to her," Marion Reddon emended, "and truer than he otherwise might be. Then they are something in case the husband quits altogether—if he turns out to be a bad lot. Most of them don't, of course; they are loyal and faithful. But if they do, then a woman has the children, and that's a world for any one."

"It makes it all the worse—if she has to support them without a man's help."

"I wonder! It's the incentive that makes work effective, isn't it?"

They crossed the vivid stream of the boulevard, the child between them, and mounted the hill towards the Panthéon.

"You know the time is coming when the woman will again be the responsible head of the family in form as she is in fact to-day, and then she will tolerate the man about her house just so long as she thinks him a fit father, and take another if she prefers him as the father of her children."

These anarchistic doctrines had a quaint absurdity on the lips of this mild, little New England woman. Milly, not having lived in circles where the fundamental relations of life were discussed with such philosophical frankness, was puzzled. The Reddons must be "queer" people, she thought.

"So I tell Sam when he gets fussy that if he isn't careful, I'll *flanquer la porte* to him and run the shop myself."

"My!"

"I could, too, and he knows it—which is very salutary for him when he gets uppish and dictatorial, as all men will at times."

"How could you?"

"You see I'm an expert taxidermist. I learned the thing vacations to help an uncle out, who was a

collector. I could always make a living at it, and one for the kiddies too. That's the nub of the whole matter, as we used to say in the country."

(Later, Milly remembered this talk in its every bearing, and had reason to appreciate the profound truth of the last statement.)

"But you love your husband," Milly remarked as if to reassure herself.

"Of course I do, or I shouldn't be living with him and bearing his children. But he needs me and the children rather more than I need him—which is the better way."

The Reddons lived on the fourth floor back of an old lantern-jawed building that tilted uphill behind Ste. Geneviève. Milly found the stairs steep and dark and the odor of the old building anything but pleasant. Marion assured her cheerfully that the smell was not unhealthy, and as they kept their windows open most of the time they did not mind it. The three little rooms of the *appartement meublée* were dingy, to say the least, but they looked out over the clock tower of Ste. Geneviève into an old college garden.

"I make Sam get the coffee mornings, and I do the *déjeuner*; then an old woman comes in to clean us up and cook dinner, if we don't go out. Sam is rather given to the student cafes."

Mrs. Reddon moved dexterously within the confined limits of the closet kitchen and continued to describe her household. "You see we pay only thirty dollars a month for this place, and I cover the housekeeping bills with another thirty or a little more."

"Heavens! How can you do it?" Milly gasped.

Their pension was over that amount apiece.

"It's cheaper than anything at home, and lots more fun!"

Presently Sam Reddon came whistling upstairs. He stopped in histrionic surprise at sight of Milly.

"Not really, Milady! How did you find your way?"

"By accident."

"Ma," he sang out to his wife, "you aren't going to try one of your historic stews on Mrs. Bragdon—our one fashionable visitor of the season? Don't you think we had better make an occasion of this and adjourn to Foyot's?"

"No," his wife replied firmly, "you've had too many 'occasions' this month. One of my *déjeuners* won't hurt Mrs. Bragdon or you either."

"Well," he submitted dolefully, "she can't drink that red ink you mistakenly bought for wine, my dear.... I'll just fetch a bottle of something drinkable."

"Hurry then! *Déjeuner* is quite ready."

"You see," she observed placidly as Reddon departed, "he takes every excuse to escape his work and make a holiday. It wasn't altogether *you*, my dear!"

"It's so human!"

"It's so—Sam."

They had a very jolly luncheon, and afterwards, the old servant having arrived to take charge of the apartment and Elsie, the two women accompanied Reddon down the hill as far as the Sorbonne, where Marion was attending a course of lectures. Milly gathered that the little woman, in spite of her housekeeping, the one child on the spot, and another coming, had many lively interests and saw far more of Paris, which she loved, than Milly and her husband did. Both the Reddons lived carelessly, but lived hard every minute, taking all their chances, good and bad, of the minutes to come. It was a useful philosophy, but not one that Milly wholly admired.

Late that afternoon Milly met her husband in a frame of mind much more serene than it was before she saw the Reddons, and told him her momentous news. He seemed more pleased and less disturbed by it than she had supposed possible. A few days later he got the proof-sheets of Reinhard's novel from the trunk, where they had been lying neglected, and worked diligently on the foolish sketches required by the text to illustrate the hero and heroine in their "tense" moments. He finished the job before they left Paris in March, which was his male way of acknowledging the new obligation that was on its way.

Milly thought there might be something in Marion Reddon's ideas about men, after all.

THE CHILD

After much debate Milly resolved to take a leaf from Marion Reddon's philosophy and not let her "condition" make any difference in her husband's plans; they should not give up the trip to Italy because of possible dangers or discomforts to her. So they went to Florence and afterwards to Rome, where the Reddons, having miraculously procured the price of the railroad tickets at the last moment, joined them and gave them lessons in how to see Europe as the Europeans see it. After a short visit to Venice, the two families settled for the summer in a quiet little village of the Austrian Tyrol, where the men tried to work, but for the most part climbed mountains and drank beer instead. Then in September they were back in Paris; the Reddons, who had exhausted all their resources, went home to America for the year's grind in the technical school; and the Bragdons settled in a small house in Neuilly. And there early in October Milly's little girl came safely into the world.

The small brick house with its scrap of garden and gravelled drive proved to be the pleasantest of Milly's European experiences. It was the most regularly domestic thing they did. The artist still went to the school in the mornings, but worked at home in the afternoons. Milly convalesced healthily and was properly absorbed in her baby and her house, so that she did not feel lonely during her husband's absences in Paris. Now that the child had got into the world, after all her fears and forebodings, Milly was surprised at the naturalness of the event. As Marion Reddon had said, it really simplified life. First consideration must always be the Baby. Mde. Virginia, as she was called after Milly's mother, could do so little in this world at present that its parents' ambitions were necessarily curbed. Milly was an admirably devoted mother. She had always liked babies since she was a very little girl, and she became wholly wrapped up in her own human venture. The summer while the child was coming had drawn her very close to Marion Reddon, with whom she had established a staunch bond of the woman's league, offensive and defensive, against men. Marion, she felt, understood both babies and men. Although she could not approve of all Marion's ideas about the relations of the sexes, she admired the frank, brave, humorous way in which she solved her own life.

Curiously enough, the child seemed to set Milly apart from her husband—and from the world of men in general. Jack was no longer the supreme emotional fact in her life. He was a good husband; she was more conscious of that than ever before. He had been very tender and considerate of her during her pregnancy, keeping up her spirits, guarding her against folly, insisting on luxuries in their travels so that she might be thoroughly comfortable. Thus he went to Gossensass, not for his own profit and pleasure, but because the doctor they consulted in Venice advised this secluded mountain resort. And when the time of the birth came, he had been properly solicitous to see that she was provided with the best attendance and care, and Milly knew vaguely that he had spent lavishly of their hoard for this purpose. Milly was sure he loved her, and what was also very important to her, she was sure that he was "a good man,"—clean-minded and unselfish with a woman. Even if he should come to love her less passionately than at the beginning, he was the loyal sort of American, who would not let that fact furnish him with excuse for errancy. And she loved him, of course—was "quite crazy" about him, as she expressed it to Marion—and still believed in his glorious future as a great painter.

Yet in some indefinable way he had sunk from first to second place in her thoughts and might soon—who knows?—descend to third place in the family triangle. As for all other men, like Sam Reddon and the artists Jack brought to the house, they began to have for her the aspect of coarse and rather silly beings, essentially selfish and sensual. "Oh, he's just a man" became more and more in her mouth the mocking formula to indicate male inferiority. Later it was, "They're all alike, men." Thus the child brought out in Milly the consciousness of womanhood. She was more the mother now than the wife, as was natural, but she had no desire to become again the wife, paramount, to any man....

Meanwhile any one of those who came in upon them in the Neuilly house and saw the father and mother grouped about the baby's bassinet would say,—*"An ideal young pair—has he much talent?"*

This winter when she grew stronger Milly saw more of people than before. She had two very capable servants and her little household ran smoothly, though its cost made severe inroads on the "hoard." People she knew drifted through Paris and were glad to lunch or dine in the little Neuilly house. Sally Norton, who was now Mrs. Willie Ashforth, having finally secured the elderly bachelor, was one of the first to come. Sally laughed over the small house, over Milly's baby, over Milly as a mother. She seemed determined to consider Milly as an irresponsible joke in everything she did, but she was good-natured and lively as always, and absorbed in her own plans. The Ashforths were building at Highland Forest, a fashionable suburb outside of Chicago. Vivie had had a "desperate affair" with a divorced man, etc., etc. Then the Gilberts turned up unexpectedly one day, gracious and forgiving to Milly, and apparently very much bored with themselves in Paris. Milly gave them a nice little dinner, to which she had the smartest people she knew, which was her way of "getting even" with Nettie for the snubs. Others came more frequently as the spring influx of Americans arrived. Occasionally Jack complained of the time these idle wanderers consumed, especially of the precious afternoons lost when they came for luncheon and stayed until tea. Milly thought it selfish of him to object to "her one pleasure," now that "she was tied up in the house." Perhaps he felt so too, for he said no more, and remained at the school to work when there was likely to be company at the Neuilly house. On the whole he was amiably indulgent with his wife, according to the best American tradition.... So with friends,

new and old, the second year of their foreign life drew on towards summer. The baby flourished, and all was well. They began to talk of summer plans.

A cheap place in the country was imperative, for by this time their "hoard" had shrunk to a mite in three figures, and unless Big Brother, who had been doing well in Big Business by all accounts, should remember to send over additional funds as he had promised, they must return to America in the autumn. Jack seemed loath to remind Big Brother of their needs as Milly wanted him to do. Yet he must have more time: he was not yet ready to get a living out of his pictures. He had not done enough work, he said. Milly, who had expected that in a year or so he would become an accomplished painter, was disturbed. She found the oils he was doing,—the picture of her beside the baby's bassinet on the terrace, for instance,—disappointing. It was distinctly less understandable and amusing than his pen-and-ink work had been, and she felt a certain relief when he did some comic sketches of the Brittany nurses to send to a magazine. His hand had not lost the old cunning, if it had not gained the new. Was it possible that her husband was not born to be a great painter?... "I don't know about such things," she murmured into the baby's ear. "Jack must decide for himself what's best."

She found it very convenient to have a husband to take upon himself decision and responsibility, the two most annoying things in life.

VII

BESIDE THE RESOUNDING SEA

After much of the usual futile discussion they decided upon Klerac, a little place on the coast of Brittany, which certain artists whom Bragdon knew recommended. One American landscapist of established reputation painted in that region, and around him had gathered a number of his countrymen, in the hope of acquiring if not his skill at least some of his commercial talent for self-exploitation.

So the end of June found them settled comfortably enough in the Hotel du Passage just across the bay from Douarnenez, where the great one had his studio. Milly, who usually had some difficulty in adjusting herself to a new situation and missed the freedoms of her own house, took to Klerac after the first few days of strangeness. The tiny village and the sleepy country were utterly unlike anything she had ever seen or dreamed of before. Green branches of broad chestnut trees overhung the dark water of the little bay, and a sea of the deepest purple lay out beyond the headland and boomed against the sand-dunes. The bay and the brilliant sea were perpetually alive with the fishing craft, which were picturesquely adorned with colored sails. And inland, only a few steps from all this vivid coloring of the sea, green lanes meandered between lofty hedges of thick blackberry vines. Always, even among the remoter fields, there was the muffled murmur of the sea on the sand and the tang of salt in the air. The queer, dark little people of the place still wore about their daily tasks their picturesque costumes, and spoke little French. One met them as in an opera, gathering kelp on the beach, driving their little tip carts through the lanes, or singing beside their thatched cottages.

From her first exploratory walks with her husband Milly returned quite ravished by the quality of the place, its beauty of colored sea and peaceful country, and the little gray houses sheltered by large trees. Here she dreamed, in this fragrant salty air, they would have an enchanting summer withdrawn from the world, and great deeds would be done by her husband. "I could almost paint myself here," she said to him, "it all looks so quaint and lovely." Jack liked the place, and quickly set up his easel under the trees down by the stone pier where the fishing-boats landed and where there was always a noisy, lively scene. Milly idled near by in the sand with the baby. But the work did not go fast. She thought that Jack must be fagged after the long winter indoors, and urged him to rest for a while. They took to walking through the lanes and along the beaches. They found little to say to each other; sometimes she thought that she bored him and he would rather be alone. They were suffering, naturally, from the too great intimacy of the past two years. Neither had a spontaneous thought to offer the other,—no reaction to arouse surprise and discussion. Milly could not comprehend her husband's restless depression, his wish to be at something which he could not formulate to himself clearly enough to do. She decided that he was developing nerves and recommended bathing in the sea. When he took to painting again, she would wander along the beach by herself and watch the boys fishing for *écrevisses* in the salt pools among the rocks, or lay prone on the sand gazing at the colored sails on the dark sea. In spite of all the peace and the beauty about her she was lonely, and asked herself sometimes if this was what it meant to be an artist's wife. Was this all? Was life to be like this for years and years?...

Their hotel was a rambling low building surrounded by high walls, with a high terrace behind, from which there was a glimpse of the sea and which was well shaded by branching plane trees. Here on calm summer nights the dinner table was spread for the *pensionnaires*, who gradually arrived. There were a few French, of a nondescript sort, a fat American from Honolulu, who had been rolling about Europe since the Spanish War, in which he had had some part. Then there was a Russian lady with two children and a Finnish maid. She was already there when they arrived and kept by herself, taking her meals at a little table with her oldest child. This Russian, a Madame Saratoff, piqued Milly's curiosity, and she soon became acquainted with her. One day

when they happened to be alone on the terrace, the Russian lady turned to her with a swift smile,

—

"You are American?" and when Milly admitted it, she added, "One can always tell the American women from the English."

She spoke English easily, with the slightest sort of accent that merely added distinction to whatever she said. Madame Saratoff was still young, and though not a beautiful woman, had an air of privilege and breeding, with something odd in the glitter of her eyes and the wolfish way in which her curving upper lip revealed strong white teeth. She had a good figure, as Milly had already recognized, and she dressed well, with great simplicity. Milly felt interested in her, and the women talked for an hour. Milly reported to her husband:—

"She's really a Baroness. Her husband is in the diplomatic service—off in the east somewhere, and she's here alone with the children and her maid. Don't you think she's interesting looking?"

The artist replied indifferently,—

"Not particularly—she has fine hands."

He seemed to have noticed that about her.

They quickly became better acquainted with Madame Saratoff, who, it seemed, had been in Brittany before and knew the coast thoroughly. She explained that the little hotel became unendurable later with the *canaille des artistes*, and so she had rented an old *manoir* in the neighborhood, which was being put to rights for her. The next afternoon the three walked to see the *manoir* through a maze of little lanes. It was a lovely old gray building with crumbling walls and had evidently once been the seat of a considerable family. But only a half dozen rooms were now habitable, and in the cracks of the great walls that surrounded the garden thick roots of creepers twisted and curled upwards. From the other end of the garden, through a break in the old hedge, there was a glimpse of the sea, and in one corner was the ruin of a chapel surmounted by an iron cross. Madame Saratoff showed them all the rooms, into which men were putting some furniture she had bought in the neighborhood—old *armoires* and brass-bound chests of black oak as well as some modern iron beds and dressing-tables. Milly admired the peaceful gray *manoir*, and Bragdon observed as they retraced their way alone through the lanes:—

"That woman has a lot of energy in her! It shows in her movements—she has personality, character."

Milly had never heard him say as much as that about any other woman, and she wondered how such large generalizations could be made from the fact that a woman was fitting up an old house. She was vaguely jealous, as any woman might be, that her husband should choose just those qualities for commendation.

She went often thereafter to the *manoir* while her husband was painting, and marvelled at the ease and sureness with which the Russian installed herself, her only helpers being the stupid peasants, who seemed to understand no language but their own jargon.

"I'm used to driving cattle," the Russian explained to Milly with a little laugh. "You see my father had estates in southern Russia, and I lived there a good deal before I was married."

"They must be quite important," Milly reported to Jack. "They seem to know people all over Europe."

"Oh, that's Russian," he explained.

"And Baron Saratoff is away on a most important mission."

"Absent husbands ought to be!"

"I don't believe she cares for him much."

"How can you tell that so soon?"

"Oh!" Milly replied vaguely, as if that were a point few women could keep from other women.

As a matter of fact the Russian lady had given Milly some new and startling lights upon marriage.

"I am," she told Milly in her precise speech, "what you call the 'show wife.' I go to parties, to court—all rigged up,—you say rigged, no?—dressed then very grand with my jewels. And I have children, see!" She pointed to the healthy little Saratoffs playing in the garden. "My husband goes away on his business—makes long journeys. He amuses himself. When he comes back, I have a child,—*voilà*." She laughed and showed her white teeth. "But I have my vacations sometimes, too, like this."

Milly thought that the Russian type of marriage must be much inferior to the American, at least the Chicago variety, where if there was any going away from home, it was usually the wife who went, and she confided this opinion to Jack, who said with a laugh:—

"Oh, you can never understand these foreigners. She's probably like every one else.... But I'd like to paint her and get that smile of hers."

"Why don't you ask her?"

"Perhaps I will one of these days."

The hotel gradually filled up. The great painter had come and with him his satellites, chiefly young American women, who "painted all over the place," as Bragdon put it. The long *table d'hôte* under the plane trees was a cheerful if somewhat noisy occasion these summer nights, with the black, star-strewn canopy above. They all drank the bottled cider and talked pictures and joked and sang when so moved. Even if the spirit was somewhat cheaply effervescent, like the cider, there was plenty of talk, clashing of eager ideas, and Milly liked it even more than Bragdon. He seemed older than the other artists, perhaps because he was married and less given to idle chatter. The great man singled him out for companionship after the first week, and gave patronizing praise to his work.

"You are still young," he said, with a sigh for his own sixty years. "Wait another ten years and you may find something to say."

Jack, repeating these words to his wife, added,— "And where do you suppose we'd be if I should wait another ten years? On the street."

Tell an American to wait ten years in order to have something to say!

"He's jealous," Milly pronounced. "You're going to do something stunning this summer, I just know it."

"How do you know it?" he asked teasingly.

"Because we can't wait ten years!"

"Um," the artist sighed, "I should think not."

VIII

THE PICTURE

Just how it came about Milly never remembered, but in the weeks that followed it was arranged that Jack should do the Russian lady's portrait. Milly flattered herself at the time that she had produced this result. Madame Saratoff came rarely to the hotel after she was installed in her old *manoir*, but she often drove to the beach for her bath and took Milly home with her for luncheon. And Jack would join them late in the long afternoon for tea. On one of these occasions the affair was settled.

Bragdon decided to do the figure out of doors in a corner of the ruined garden wall with a clustering festoon of purple creeper above and a narrow slit of sea in the distant background. Against the gray and green and purple of the wall he placed Madame Saratoff, who was tall, with a supple, bony figure. It was for him a daring and difficult composition. The first afternoon, while the figure was being lined in with charcoal, Milly was much excited. She tried to keep quite still, but Madame Saratoff persisted in making little jokes and impertinent comments upon the artist. She did not seem to feel the importance of the event. Milly thought to herself, "How wonderful if he should do a really stunning picture and have it in the Salon next season!" and she said to herself, "Portrait of the Baroness Saratoff by John Archer Bragdon." That would be a start towards fame!

But the start was scarcely perceptible those first days. Milly could make nothing of the blurred canvas and was depressed. Jack seemed more intent on watching the lithe figure, with the mottled flesh tones, the steel-blue eyes, the mocking mouth than in putting brush to canvas. When Milly complained of his dawdling, the Baroness remarked with a curl of her lips,—

"How do you expect an artist to work with his wife hanging over his brushes and counting every stroke?"

Milly pretended to be hurt and ran off to the other end of the garden. She asked her husband on their way back if she were really in the way, and though he laughed at her question and considered the Russian woman's remark as merely one of her rather feline jokes, Milly did not come the next day. She said the baby was sick, and needed her attention. It was several days before she returned to the *manoir*, and then because Jack made a point of it. She was astonished at the progress which he had made. The picture had suddenly leaped into life.

"See!" the Russian remarked, indicating the canvas with a slow sweep of her long, thin fingers. "The painter has done all that without his wife's help."

Milly resented the joke. But it was true that in these few days the picture had grown surprisingly: the pose of the tall figure, the background was all firmly worked in, and he had begun to define the features,—the perilous part. Already something of the subtle mockery of the Russian woman's expression was there. Milly turned away. For the first time she felt outside her husband's world and in the way. Presently, in spite of the Baroness's protests, she took little Paul Saratoff to the

beach. When her husband came in at the hotel just in time for dinner and expressed surprise that she had not returned to the *manoir* for him, she said coldly,—

"Oh, I didn't care to—I didn't want to interrupt."

"Anna expected you back to tea."

"I guess not."

Bragdon gave her a swift glance, but said nothing. This was a new aspect of his wife, and it evidently puzzled him. He was too much absorbed by his picture, however, to give much heed to anything.

Latterly another American had joined the circle around the dinner table on the terrace,—a long, lanky young man who had been in the navy during the late war and was now engaged in the production of literature. That is, he contributed profusely to those American magazines with flaming covers stories of love and adventure in strange seas,—the highly seasoned bonbon entertainment for the young. He was southern by birth with a pronounced manner towards women. And Milly found him attractive. Roberts and the fat Hawaiian wit had many encounters that kept the table stirred. To-night they were discussing the needs of the artist nature,—and "temperament." That was a term not much in vogue in the Chicago of Milly's time, but it seemed to occupy endlessly the talkers about the table at the Hotel du Passage. Milly never understood exactly what was meant by "having a temperament," or the "needs of the artistic temperament" except vaguely that it was a license to do flighty things that all reasonable Chicago folk would deplore.

To-night the Hawaiian was maintaining his favorite thesis,—that the first duty of the artist was to himself, to preserve and make effective his "temperament." Modern life, especially in America, he held, made *bourgeois* of us all. The inevitable ruin of the artist was to attempt to live according to the *bourgeois* ideal of morality. (That was another term which puzzled Milly always,—*bourgeois*. These young artists used it with infinite contempt, and yet she concluded shrewdly that the people she had known best and respected all her life would have to come under this anathema. To be healthy and normal, to pay one's bills and be true to husband or wife, was to be just *bourgeois*. According to that standard Jack was *bourgeois*, she supposed, and she was glad of it, and yet a little afraid at the same time, because it seemed to mark him out for artistic ineptitude.) But the fat man was talking heatedly, and Milly was listening.

"In our society artists have no chance to experiment in life, to perfect their natures untrammelled by public opinion, as the artists of old did." (And he cited a lot of names, beginning, of course, with Benvenuto and including Goethe, but Milly was not interested in these historical cases. It was the immediate application of the principle she was waiting for.)

"In those days," some one said, "artists were content to live in their own class like actors and had no social ambitions."

"And much better for them, too!" the Honolulu man put in.

"How about Leonardo and Petrarch?" the great artist queried from his end of the table, and then for a few moments the conversation got off into the question of the social position of artists in the renaissance and their relation to their patrons, which bored Milly, but the Hawaiian brought it back to his point.

"So that's why we have no real creators to-day in any of the arts," he asserted. "They're merely a lot of little citizens who daub canvass to support a wife and a respectable house or pay the butcher's bill with fluffy stories about silly women and impossible heroes." (This, Milly thought, was a raw stab at young Roberts. She wondered how men could say such things to one another and still remain friends.) "They have bank-accounts and go to dinner-parties."

To which the story-teller retorted when he got his chance:—

"What you fellows always mean by 'living' is messing around with some woman who isn't your own wife. A good many of our modern citizens manage to live their own lives that way, and what does it do for them?"

Milly approved.

"That's just the trouble: society damns them and finishes them if they don't behave like proper *bourgeois*. Take the case of——" and he cited an instance of a young artist who was having much newspaper notoriety over his passionate experiments. "Women kill art, anyway," he concluded with a growl.

Thereat Roberts' southern blood was touched, and he launched into a glowing sentimental eulogy of Woman as the Inspirer of Men towards the Noblest Things, and incidentally of the peace and the purity of marriage. Milly liked what he said, although it seemed to her rather florid in phrasing, and she felt an instinctive hostility towards the fat gentleman from Honolulu, whom she suspected of disgusting immorality. (Later in New York she was astonished to learn that Roberts had had a very scandalous divorce from a wife, while the Hawaiian lived a laborious and apparently upright life, supporting a mother, as a newspaper correspondent. She learned then

that men's expressed views had very little to do with their conduct, and that an ideal was often merely the sentimental reaction from experience.)

Just as Milly, thinking she heard Virginia cry in the room above, slipped away from the table some one said,—

"A man who has anything to do in the world will never let a woman stand in his way. If he does, he is soft, and that's the end of him."

Milly felt moved to put a word in here in behalf of her sex, but the child's cry came more loudly and as she left she heard her husband ask mildly,—

"And how about the children?"

"Oh, the kids—that's woman's business," the fat man replied carelessly. "Pass the cigarettes, will you," and the talk went off somewhere else....

Children were not all "woman's business," Milly felt indignantly. She had surprised her pretty little maid Yvonne in a lonely lane one moonlight night, in company with a tall man, who did not look like a Breton. She had reported the fact to her husband, with her suspicions as to the tall man, observing,— "Men are so horrid!" to which Jack had merely laughed easily. She had scolded him for his frivolity, also scolded Yvonne, who cried, yet somehow seemed to smile through her tears.

To-night when her husband came up for bed, she asked seriously,—

"You don't believe all that stuff Steve Belchers was saying, do you?"

"What stuff?"

"About artists and women."

Bragdon yawned and laughed. Milly came close to him and put her arm about his neck.

"You don't feel that your temperament is ruined by marriage, do you?"

"Never knew I had one before," he replied jokingly.

"Because you know if you ever want your freedom, you can have it."

"Thanks."

"If you need that sort of experience, I shan't stand in your way," she concluded in a heroic burst....

Nevertheless she was glad that her husband had shown no symptoms hitherto of this dangerous "temperament" and was content to be as *bourgeois* as the best. All the time there was growing in her a sense of sex distinction, and a dislike, or rather disapproval, of men as a whole. God, she was convinced, as the Southerner had said, had meant the perfect type to be Woman, rather than Man.

IX

THE PARDON

One day the noisy chatter at the mid-day meal was interrupted by the terrific splutter and throbbing of a motor-car. Those were still the days when touring cars with strangely clad occupants were less familiar, even on French roads, than they have since become, and the machines announced themselves from afar by their ponderous groans. Very few cars, indeed, got down to this secluded Brittany village which was reached by only one road of the third class that penetrated the little peninsula from Morlaix, a number of miles away to the north.

So every one left the table and crowded to the terrace wall to observe the arrivals. As a dusty, becaped and begoggled figure got down from the seat beside the driver, Milly exclaimed excitedly, "Why, it's Roy Gilbert!" and ran towards the courtyard. The car finally disgorged Nettie Gilbert and her uninteresting fourteen-year-old daughter. They came in for luncheon, and their story was soon told. Paris was hot, and in despair of dispelling Roy's thickening ennui at his European exile, which threatened to terminate their trip, Mrs. Gilbert had induced her husband to charter the car for a tour of Normandy and Brittany. Having done all the north-coast watering-places and remembering that the Bragdons were staying at this little place "with a funny name," they had decided to make them a call. Roy Gilbert ate copiously and denounced hotels, food, and the people, while Milly and Nettie Gilbert talked Chicago and Baby.

"We want to see a '*Pardon*,'" Mrs. Gilbert announced at last, "and we've come to take you and your husband with us."

It was the season of that famous Brittany festival, so Baedeker said, and they had seen some evidences of it in the little villages through which they had passed. Did Milly know of a good one? The Gilberts were as aesthetically lazy as they were weak in French, and of course quite helpless

in Brittany, whose peasants seemed to them dirty baboons with a monkey language. Milly quickly recalled that some of the artists had been talking of the famous *Pardon* at Poldau, a little fisher-settlement at the extreme tip of the western coast, where the costumes were said to be peculiarly rich and quaint. She had wanted to visit it with Jack, but he had become so much absorbed in his new picture that they had given up the idea. And there was Baby—she did not like to leave her.

"Yvonne will do all right," her husband urged. "Better take the chance—I'll look after Virgie."

So after much encouragement, though with misgivings, Milly consented to accompany the Gilberts in their car for a couple of days and show them the glories of the Brittany countryside.

"I owe Nettie so much," she explained privately to her husband, by way of apology. "I can't very well refuse—and they are so helpless, poor dears!"

"You'll have a bully time," he replied encouragingly. "Don't worry about anything. I'll watch Yvonne like a cat."

"And telegraph me instantly if anything goes wrong."

"Of course.... Don't hurry back if they should want you to go farther. It'll be good for you."

"Oh, not more than two days—I couldn't."

She did not give a thought to the Russian woman, or to anything but the baby. (Afterwards she became convinced that the whole plan had been arranged with skilful prescience by the wicked Baroness in order that she might have the artist to herself these few days....)

The departure in the freshness of the August morning was a great event. Every one in the hotel, including the *patron* in his cook's white costume, the *patronne*, the grinning ape of a waiter, all the artists, and half the village gathered to watch the motor get under way. The lumbering ark of a car was laden with bags and trunks and bundles, for the Americans meant to be comfortable. Then Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert, their natural amplitude swollen by their dust-coats, goggles, and veils, mounted with stately complacency to their respective seats, and Milly tucked herself into a corner. Then the ratlike French chauffeur attempted to crank the engine, and perspiring, red in the face, spluttering with oaths, made many desperate efforts to arouse his monster. There were sympathetic murmurs from the audience. "Now he's got her—ah—oh—no! Hang to it Pierrot, etc." Finally Pierre exploded in a tragic *tirade* to his employer, who sat stolidly through all the rumpus, merely asking at the end, "What's he saying, Milly?"

"He can do nothing with the curséd beast," Milly abridged.

"That's evident," Gilbert remarked with cynical satisfaction.

"He thinks it's the water; he warned you not to come down here."

It seemed as if Milly's little trip was not to come off, after all, when Bragdon, who had picked up some knowledge of the new machines in his earlier singlestate, tipped up the hood and dove for the carburetor. After a time he signalled to the Hawaiian to work the crank, and then with a whir, a rumble, at last a clear bellow, the monster responded, trembled, turned its snout up the narrow road, and disappeared. Milly threw a kiss to her husband, who waved his hat in answer. He had saved the day, and she was proud of him.

They had a wonderful time, in spite of Pierre and his balky car, bowling along the winding, leafy roads not far from the sea, through little gray stone villages whose inhabitants turned out *en masse*, including children and animals, to witness their stately progress of ten miles an hour. They got stuck once in a ford and had to be fished out with three yoke of cream-colored bulls and a long ship's rope. That was about noon, and they decided to lunch at the next inn, though it did not look inviting. However, Milly's French coaxed a tolerable meal from the fat housewife whom they discovered cleaning fish in the kitchen, and even the stodgy Roy mellowed under the influence of fresh fish and a drinkable bottle of wine which he and Milly discovered somewhere.

That evening, without further mishap, they rumbled into the hamlet of Poldau. For the last hour they had seen signs of the coming *fête*. All the natives, arrayed in their best clothes, were drifting westward to the rocky cape, where, perched on a lonely cliff, was the tiny chapel, "Our Lady of the Guard," which was the scene of the *Pardon* on the morrow. Before they entered Poldau night had fallen, and the long yellow beams from the powerful *Phare* glanced out across the sullen waters and the level land. It was beneath this lofty lighthouse they slept, in a clean, bare little inn. Milly, lying in her cushiony bed, could hear the waves grumbling around the rocks, and watch the sweep of that golden beam of light,—speaking to the distant passers-by upon the Atlantic, warning them of the dangers of this treacherous coast....

It was the first time she had been separated from her family, and she lay awake long hours, restless and sleepless, wondering whether Yvonne would remember to pull up the extra blanket over Virginia before the early morning dampness. And she thought about her husband, fleetingly, contrasting him with Roy Gilbert, who seemed to have grown heavier in mind as well as in person

these last years. Roy was surely what the artists called *bourgeois*, but she liked him—he was so kind and good to Nettie. She felt at home, getting back to the familiar *bourgeois* atmosphere of the Gilberts, where life was made easy and comfortable, and you knew every idea any one would advance before the words were half spoken....

Milly was wakened before dawn by the sound of a drunken quarrel beneath her window. Some Breton evidently had begun to celebrate the *Pardon* too soon; a shrill woman's voice broke the silence with unintelligible reproaches. There was the sound of blows, of crashing glass, a scuffle, sobs,—then silence, broken now and again by fresh sobs. Ah, those men,—men!... The lamp in the *Phare* went out: it was dawn. Milly fell into a broken sleep.

The *Pardon* itself, they all agreed, was wonderfully impressive and picturesque, as Baedeker had promised. The little chapel on the cliffs was stuffed with kneeling women in their stiff, starched coifs and heavy velvet-trimmed skirts. The men, slinking up sheepishly, as always to religious ceremonies, fell on their knees on the rocky ground all about the chapel when the priests advanced with the sacred emblems, and prayed vigorously with tight-closed eyes. The strangers, under the guidance of the chauffeur, who maintained a supercilious disdain for these "stupid Brittany pigs," took their position at the apex of the cliff, where they could see everything to advantage. The Gilbert girl kodaked the kneeling throng, which distressed Milly; she thought the people might resent it, but they paid no attention to the Americans.

Her own eyes were filled with unaccountable tears. The symbols of the Catholic religion always affected her in this way; while Nettie Gilbert stared rather disapprovingly at the superstitious ceremony. In spite of its quaint mediævalism, it seemed to Milly quite human,—the gathering together of suffering, sinning human beings around the gray chapel on the storm-beaten coast—"Our Lady of the Guard"—their prayers, the absolution granted by the robed priests, and the going forth to another year of trials and temptations, efforts and sins.... Just below the chapel, withdrawn only a few feet from the religious ceremony, was a cluster of tents, sheltering hurdy-gurdys, merry-go-rounds, cook-shops, and cider—plenty of cider. A few indifferent males, bedecked in their short coats brightly trimmed with yellow braid, were already feasting, even while the host was being elevated above the kneeling throng. But most of the people, with reverently bent heads and murmuring lips, received the sacrament, kneeling around the gray chapel. It was solemn and moving, Milly thought, and she wished that Jack might have had the experience....

"Baedeker says," Roy Gilbert pronounced in her ear, in the midst of the ceremony, "that there must be Spanish blood among these people because their costumes show Spanish designs.... They all look like Irish or monkeys to me."

Milly smiled responsively to him.

"The costumes are lovely, aren't they?"

The crowd of women worshippers had burst forth from the chapel: there was a swarm of white and black figures over the rocky headland. The faces beneath the broad white caps did not seem to Milly monkeylike. They were weather-beaten and bronzed like their coast, but eager and smiling, and some of the younger ones quite bonny and sweet. And the young men sidled up to the young women here as elsewhere in the world. Milly was full of the spirit of forgiveness that the ceremony had taught: men and women must mutually forgive and strive to do better. She said this to Nettie Gilbert, who seemed only moderately impressed with the semi-pagan scene.

They went down the hill to the booths, which were already thronged with a noisy crowd of eating and drinking peasants, and straightway became too evil-smelling for the Americans.

"If the ladies like this barbaric show," the chauffeur confided to Gilbert, "there is an even larger one to be seen a day's run farther north on the coast at the celebrated shrine of Ste. Anne de Beaupré."

So they went on that afternoon to "the other show," as Gilbert expressed it. Milly's doubts were quickly overborne: they must have her longer now that she was with them; she could return any time if necessary by rail; they would telegraph that evening, etc. And they set forth hopefully again in search of the picturesque. The larger *pardon* proved disappointing, less religious and characteristic, more like a country fair. The next afternoon they meant to return to Klerac, in time for dinner, but the car balked and finally gave out altogether. All Pierre's ingenuity, as well as his heartfelt curses, availed nothing, and they had to abandon it. They drove to the nearest railroad station, which proved to be many kilometres distant, and waited there half a day for a train.

Milly left the Gilberts at Morlaix. They were bound for Paris, and judging from Roy Gilbert's remarks they would shortly be on their way back to America and "some decent living." Four months of Europe and strange beds was all he could endure at a stretch. Milly laughed at his complaints. The way the rich spent their money had always seemed to her a little stupid. If she and Jack had the Gilberts' money! She mused of all the exciting freedom they could get out of it, while the little one-horse trap she had hired at the station rattled her over the hard road towards Klerac.

She had enjoyed her trip greatly, yet after the five days' absence she was eager to get back and see her child. She even looked forward to the noisy Hotel du Passage, with its cluttered table of talkative artists and her own two small rooms. As she had said to Nettie Gilbert, "I'm something of a cat and like my own garret best," even if it were a traveller's garret. And though she had liked being with the Gilberts, going over old Chicago times with Nettie, and had enjoyed the car and the luxurious, easy way of travelling, she suspected that long contact with these good people would be boresome. They were so persistently occupied with how they should sleep and eat, with all their multitudinous contrivances for comfort, with fear of the dust or of getting tired, that they had little energy for other things. She decided that the Gilbert sort made a fetish of comfort and missed most of the landscape of life in their excessive attention to the roadbed. Perhaps that was what clever folk meant by being *bourgeois*. If so, she hoped that she should never be *bourgeois* to the extent the Gilberts were.

Thus Milly, in a properly contented frame of mind, urged the peasant lad to whip up his lazy pony and get her more quickly home to her family.

X

THE PAINTED FACE

There was a midsummer silence about the hotel in the early afternoon when Milly arrived. Yvonne, so the *patronne* informed her, had taken the baby to the dunes, and thither Milly, without stopping to change her dusty dress, set out to find her. She descried her little Brittany maid on the sands safely above tide-water, and by her side a small white bundle that made Milly's heart beat faster.

Virginia received her returned mother with disappointing indifference, more concerned for the moment in the depth of the excavation into the sand which her nurse was making for her benefit. Milly covered her with kisses, nevertheless, while Yvonne explained that all had gone well, "*très, très bien, Madame.*" *Bébé*, it seemed, had slept and eaten as a celestial *bébé* should. They were looking for Madame yesterday, but Monsieur had not been disturbed even before the *dépêche* arrived.... And Monsieur was at his work as usual at the other madame's *manoir*.

After a time Milly, wearied of bestowing unreciprocated caresses upon her daughter, left her to the mystery of the hole in the sand and sauntered up the beach. Dotted here and there in the sunlight at favorable points along the dunes were the broad umbrellas of the artists, who were doubtless all busily engaged in trying to transfer a bit of the dazzling sunlight and dancing purple sea to their little squares of canvases. To Milly this ceaseless effort to comment on nature had something of the ridiculous,—perhaps supererogatory would be a better word. It was so much pleasanter to look at the landscape, and easier! Offshore the dun-colored sails of the fishing fleet dipped and fluttered where the sturdy men of Douarnenez were engaged in their task of getting the herring from the sea. That seemed to Milly more real and important in a world of fact. Such a view betrayed the *bourgeois* in her, she suspected, but according to the Hawaiian all women were *bourgeois* at heart.

After a time her feet turned into one of the lanes, and she followed unconsciously the well-known path until the gray wall of the ruined *manoir* came in sight. She paused for a moment—she had not meant to go there—then impulsively went forward, crossed the empty courtyard, and finding the garden door ajar pushed it open. The drowsy midsummer silence seemed to possess both house and garden. The place was deserted. In the corner stood the painter's large canvas on the easel, with the brushes and palette on the bench by its side, as if just abandoned, and one of Madame Saratoff's large hats of coarse straw.

Milly went over and examined the picture. It was almost finished, in that last stage where the artist can play with his creation, fondly touching and perfecting infinitesimal details, knowing that the thing has really been "pulled off." And it was triumphantly done! Even to Milly's untutored eyes, the triumph of it was indubitable. There the Russian stood on her thin, lithe haunches, her head tipped a little back disdainfully as in life, the open mouth about to emit some cold brutality, the long curving lip daringly drawn up over the teeth,—the look of "one who eats what she wants," as she herself had said one day. Milly shuddered before the insolence of the painted face. She felt that this was one of the few creatures on the earth whom she feared and hated. Instinctively she made a gesture as if she would deface the portrait. The face seemed to answer her with a sneer,—"Well, and if you did, what good would that do? Would he love *you* any more for that?" it said, and she paused.

Even the background and all the details were admirably conceived and rendered,—the crumbling, lichened wall, in cold gray, with the gnarled root of the creeper and the wreath of purple blossoms, in sharp contrast to the pallor of the face and the bold assurance of the figure. The light fell across the canvas, leading down to a slab of vivid purple water in the far distance. There was nothing pretty or affected or conventional about the painting: it was life caught and rendered with the true boldness of actuality. Milly, gazing in fascination at the creation of line and color and light, realized that here was the work of a new man, totally unknown to her. Its maker was no youthful pupil, stumbling at his set task. No dabbler, this one, no trivial illustrator or petty drawing-room amuser, but a man who had found within himself something long sought for. She

shuddered and turned away. So that was what it was to be an Artist! She understood, and she hated it,—Art and all the tribe of artists big and little. In this strange woman, whom chance had put in his way, he had seen what she had not noticed, and he had projected what he saw. He was able to divine the soul of things beneath their superficial appearance, and he was able, exultantly, to project in material form that hidden meaning for others to see and understand, if they would. And that was what an artist, a real artist, was for.

Naturally Milly did not analyze closely her own troubled mind. Here was plain evidence of her husband's being in which she no longer had the smallest share. She had been slightly jealous, more than she would admit, that other time at the beginning of the portrait because of Jack's absorption in his subject and his work. Her egotism had been wounded. But that was trifling compared with the present feeling. In this completed creation she no more existed than the fly which rested for a moment upon the painted canvas. His creation had nothing whatsoever to do with her. And something deeper than egotism, far deeper than jealousy, rose from the depths of her nature in antagonism—a sex-antagonism to the whole affair. Her husband had a new mistress—not necessarily the Russian woman, for that idea had not yet come to her—but his Art. And he might follow this mistress whither she beckoned,—to poverty, defeat, or victory,—unmindful of her and her child, forgetting them like idle memories in the pursuit of his blind purpose. It was a force inimical to her and antagonistic to all orderly living, as the Hawaiian had said,—a demonic force which rises in the midst of society to give the lie to all the pretences men make to themselves and call "civilization."

Milly hated it, instinctively. Jack must paint no more such pictures for love or for money, if their life were not to end in disaster. Did he know what he had done with this Russian woman?... Where were they, anyway?

She looked up at the silent *manoir*. The green blinds were drawn to shut out the western sun. Milly knew the long, high room with its timbered ceiling which Madame Saratoff had restored and furnished in English style, and where, for the most part, she lived. The two were there together now—she was sure of it. A new and fiercer emotion swept Milly towards the house: she would discover them in their shame, in their cruel selfishness. But she stopped on the stairs, suffocated by her passion. She felt their presence just above her with a physical sense of pain, but she lacked the strength to go forward. A terrible sense of weakness in face of her defeat made her tremble. Her heart was broken, she said; what mattered it now what they did. She had no doubts: all was revealed as if she saw them in each other's arms. No man could have discovered the secret of a woman's inmost being, if she had not voluntarily yielded to him the key....

After a time she left the place, slipped out through the garden-gate into the green field behind the *manoir* and wandered unseeingly along the hedge, and at length flung herself down on the ground, sobbing. She was alone, so utterly alone. The one in whose hands she had put her whole life had betrayed her and deserted her. It was worse than death. They were there in that dim, silent room, in the utmost intimacy, and she lay here outside, robbed and abandoned.... She rose to get farther away from the place, when she heard steps approaching on the other side of the hedge. Kneeling close to the ground, she could see through the thick roots of the hedge and watch the two as they came up the lane. It was her husband and the Russian woman. They were not closeted in the house. She had been wrong. They had been for a stroll after his work, and were coming back now for their tea, silently and companionably, side by side. For the merest moment Milly had a sense of relief: it might not be true what her heart had said, after all. But almost at once she knew that it made no difference just what their relations were or had been.

She could read their faces as they came slowly towards her,—the Russian woman's slanting glance from covered eyes of hateful content as she looked at the artist. The "one who eats what she wants!"... They walked very slowly, as if full of thoughts and weary with the day. Bragdon's head was high, his glance fell far off across the fields, his mind intent on something within, his brow slightly contracted as in stern resolve. He was pale, and he seemed to his wife older, much older than she remembered. He was a man, not the careless boy she had married so many, many years ago, and her heart tightened anew with intolerable pain.... His glance fell to the expectant face of his companion, and both smiled with profound intimacy as at a meeting where words are needless.... Milly's hand grasped the prickly vines of the hedge, and she held herself still until they had passed. No, it made no difference to her now what they thought or did. She knew.

She fled. She heard her name faintly through the din of rushing blood in her ears, but she stumbled across the field out into the lane, towards the sea. There followed the most atrocious hour Milly was ever to know in her life, while she wandered aimlessly to and fro on the lonely beach. Her marriage was over—that thought returned like a mournful chant in the storm of blind feeling. Latterly she had come to take her husband as a matter of course, as a part of the married life of a woman. Though she had said to Nettie Gilbert, "I'm as much in love with Jack as when I married him," and believed it, she hadn't been. But now that another had dared to take her husband from her, if only for a few days or hours, she was outraged. She persistently focussed her whole anguish upon this foreign creature with her vampire mouth, though she might know in the depth of her heart that her quarrel was not with the Russian or any woman, but with fate.... She kept repeating to herself,—"He doesn't love me any longer. He loves her—*her!*... He will be hers now—for a time. They are all like that,—artists. It's *bourgeois* to love one woman always." So Womanhood from the beginning of time seemed outraged in her person.

Had she not joyfully "given up everything for him," as all women did for the men they loved?

(Even her worldly prospects when she married the penniless artist began to seem to her brighter than they really had been.) Had she not, at any rate, given *herself* to him, first, and always, and only? And borne him a child in pain and danger? What more could woman do? He was her debtor for eternity, as every man was to the woman who gave herself to him. And four years had barely passed before another one plucked him easily from her side!... Women were cheated always in the game of life because of their hearts, fated unfairly in the primal scheme of things. Marion Reddon knew—she probably had had *her* experiences. But at least she had the child.

On that note her heart became centred, and she hurried back to the hotel and began aimlessly to gather her clothes together and throw them into the trunks. She must take her child and leave at once. She did not want to see him again.... But where should she go—how? Jack always arranged everything for her: she couldn't even make out a time-table or buy a railroad ticket. Marriage had made her dependent—she would have to learn.

At this moment Bragdon entered the room. His face still wore the stern expression she had noted, which gave him the look of age.

"What are you doing?" he demanded abruptly.

"Don't you see—packing!"

"What for?... I've cabled home for more money—I'm going to stay here and paint."

She thought swiftly to herself that the Other had persuaded him to do what he had refused to do for her. She made no reply, but continued to put things blindly into the trunk.

XI

CRISIS

When two human beings—above all when man and wife—meet at such tense moments, one of Virgil's beneficent clouds should descend upon them, hiding all, and they should be wafted apart to remote places, there to abide until once more a sense of the proportion and the harmony in this mundane system has taken possession of them, and they have become, if not gods and goddesses, at least reasonable human beings. The least the historian can do under the circumstances is to imitate Virgil and draw a merciful veil between the cruel battle-field and all profane eyes. The more so as few of the hot words then uttered, the sharp agony displayed, the giving and the baring of wounds have any real effect upon the result. What is done counts, and that is about all, always.

It might be that afterwards Milly derived some deeper understanding of herself, of her husband, and of the married way of life from the agony she then experienced. It might be that the young artist, headstrong in his first triumphant mastery, the first achievement of his whole being, entertained, for some moments at least, the idea of cutting the knot then and there and taking his freedom which he had surrendered at the altar, choosing what might seem to him then spiritual life instead of prolonged death. The blood was in his head, the scent of delirious deeds which he knew now that he could do. But he was an honest and loyal young American, no matter what he had done: he could not hesitate long. One glance at the sleeping form of his small child, dependent upon him for the best in life, probably settled the matter.

In the calm of the still night it *was* settled—and by him.

The little colony of the Hotel du Passage were genuinely concerned over the hurried departure of the Bragdons, who were much liked. All—but one—were at the pier that September morning to wish them farewell and good luck and much happiness. It was understood that family matters had recalled them unexpectedly to the States. Too bad! Bragdon was a promising chap, the great painter pronounced at *déjeuner*;—willing to work, intelligent, with his own ideas. Had any one seen Madame Saratoff's portrait? He had kept very quiet about that—perhaps it had not come off. Well, he needed years of hard work, which he wouldn't get in America, worse luck. With a sigh he went to his day's task of completing the thirty-seventh edition of the well-known landscape,—"Beside the Bay at Klerac," with a fresh variation of four colored sails on the horizon instead of three....

And meanwhile the slow train to Paris was carrying a man, who having climbed his hill and looked upon the promised land from afar, must turn his back for the present upon all its glories and await Opportunity.

XII

"COME HOME"

It is a long and tiresome journey in a second-class compartment from the farther end of Brittany to Paris, even under the best of circumstances. To Jack Bragdon and Milly, with the vivid memory of their personal wreck on that rocky coast, it was monotonously painful. They dared not ask each other,—“What next?” At first Milly thought there could be no next, though she was really glad not to be making this journey alone with her child, as she had expected to do. To the man who sat in the opposite corner with closed eyes and set lips, it seemed to matter little for the present what the next step was to be.

Happily an impersonal fate settled this for them. Bragdon found at the bankers in Paris an answer to his appeal for funds. The curt cable read, without the aid of code,—“Come Home.” Probably that would have been the wisest thing to do in any case. But it would have meant a hard struggle with himself to turn his back so quickly upon the promised land of accomplishment. Now it was beyond his power to do otherwise, unless he were willing to force Milly and the child to starve on what he could make. If that had ever been possible, it surely was not any longer.

So with the last of the hoard he bought their tickets, and all three sailed for New York on the next steamer.

PART FOUR

REALITIES

I

HOME ONCE MORE

There was no one at the dock to greet them.

“Your friends come down to see you off,” Milly reflected sadly, while Bragdon was struggling with the inspectors, “but they let you find your way back by yourself!”

It was hot and very noisy,—the New World,—and no one seemed to care about anything. As they made their way up town through the crowded streets, Milly felt it must be impossible for human beings to do more than keep alive in this maelstrom. The aspect of an American city with its savage roar, especially of New York in the full cry of the day's work, was simply terrifying after two years of Europe. There was something so sordidly repellent in the flimsily furnished rooms of the hotel where they went first, that she shed a few tears of pure homesickness. She longed to take the first train west; for the sights and the sounds of Chicago, if no gentler, were at least more familiar.

She did not know what they would do; husband and wife had not discussed plans on the homeward voyage or referred in any way to the future, both shrinking from the quaking bog that lay between them. Now their course must speedily be settled. When Bragdon went out after establishing them in their hotel, Milly felt curiously like a passenger on a ship whose ticket had been taken for her and all arrangements made by another. All she could do, for the present at least, was to wait and see what would happen....

Towards evening Big Brother came in with Jack and welcomed her back nonchalantly. He had the New York air of unconcern over departures and arrivals, living as he had all his life in a place where coming and going was the daily order of life. He declared that Milly had grown prettier than ever and accepted his niece with condescending irony,—“Hello, missy, so you came along, too? Made in France, eh!” and chuckled over the worn joke.

It seemed that no business disaster had caused him to send his cable recalling them. Business, he declared, was “fine, fine, better all the time,” in the American manner. It was merely on general principles that he had cabled,—“Come home.” Two years was enough for any American to spend out of his own country, even for an artist. Eying his younger brother humorously, he remarked,—“I thought you'd better get a taste of real life, and earn a few dollars. You can go back later on for another vacation.... I saw Clive Reinhard on the Avenue the other day. He wanted to know how you were getting on. Think he has another of his books on the way. You'd better see him, Jack. He's a money-maker!”

The artist meantime sat cross-legged on his chair and stroked his mustache meditatively, saying nothing. Milly glanced at him timidly, but she could not divine what he was thinking of all this. As he was American-trained he was probably realizing the force of Big Brother's wholesome doctrine. He could not live on other people's bounty and prosecute the artist's vague chimeras. Having taken to himself a wife and added thereto a child, he must earn their living and his own, like other men, by offering the world something it cared to pay for.

Nevertheless, there smouldered in his eyes the hint of another thought,—a suggestion of the artist's fierce egotism, the desire to fulfil his purpose no matter at whose cost,—the willingness to commit crime rather than surrender his life purpose. It was the complement of the Russian's "will to eat," only deeper, more impersonal, and more tragic. But nowadays men like Jack Bragdon neither steal nor murder—nor commit lesser crimes—for the sake of Art.

Instead he inquired casually,—“Where is Reinhard staying? The same place?” and when his brother replied,—“He's got an apartment somewhere up town. They'll know at the club—he's been very successful,”—Bragdon merely nodded. And the next morning after breakfast he sallied from the hotel, leaving Milly to dispose of herself and the child as she would. For several days she hardly saw him. He had caught the key of the New World symphony at once, and had set forth on the warpath without losing time to get the job. He succeeded without much difficulty in securing the illustration of Reinhard's new piece of popular sentimentality and also put himself in touch with the editors of a new magazine. Then to work, not his own work, but the world's work,—what it apparently wanted, at least would pay well for. And the first step was to find some sort of abiding-place where his family could live less expensively than at the hotel. Here Milly came in.

The one distinct memory Milly kept of that first year in New York was of hunting apartments and moving. It seemed to her that she must have looked at a cityful of dark, noisy rooms ambitiously called apartments, each more impossible than the others. (As long as they lived in New York she never gave up the desire for light and quiet,—the two most expensive luxuries in that luxurious metropolis.) They settled temporarily in a small furnished "studio-apartment" near Washington Square, where they were constantly in each other's way. Milly called it a tenement. Although they had done very well in two rooms in Brittany, it required much more space than the studio-apartment offered to house two people with divided hearts. So in the spring they moved farther up-town to a larger and more expensive apartment without a studio. Bragdon preferred, anyway, to do his work outside and shared a studio with a friend. Milly regarded this new abode as merely temporary—they had taken it for only one year—and they talked intermittently of moving.

Once or twice Jack suggested going to one of the innumerable suburbs or abandoning the city altogether for some small country place, as other artists had done. It would be cheaper, and they could have a house, their own patch of earth, and some quiet. Milly received this suggestion in silence. Indeed they both shrank from facing each other in suburban solitude. They were both by nature and training cockneys. Milly especially had rather perch among the chimney-pots and see the procession go by from the roof than possess all that Nature had to offer. And they were still young, she felt: much might happen in the city, "if they didn't give up." But she said equivocally,

—
"Your work keeps you so much in the city; you have to see people."

What he wanted to reply was that he should abandon all this job-hunting and live lean until he could sell his real work, instead of striving to maintain the semblance of an expensive comfort in the city by selling himself to magazines and publishers. But Milly would not understand the urgency of that—how could she? And what had he to offer her now for the sacrifice he should be demanding? What would she do with the long, silent days in the country, while he worked and destroyed what he did, only to begin again on the morrow at the ceaseless task, with its doubtful result? If there had been real companionship, or if the flame of their passion had still burned, then it might not have proved an intolerable exile for the woman....

They did as others would do under the circumstances—hung on in the great city as best they could, in the hope of a better fortune soon, living expectantly from day to day. Each month the city life seemed to demand more money, and each month Bragdon sank deeper into the mire of journalistic art. Worst of all they got into the habit of regarding their life as a temporary makeshift, which they expected to change when they could, tolerating it for the present as best they could,—like most of the workers of the world. Bragdon, at least, knew what he hoped for, impossible as it might be,—a total escape from the debauching work he was doing. Milly hoped vaguely for a pleasanter apartment and an easier way of living,—more friends and more good times with them.

One of the first familiar faces Milly met in the bewildering new city was Marion Reddon's. She came across the little New Englander standing at the curb of a crowded street, a child by either hand, waiting until the flow of traffic should halt long enough to permit crossing.

"Marion!" Milly cried, her eyes dancing with delight on recognizing her. A smile came to the white, tired face of the other woman,—the smile that gave something of beauty to the plain face. "Are you living here, too—in New York?"

"Yes, since the autumn."

"Has Sam given up his teaching?"

"I made him resign."

They drew to one side where they could hear each other's voices. The sight of Marion Reddon brought back happy days,—at least they seemed to be happy now, by comparison. Marion continued:—

"The teaching was too easy for him—besides he didn't like it. And if a man doesn't like that work,

he's no business doing it. He had much better get out into the fight with other men and make his way against them."

"But you loved the college town: you must have hated to leave it."

"It was what I had known all my life, and it was a good sort of place to bring the children up in—pleasant and easy. But New York is the big game for men, of course. I wanted Sam to go up against it."

She smiled, but Milly might divine something of the courage it had taken for Marion to launch her small craft in the seething city. They talked a little longer, then parted, having exchanged addresses.

"Take the subway," Marion called out as she plunged into the street, "get out when it stops, then walk! Don't forget!" and with a last smile she was gone.

Milly went on her way about some errand, thinking that Marion was no longer in the least pretty,—quite homely, in fact, she was so worn and white. She had nice, regular features and a quaintly becoming way of wearing her hair in simple Greek fashion, waving over her brows. If she only dressed better and took more care of herself, she might be attractive still. She had let herself fade. Milly wondered if Sam loved her still, really loved her, as he seemed to in his rough way when they were together that summer at Gossensass. How could he? That was the cruelty in marriage for women. Men took the best they had to offer of their youth and beauty, gave them the burdens of children, and then wanted something else when they had become homely and unattractive. At least Jack did not yet have that excuse with her.

Milly did not think that a man might love even a faded flower like Marion Reddon, if she had kept the sweet savor of her spirit alive.... So the Reddons were in New York, living far out in the impossible *hinterland* of the Bronx. When she told her husband at dinner of meeting Marion Reddon and of their new move, Jack seemed neither greatly surprised nor interested.

"We must try to see them," he remarked vaguely.

Perhaps, she thought, he did not care to recall those happier days in Europe. The truth was that the New York struggle specialized men intensely, removing to the vague background every one not directly in the path. Bragdon's efforts were so supremely concentrated on rolling his own small cart in the push, that he had little spirit to bestow elsewhere, however well he might wish people like the Reddons and others not in his immediate game.

"I thought you liked the Reddons," Milly said, half accusingly.

"I do—what makes you think I don't?" he asked, taking up a pipe preparatory to work.

"You don't seem much interested in their being in New York."

"Oh," he said lightly, "every one comes to New York."

And he turned to his evening task. This habit of working evenings, which Milly rather resented, served to prevent discussion—of all kinds. She played a few bars on the piano, then settled herself comfortably with Clive Reinhard's latest book. That was the way their evenings usually went unless some one came in, which did not happen often, or Jack was called out.

Even New York could be dull, Milly found.

II

"BUNKER'S"

Milly could not remember just when she first heard of *Bunker's Magazine*,—certainly not before their return from Europe, but soon thereafter, for its name was associated with her first experiences in New York. Shortly after they landed, *Bunker's* was added to the highly colored piles on the news-stands among the other periodicals that increased almost daily in number. During that first year of apartment hunting and moving, the name of *Bunker's* became a household word with them. Some of the men Bragdon knew were interested in the new magazine, and one of the first jobs he did was a cover design for an early number. The magazine with his picture—a Brittany girl knee-deep in the dark water helping to unload a fishing boat—lay on the centre table for weeks. Clive Reinhard's new novel, for which Jack did the pictures, also came out in *Bunker's* this year. The novelist had been paid ten thousand dollars for the serial rights, Jack told Milly, which seemed to her a large price. Some forms of art, she concluded, were well paid.

Bunker's was to be a magazine of a very special kind, of course, altogether different from any other magazine,—literary and popular and artistic all at once. Also it was to have an "uplift"—they were just beginning to use that canting term and *Bunker's* did much to popularize it. The magazine was to be intensely American in spirit, optimistic and enthusiastic in tone, and very chummy with its readers. Each month it discussed confidentially with "our readers" the glorious success of the previous issue and the astonishing triumphs in the way of amusement and

instruction that were to be expected in the future.... All this Milly gathered from the editor's "talks" and also from the men who worked for it or hoped to work for it, who were among their first friends in New York. Its owner, who had boldly given to it his name, was a rich young man, something of an amateur in life, but intensely ambitious of "making himself felt." And this was his way of doing it, instead of buying a newspaper, which would have been more expensive, or of running for public office, which would have meant nothing at all to anybody. Jack pointed him out to his wife one night at the theatre. He was in a box with a party of men and women,—all very well dressed and quite smart-looking. He had a regular, smooth-shaven face with a square jaw like hundreds of other men in New York at that moment. Milly thought Mrs. Bunker overdressed and "ordinary." She was a very blonde, high-colored woman, of the kind a rich man might marry for her physical charm.

All that first year *Bunker's* came more and more to the fore in their life. The wife of the Responsible Editor, Mrs. Montgomery Billman, called on Milly in company with Mrs. Fredericks, the wife of the Fiction Editor, and the two ladies, while critically examining Milly, talked of "our magazine" and described the Howard Bunkers, who evidently played a large rôle in their lives. Mrs. Billman, Milly decided, and so confided to her husband, was hard and ambitious socially. Mrs. Fredericks she "could not quite make out," and liked her better. Both the ladies seemed to "go in for things" hard and meant to "count." They knew much more about their husbands' affairs than Milly had ever cared to know about Jack's. She decided that was the modern way, and that Jack ought to take her more fully into his confidence. By the time she had returned these visits and realized the importance felt by the editors' wives for their husbands' work *Bunker's* gained greatly in her eyes.

Then, unexpectedly, the magazine became of first importance to the Bragdons. Jack was asked to become the Art Editor. He had been at luncheon with Bunker himself and the Responsible Editor, who was a gaunt and rather slouchy person from the other shore of the Mississippi. The Responsible Editor, who had a way of looking through his spectacles as if he were carrying heavy public burdens, unfolded to Bragdon the aims and purposes of the magazine, while Bunker contented himself with ordering the lunch and, at the close, making him the offer. Milly, when she learned of the offer, was surprised that her husband did not show more elation. She had a woman's respect for any institution, and Mrs. Billman had made her feel that *Bunker's* was a very important institution.

"What will they give?" she asked.

"Six thousand."

It was more than she had ever dreamed an "artist" could make as an assured income.

"Aren't you glad—all that!" she exclaimed.

"That's not much. Billman gets twelve thousand and Fredericks eight. But I shall be able to make something 'on the side.'"

"I think it's wonderful!" Milly said.

But Jack exhibited slight enthusiasm.

"I'll have to see to getting illustrations for their idiotic stories and half tones and colors—all that rubbish, you know."

There was nothing inspiring to him in "educating the people in the best art," as the Responsible Editor had talked about the job.

"And they want me to contribute a series of articles on the new art centres in the United States: Denver in Art, Pittsburgh in Art, Milwaukee in Art—that sort of rot," he scoffed.

Milly saw nothing contemptible in this; all the magazines did the same thing in one subject or another to arouse local enthusiasm for themselves.

"You write so easily," she suggested, by way of encouragement, remembering the newspaper paragraphs he used to contribute to the *Star*.

"But I want to paint!" Bragdon growled, and dropped the subject.

In the intervals of pot boiling he had been working on several canvases that he hoped to exhibit in the spring. Milly had lost confidence in painting since she had come to New York and had heard about the lives of young painters. Even if Jack could finish his pictures in time for the exhibition, they might not be accepted, and if they were, would probably be hung in some obscure corner of the crowded galleries for several weeks, with a lot of other "good-enough" canvases, only to be returned to the artist—a dead loss, the fate of most pictures, she had learned.

So Milly was for the Art Editorship. She took counsel with Big Brother, who happened to call, and B. B., who regarded Milly as a sensible woman, the right sort for an impracticable artist to have married, said: "Jack would be crazy to let such a chance slip by him. I know Bunker—he's all right." So when he saw Jack next, he went at him boisterously on the subject, but the artist cut him short by remarking quietly,—"I've told them I'd take it—the thing's settled."

When Milly heard this, she felt a little reaction. Would Marion Reddon have done the same with

Sam? But she put her doubts aside easily. "It'll be a good start. Jack is still young, and he will have plenty of time to paint—if he has it in him" (a reservation she would not have made two years before), "and it will do him good to know more people."

Milly would like herself to know more people in this great city, which was just beginning to interest her, and she was not at all inclined to immure herself in a suburb or the depths of the country with a husband who, after all, had not fully satisfied her heart. To know people, to have a wide circle of acquaintance, seemed to her, as it did to most people, of the highest importance, not merely for pleasure but for business as well. How otherwise was one to get on in this life, except through knowing people? Even an artist must make himself seen.... So she considered that in urging her husband to become part of the Bunker machine, she was acting wisely for both,—nay, for all three of the family, for should not Virginia's future already be taken into account?

The wife of the Fiction Editor, with whom she had become intimate in her rapid way, confirmed this view of things. Hazel Fredericks fascinated Milly much more than the aggressive Mrs. Billman, perhaps because she went out of her way to be nice to the artist's wife. Milly had not yet convinced the wife of the Responsible Editor that she was important, and she never wasted time over "negative" people. The dark little Hazel Fredericks, with her muddy eyes and rather thick lips, was a more subtle woman than Mrs. Billman and took the pains to cultivate "possibilities." She had Milly at lunch one day and listened attentively to all her dubitations about her husband's career. Then she pronounced:—

"Stanny was like that. He wanted to write stories. They are pretty good stories, too, but you know there's not much sale for the merely good thing. And unsuccessful art of any kind is hardly worth while, is it?... When we were first married, he had an idea of going away somewhere and living on nothing at all until he had made a name. But that is not the way things are done, is it?"

She paused to laugh sympathetically and look at Milly, as if she must understand what foolish creatures men often were and how wives like Milly and herself had to save them from their follies.

"Of course," she continued, "if he had had Reinhard's luck, it would have been another thing. Clive Reinhard's stuff is just rot, of course, but people like it and he gets all kinds of prices."

She took a cigarette and throwing herself comfortably on a divan blew a silvery wreath upwards. Meditatively she summed up the philosophy she held,—

"It's better to stay with the game and make the most you can out of it, don't you think so?"

Milly agreed.

"And *Bunker's* is a very good game, if you haven't any money."

Milly admired her new friend's cleverness. She was the kind who knew how to manage life,—her own life especially,—and get what she wanted out of the game. Milly began to have great respect for that sort of woman and wished she were more like them. She felt that Hazel Fredericks never did things waywardly: she always had a well-calculated purpose hidden in her mind, just as she had a carefully conceived picture of herself that she desired to leave upon the minds of others. If Mrs. Billman had put her husband where he was in *Bunker's* by force, as her rival hinted, Mrs. Fredericks had also engineered "Stanny's" career with skilful strategy.

Just at present she was involved in a project for a coöperative apartment building, which some people she knew were to put up in a desirable neighborhood. She quite fired Milly with the desire to buy space in the building.

"It's really the only way you can live in New York, if you haven't money," Mrs. Fredericks said convincingly, displaying the plan of their tiny apartment. "Of course we can't have children—there's no room for them—but Stanny is so delicate I shouldn't feel it was right to have them, anyway."

She spoke as if it were a sacrifice she had deliberately made for her husband....

Milly talked enthusiastically to Jack that night of the new coöperative building and urged him to look into it. "I do so want a home of my own," she said with a touch of pathos. "Mrs. Fredericks still thinks there's space to be had on one of the floors."

Bragdon looked into it, and reported that a good deal of space was to be had. He was dubious of the wisdom of the scheme, even if by a complicated arrangement of loans they could manage to buy a nominal share. But Milly was persistent and proved to him with a sudden command of figures that it would really reduce the cost of rent. She found out more details, and she gained the support of Big Brother, who generously offered to finance the undertaking for them. "It will make you feel settled," he said, "to own your own home." Jack could not see that in the end he should own much of anything unless by some surprising stroke of luck a good many thousands of dollars fell into his lap. But he felt that Milly should have a permanent place of her own, such as the slice of the new ten-story building offered, and it would be better for the child than to be wandering from rented apartment to apartment. So the plans were drawn, the agreements practically made, when he had a final misgiving.

The agreements lay on the table before him to be signed, and he had just read them over carefully. They seemed to him like a chain that, once signed, bound him to the city, to *Bunker's* for an indefinite future. His editorial chair had been specially galling that day, perhaps, or the impulse to paint stronger than usual. He threw down the papers and exclaimed,—

"Let's quit, Milly, before it's too late!"

"What do you mean?"

And he made his plea, for the last time seriously, to take their lives in their hands and like brave people walk out of the city-maze to freedom, to a simple, rational life without pretence.

"I want to cut out all this!" he cried with passion, waving his hand carelessly over the huddle of city roofs, "get into some quiet spot and paint, paint, paint! until I make 'em see that I have something to say. It's the only way to do things!"

With passionate vividness he saw the years of his youth and desire slipping away in the round of trivial "jobs" in the city; he saw the slow decay of resolves under the ever increasing demands to "make good" by earning money. And he shrank from it as from the pit.

"I don't see why you say that," Milly replied. "Most painters live in the city part of the year. There's — and —"

She argued the matter with him long into the night, obstinately refusing to see the fatality of the choice they were making.

"We can get rid of the apartment any time, if we don't want it," she said, and quoted Hazel Fredericks.

They came nearer to seeing into each other's souls that night than ever before or ever again. They saw that their inmost interests were antagonistic and must always remain so for all the active, creative years of their lives, and the best they could do, for the sake of their dead ideals, much more for the sake of the living child, was decently to compromise between their respective egotisms and thus "live and let live."

"If I had married a plain business man," Milly let fall in the heat of the argument, revealing in that phrase the knowledge she had arrived at of her mistake, "it would have been different."

Bragdon was not sure of that, but he was sure that in so far as he could he must supply for her the things that "plain business man" could have given her. Or they must part—they even looked into that gulf, from which both shrank back. At the end Milly said:—

"If you don't think it's best, don't do it. You must do what you think is best for your career."

Such was her present ideal of wifely submission to husband in all matters that concerned his "career," but she let him plainly perceive that in saying this she was merely putting the responsibility of their lives wholly upon his shoulders, as he was the breadwinner.

With an impatient gesture, Bragdon drew the agreements towards him and signed them.

"There!" he said, with a somewhat bitter laugh, "nothing in life is worth so much talk."

Afterwards Milly reminded him that he had made this choice himself of his own free will: he could not reproach her for their having bought a slice in the East River Terrace Building.

III

MORE OF "BUNKER'S"

One of the notable incidents of this period was the visit they made to the Bunker's place on Long Island. It was in the autumn after Bragdon had been on the magazine staff for some months. Milly went out in the train with Hazel Fredericks, who took this occasion to air her views of the Bunkers and the Billmans more fully than she had before. She described the magazine proprietor and his wife in a succinct sentence,—

"They're second-class New York: everything the others have but the right crowd—you'll see."

Howard Bunker, she admitted, was likable,—a jolly, unpretentious, shrewd business man, with a hearty American appetite for the bustle of existence. As for the handsome Mrs. Bunker,—"She was from Waterbury, Connecticut, you know," she said, assuming that Milly, who had heard of the Connecticut town solely as a place where a popular cheap watch was manufactured, would understand the depth of social inferiority Mrs. Howard Bunker's origin implied. "She's too lazy to be really ambitious. They have a box at the Opera, but that means nothing these days. She's kind, if you don't put her to any trouble, and they have awfully good food.... It's a bore coming out to their place, but you have to, once in so often, you understand. You sit around and eat and look over the stables and the garden and all that sort of thing."

She further explained that probably Grace Billman was motoring out with their host. "She always

manages that: she regards him as her property, you know." It would be a "shop party," she expected. "That's all the social imagination these people have: they get us together by groups—we're the magazine group. Possibly she'll have Clive Reinhard. He's different, though, because he's made a name for himself, so that all sorts of people run after him."

Mrs. Bunker met the young women at the station, driving her own ponies. Milly recognized the type at a glance, as much from her Chicago experience as from Mrs. Fredericks' description. Mrs. Bunker was a largish, violent blonde, with a plethora of everything about her,—hair and blood and flesh. She was cordial in her greeting to the editors' wives. She apparently regarded the magazine as one of her husband's fads,—an incident of his wealth,—like a shooting-box or a racing stable or a philanthropy. It gave prestige.

"I've got Clive Reinhard," she announced, as they started from the station, a note of triumph in her languid voice. "My, but he's popular. I've tried to get him for a month. This time I had him on the telephone, and I said 'I won't let you go—simply won't ring off until you promise. I'll tell Howard to turn down your next book.'"

She laughed at her own wit. Hazel Fredericks glanced at Milly with a look of intelligence. Milly was much amused by the good lady and listened appreciatively to her petty conversation....

It was all just as Mrs. Fredericks had predicted. Their host arrived shortly in his car with Mrs. Montgomery Billman, who cast a scornful glance at the "shop party," nodded condescendingly at Milly, kissed Hazel on the tip of her nose, and retired to her room. The men came along later, in time for dinner, all except the popular novelist, who was motored over from another house party the next morning. Dinner was long and dull. The Responsible Editress absorbed the host for the most part. What little general talk there was turned on the magazine, especially on the noise it was making with a series of "exposure" articles on the "Crimes of Big Business." Milly could not understand how Mr. Bunker, who seemed to have prospered under the rule of Big Business, could permit such articles in his magazine. But Reinhard explained to her the next day that Radicalism was the "new note." "You have to be progressive and reform and all that to break into notice," he said.

After dinner there was a little music, some bridge, more talk; then the women yawningly went to bed, while the men stayed up for another cigar and further shop talk. The next day was also much as Hazel Fredericks had said it would be. It was hot, and after the very late and copious breakfast everybody was languid. Milly was much interested in being shown over the place by her hostess. She admired the gardens, the hothouses, the planting, the stables, and all the other appurtenances of a modern country estate. Later she had a brief tête-à-tête with Bunker, who had been prejudiced against her by Mrs. Billman and was bored by her too evident flattery. She had also a talk with Clive Reinhard, with whom she discussed his last story and his "ideas about women." For the rest it was a torpid and sensual Sunday with much to eat and drink,—very much like the Sunday of some thousands of rich Americans all over the land. Most of the guests returned to the city on an evening train, bored and unconsciously glad to get back into their respective ruts.

All but Milly! She had enjoyed herself quite genuinely, and with her quick social perceptions had gathered a great deal from the visit, much of which she imparted to her drowsing husband on the train. She mapped out for his duller masculine apprehension the social hierarchy of *Bunker's*. Mrs. Bunker patronized Mrs. Billman, invited her to her best dinners and to her opera box, because she was striking in looks and had made a place for herself in "interesting circles" in the great city and was more or less talked about. "Hazel is jealous of her," Milly averred. Nevertheless the junior editor's wife accepted Mrs. Billman's patronage and invitations to Mrs. Bunker's opera box when it was given on off nights or matinées to the chief editor's wife, and in turn she was inclined to patronize Mrs. Bragdon by sending her tickets to improving lectures and concerts.

Hazel Fredericks, in her quiet and self-effacing manner, had aspirations, Milly suspected. She could not compete either with Mrs. Howard Bunker or Mrs. Montgomery Billman, of course, but she aspired to the Serious and the Distinguished, instead of the Rich or the merely Artistic. She went in for "movements" of all sorts and was a member of various leagues, and associations, and committees. Occasionally her name got into public print. Just at present she was in the "woman movement," about which she talked to Milly a good deal. That promised to be the most important of all her "movements."

Indeed, as Milly saw, all these women "went in" for something. They tried to conduct their lives and their husbands' lives on lines of definite accomplishment, and she was decidedly "old-fashioned" in living hers from day to day for what it offered of amusement or ennui. She was rather proud of the fact that she had never deliberately "gone in" for anything in her life except Love.

Nevertheless, she found the flutter of women's ambitions exciting and liked to observe the indirect working of their wills even in the man's game....

"Mrs. Billman is too obvious, don't you think Jack?" she said to her husband. But Jack had gone sound asleep.

IV

THE HEAD OF THE HOUSE

Before the winter they were established in their own home, in a corner of the new East River Terrace Building, and thereafter their life settled down on the lines it was to follow in New York. Their acquaintance gradually widened from *Bunker's* and the editorial set to other circles, contiguous and remote, and the daily routine brought husband and wife less often into contact, and they were thrown less and less on each other's resources. As the artist no longer tried to work at home, the large room designed for studio became the living-room of their apartment. Bragdon went off immediately after his breakfast to the magazine office, like a business man, and as Milly usually had her coffee in bed they rarely met before dinner. Sometimes he came back from the office early to play with Virgie before her supper time, but Milly usually appeared about seven, just in time to dress for dinner.

If she ever stopped to think of it, this seemed the suitable, normal relation of husband and wife. He had his business, and she had hers. Sundays when he did not go to the office, he dawdled through the morning at his club, talking with men or writing letters, and they often had people to luncheon, which consumed the afternoons. On pleasant days he might take the child to the Park or even into the distant country. He was very devoted to his little girl and on the whole a considerate and kindly husband. Milly thought she had forgiven him for breaking her heart. As a matter of fact there is less forgiveness than forgetting in this world. Milly felt that on the whole "they got on quite well" and prided herself on her wise restraint and patience with her husband "at that time."

The household ran smoothly. At first there were only two maids,—the second one serving as nurse for Virginia and Milly's personal helper as well,—a triumph of economic management, as Milly pointed out. For Hazel Fredericks had two merely for household purposes and the Billman's house boasted of four and a boy in buttons. They had to have the laundry done outside and engage extra service when they entertained. By the end of the first year Milly convinced herself it would be cheaper to have three regular servants, and still they depended more or less on outside help....

They saved nothing, of course. Few Americans of their class ever save. They were young, and the future seemed large. Living in New York was horribly expensive, as every one was saying, and it was worse the more they got to know people and had their own little place to keep in the world. It seemed to Milly hard that such perfectly nice people as they were should be so cramped for the means to enjoy the opportunities that came to them. The first year they spent only five thousand dollars and paid something towards the huge loan on their apartment. The second year it was seven thousand and they paid nothing, and the third year they started at a rate of ten thousand dollars. The figures were really small when one considered what the other people they knew were spending. Bragdon began to suspect that here was the trouble—they didn't know any poor people! Milly said they "barely lived," as it was. Of course there were good people who got along on three or four thousand dollars a year and even indulged occasionally in a child or two—professors and young painters and that sort. Milly could not see how it was done,—probably in ghastly apartments out in the *hinterland*, like the Reddons. The newspapers advertised astonishing bargains in houses, but they were always in fantastically named suburban places, "within commuting distance." One had to live where one's friends could get to you, or go without people, Milly observed.

Husband and wife discussed all this, as every one did. The cost of living, the best way of meeting the problem, whether by city or suburb or country, was the most frequent topic of conversation in all circles, altogether crowding out the weather and scandal. At first Jack was severe about the leaping scale of expenditure and inclined to hold his wife accountable for it as "extravagance." He would even talk of giving up their pretty home and going to some impossible suburb,— "and all that nonsense," as Milly put it to her closest friend, Hazel Fredericks. But Milly always proved to him that they could not do better and "get anything out of life." So in the position of one who is sliding down hill in a sandy soil, he saw that it was useless to stick his feet in and hold on—he must instead learn to plunge and leap and thus make progress. And he did what every one was doing,—tried to make more money. It was easy, seemingly, in this tumultuous New York to make money "on the side." There were many chances of what he cynically called "artistic graft,"—editing, articles, and illustration. One had merely to put out a hand and strip the fat branches of the laden tree. It was killing to creative work, but it was much easier than sordid discussion of budget with one's wife. For the American husband is ashamed to confess poverty to the wife of his bosom.

Milly, perceiving this power of money-getting on her husband's part, did not take very seriously his complaints of their expenditure. Even when they were in debt, as they usually were, she was sure it would come out right in the end. It always had. Jack had found a way to make the extra sums needed to wipe out the accumulation of bills. Bragdon might feel misgivings, but he was too busy these days in the gymnastic performance of keeping his feet from the sliding sand to indulge in long reflection. Perhaps, in a mood of depression, induced by grippe or the coming on of languid spring days, he would say, "Milly, let's quit this game—it's no good—you don't get anywhere!"

Milly, recognizing the symptoms, would bring him a cocktail, prepared by her own skilful hand

and murmur sweetly,—

"What would you like to do?"

This was her rôle of wife, submissive to the "head of the house."

That archaic phrase, which Milly used with a malicious pompousness when she wished to "put something hard up" to her lord, was of course an ironical misnomer in this modern household. In the first place there was no house, which demanded the service and the protection of a strong male,—merely a partitioned-off corner in a ten-story brick box, where no man was necessary even to shake the furnace or lock the front door. It was "house" only symbolically, and within its limited space the minimum of necessary service was performed by hirelings (engaged by the mistress and under her orders). Almost all the necessities for existence were manufactured outside and paid for at the end of each month (supposably) by the mistress with little colored slips of paper called cheques. In the modern world the function of the honorable head of the house had thus been reduced to providing the banking deposit necessary for the little strips of colored paper. He had been gradually relieved of all other duties, stripped of his honors, and become Bank Account. The woman was the real head of the house because she controlled the expenditures.

"I draw all the cheques," Hazel Fredericks explained to Milly, "even for Stanny's club bills—at is so much easier."

That was the perfect thing, Milly thought, forgetting that she had once tried this plan with disastrous results and had returned to the allowance system with relief. Most men, she felt, were tyrannical and arbitrary by nature, especially in money matters, or as she sometimes called her husband,—"Turks." She often discussed the relation of the sexes in marriage with Hazel Fredericks, who had "modern" views and leant her books on the woman movement and suffrage. Although she instinctively disliked "strong-minded women," she felt there was great injustice in the present situation between men and women. "It is a man's-world," became one of her favorite axioms. She could not deny that her husband was kind,—she often boasted of his generosity to her friends,—and she knew that he spent very little on his own pleasures: whatever there was the family had it. But it always humiliated her to go to him for money, when she was behind, and in his sterner moods try to coax it from him. This was the way women had always been forced to do with their masters, and it was, of course, all wrong: it classed the wife with "horrid" women, who made men pay them for their complaisance.

Ideas on all these subjects were in the air: all the women Milly knew talked of the "dawn of the woman era," the coming emancipation of the sex from its world-old degradation. Milly vaguely believed it would mean that every woman should have her own check-book and not be accountable to any man for what she chose to spend. She amplified this point of view to Reinhard, who liked "the little Bragdons" and often came to their new home. Milly especially amused him in his rôle of student of the coming sex. He liked to see her experiment with ideas and mischievously encouraged her "revolt" as he called it. They had tea together, took walks in the Park, and sometimes went to concerts. He was very kind to them both, and Milly regarded him as their most influential friend. She felt that the novelist would make a very good husband, understanding as he did so thoroughly the woman's point of view.

"I'm not a 'new woman,' of course," Milly always concluded her discourse.

"Of course you're not!" the novelist heartily concurred. "That's why you are so interesting,—you represent an almost extinct species,—just woman."

"I know I'm old-fashioned—Hazel always says so. I believe in men doing the voting and all that. Women should not try to be like men—their strength is their difference!"

"You want just to be Queen?" Reinhard suggested.

"Oh," Milly sighed, "I want what every woman wants—just to be loved."

She implied that with the perfect love, all these minor difficulties would adjust themselves easily. But the woman without love must fight for her "rights," whatever they were.

"Oh, of course," the novelist murmured sympathetically. In all his varied experience with the sex he had found few women who would admit that they were properly loved.

Milly's daily programme at this time will be illuminating, because it was much like the lives of many thousands of young married women, in our transition period. As there was no complicated house and only one child to be looked after, the mere housekeeping duties were not burdensome, especially as Milly never thought of going to market or store for anything, merely telephoned for what the cook said they must have, or left it to the servant altogether. She woke late, read the newspaper and her mail over her coffee, played with Virgie and told her charming stories; then, by ten o'clock, dressed, and her housekeeping arranged for, she was ready to set forth. Usually she had some sort of shopping that took her down town until luncheon, and more often than not

lunched out with a friend.

Occasionally on a fine day when she had nothing better to do, she took Virginia into the Park for an hour after luncheon. Usually, however, the child's promenade was left to Louise. Her afternoons were varied and crowded. Sometimes she went to lectures or to see pictures, because this was part of that "culture" essential for the modern woman. Old friends from Chicago had to be called upon or taken to tea and entertained, and there was the ever enlarging circle of new friends, chiefly women, who made constant demands on her time. She finished her day, breathlessly, just in time to dress for dinner. They went out more and more, because people liked them, and when they stayed at home, they had people in "quite informally" and talked until late hours. On the rare occasions when they were alone Milly curled up on the divan before the fire and dozed until she went to bed,—"dead tired."

There was scarcely a single productive moment in these busy days. Yet Milly would have resented the accusation that she was an idle woman in any sense. She had the feeling of being pressed, of striving to overtake her engagements, which gave a pleasant touch of excitement to city existence. That she should DO anything more than keep their small home running smoothly and pleasantly—an attractive spot for friends to come to—and keep herself personally as smart and youthful and desirable as her circumstances permitted, she would never admit. A woman's hold on the world, she was convinced, lay in her looks and her charms, not in her character. And what man who had anything of a man in him would expect more of his wife?... Her husband, at any rate, gave no sign of expecting more from *his* wife. All their friends considered them a contented and delightful young couple....

It should be added that Milly was a member of the "Consumers' League," though she paid no attention to their rules, and had been put on a "Woman's Immigration Bureau" at the instance of Hazel Fredericks, who was active in that movement just then. She also had a number of poor families to look after, to whom she was supposed to act as friend and guide. She fulfilled this obligation by raising money for them from the men she knew. "What most people need most is money," Milly philosophized.... All told, her public activities occupied Milly a little more than an hour a week.

As a whole, Milly looked back over her life in New York with satisfaction. They had a pleasant if somewhat cramped home and a great many warm friends who were very kind to them. They were both well, as a rule, though usually tired, as every one was, and the child, though delicate, was reasonably well. Jack was liked at *Bunker's*, and his periods of depression and restlessness became less frequent. They were settling down properly into their place in the scheme of things. But sometimes Milly found life monotonous and a trifle gray, even in New York.

"Love is the only thing in a woman's life that can compensate!" she confided to Clive Reinhard.

And the novelist, trained confessor of women's souls, let her think that he understood.

V

A SHOCK

Milly supposed their life would go on indefinitely like this. She lived much in the slight fluctuations of the present, with its immediate gratifications and tribulations. It seemed to her foolish to take long views, as Jack did sometimes, and wonder what the years might bring forth. Life had always been full enough of interesting change.

The most disturbing fact at present was the difficulty they had in deciding where to go for the summers. The question came up every spring, the first warm days of March, when Bragdon developed fag and headaches. Then it was he would suggest "chucking the whole thing," but that obviously, with their present way of living, they could not do. So it resolved itself into a discussion of boarding-places. It had to be some place near enough the city to permit of Bragdon's going to his office at least three or four times a week. One summer they boarded at an inferior hotel on Long Island. That had been unsatisfactory because of the food and the people. Another summer they took a furnished cottage, in Connecticut. That had been hot, and Milly found housekeeping throughout the year burdensome—and it may be added expensive. As the third summer approached, Bragdon talked of staying in the city until midsummer. Milly and the child could go to the Maine coast with the Fredericks, and he would join them for a few weeks in August. Milly accepted this compromise as a happy solution and looked forward to a really cool and restful summer.

While she was making her arrangements, there was a threatened upheaval in their life. This time it was the magazine. There had been growing friction in *Bunker's* for some time. The magazine, having to maintain its reputation, had become more and more radical, while the proprietor, under the influence of prosperity and increasing years, had become more conservative.

"You see," Hazel Fredericks explained, "the Bunkers find reform isn't fashionable the farther up

they get, and the magazine is committed to reform and so is Billman. There must be a break some day."

She further hinted that if it had not been for Grace's strong hand, the break would have already come.

"She's not ready for Montie to get out, yet," she said.

Milly was much interested in the intrigue, but she could learn little from her husband, who always expressed a weary disgust with the topic. One evening in early June, just before her departure, he told her that *Bunker's* had changed hands: a "syndicate" had bought it, and he professed not to know whose money was in the syndicate. Hazel hinted that Grace Billman knew....

Bragdon seemed more than usually fagged this spring, after his annual attack of the grippe. He had not recovered quickly, and his face was white and flabby, as the faces of city men commonly were in the spring. Milly noticed the languor in his manner when he came to the train to see her off for the summer.

"Do be careful of yourself, Jack," she counselled with genuine concern. He did not reply, merely kissed the little girl, and smiled wearily.

"Try to get away early—in July," were her last words.

Jack nodded and turned back to the steaming city. Milly, reflecting with a sigh that her husband was usually like this in the spring, sank back into her chair and opened *Life*. For several weeks after that parting she heard nothing from Jack, although she wrote with what for her was great promptness. Then she received a brief letter that contained the astonishing news of his having left the magazine. "There have been changes in the new management," he wrote, "and it seemed best to get out." But neither Billman nor Fredericks had felt obliged to leave the magazine, she learned from Hazel.

She could not understand. She telegraphed for further details and urged him to join her at once and take his vacation. He replied vaguely that some work was detaining him in the city, and that he might come later. "The city isn't bad," he said. And with that Milly had to content herself.... The summer place filled rapidly, and she was occupied with immediate interests. She said to Hazel,—"It's so foolish of Jack to stay there in that hot city when he might be comfortably resting here with us!" Hazel made no reply, and Milly vaguely wondered if she knew more about the situation on the magazine than she would tell.

It was in August, in a sweltering heat which made itself felt even beside the Maine sea, that a telegram came from Clive Reinhard, very brief but none the less disturbing. "Your husband here ill—better come." The telegram was dated from Caromneck,—Reinhard's place on the Sound....

By the time Milly had made the long journey her husband was dead. Reinhard met her at the station in his car. She always remembered afterwards that gravelly patch before the station, with its rows of motor-cars waiting for the men about to arrive from the city on the afternoon trains, and Reinhard's dark little face, which did not smile at her approach.

"He was sick when he came out," he explained brusquely; "don't believe he ever got over that last attack of grippe.... It was pneumonia: the doctor said his heart was too weak."

It was the commonplace story of the man working at high pressure, often under stimulants, who has had the grippe to weaken him, so that when the strain comes there is no resistance, no reserve. He snaps like a sapped reed.... The tears rolled down Milly's face, and Reinhard looked away. He said nothing, and for the first time Milly thought him hard and unsympathetic. When the car drew up before his door, he helped her down and silently led the way to the darkened room on the floor above, then left her alone with her dead husband.

When a woman looks on the face of her dead comrade, it should not be altogether sad. Something of the joy and the tenderness of their intimacy should rise then to temper the sharpness of her grief. It was not so with Milly. It was wholly horrible to plunge thus, as it were, from the blinding light of the full summer day into the gloom of death. Her husband's face seemed shrunken and pallid, but curiously youthful. Into it had crept again something of that boyish confidence—the joyous swagger of youth—which he had when they sat in the Chicago beer-garden. It startled Milly, who had not recalled those days for a long time. Underneath his mustache the upper lip was twisted as if in pain, and the sunken eyes were mercifully closed. He had gone back to his youth, the happy time of strength and hope when he had expected to be a painter....

Milly fell on her knees by his side and sobbed without restraint. Yet her grief was less for him than for herself,—rather, perhaps, for them both. Somehow they had missed the beautiful dream they had dreamed together eight years before in the beer-garden. She realized bitterly that their married life, which should have been so wonderful, had come to the petty reality of these latter days. So she sobbed and sobbed, her head buried on the pillow beside his still head—grieved for him, for herself, for life. And the dead man lay there on the white bed, in the dim light, with his closed eyes, that mirage of recovered youth haunting his pale cheeks.

When she left him after a time, Reinhard met her in the hall. She was not conscious of the swift, furtive glance he gave her, as if he would discover in her that last intimacy with her husband. When he spoke, he was very gentle with her. He was about to motor into the city to make some arrangements and would not return until the morning, leaving to her the silent house with her dead. She was conscious of all his kindness and delicate forethought, and mumbled her thanks. He had already notified Bragdon's older brother, who was coming from the Adirondacks and would attend to all the necessary things for her. As he turned to leave, Milly stopped him with a half question,—

"I didn't know Jack was visiting you."

The novelist hastened to reply:—

"You see he had promised to do another book for me, and came out to talk it over. That was last Saturday."

"Oh!"

"He was not well then," he added, and then he went.

He never told her—she never knew—that he had run across Bragdon quite by accident one day of awful heat, and stopped to exchange a few words with an old friend he had not seen for some time. Bragdon had the limp appearance of a man thoroughly done by the heat, and also to the novelist's keen eye the mentally listless attitude of the man who has been done by life before his time,—the look of one who knows he is not "making good" in the fight. That was what had tortured the lip beneath the mustache.

So on the spur of the moment he had suggested to the artist the new book, though he knew that his publisher would demur. For his fame had raised him altogether out of Bragdon's class. But it was the only tangible way of putting out that helping hand the artist so obviously needed just then. Bragdon had hesitated, as if he knew the motive prompting the offer, then accepted, and the two had motored out of the city together that evening. Even then the artist had a high fever....

That night Milly lived over like a vivid nightmare her married life down to the least detail,—the time of golden hopes and aspirations, Paris and Europe, her disillusionment, the futile scurry of their life in New York, which she realized was a compromise without much result.... It ended in a choke rather than a sob. There was so little left!

In the morning Reinhard reappeared with her brother-in-law. She remembered little of what was done afterwards, in the usual, ordered way, until after the brief service and the journey to the grave she was left alone in their old home. She had wished to be alone. So Hazel Fredericks took Virginia to the Reddons and left Milly for this night and day to collect herself from her blow and decide with her brother-in-law's help just what she should do.

VI

THE SECRET

The large "studio" room of the apartment had an unfamiliar air of disorderliness about it. Bragdon's easel was there and his uncleaned palette. Also a number of canvases were scattered about. These last weeks, after he had left the magazine—voluntarily as Milly now learned—he had got together all his painter's things and worked in the empty apartment. When Milly began to pick up the odds and ends, she was surprised at the number of canvases. A few of them she recognized as pictures he had attempted in his brief vacations. Almost everything was unfinished—merely an impression seized here and there and vigorously dashed down in color, as if the artist were afraid of losing its definite outline in the rush and interruption of his life. Nothing was really finished she saw, as she turned the canvases back to the wall, one by one. Tears started to her eyes again. The tragedy of life was like the tragedy of death—the incomplete! The nearest thing to a finished picture was the group done in Brittany of herself, Yvonne, and the baby on the gleaming sands, which he had tried to get ready for the New York exhibition on their return. That had the superficial finish of mechanical work from which the creator's inspiration has already departed. With a sigh she turned it to the wall with the others, and somehow she recalled what Reinhard has said once about her husband.

"He had more of the artist in him than any of us when he was in college—what has become of it?"

The remark stabbed her now. What had he done with his gift—what had they made of it?...

She came to the last things,—the canvas he had been working on the day his friend had found

him. The touch of fever was in it,—a grotesque head,—but it was as vivid as fresh paint. Yes, he had been one who could see things! She had a sense of pride in the belief.

Another of Reinhard's sayings came back to her,—

"It's all accident from the very beginning in the womb what comes to any of us, and most of all whether we catch on in the game of life, whether we fit!"

The novelist himself, she knew, had not "caught on" at first. He had confessed to her that he had almost starved in New York, writing stories that nobody would read and few publishers could be induced to print—then. They were the uttermost best he had in him, and some had been successful since, but they didn't fit then. Suddenly he arrived by accident. A slight thing he had done caught the fancy of an actress, who had a play made out of it, in which she was a great success. A sort of reflected glory came to the author of the story, and the actress with unusual generosity paid him a good sum of money. From that first touch of golden success he had become a different man. His new and popular period set in when he wrote stories about rich and childish boys and girls and their silly love affairs. Hazel Fredericks and her set affected to despise them, but they were immensely popular.

If he had sold himself, as his critics said, he had made a sharp bargain with the devil. He had become prosperous, well-known, envied, invited. Milly had always admired his intelligence in grasping his chance when it came.

She remembered now another story about the popular novelist. He had never married, and the flippant explanation of the fact was that he was under contract with his publishers not to marry until he was fifty in order not to impair his popularity among his bonbon-eating clientèle, who wrote him intimate, scented letters. But she knew the truth. She had the story from the sister of the girl, whom she had met in Paris. The girl was poor and trying to paint; they met in the garret-days when Reinhard "was writing to please himself," as they say. The two were obviously deeply in love, and only their common poverty, it was supposed, prevented the marriage. It was still desperate love when the fortunate accident befell Reinhard that led him out of obscurity to fame. It was then that the affair had been broken off. The sister found the poor girl in tears with a horrible resolve to throw herself away. (Later she married a rich man, and was very happy with him, the sister averred.) Milly had always felt that Reinhard must have been "hard" with this poor girl,—he would not let his feeling for her stand in the way of his career. Now she understood better why he would have none of her sex except as buyers of his wares. She admired him and disliked him for it all at once. That was what Jack should have done with her. But he was too tender-hearted, too much the mere man.... Oh, well, these artists with their needs and their temperaments!

Slowly Milly went over all the sketches, one by one. It was like a fragmentary diary of the life she had lived beside and not looked at closely while it was in being. She was surprised there were so many recent ones—all unfinished. She could not recall when he had done them or where. It proved that Bragdon had never really given up the idea of painting. The desire had stung him all the time, and every now and then he must have yielded to it, stealing away from the piffling duties of the magazine office—spat on popular art, so to speak—and shut himself away somewhere to forget and to do. Milly remembered certain unexplained absences, which had mystified her at the time and aroused suspicions that he "was having another affair." On his returns he had been morose and dispirited. Evidently the mistress he had wooed in this intermittent and casual fashion had not been kind. But the desire had never left him,—the urge to paint, to create. And during these last desperate days when, fevered, he was stumbling towards his end, he had seized the brush and gone back to his real work....

At last she had reached the bottom of the pile—the Brittany sketches. These she looked over as one might views of a past episode in life. The memories of those foreign days rushed over her with a sad sort of joy. There, they had been completely happy—at least she thought so now—until that hateful woman had taken her husband from her. She had almost forgotten the Russian baroness. Now with a start of fresh interest she thought of the portrait and wondered where it was,—the masterful picture of the one who had ruined her happiness. She looked through the clutter again, thinking that it was probably with the Russian wherever she was. But the portrait was there with the rest, wrapped carefully in a piece of old silk.

With eager hands Milly undid the cover of the picture and dragged it forward to the light. It was as if an old passion had burst from the closet of the past. There she was, long, lean, cruel,—posed on her haunches with upturned smiling face,—"The woman who would eat." She lived there on the canvas, eternally young and strong. Milly could admire the mastery of the painting even in the swell of her hatred for the woman who had taken her lover-husband from her. He was young when he had done that,—barely twenty-seven. A man who could paint like that at twenty-seven ought to have gone far. Even Milly in the gloom of her prejudiced soul felt something like awe for the power in him, which seemingly justified the wrong he had done her. Even Milly perceived the tragic laws stronger than herself, larger than her little world of domestic moralities. And thus, gazing on her husband's masterpiece, she realized that her hatred for the woman who she believed had done her the greatest wrong one woman can do another was not real. It was not the Baroness Saratoff who had cheated her: it was life itself! She no longer felt eager to know whether they had been lovers,—as the saying is, had "deceived" her. For this ghostly examination of her husband's work convinced her that Jack did not belong to her, never had,—the stronger, better part of him. She had lived for eight years, more or less happily, with a stranger. She understood now that domestic intimacy, the petty exchanges of daily life, even the habit of

physical passion, cannot make two souls one....

She turned at last from the picture with weariness, a heavy heart. It had all been wrong, their marriage, and still more wrong their going on with it "in the brave way." Well, *he* was done with the mistake at last, and he could not be sorry. She was almost glad for him.

Her brother-in-law had asked her to look through her husband's papers for an insurance policy he thought Jack had taken on his advice. In the old desk Bragdon had used there was a mass of letters and bills, a great many unpaid bills, some of which she had given him months and months before and had supposed were paid. There were two letters in an odd foreign hand that she knew instantly must be the Russian woman's. The first was dated from the *manoir* at Klerac on the evening of their sudden departure. Milly hesitated a moment as if she must respect the secrets of the dead, then with a last trace of jealousy tore it open and read the lines:—

... "So you have decided—you are going back. You will give up all that you have won, all that might be yours,—and ours. I knew it would be so. The puritan in you has won the day,—the weak side. You will never be content with what you are doing, never. I have seen far enough within your soul to know that.... I ask nothing for myself—I have had enough,—no, not that,—but more than I could hope. But for you, who have the great power in you, it is not right. You cannot live like that.... Some day you will be glad as I am that we were not little people, but drank life when it was at our lips."

Milly dropped the letter and stared blankly at the dark wall opposite. What it revealed did not come to her with shock, because she had always felt sure that it had been so. What startled her was the realization for the first time how much the experience had meant to both,—the examination of the picture and the silence of death enabled her to understand that. He had had the strength—or was it rather weakness?—to do "the right thing," to renounce love and fulfilment and fame because of her and their child. It came over her in a flash that she could not have done as much. Give up love that was strong and creative—no, never, not for all the right and convention on the earth. Any more than the Russian woman would have given it up! Women were braver than men sometimes.

She folded the letter and put it back in its envelope with a curious feeling of relief, a sort of gladness that he had had even the little there was—those few days of fulfilment, of the diviner other life which with all the years between them they had failed to grasp.

It was the most generous, the most genuine, the most humiliating moment of Milly's life. Yes, she was glad that in all the drab reality of their life,—in spite of the bills, the worry, the defeat,—he had had his great moments of art and love. They were not stolen from her: such moments cannot be stolen from anybody. She wished that he might only know how freely she was glad,—not forgave him, because forgiveness had nothing to do with it. She understood, at last, and was glad. If he should come back to life now by some miracle, she would have the courage after this self-revelation to leave him, to send him back, if not to her,—at least to his great work. Only that, too, might now be too late—alas!

With a quiet dignity that was new, Milly opened the other letter. It was dated only a few weeks before from some small place in Russia. Madame Saratoff explained briefly that she was now living with her children on her mother's estate in central Russia, and she described the life there in its perfect monotony, like the flat country, with its half animal people. "I live like one of those eastern people," she wrote, "dreaming of what has been in my life." She had heard accidentally of the American from some one who had met him in New York. He was no longer painting, she understood, but engaged in other work. That was sad. It was a mistake always not to do that which one could do with most joy. In the whirlpool of this life there was so much waste matter, so little that was complete and perfect, that no one with power had the right not to exercise it.

She sent this letter with the picture he had made of her. It belonged more to him than to her because he had created it—the man's part—while she had merely offered the accidental cause,—the woman's share. And further she wished to torture him always with this evidence of what once had been in him; not with *her* face,—that doubtless had already faded from his mind. But no other one had he fixed eternally by his art as he had hers. Of that she was sure. "Farewell."

It was cold; it was cruel. And it must have burned the artist like acid on his wound. The letters should have gone with him to his grave....

With a sense of finality,—that this was the real end, the end of her marriage,—Milly did up the letters carefully and folded the piece of old silk about the portrait. They must be returned to the Baroness Saratoff. And now for the first time since they had met and married, everything seemed clear and settled between her and her husband. She was left with her little girl "to face life," as the saying is.

And Milly bravely turned her face towards life.

VII

BEING A WIDOW

Many times during the ensuing months Milly had occasion to recall the remark of a clever woman she had once heard. "There's no place in modern society for the widow." She came to believe that the Suttée custom was a frank and on the whole a merciful recognition of the situation. Every one was kind to her,—unexpectedly, almost embarrassingly kind, as is the way with humanity. But Milly knew well enough that no one can live for any considerable period on sympathy and the kindness of friends. The provoking cause for any emotion must be renewed constantly.

It would have been much easier, of course, if her husband had left her and his child "comfortably off," or even with a tiny income. Instead, there were the bills, which seemed to shower down like autumn leaves from every quarter. The kindly brother-in-law, who undertook to straighten out affairs, became impatient, then severe towards the end. What had they done with their money? For Bragdon until the last weeks had been earning a very fair income. Nothing seemed paid. On the apartment only the first thousand dollars had been paid, and all the rest was mortgage and loan from him. Even the housekeeping bills for the year before had not been fully settled. (It seemed that one had merely to live with a false appearance of prosperity to secure easy credit, in a social system that compels only the very poor to pay on the nail.)

Milly could not explain the condition of their affairs. She had no idea they were "so far behind." She was sure that she had given Jack most of the bills and supposed that he had taken care of them. She protested that she had always been economical, and she thought she had been, because there were so many more things she wanted,—things that all their friends seemed to have. When confronted by the figures showing that they had spent seven, nine, eleven thousand dollars a year,—and yet had many unpaid bills,—she could not believe them and stammered,—"I know I'm not a good manager—not really. But all that! You must be mistaken." Then the business man showed his irritation. Figures did not lie: he wished every woman could be taught that axiom at her mother's knee....

"We lived so simply," Milly protested. "Just two maids most of the time,—three this winter, but," etc. In the end the brother-in-law gathered up all the unsettled bills and promised to pay them. He would not have his brother's name tarnished. And he arranged for an advantageous lease of the apartment from the first of the next month, so that after paying charges and interest there would be a little income left over for Milly. Here he stopped and made it clear to Milly that although he should do what he could for his brother's child, she must see what she could do for herself, and what her own people offered her. Big Business had been disturbed of late. He was obliged to cut his own expenses. First and last he had done a good deal for Jack. His wife called Milly "extravagant"—Milly had never found her congenial. In the end Milly felt that her brother-in-law was "hard," and she resolved that neither she nor her child should ever trouble him again.

She had already written her father of her bereavement, and received promptly from Horatio a long, rambling letter, full of warm sympathy and consolation of the religious sort. "We must remember, dear daughter, that these earthly losses in our affections are laid upon us for our spiritual good," etc. Milly smiled at the thoroughness with which her volatile father had absorbed the style of the Reverend Herman Bowler of the Second Presbyterian. To Milly's surprise, there was not a word of practical help, beyond a vague invitation,—"I hope we shall see you some day in our simple home in Elm Park. Josephine, I'm sure, will welcome you and my granddaughter."

Milly very much doubted whether the hard-featured Josephine would welcome her husband's widowed daughter. In fact she saw the fear of Josephine in her father's restrained letter. She contemplated a return to Chicago as a last resort, but it was sad to feel that she wasn't wanted....

At this point Milly began to reproach her husband for failing to leave her and his child with resources. "He ought to have made some sort of provision for his family—every man should," she said to herself. There was manifest injustice in this "man-made world," where a good wife could be left penniless with a child to care for.

Milly always thought of herself as "a good wife," by which she meant specifically that she had been a chaste and faithful wife. That was what the phrase in its popular use meant, just as "a good woman" meant merely "a pure woman." If any one had questioned Milly's virtue as a wife, she would have felt outraged. If any one had said that she was a bad wife, or at least an indifferent wife, she would have felt insulted. A girl who gave herself to a man, lived with him for eight of her best years, bore him a child and had been faithful to him in body, must be "a good wife," and as such deserved a better fate of society than to be left penniless. All her friends said it was a very hard situation.

These same friends were endeavoring to do their best for her, pricked by sympathy with her evident need. If it had not been for a cheque for two thousand dollars, which Clive Reinhard sent her, "in payment for your husband's work on the new contract," Milly would soon have been without a dollar in her purse. She took Reinhard's cheque thankfully, without suspecting her right to it. Others might suspect. For there was no contract, no illustrations made—nothing but the novelist's recognition of a need. The cheque was merely one of the ways he took of squaring

himself with his world.

When Milly's women friends heard of it, they said with one voice,—“Thank heaven! If Clive Reinhard would only marry Milly—he ought to!”

Which merely meant that, as he was a rich bachelor who had amassed money by exploiting the sentimental side of their sex, there would be a poetic justice in his chivalrously stepping into the breach and looking after his dead friend's helpless widow. It would make up for “the others,” they said, and were enthusiastic over their sentimental plan.

“Milly would make a charming hostess in that big country place of Clive's. It would give her a free hand. What Milly has always wanted is a free hand—she has the ability. And Clive is getting pudgy and set. He ought to marry—he's too dreadfully selfish and self-centred,” etc.

Mrs. Montgomery Billman took the affair specially in charge. Of course a decent time must elapse after poor Jack's death, but meanwhile there was no harm in bringing the two together. The masterful wife of the Responsible Editor conceived the scheme of having a private exhibition and sale of Bragdon's work, and that took many interviews and much discussion on Sunday evenings when the hostess tactfully left the two to themselves before the fire, while she retired “to finish my letters.” When she returned, however, she found them dry-eyed and silent or chatting about some irrelevant commonplace. The private exhibition came off during the winter in the “Bunker's Barn,” as they called the big Riverside Drive house. A good many cards were scattered about in literary and artistic and moneyed circles; tea was poured by the ladies interested; Milly appeared in her widow's black, young and charming. A number of people came and a few bought. Mrs. Billman contented herself with the sketch of a magazine cover representing a handsome woman and a young boy, which was said to resemble herself and her son. On the whole the sale would have been a dreary failure if it had not been for Bunker's liberal purchases and Reinhard's taking all that was unsold “to dispose of privately among Jack's friends.”

The hard truth was that Jack Bragdon had not shaken the New York firmament, certainly had not knocked a gilt star from its zenith. At thirty-two he was just a promising failure, one of the grist that the large city eats annually. And his friends were not powerful enough to make up for his lack of *réclame*. “He had a gift—slight though. Nothing much done—charming fellow—died just as he was starting, poor chap!” so the words went. If the portrait of the Russian had been there, the tone might have been less patronizing; but Milly had already sent this off on its long journey.

The practical result was fifteen hundred dollars, of which Bunker contributed a thousand, and various convenient sums that dribbled in opportunely from the novelist, “whenever he was able to make a sale.” (A good many of Jack Bragdon's things ultimately will come under the hammer when the Reinhard house is broken up.)

And that romance which Milly's friends had staged came to nothing. Reinhard called on her often, was very kind to her, and really solicitous for her welfare; he also was charming to little Virginia, who called him Uncle Clive; and he had both at his country place for long visits,—abundantly chaperoned. Nothing could have been “nicer” than the novelist's attitude to his friend's widow, all the women declared, and it must have been *her* fault—or else that “other affair” had gone deeper with him than any one supposed.

Milly herself was not averse to entertaining a new “hope.” Her marriage seemed so utterly dead that she felt free to indulge in a new sentiment. But the novelist looked at her out of his beady, black eyes,—indulgently, kindly,—but through and through, as if he had known her before she was born and knew the worth of every heart-beat in her.... Gradually beneath that scalping gaze she grew to dislike him, almost to hate him for his indifference. “He must be horrid with women,” she said to Hazel, who admitted that “there have been stories—a man living by himself, as he does!”

And so this solution came to naught.

Milly was “up against it again,” as she said to herself. Her small bank-account was fast melting away. (She had her own sheaf of bills that she had not cared to present to her brother-in-law, and she found that a penniless widow has poor credit.) Collectors came with a disagreeable promptness and followed her with an unerring scent through her various changes of residence. It became known among her friends that “Milly must really do something.”

The competent wife of the Responsible Editor thought it ought not to be difficult to find something of “a social nature” for Milly to do. “Your gift is people,” she said flatteringly. “Let me think it over for a day or two, and I'm sure the right idea will come to me.”

She promptly turned the problem over to Mrs. Bunker, with whom she still maintained amicable relations. That lady in due time wrote Milly a note and asked her to call the next morning. Milly went with humbled pride, but with a misgiving due to her previous experiences in the parasitic field of woman's work. When after many preambles and explanations, punctuated by “like that, you know,” “all that sort of thing,” “we'll have to see,” etc., the good lady got to her offer, it sounded like a combination of lady-housekeeper and secretary. With considerable decision Milly said that she did not feel qualified for the work, but Mrs. Bunker was most kind; she would

consider her offer and let her know, and left. She had decided already. The memory of her work for Eleanor Kemp,—the humiliation and the triviality of this form of disguised charity,—had convinced her, and Eleanor Kemp was a lady and a friend and a competent person, all of which Mrs. Howard Bunker was not. "I'd scrub floors first," Milly said stoutly, and straightway despatched a ladylike refusal of the proffered job.

("I thought you said she was in great need," Mrs. Bunker telephoned Mrs. Billman in an injured tone of voice. "She is!" "Well, you wouldn't think so," the Bunkeress flashed back. "It's so hard to help that sort. You know, the kind that have been ladies!" "I know," the Editress rejoined, without the glimmer of a smile.)

The only one of all Milly's friends beside the novelist who came promptly to the rescue at this crisis was Marion Reddon,—the one Milly had seen least of since she had been thoroughly launched in New York. Marion with her puritan directness went to the point at once.

"What you want is a place to stay in while you look around. You and Virginia come to us. The hang-out, as Sam calls it, isn't large, but there's always room somehow."

Milly demurred at first, but later when Marion Reddon was obliged to depart hurriedly for the south because one of the children was threatened with tuberculosis, she gratefully accepted the offer of the Reddons' apartment during their absence. She moved from the boarding-house where she had been staying between visits to the top floor of the flimsy building behind Grant's Tomb in which the Reddons had perched themselves latterly. Virginia was obliged to leave her school where "the very nicest children all went," which was a keen regret to Milly, for she had already formed ambitions for her daughter. The contrast of her own pretty apartment with the shabby, worn rooms of the Reddon flat brought home to her, as nothing else had, her precarious situation. And she set herself vigorously to meet it.

VIII

THE WOMAN'S WORLD

Milly's most intimate friend was Hazel Fredericks. That restless, keen young woman, after experimenting variously in settlement work, hygiene for the poor, and immigration, had concentrated her interests on the woman movement then coming more and more into notice. The agitation for the suffrage, it seemed to her, was the effective expression of all advanced, radical ideas for which she had always worked. Her activity in the movement had brought her into close relations with some of the local leaders, among whom were a few women socially prominent, as everybody knows. (In this way she had eclipsed her old rival, Mrs. Billman, who had kept to Art and Society.) Hazel was on intimate terms with a very rich young married woman, who lived apart from her husband, "for the very best of reasons, my dear," and who spoke in private houses on the Cause.

In those happier days when Milly still had her own little place in the world, she had rather made fun of Hazel's views and imputed them to social ambition. "She wants to be talked about," she said. But since the experience of widowhood, Milly was changing her mind and listened much more attentively to all that Hazel had to say about "the woman movement,"—the "endowment of motherhood," the "necessity for the vote,"—and read "What Forty Thousand Women Want," "Love and Marriage," and other handbooks of the Cause.

One of the theories with which Milly most heartily agreed was that the labor of women in the home should be paid just as the labor of men. Milly felt that she had a valid claim for a number of years' wages still due her. This and other subjects she talked over with Hazel and became fired with enthusiasm for the Cause. Now, in her need of work, she asked,—

"Why shouldn't I do something for the movement?"

"I've been thinking of that," Hazel replied, with a shade of hesitation in her voice.

"You said there were paid secretaries and organizers."

"Yes—there are some, and we need more."

She did not explain that there were hundreds of eager young women, college graduates and social workers, younger and much better informed and more modern than Milly,—in a word, trained women. She did not wish to discourage Milly, and believed she had enough influence with Mrs. Laverne (the pretty married worker) and with Mrs. Exeter, the social leader most prominently identified with the Cause, to work Milly into some paid place. So she said reflectively,—

"There's to be a most important meeting of the leaders in the movement at Mrs. Exeter's, and I'll see what I can do."

With a laughing "Votes for Women" and "For a Woman's World," the two friends kissed and parted. Shortly afterwards a card came to Milly from a very grand person in the social world, a name that is quite familiar wherever newspapers penetrate. The card invited Mrs. John Bragdon to take part in a meeting of those interested in the Woman Forward Movement on the evening of the twentieth, at which addresses would be made by certain well-known people. The last name on the list of speakers was that of Mrs. Stanfield Fredericks. Milly was much excited. She was eager to go to the meeting, if for no better reason than from a natural curiosity to see the famous house, so often the theme of newspaper hyperbole. Also she was anxious to hear Hazel talk. But she doubted the propriety of her going anywhere so early in her widowhood. While she was debating this point with herself the telephone rang and Hazel Fredericks asked if she had received the card.

"You're going, of course?"

There followed a long feminine discussion over the propriety of accepting, the dress to be worn, etc. Hazel insisted that this occasion was not really social, but business, and steadily bore down Milly's scruples. "There'll be a great crush. It won't make any difference what you wear—nobody'll know!"

Milly went. She had to bribe the raw Swedish servant to remain in that evening with little Virginia, and she went to the expense of a cab in order not to arrive at the grand house in a sloppy and tousled condition. It was in many respects a thrilling experience. Once inside the glassed vestibule on the marble steps, Milly felt that she would not have missed it for a great deal. In the first place she enjoyed seeing the solemn liveried men servants, one of whom proffered pamphlet literature of the suffrage cause on a large silver tray. (The little books were sold at a good price, and Milly dropped another dollar or two in acquiring stuff that she could have had for nothing from Hazel Fredericks, whose apartment ran over with this "literature.")

Having supplied herself with the ammunition of the Cause, she followed the throng into the celebrated ball-room hung with beautiful old tapestries and with a ceiling stolen bodily from a French château. For a time the richness and the gayety of the scene sufficiently occupied Milly's attention. After the sombre experiences through which she had been and her present drab environment, it all seemed like fairyland. She tried to guess who the important-looking people were. A few were already known to her by sight, and others she recognized from their newspaper portraits. There was a majority of elegantly dressed women, and a minority of amused or bored-looking men.

At last the gathering was hushed by the voice of the hostess,—a plump and plethoric person, who said wheezily that in assembling here to-night there were two objects in view: first, to hear cheering words of wisdom from the leaders of the Cause, and secondly, to show the world that the cultivated and leisure classes were for the Emancipation of Woman. It was a democratic movement, she observed, and the toiling sisters most in need of the vote were not with them to-night. But all effective revolts, she asserted, started from above, among the aristocrats. They must rouse the womanhood of the nation, the common womanhood that now slumbered in ignorant content, to a sense of their wrongs, their slavery. She murmured *noblesse oblige* and sat down. Thereat a little bespectacled lady bobbed up at her side and began reading a poem in a low, intense voice. There were interminable verses. The well-dressed, well-dined men and women in the audience began to show signs of restlessness and boredom, although they kept quiet in a well-bred way. One lone man with a lean, humorous face, who was jammed into the corner beside Milly, looked at her with a twinkle in his eye. She could not help smiling back, but immediately recomposed her face to seriousness.

The verses ended after a time, as all things must end, and the speeches followed,—the first by a very earnest, dignified woman,—a noted worker among the poor,—who argued practically that this man-governed world was a failure, from the point of view of the majority, the unprotected workers, and therefore women should be permitted to do what they could to better things. There was a slight murmur of appreciation—rather for herself than for her argument—when she sat down. She was followed by a pompous little man, who made a legal speech with lumbering attempts at humor. Milly was much impressed by the long list of legal disabilities he cited which women suffered in this "man-made world," and which she had not hitherto suspected. The man by her side was yawning, and Milly felt like reproving him.

After the pompous judge came the star of the performance,—the pretty little woman who was separated from her husband. She was very becomingly dressed, much excited apparently, and swayed to and fro as she talked. Sometimes she closed her eye in a frenetic vision of women's wrongs, then suddenly opened them wide upon her audience with flashing indignation, as old-fashioned actresses once did. After the dull pleas of the preceding speakers, based on general principles and equity, this was an impassioned invective against the animal man. One felt that hers was a personal experience. The low, degraded nature of the sex that had, by physical force, usurped the rule of the universe was dramatically exposed. Milly glowed with sympathy while she listened, though she could not explain why, as her experience with men had not been with lechers, drunkards, wife-beaters. The men she had known had been on the whole a fairly clean, hard-working, kindly lot, yet she knew instinctively, as she often said, that "All men are alike," by which she meant tyrannical and corrupt in regard to women.... The audience listened closely to the speaker. No doubt their interest was increased by the gossip every one knew,—how her husband had struck her at a restaurant, how he had dragged her by the hair, cut her with a bottle from her own dressing-table, etc. Milly noticed that Hazel Fredericks and the settlement worker

kept their heads lowered disapprovingly. The man next her twisted his quizzical face into a smile, and turning to Milly as the speaker stopped, amid a burst of applause, said frankly and simply as to an old friend,—

"Whew—what rot!"

Milly could not help smiling back at the engaging stranger, but she protested stoutly,—

"I don't think so!"

Before they could extend their remarks, the next speaker, a rich widow well-known for her large charities, was addressing the audience in low, earnest tones. Her theme was taken from the poet's verses: she pleaded for the full emancipation of Woman as man's equal comrade in the advance of the race. It was a vague, poetic rhapsody, disconnected in thought, and made slight impression on Milly. The last speaker was Hazel Fredericks. Her subject was the intellectual equality of women with men and their right to do their own thinking. Milly recognized many of the pat phrases and all the ideas which were current in the magazine set where she had lived,—woman's self-expression and self-development, etc. It was the most carefully prepared of all the addresses and very well delivered, and it made an excellent impression, though it contained nothing original either in thought or in expression. Like Milly's famous graduation essay on Plato it was a masterpiece of skilful quotation, but in this case the theft was less obvious and the subject was certainly fresher.

There was the usual movement of relieved humanity after it has been talked to for two hours, and then the hostess rose again, and in her languid drawl announced that all who felt interested in the Cause were requested to sign the "Roster" and give their addresses, so that they might be kept in touch with the movement. The "Roster" was a very handsome gilt-edged, blue levantine-bound book, which was carried about in the crowded room by a footman, another man carrying a gold inkstand and pen.

The stranger beside Milly murmured in her ear,—

"So Society has taken up the Cause!"

"I'm afraid," Milly replied with an arch smile, "you don't take us quite seriously."

"Don't think it for one moment!" he retorted. "I don't believe I have ever taken anything so seriously in all my life as Women."

"In what way?"

"In every way."

He resumed in a moment, more seriously,—

"Frankly, I don't believe much is accomplished for your Cause by this sort of thing!"

His gesture included comprehensively the gorgeous room, the gorgeous assembly of socially elect, the speakers, and the liveried servants who were now approaching their corner with the "Roster."

"But you have to start things somehow," Milly rejoined, remembering Hazel's arguments. "Social prestige counts in everything."

"Is that what you need—social prestige?... I don't believe one of those women who talked, including the poet, ever earned a dollar in her life!" and with a glance about the room he added, "nor any woman in this room."

"Oh, yes—I have myself!" Milly replied promptly and proudly.

The man looked at her sharply.

"And that doesn't make any difference," she continued with a superior air; "you men are always trying to bring things down to dollars and cents."

"You'll admit it's a tangible basis of discussion."

"I've no doubt if they only had their rights many of them ought to be paid a great deal for what they've done for you men."

"I mean that not one has ever done anything really productive in her life—has added anything to the world's supply of necessities," he continued with masculine arrogance.

"Oh?" Milly protested.

"Not even children!" he added triumphantly, and glanced at the names on his programme. "I don't believe they could produce a child among 'em."

Milly knew that the women speakers of the evening happened all to be childless women. One of them was not married, another was a widow, a third separated from her husband, and of the others at least one—Hazel—had deliberately evaded maternity.

"That may not be their fault!" Milly retorted with meaning.

"True," the man admitted. "But I'd like to hear something on the question from Mothers."

"Having children isn't the only thing women are good for," Milly suggested.

"It's one mighty fine thing, though!"

(Milly could never understand why men, as a rule, were so enthusiastic over women who had children.)

"Aren't we getting away from the subject?" she suggested.

Their talk was interrupted by the presence of the solemn footman with the book of irreproachable names. To Milly's surprise her unknown companion grasped the pen and scrawled beneath her signature a name that looked like "A. Vanniman," with the address of a well-known club. So he was a single man!

"How could you do that?" Milly demanded accusingly.

"Why not? I want women to vote, just as soon and as often as they like. Then they'll know how little there is in the vote and maybe get down to brass tacks."

"You don't really believe in women," Milly remarked coquettishly.

"I don't believe in this sort of flummery, no.... I want to hear from the waitresses, the clerks, the factory girls—the seven or eight millions of women who are up against it every day of their lives to earn a living. I want to hear what *they* have to say about suffrage and the rights of women—what *they* want? Did you ever ask them?"

"No-o," Milly admitted, and then recalled another of Hazel's arguments. "All those women need the vote, of course, to make laws to help them earn their living. But they haven't the time to agitate and organize. They are not educated—not expressive."

"Not expressive!" the man exclaimed. "I wish you and all these good women here could listen to my stenographer for ten minutes on what women need. She knows the game!"

Milly did not approve of her companion's sentiments: he clearly belonged to the large class of prejudiced males whose indifference the Cause had to combat. But he had an interesting face and was altogether an attractive specimen of his species. She wondered who he might be. It seemed to her that "Vanniman" had a familiar sound, and she believed he was some man of importance in the city.

There was a general drift towards the supper room. But Milly hesitated. She had promised Hazel to join her after the speaking and be introduced to some of the leaders,—especially to the pretty young woman who had denounced Man,—in the hope that a paid position could be found for her. At first she could not find her friend, and then she saw Hazel surrounded by a number of important-looking men and women, talking very earnestly with them, and a sudden timidity came over her in the midst of this distinguished gathering.

"We'd better get something to eat," her unknown acquaintance suggested. He had waited for her, and she felt relieved to have some one to speak to. "It makes one fearfully hungry to listen to a lot of talk, don't you think?"

So Milly went out to supper with the agreeable stranger.

"No," he resumed, after presenting her with a comforting beaker of champagne, "I've every sympathy with the woman with a job or with the woman who wants a job. All this silly talk about the sexes makes me tired. Man or woman, the job's the thing."

"Yes!" Milly assented with heartfelt emphasis.

"What every one needs is something to do, and women must be trained like men for their jobs."

He began to talk more seriously and entertainingly on the economic changes in modern society that had produced the present state of unrest and readjustment. He sketched quite feelingly what he called the old-fashioned woman, with her heavy duties and responsibilities in the pioneer days. "The real pillar of Society—and often a domestic slave, God bless her!" he said. "But her granddaughter has become either a parasite, or another kind of slave,—an industrial slave. And the vote isn't going to help her in either case."

Milly wondered in which class she fell. She didn't like the word "parasite,"—it sounded like a disease,—and yet she was afraid that was what she was.

"I think that I must be going," Milly said at last. She noticed that the rooms were fast emptying after the food had been devoured, and she could see Hazel nowhere. She would call her up in the morning and congratulate her on her speech. And so with a nod to the stranger she went for her wraps. But she found him again in the vestibule, and wondered if he had waited for her to come down.

"What's the name?" he asked, as the servant came forward to call her carriage.

"I haven't any cab," Milly replied bravely. It was her custom these days Cinderella-like to dispense with a return cab.

"But it's raining," the man protested. "You must let me set you down at your home."

A private hansom had drawn up to the curb before the awning. "Where?" he insisted.

"It's an awful way out," Milly faltered; "just take me to the nearest subway station."

Embarrassed by the gaze of the servant and by the waiting people behind, she got into the hansom. The man gave some sort of order to his driver and got in beside her. They trotted briskly around the corner on to the Avenue, and as it was misting heavily the driver let down the glass shield. It seemed cozy and pleasant to jog home from a party in a private cab, with an agreeable man by one's side. Quite like old times, Milly thought!

"You'd better let me take you all the way. Where shall I say?" and he raised the top with his stick. For a moment Milly was about to yield. She liked the sense of having a masterful man near her, overbearing her doubts, but she still protested,—

"No, no—it's too far. Just put me down at Columbus Circle."

The man hesitated, looked at Milly curiously, then gave the driver the direction. Milly wondered why he had not insisted as she had expected he would or did not again suggest driving her out, when they had reached the subway station. There was a time when men would not have taken no for an answer. But he didn't—nor even ask her name. Instead he courteously helped her to alight and raising his hat drove off.

She was depressed going up-town in the crowded, smelly, shrieking train. The meeting had not been as thrilling as she had anticipated. Hazel would probably scold her to-morrow for not coming forward and meeting the leaders. But she felt that the Woman Forward movement had little to offer her in her perplexities. Hers was part of that economic maladjustment that the good-looking stranger had talked about, and even with the suffrage it would take generations to do anything for women like her.

What really depressed her most was the fact that her unknown acquaintance had not considered it worth while to find out her name and pave the way for further relations. She realized cynically that for the present at any rate the woman question came down to just this: men could do many pleasant and useful things for women when they were so inclined. And a woman failed when she could not interest a man sufficiently to move him to make the advance. Of course Milly knew that the "modern woman" would fiercely desire to be independent of all such male patronage. But as Milly climbed wearily the long flight of stairs to her apartment, feeling tired and forlorn and very much alone in the world, she knew that in the bottom of her heart she had no wish to be "modern." And she was even sceptical as to how sincerely the other women, like Hazel Fredericks, desired that "complete independence of the male" they chattered so much about.

When Milly turned on the electric light in the little apartment, it was forebodingly still. She glanced at once into the room where Virginia slept and found it empty, with the bedclothes tumbled in a heap. She rushed to the maid's room. That too was empty and the rear door was locked on the outside. For a moment Milly's heart ceased beating, then with a shriek,—"Virgie, Virgie—where are you!" she ran into the front hall and plunged, still shrieking, down the stairs.

A door opened on the floor below, and the figure of a large woman in a rose-pink negligee confronted Milly.

"Lookin' for yer little girl?" the stranger asked in a loud, friendly voice. "Well, she's all right—just come in here!"

She held open the door and pointed to the front room, where under a crocheted shawl little Virginia was curled up asleep on the divan. Milly fell beside her with an hysterical sob. The child, partly awakened, put out her thin arms and murmured sleepily, "The strange lady's very nice, but she's queer. Take me home, mama, please."

The "strange lady," who was looking on interestedly, explained,—

"I heard the kid runnin' round up above and cryin'—oh, that was hours ago when I first com' home—and as she kep it up cryin' as if she were scared and callin', I went up there and brought her down to stay with me till you got back.... Guess she woke up and was lonesome all by herself."

"That brute Hilda," Milly gasped, "must have gone off and left her."

"They're all like that,—them Swedes," the woman of the rose-pink negligee agreed. "Got no more heart than a brick."

She spoke as from a vast experience with the race.

"The little girl has been as nice as pie," the woman replied to Milly's stammered thanks. "We've been real friendly. Good-by, girlie, I'll be up to-morrer some time and tell you the last of that story.... Good-night!"

Milly gathered her precious bundle in her arms and with renewed thanks staggered back to her

own quarters.

"She's queer, mama, and something happened to her arm and leg, long ago, but she's very kind," the small Virginia explained sleepily as her mother dropped her on her own bed.

By "queer" Virginia merely meant that her good Samaritan was not of the class she had been accustomed to, and did not use language precisely as her mother and her mother's friends used it. To Virginia the janitor of the building was "queer," and almost all of the many thousands of her fellow-beings whom she saw daily on the streets of the great city.

So Milly thought no more about it.

IX

THE NEW WOMAN

But the "queer" woman in the rose-pink negligee who befriended Virginia on the night when her mother had gone to the meeting of the Woman Forward Movement in the very grand house and "the beast of a Swede" Hilda had slipped out to meet her lover beside Grant's Tomb, has more to do with Milly and the woman question itself than the suffrage meeting and all the talk there. Ernestine Geyer, for such was the woman's name, came into Milly's life rather late, but she will have much to do with it hereafter and deserves a chapter to herself to begin with.

Incredible as it would seem to Milly, Ernestine's origin was not widely separated from that of Milly Ridge. She might very well have been one of the many little schoolmates, not exactly "nice," who sat beside Milly on the benches of the St. Louis public school. Her ancestry, to be sure, was more mongrel than Milly's; it would defy any genealogist to trace it beyond father and mother or resolve it properly into its elements. The name itself indicated that there must have been some German or Dutch blood in the line. Neither would it be possible now to explain what exigencies of the labor market compelled Ernestine's family to migrate from St. Louis to New York.

All that Ernestine herself knew was that her father worked in breweries, and that she with her five brothers and sisters lived in one of those forbidding brick rookeries on the lower west side of New York. This was when she was ten. When she reached fourteen—the legal age—she escaped from the routine of school and joyfully went to work in a laundry. For children of her class it was like coming of age,—to become wage-earners with the accompanying independence and family respect.

The laundry where she found her first job was a small affair, of the "domestic-hand laundry" type, situated in a low brick building that had once served as a gentleman's private stable on one of the cross streets near Gramercy Park. At that time Ernestine was a hearty, vigorous child, strong for her age, or she never could have endured the long hours of hard work on wet floors in a steaming room and with heavy bundles to lift and carry. As a grown woman her squat figure, large and slightly round-shouldered, betrayed these early years of stooping labor, and her colorless complexion, not a sickly pallor but a neutral white beneath the thick black hair, was the result of years spent in a dark, misty atmosphere, through which even the gas-lights burned dimly. In those early days when Ernestine scurried across the city in the procession of working-girls, mornings at seven forty-five and evenings at six, she was very much like all the others,—a not wholly unattractive young woman with quick eyes. Perhaps she was a trifle quieter, less emotional than her companions at the laundry—more reflective in disposition—but not noticeably more intelligent than the many thousands in her class.

And if it had not been for an accident, which at the time seemed frightful to her, Ernestine Geyer would probably have turned out, as most of her kind turn out, either have become the wife of a workingman with a brood of children to feed the labor hopper or gone to her end more rapidly on the streets. But one day, owing to a defect in the machinery that controlled the huge cauldron over which she was bending, the thing tipped and scalded her with a flood of boiling water on her right arm and leg. At the hospital it was thought she would have to lose the arm; but she was too robustly made for that. A frightful red scar from her hip to below the knee and a withered right hand and forearm were the results. They took her back at the laundry when she left the hospital out of pity and a sense of responsibility for her bad luck, and gave her some light work sorting out clothes and checking pieces, which she could do after a fashion with her left hand and the withered stump.

Ernestine quickly realized—and just here was the proof of her innate superiority to the majority—that her only chance for existence was to make herself so useful in the irregular labor she could perform that she would not be discharged at the first opportunity. And she worked as she had never before dreamed she could work! She counted, sorted, marked, checked the huge piles of restaurant and office linen that the laundry took. She had the sense to employ a younger brother to assist her with his whole hands. She became, in a word, the order, the system, the regulator of the small establishment, and hence indispensable to the overworked proprietor. Her accident by depriving her of the ordinary amusements of her fellows also made her more intelligent, because she had nothing but her work to occupy her mind. The laundry became the one thing she lived for: it had her every thought and emotion. She knew from the first that no man would ever think

of marrying her—she saw it in the pitying glances that the girls gave her. No man would endure a woman with a withered stump of a right hand, not to mention the ugly scar that defaced her body. Thus the world of sex shut out with all its related disturbances, she became by the process of intense specialization a most efficient worker.

It is not necessary to recount all the steps of her progress upward. When the small proprietor of the "hand laundry" acquired another property farther up town she persuaded him to let her manage the old business under his direction. (He was a widower now and no longer young; he would have married her, perhaps. But she knew what that meant—a loss of salary and double work; and she would have none of him as husband.) She was twenty now, and earning more than she had ever expected to make,—eighteen dollars a week. After that the years passed quickly until she was twenty-five and getting thirty dollars a week. Her family having broken up, she was living in a boarding-house not far from the laundry....

Through the misty, dirty panes of the window in the rough office on the upper floor of the old stable where Ernestine now had her desk, she could look across the narrow street to the row of small brick houses opposite. These houses had suffered various vicissitudes since Ernestine had first come to work in the laundry. Then they had been shabby-genteel boarding-houses like the one a block or two away where she herself now lived. Gradually the character of the street had improved. Some young couples, hunting for a spot in all this crowded, expensive city where they might make their modest nests, had moved into the old-fashioned houses and renovated them according to modern ideas. Number 232, almost directly opposite Ernestine's loft, had been among the first thus to renew its youth. The old iron balconies had been restored and little green shutters with crescent-shaped peep-holes added, and also flower-filled window-boxes.

Ernestine had taken a special interest in this house and often speculated about the life going on within its sober brick walls, behind the fresh muslin curtains of the upper windows. At first there was just a man and his wife and a small child, whose young mother wheeled it out each morning in a basket carriage, for the one maid was busy all day long. Then another child had come and another. The first child went to school with a maid—there were three maids in the house now. Ernestine watched the orderly development of this family with all the interest of a nature lover observing a nest of robins. At first when the shutters were closed in the early hot days of June she was afraid lest other hands might open them in the autumn, but after a time she knew her family well enough to understand that they were not the kind that moves, except for death or other cogent cause. She inferred that they were becoming more prosperous, as was quite proper. There was an increasing amount of coming and going at the old-fashioned door, and she got to know the habitual visitors apart from the merely casual acquaintances. In time she built up from her myriad glances across the street a substantial family tree of uncles and aunts, cousins and brothers. What interested her most were the occasional glimpses of the front rooms she had when the maids opened wide the windows and pushed aside the curtains. She was enabled thus to observe three layers of an orderly, inviting domesticity: on the first floor she could see a large, soft rug, an oil painting, a lovely silk hanging that shut off the inner room, and a corner of a mahogany case with some foreign bric-a-brac. She liked best the floor above, where the family mostly lived when they were by themselves: here was one large recessed room where the crowded book-shelves went to the ceiling, a real fire burned in a fireplace, and real lamps lighted a large table, around which the members of the family read or worked or played. Here the lady of the house—a vigorous little body, with laughing eyes—sat and sewed, had tea with visitors, read to her children, and wrote letters. Here in the winter twilight before the day at the laundry was finished the man of the house entered with a jerky little masterful step, crossed to the chair where his wife sat reading, leaned over, kissed her, and having established himself with back to the fire delivered himself, so Ernestine judged, of his daily budget of news. How she would like to hear what he had to say!

It was all a little pantomime of domestic life,—a varied, yet orderly pantomime, and it had continued with suitable variations for more than seven years. Ernestine often thought about it, not so much during the day when her mind was occupied with business wherever her eyes might be, as at night when she returned to her forlorn boarding-house room. That commonplace domestic interior of number 232 had more to do with Ernestine Geyer's life than it would be easy to say. It was her dream, her ideal of life as it should be—and almost never was.

Unconsciously it moved this solitary woman to listen favorably to the advances of a man she met at her boarding place. He was not much of a man—she knew that! A feeble body of a man, indeed, with a drooping, sallow face, and as Ernestine shrewdly suspected, he was making less money at the dry-goods shop where he worked than she made at the laundry. But for a time they "went out together"—a better phrase than became "engaged." Then Ernestine, with an unexpected keenness of vision and readiness to recognize a fact, even if it hurt her pride, knew that the man was marrying her to be taken care of. She had seen enough of that sort of marriage and had no mind for it. If he had wanted her with genuine passion, she would have lived with him—and gladly. But the shame of it all was that he had no desire of any kind for her. And she was not bad looking in spite of her deformity and her glasses. Her large, regular face was full of intelligence, and her black hair was thick and slightly curling. But no man wanted her, just for herself. She looked the fact in the face—and moved to another boarding-house.

About that time another change took place in the laundry business. The old proprietor sold out to two young men who knew little about the business. They incorporated as the "Twentieth Century Domestic Laundry" and left the management in Ernestine's competent hands. The old location was bought for a loft building, and a new building to be wholly occupied by the laundry business

was put up farther north. Ernestine disliked leaving her family, as she called "number 232," but she judged that even they would not remain long after all their light had been cut off by the loft building. Anyway she had no time for sentimental regrets, for the business, with fresh blood and new capital, was growing past all belief. "Everybody has to get washed some time," was one of Ernestine's sayings, and it seemed as if a great many had to be washed by the Twentieth Century Company. She was neck and neck with the expanding business, and her salary went up rapidly until by the time she came into Milly's life she was drawing five thousand dollars a year, and earning it all as the responsible head of a business that netted twenty per cent on its capital, with nearly a hundred operatives under her.

In trade circles Ernestine was known as the "Laundryman," a name in which respect was mixed with chaff. Ernestine did not care. She knew that she had "made good," and it was pleasant. She could afford now to have a home of her own, and so she had installed herself in this apartment, far out of the dirt and the noise in which she had lived her life. She filled it with a strange assortment of furniture and ornamental accessories that did not please her. Somehow after all her years of longing, and all her efforts to make a home like other people, she had failed lamentably, and she knew it.

"I guess it ain't in me!" she confessed to Milly.

Nevertheless, she kept the vision of it,—the vision she had had through the swaying muslin curtains of "number 232."

Thus far Ernestine had come when she happened into Milly's life. Only the merest outline of her strenuous, if monotonous, existence has been given, and though Ernestine deserves much more,—deserves to be known in her mind and her feelings, yes, and in her soul,—she must put up, as she did in life, with getting less than her deserts, and let her rough actions reveal her nature imperfectly.

X

MILLY'S NEW MARRIAGE

The next morning—it was Sunday—when Ernestine presented herself at the Reddon flat to inquire in her heavy, grumbling voice for "the little gurl," Milly had difficulty in recognizing the woman who had offered Virginia an asylum the night before. Ernestine was now clothed in a well-cut walking suit of dark blue broadcloth, which became her square figure much better than the soft folds of the rose-pink negligee. Yet Milly thought her "quite common," and had a momentary pang, realizing how she and her daughter had come down in the world when they were obliged to have such neighbors. But Ernestine Geyer was not "common," and Milly, with her quick instinct for personal values, realized it as soon as she could recover from the shock of the harsh voice and the ungrammatical idiom.

After the obvious remarks about the evening's episode and some conversation with Virginia, for whom the stranger's withered hand had a great fascination, there was a pause. It was time for Ernestine to depart, and she knew it; but either her awkwardness kept her fixed in her chair or she was too much fascinated by Milly to stir. This morning Milly had put on a loose silk blouse, open at the neck, in which she looked very pretty and girlish. Ernestine stared at her in frank admiration. Milly could not understand that she embodied to this "queer" woman all that her heart had secretly longed for,—all the feminism in which she knew herself to be utterly lacking. She tried to take Virginia in her lap to caress her, but that demure little lady, submitting politely for a few moments, slipped off at the first chance and took refuge in her mother's lap, where she snuggled with conscious pleasure. Ernestine did not know how to hold a child.

"That's a nice picter," Ernestine grumbled, covering mother and daughter with glowing eyes. "Wished I had one of 'em in my place!"

"Perhaps you will some day," Milly replied politely. But Ernestine shook her head.

"Not unless I took one out of an asylum. I've thought of that, but I guess it ain't the same thing."

"Are you all alone?" Virgie asked gravely.

Ernestine nodded and added in a burst of confidence to Milly,—

"And it *is* lonely, I can tell you, coming home every night from your work to find just a hired girl waitin' for you and your food on the table!"

To which Milly made some commonplace rejoinder, and as another pause threatened she remarked pleasantly,—

"Where do you suppose I was last night, when I should have been at home looking after my little girl? At a suffrage meeting. Wasn't that like the modern mother?"

"Were you at that swell Mrs. —'s house with all those big-bugs?" Ernestine questioned excitedly.

"Yes.... There were speeches about the suffrage,—the reasons why woman should have the vote, you know."

"I read all about it in the paper this morning."

Milly recalled what the interesting stranger had said to her about the point of view of actual women workers, and inquired,—

"What do you think about suffrage, Miss Geyer?"

Ernestine gave a hoarse laugh.

"I don't think much," she said succinctly.

Milly made some remarks on the subject, quoting freely from Hazel Fredericks on the injustices to women in this man-made world. Ernestine listened with a smile of sceptical amusement on her homely face, and slowly shook her head.

"There ain't much in *that*," she pronounced dogmatically. "The trouble ain't there. Any working-woman will tell you she ain't bothered much by lack of political power. We've got all the political powers we can use.... What does it amount to, anyhow? Things aren't done in this world by voting about 'em."

She easily threw down the feeble structure of Milly's arguments, which were largely borrowed from the talk she had heard the night before. Ernestine spoke with the assurance of one who has had reason to know.

"What women want is money, ain't it? Same as the men?" she demanded flatly.

"That's so!" Milly assented heartily.

"And they'll get it when they know how to do something somebody wants done as well as a man can. They do get it now when they've got something to give—that's truth!"

She gave Milly a brief account of her own struggles in the labor market, which interested Milly deeply.

"Now how did I get where I am to-day?" she concluded dramatically, drawing up her right sleeve and pointing to the withered arm. "Because of that. It taught me a lesson when I was nothing but an empty-headed girl. That and the burn on my leg made a man of me, because it took most of the woman thing out of me. I learned to think like a man and to act like a man. I learned my job, same as a man. Yes! And beat my boss at it so he had to pay me a man's wages to keep me, and the company has to pay me big money now—or I'd go out and get it somewheres else."

Milly was impressed. She said doubtfully,—

"But you had great ability to do all that."

Ernestine shook her head,—

"Not so much more'n most."

"And good health."

"Yes. My health don't trouble me—and that's partly because I've had no chance to fool it away like most girls."

"So you think it all depends on the women," Milly said unconvinced.

"Women—oh, Lord!" Ernestine exclaimed irreverently, getting up and walking about the room. She examined the books and the few sketches of Jack's that Milly had kept and hung on the bare walls of the Reddons' living-room.

"My husband did those," Milly explained.

"Widow?"

Milly nodded.

Examining a drawing, with her back to Milly, Ernestine continued her remarks on the great question:—

"Women! I guess the trouble with 'em started 'way back—in the Garden of Eden. They didn't like being put out, and they've never got reconciled to it since. They're mostly looking for some soft snap,—working-women, that is," she said deferentially for Milly's sake. "The ones I know at any rate. When they're young they mostly expect to marry right off—catch some feller who'll be nice to 'em and let 'em live off him. But they'd oughter know there's nothin' in that sort of marriage. All they have to do is to look at all the women the men get tired of and desert. And the slaves the mothers are! I knew that!" she interpolated with a woman's pride to prove to this other pretty woman that even she was not single in the world because she had not had her chance. "I c'd have married once, and came near making one great fool of myself like the others. But I got wise in time. You see he weren't no good," she explained frankly. "I expect, though, he's eatin' off some other woman before this.... Girls always expect to draw the grand prize in the lottery, where there's mostly blanks, and get a man who'll love 'em more'n anythin' else in the world, and give

'em a good time all their lives. Ain't that so?"

Milly agreed with reservations. Ernestine's observations had been confined to a class of women with whom Milly was not familiar, but her conclusions applied fairly well to the class Milly knew best,—the so-called "educated" and well-to-do women.

"Well, that ain't life," Ernestine pronounced with clenching force.

"Women have hearts, you must remember," Milly sighed a little sentimentally. "They'll always be foolish."

"Not that way—when they learn!"

"I wonder."

"And that's the reason I've been givin' yer why girls don't take to any work seriously and make somethin' of it, same as a man has to. Oh, I've seen lots of 'em—just lots!"

She waved a hand disgustedly.

Milly was now thoroughly interested in her new acquaintance, and they went deeper into the complicated woman-question. Ernestine, she perceived, had learned her lessons in the hard school of the man's world of give and take, and learned them thoroughly. And she had the rare ability to learn by experience. This with her good health and an innate sense of orderliness and thrift, possibly due to the Teutonic strain in her blood, had sufficed to put her ahead in the race. For she was even less educated than Milly, and naturally less quick. But having touched realities all her life, she had achieved an abiding sense of fact that Milly was now totally incapable of acquiring. Her philosophy was simple, but it embraced the woman question, suffrage, and the man-made world. To live, she said, you must give something of yourself that is worth the while of Somebody Else to take and pay for—pay as high as he can be made to pay. To Milly it seemed a harsh philosophy. She wished to give when and what she liked to whom she pleased and take whatever she wanted. It was the failure of this system to work that had brought about the present crisis in her affairs.

One o'clock arrived, and Milly, who was genuinely aroused by the harsh-voiced working-woman, invited Ernestine to stay for the mid-day meal, which on account of the child was dinner rather than lunch. The light in Ernestine's black eyes and the pleased, humble tone in which she exclaimed,—“Oh, may I!” touched Milly.

So the three presently sat down around the small table, which Milly had served in the front room of the flat rather than in the dark pocket of a dining-room. That seemed to Ernestine a very brilliant idea, and she was also much impressed by the daintiness of the table and the little details of the meal. Milly had a faculty of getting some results even from such unpromising material as Marion Reddon's sullen Swede. She knew very well how food should be cooked and served, how gentlefolk were in the habit of taking their food as a delightful occasion as well as a chance to appease hunger, and she always insisted upon some sort of form. So the mid-day meal, which seemed to Milly poor and forlorn compared with what she had known in her life, was a revelation to Ernestine of social grace and daintiness. Her keen eyes followed Milly's every motion, and she noted how each dish, and spoon, and fork was placed. All this, she realized, was what she had been after and failed to get. Milly apologized for the simple meal,—“Hilda isn't much of a cook, and since we've been by ourselves, I have lost interest in doing things.”

"It ain't the food," Ernestine replied oracularly.

(When Virgie went to take her nap, she inquired of her mother why the nice "queer" lady said "ain't" so often.)

It was raining in torrents, and the two women spent the long afternoon in a series of intimate confidences. Milly's greatest gift was the faculty of getting at all sorts of people. Now that she had become used to the voice and the grammar of the street which Ernestine employed, and also to the withered hand, she liked the working-woman more and more and respected her fine quality. And Ernestine's simple, obvious admiration for Milly and everything about her was flattering. In the plain woman's eyes was the light of adoration that a man has for the thing most opposite to his soul, most lacking in his experience.

In the course of this long talk Milly learned everything about Ernestine Geyer's life contained in the previous chapter of this book and much more that only a woman could confide in another woman,—intimate details of her honorable struggle. Ernestine bared her hungry heart, her loneliness in her new home, and her feeling of helplessness in not getting, after all, what she wanted and what she had earned the money to pay for.

"I guess I'm too much of a man," she said, after she had described her solitary life in the apartment below. "There ain't enough of a woman left in me to make a home!"

Milly tried to cheer her and encourage her, and promised to take dinner with her some day and

give her any suggestions she could.

After that Sunday Milly saw Ernestine Geyer almost every day and often on Sundays for the whole day. Ernestine was fertile in clumsy ways of wooing the new-found friends. She brought Virgie fruit and candies and toys and insisted upon thrusting flowers and dainties on Milly. The latter heartily liked the "queer" lady, as Virginia still called Ernestine, and invited her cordially to come in whenever she would. In Milly's busier, more social days, Ernestine's devotion might have proved a bore. But this was a lonely winter. Very few friends came to see her, and Milly had many idle hours.

Hazel Fredericks had not been offended by Milly's neglect to take advantage of her opportunities the night of the suffrage meeting,—at least she showed no pique when Milly finally got around to telephoning her friend and congratulating her on her successful speech. But Hazel had become so involved in the movement by this time, especially so intimate with the fascinating young married agitator, that she had less time and less interest to spare for Milly's small affairs. She was planning with her new friend, so she told Milly when she did get out to the flat, a serious campaign that promised to be immensely exciting,—nothing less than a series of drawing-room meetings in some western cities, especially Chicago, where "Society" had shown a lamentable indifference hitherto to the Cause. Presently this mission took Hazel Fredericks altogether beyond Milly's narrow sphere for the remainder of the winter. From time to time Milly received newspaper clippings and an occasional hurried note from Hazel, recounting the social flutter that they had created by their meetings, and the progress the Cause was making in the most fashionable circles of the middle west. Milly envied Hazel this new and exciting experience, and wished she might be in Chicago to witness the triumphs of the two missionaries. But she realized, nevertheless, more than ever before, her unfitness for the work. She no longer had a very fervent faith in it....

So in her loneliness she came to accept Ernestine Geyer's companionship and devotion, at first passively, then gratefully. Together they took Virginia on holiday sprees to the theatre, and the three had many of their meals together, usually in Milly's apartment, as she had found Ernestine's home "impossible," a "barracks," and the food,—"just food." Virginia had gotten used to the withered hand and no longer found Ernestine so "queer." Like the little egotist she was, as most children, she valued this new friend for all the good things that came from her, and found she could "work" Ernestine much easier than her mother.

"We make a pretty cosey family," Ernestine said happily, summing it up one day at dinner.

"Mama, papa, daughter," Virgie added, pointing demurely to Ernestine as "Papa." After that the Laundryman was known as "Pa" by the trio.

Milly was occasionally embarrassed by Ernestine,—and she was ashamed of her feeling,—as when Clive Reinhard came in on them one evening without warning. Reinhard glanced at the squat figure of the Laundryman, and tried to make her talk. Fortunately for Milly's feelings, Ernestine sat bolt upright and tongue-tied in the novelist's presence and thus did not betray her ungrammatical self. But she stayed on relentlessly until the visitor went, and observed afterwards,—

"So that's the Johnnie that writes the books I see in the windows? And the girls are crazy about 'em—humph!" All of which would have amused the popular novelist.

It was inevitable, of course, that sooner or later Ernestine should meet all of Milly's friends who still sought her out. And she always sat through these occasions, quiet and sharp-eyed; when she trusted herself to speak, her harsh, positive voice had the effect of dropping a piece of china on the floor. Milly was often mortified at first, though by this time she cared for Ernestine so genuinely that she would not let her suspect or hurt her feelings. She convinced herself that Ernestine's grammar was an accident of the slightest importance, and that as a person she compared quite favorably with all the people she knew.

Ernestine's fondness for Milly's visitors was not due to any vulgar desire to push herself into superior circles, merely a human curiosity about these members of another world and a pathetic admiration for their refinement. With the same attitude she was painstakingly, if shyly, improving her table manners and her speech. To Virginia's relief she had largely suppressed "ain't" already, and occasionally bestowed a final syllable on the participles.

But Milly had many more real worries than these trifling social maladjustments between her old friends and her new one. Her small funds were dwindling rapidly, as usual, even with the practice of a greater economy than she had ever before attempted. All her feeble efforts to find employment and earn money had failed. She felt herself slipping down, and with all her courageous determination to save herself from social chaos she was like a bird fluttering at the brink of a chasm, unable to wing itself steadily out of danger. The Reddons, she knew, would soon need their apartment, for Marion was coming north in the first warm weather. Then there would be for herself and Virginia nothing but a boarding-house, from which she shrank. And after that, what? Mornings she woke to consciousness with a start of terror, realizing that the weeks

were melting to days,—days of grace as for a criminal! What should she do? What *could* she do? She envied Ernestine as she had never envied any one in her life, when she saw her striding off in the morning, her head in the air, a serious scowl on her plain face, competent and equipped in the face of life....

Ernestine found her one evening at a low point in her depression over her fate. Milly had told far less of her circumstances to the working-woman than Ernestine had told of hers in their mutual confidences. Social pride—a sense of caste—had prevented Milly from confessing her miserable situation. But now she unfolded the whole story, with a few tears.

"If it wasn't for Virgie," she sobbed, "I'd walk into the river to-night—I'd do anything to end it. I'm no good."

"Don't you talk like that, dearie!" Ernestine said, getting up impulsively and with her heavy tread crossing the room. She took Milly in her strong arms and held her tight. "Don't ever say those things again!" she murmured in an uncertain voice, hugging the yielding figure to her. "Don't I know how you feel?... I guessed things weren't very rosy with you, but I didn't like to ask you until you were ready to say.... Now we'll straighten this thing out."

Her robust, confident manner cheered Milly as much as her embrace. She trusted Ernestine's strength as she had once that of her husband. Ernestine went at things like a man in more ways than one. Releasing Milly, she stood over her frowningly, her hands on her hips, and looked steadily, intently at the pitiful face of the other woman.

"Couldn't I do something in the laundry?" Milly suggested timidly. "You employ so many women there," she faltered. It had taken a struggle with her pride to contemplate this work. "I'm pretty strong."

Ernestine smiled and shook her head very positively.

"No, that's one thing that *wouldn't* do. You'd be no good as a working-woman now, dearie!"

"But I *must* do something!" Milly wailed, "or starve and let Virgie go to her father's people. Isn't there *anything* I can do in the world?"

She had reached the ultimate bottom of life, she felt, and her demand had a tragic pathos in it. She waited for her answer.

"Yes!" Ernestine exclaimed, a smile of successful thinking on her broad face. "You can make a home for me—a real one—that's what you can do—fine! Now listen," she insisted, as she saw the look of disappointment on Milly's expectant face. "Listen to me—it ain't bad at all."

And she unfolded her plan, recounting again her longing for her own hearth, and proving to Milly that she could do a real, useful thing in the world, if she would make life pleasanter and happier for one who was able to earn money for three.

"Don't wait for your friends to come back," she urged. "Just pack right up as soon as you can and move downstairs. Do you suppose Virgie's asleep? We'll tell her to-morrer any way.... And you do with my shack what you want,—any old thing, so's you let me sleep there. It'll be fine, fine!"

And so it was agreed, although Milly was not greatly pleased with the prospect of becoming homemaker and companion to the Laundryman. It was not very different in essentials from her marriage with Jack, and she recognized now that she had not made a success of that on the economic side. In short, it was like so much else in her life, practically all her life, she felt bitterly,—it was a shift, a compromise, a *pis-aller*, and this time it was a social descent also. What would her friends say? But Milly courageously put that cheap thought out of her mind. If this was all that she could find to do to support herself and her child,—if it was all that she was good for in this world,—she would do it and swallow her pride with her tears.

And she was sincerely grateful to Ernestine for the warm-hearted way in which she had put her proposal, as if it were a real favor to her. She made this one mental reservation to herself,—it should last only until she found "something better" as a solution. When Milly told the little girl of the new move, Virgie was delighted. "It'll be like having a real man in the house again," she said. "We'll have to teach her how to speak like we do, shan't we, mama?"

Ernestine came bubbling in the next day with a new inspiration.

"Been thinking of our scheme all night," she announced breathlessly, "and couldn't attend to business I was so excited. Now this is the conclusion I got to. You can't make a home in one of these flat-boxes, can you?"

Milly agreed listlessly that they were a poor compromise for the real thing.

"Well, I said to myself,—'Why not a real house?' So this morning I quit work and took a taxi so's I could get over ground faster and went down—"

"I know," Milly interrupted with a laugh,—"to number 232!"

"Yes! And they're there still, and I've got number 236! What do you think of that? It don't take me

long to do business when I got an idea.... Of course there is that loft building opposite, but it's thin and don't take much light.... So to-morrow, Mrs. Bragdon, you meet me at luncheon and we'll go down and look over our new home!"

How could any one be doleful under so much joy? Milly kissed Ernestine with genuine emotion.

"It will be splendid. Virgie will like a house so much more than this."

"Of course, of course—it's the only proper thing for a family.... You'll have to do the whole thing, Madam." (Ernestine had a curious shyness about using Milly's name.) "I'll give you 'Carter Blanch' as they say.... Only one thing!"

She shook her thick finger at Milly solemnly.

"What's that?"

"Muslin curtains at all the front windows, and a real fireplace in the livin'-room—"

"And window boxes at the windows and real oil lamps on the table, Mr. Geyer!" Milly completed, entering into Ernestine's spirit.

"We'll be comfy and homelike, don't you think so?" Ernestine shouted gleefully, putting an arm around Milly's soft figure. "Now I've got what I want," she said almost solemnly.

"Don't be too sure—I'm a pretty bad housekeeper."

"I know you're not."

"Careless and horribly extravagant—every one says so."

"I won't let you break *me*!... Say, you'd ought to be married to a real man—that's what you are made for."

"Thanks!" Milly said a little sadly. "I've had all of *that* I want.... This suits me far better."

"Well, it does me, anyway!"

Thus Milly's second marriage came off. In another month she and Virginia were living quite happily in Ernestine Geyer's establishment at "number 236," with muslin curtains behind the windows, and flower-boxes.

PART FIVE

THE CAKE SHOP

I

"NUMBER 236"

Milly was content. At least she felt that she ought to be, and she really was—for a time. Thanks to Ernestine's "Carter Blanch," she had made a comfortable, homelike interior out of the little old house, in which she installed her own furniture and almost nothing of Ernestine's. Sam Reddon helped her make the alterations and decorate afresh "number 236," as the new home came to be known among Milly's friends. Reddon was explosively enthusiastic over the Laundryman, whom he described as a "regular old sport," "one of the finest," "the right sort," and the climax of praise—"one first-class man." He took a mischievous delight in drawing her out, especially on the æsthetic side, where she was wildest, and he revelled in her idiom, which reminded him of the dear *argot* of his beloved city, and which he declared was "the language of the future." Clive Reinhard, also, who came to dinner at the new house very soon, approved warmly of Ernestine. In his more conventional vocabulary she was "a character," "a true type," and "a trump." He liked her all the better, perhaps, because he did not feel obliged to study her professionally, and relaxed in her company.

Indeed, all the men Milly knew liked Ernestine Geyer and quickly got the habit of dropping in at "number 236" at all hours,—it was so conveniently near their offices and clubs, they said. They came for breakfast and luncheon and tea, and even for whiskey and cigarettes after the theatre. With the blunted sense of fine proprieties characteristic of their sex, they approved unreservedly of Milly's new marriage. In Reddon's frank phrase it was "an extraordinary fit." "You two are complements—which is more than one can say of most regular marriages."

(It was more than Milly could say of her union with Jack, alas!)

"I wonder more women don't do the same thing," the architect continued in a vein of philosophical speculation; "get married to other women. Now Ernestine has every good quality of a man, and she can't deceive you with a chorus girl! It cuts out all the sex business, which is a horrid nuisance—see the newspapers."

"Sam!" Milly warned, and then ventured,—*"How about the children—where would they come in?"*

"That is a difficulty," Reddon admitted, stretching his feet to the fire.

"You see I had mine already,—bless her little heart!"

"One of 'em would have to do as you did," Sam mused, *"get the children on the side."*

At this point Milly with a "Sam, don't be horrid" shut off further social theorizing. Ernestine grinned and chuckled over Sam's sallies. As Reddon said,—*"You can say anything to her! She has a man's sense of humor,—the only woman I ever saw except Marion who has."*

With the exception of Marion, Milly's women friends were much more dubious than the men about the new household. Mrs. Bunker and Mrs. Billman, of course, had long since lost sight of Milly in the course of her migrations. Although Hazel Fredericks looked her up soon after her return from the suffrage tour and praised the little house and said of the domestic arrangement,—*"How interesting!... Miss Geyer must be a woman of remarkable force of character.... It is a wise experiment,"* etc., yet Milly knew that to others Hazel would shrug expressive shoulders and drop eyelids over muddy eyes and in other feminine ways indicate her sense of Milly's social descent. And from this time the friendship between them declined swiftly. Hazel explained, *"They were interested in different things,"* and *"Milly doesn't care for ideas, you know."* Mrs. Fredericks, who considered herself to be in the flood-tide of the modern intellectual movement, had few moments to spare for her insignificant friend. Milly realized this with a touch of bitterness. *"I can't do anything for her in any way. I can't help on her game."* She knew that these ambitious, modern, intellectual women, with whom she had been thrown, had no use for people *"out of the game."*

It was that really, more than the fact that she had lost caste by keeping house for a business woman, that cost her women's friendship. Milly no longer in the least *"counted."* She had done something rather *"queer"* from the feminine point of view, however sensible a solution of her own problem it might be. She had confessed herself without ambition and *"aim,"* as Mrs. Billman would put it; had no social sense or wish *"to be Somebody,"* as Mrs. Billman would put it. She had become just plain Mrs. Nobody. Of course she could not entertain in any but the most informal, simple fashion as she entertained the men who came to the house, and women find no distinction in that sort of hospitality and do not like to offer it. All this Milly realized more and more, as any woman would have, when the house had settled into its groove. She bravely put the thoughts aside, although they rankled and later manifested themselves, as such things must. For the first time her own sex dropped Milly, and it cut.

Meantime there was much that was pleasant and comforting in her new life in pretty little *"number 236,"* and Milly got what joy there was out of Virginia's delight in having a real home and Ernestine's beaming happiness all the time she was in the house. The little girl could return now to that *"very nice school"* where other nice little girls went. She departed every morning beside the Laundryman, tugging at her arm, skipping and chattering like a blackbird in June. Ernestine saw her safely up the school steps and then took the car to her business. Milly, after the housekeeping and her morning duties, walked up town for her daughter and spent most of the afternoons with her, as she had not much else to do. She had suggested at the beginning helping Ernestine in some way in the business, but the Laundryman had not encouraged that. In fact, she showed a curious reluctance in even having Milly visit the office or call for her there.

"It ain't any place for you, dearie," she said. *"You just stick to your end of the business, the house—and that's enough."*

Milly paid much more attention to the details of their simple housekeeping than she had ever cared to do for herself and Jack. It may have been from a sense of obligation in spending Ernestine's money, for after all the Laundryman was not her legal husband. Or it may have been due to the fact that Ernestine, being another woman, knew and could not be easily bluffed with, *"Everybody does that,"* *"You can't get along with less and live, anyhow,"* etc., as a mere man could. Nor did she like to wheedle a woman. Whatever the cause, Milly gave up her lazy habit of telephoning to the dearest stores for supplies or letting the servants do the ordering, and went forth herself each morning to market. She accepted Ernestine's suggestions about where things could be bought cheaply, and even condescended to enter the large department stores where groceries were sold for cash at wholesale rates. The Laundryman purchased all the supplies for her business, and she knew that buying was a science and a game combined,—a very ancient game which is the basis of *"trade."* She took it for granted that Milly would play the game to the best advantage for all of them, and after a few attempts at the old slovenly, wasteful method of providing, Milly accepted the situation and did the best she knew how to meet Ernestine's idea. *"Number 236"* was to be well stocked with an abundance of wholesome food, but there was to be no waste and no *"flummery."* In a word, *"efficiency."*

There was almost no friction between them. It would seem that the Laundryman knew how to be

both gentle and firm,—the requisites, so the sages say, for successful domesticity. Jack had often been not gentle with Milly, and almost never firm. Milly did not take seriously his constant complaint over bills, and in some way sooner or later got what she wanted. With Ernestine it was quite different: she did not dare let the accounts run on or run over. After the first few equivocations she had her bills ready for examination by the first of the month, and they were reasonably near the figures agreed upon. So, as Ernestine put it, slapping her knee with the cheque-book, "it all goes as slick as paint."

And so, to sum it up in conventional terms, one might call Milly's new marriage a success and expect that the modest little household of "number 236" would go its peaceful way uneventfully to nature's fulfilment of a comfortable middle age—and thus interest us no more. For a time both Ernestine and Milly so believed it would be. But they were deceived. Human affairs, even of the humblest, rarely arrange themselves thus easily and logically.

Milly, in spite of her sincere resolve to be contented with what she had, was growing restless. Once this orderly domestic life of the three in the small house was running smoothly, she began to feel cramped, full of unexpended energies. She would have spent them naturally in entertaining and the usual social activity, to which she had become accustomed as the fit expression of woman's life, but that obviously could not be in the present circumstances. Milly recognized this and did not attempt the impossible. Even if she had had the money, Ernestine was not one who could be made a social figure, nor could she be ignored in her own house. The situation, as has been described, had a flavor of social irregularity, like an unauthorized union, and the social penalty must be paid. With Milly's lean purse there was not much shopping to be done, beyond the daily marketing, and it was dreary to walk the New York streets and gaze into tempting shop windows, though Milly did a good deal of that in her idle hours. She had never cared to read, except as an occasional diversion, or to "improve her mind," as Grandma Ridge might have put it, by lectures such as Hazel Fredericks had once patronized. Lectures bored her, she admitted frankly, unless she knew the lecturer personally. Perhaps Hazel and her set were justified in condemning Milly's general lack of purpose and aim in life. But it should be remembered that the generation with which Milly began had never recognized the desirability of such ideals for women, and Milly, like many of her sisters in the middle walk of life, always resented the assumption that every human being, including women, should have a plan and a purpose in this life. She liked to think of herself as an irresponsible, instinctive vessel of divine fire to bless and inspire. But such vessels very often go on the reefs of passion, and if Milly had not been so thoroughly normal in her instincts, she might have suffered shipwreck before this. Otherwise, they float out at middle age more or less derelict in the human sea, unless they have been captured and converted willy-nilly to some other's purpose. Now Milly was drifting towards that dead sea of purposeless middle age, and instinctively feared her fate.

She felt that her present life with the Laundryman offered her no outlet for her powers, and this was the period when she became fertile in launching schemes for which she displayed a few weeks' intense enthusiasm that gradually died out before Ernestine's chilly good sense. One of the first of these enthusiasms was "Squabs." She tried to interest Ernestine in the business of raising squabs for the market. She had read in some country-life magazine of a woman who had made a very good income by breeding this delicacy for the New York market. Ernestine had talked of buying a farm somewhere near the city for the summers, and Milly thought this could be made into a productive enterprise. "With a man and his wife to run it," they could raise squabs by the thousands. But Ernestine, who had all the business she could attend to with her laundry, was apathetic. She averred that any man and his wife who could make money in the poultry business would be exploiting it for themselves, not for "two green-horn women."

The next proposal was "Violets," and then "Mushrooms," to which Ernestine was equally indifferent. You had to get your market in every case, she suspected. "You don't know how to sell violets or mushrooms, dearie, any more than you know how to raise 'em."

"But I could learn!" Milly pouted. She thought Ernestine was unenterprising and also underrated her ability, just because she had not been a working-woman.

"'Twould cost too much for you to learn," Ernestine replied dryly.

Milly's little schemes were oddly always of the luxury order,—to cater to the luxury-class,—squabs, violets, mushrooms. Her ideas revolved about the parasitic occupations because they seemed to promise large, immediate returns. Rebuffed in these first attempts she brought forth no new scheme for a time, but she was seeking. She envied Ernestine her manlike independence, her Bank-Account aspect, and wanted to become a Business Woman.

One invariable objection that Ernestine had made to all Milly's proposals was:—

"I don't know anything about that business. I know the laundry business from the skin to the clothes-line and home again—and that's all! It's a good enough business for me. Everybody has to get washed sometimes!" She was for the fundamental, basic occupations that dealt in universal human necessities, and once said to Sam Reddon, who had banteringly offered her the job of running his new office, "No, thank you! If I ever make a change from the laundry, I'm going into the liquor business. Every man seems to need his drink the same as he has to be washed." (This retort had immensely pleased Reddon, and he was always asking Ernestine when she would be

ready to start a saloon with him.)

At last Milly thought she had cornered Ernestine's favorite objection by a new scheme, which was nothing less than starting a model "Ideal Laundry" in some pretty country spot near the city, "where the water is clean and soft," and there were green lawns and hedges on which to spread the clothes, "as they do abroad." It was to be manned by a force of tidy, white-clothed laundresses, who might do their washing bare-legged in the running brook. (She described to Ernestine the picturesque, if primitive, laundry customs of the south of Europe.) "They do such nice work over there: their linen is as soft and white as snow," she said.

"And whose goin' to pay for all that gilt?" Ernestine demanded in conclusion. For Milly had expatiated on the fortune they might confidently expect from the new laundry. Milly was sure that all nice, well-to-do families would be only too thankful to pay large prices for their laundry work, if they could be assured that it would be done in such sanitary, picturesque fashion by expert laundresses. And she had thought of another plan which combined philanthropy with æstheticism and business. They might employ "fallen women" as laundresses and teach them also expert mending of linen. To all of which Ernestine smiled as one would at the fancies of an engaging child. She said at the end in her heavy-voiced way:—

"I don't know how it is in Europe, but in this country you don't make money that way. You've got to do things cheap and do 'em for a whole lot of people to get big money in anything. It's the little people with their nickels and tens and quarters as pile up the fortunes."

Milly felt that Ernestine betrayed in this the limitations of her plebeian origin.

"S'pose now you c'd get all the capital you need for your Ideal Laundry—who'd patronize it? The swells, the families with easy money to spend? There ain't so many of them, take the whole bunch, and I can tell you, so far as I know, the rich want to get somethin' for nothin' as bad as the little fellers—I don't know but worse! I guess that's why they get rich."

Thus Ernestine would have nothing of any business that catered solely to the rich and exclusive classes. A sure democratic and business instinct made her rely for steady profits upon the multitude, who "must all get washed sometime," in her favorite axiom, and as cheaply as possible.

"You never take any of my ideas seriously," Milly complained after this rebuff.

It happened to be a stormy winter's evening when the Ideal Laundry had been up for discussion. They could hear occasional spats of snow against the window-panes behind the long red curtains, which had been drawn. A wood fire was crumbling into glowing coals on the hearth. Virginia had long since gone to bed, and Sam Reddon, who had dropped in for dinner in the absence of his wife from the city, had left after an evening of banter and chit-chat.... At Milly's despairing exclamation, Ernestine squatted down on a footstool at her feet and looked up at her mate with the pained expression of a faithful dog, who wants to understand his Idol's desires, but can't.

"What's the matter with *this*, dearie?" she grumbled, taking one of Milly's hands in her powerful grip. "Can't you be satisfied just as it is? Seems to me—" and she broke off to look around the cheerful room with a glance of appreciation—"seems to me we're pretty comfortable, we three, just as we are, without worrying 'bout making a lot more money and trying things that would be a bother and might turn out badly in the end."

As Milly's face still gloomed, unresponsive, she added contritely,—

"I know it's small. It ain't what you—"

"Oh, it isn't that!" Milly interrupted hastily. "You don't understand, Ernestine; I want to do something for myself just to show I can. I'm so useless—always have been, I suppose.... Well." She rose from her chair, disengaging herself from the Laundryman's embrace, and stood musingly with one foot on the fender, the firelight playing softly over the silk of her gown. (The favorite attitude, by the way, of the heroine in Jack's illustrations of Clive Reinhard's stories.)

"You ain't one mite useless to *me*!" Ernestine protested. (In her emotional moments she lapsed into her native idiom in spite of herself.)

"You're kind, Ernestine," Milly replied almost coldly. "But I really *am* nearly useless. Can't you see why I want to do something for myself and my child, as you have done for yourself? And not be always a dependent!"

Ernestine threw herself on the lounge, looking quite miserable. The worm in her swelling bud of happiness had already appeared.

"I'm content," she sighed, "just as it is."

"I'm not!" Milly retorted, rather unfeelingly.

"It suits me to a T, if it could only last."

For a time neither added anything to the subject. Milly, who was never hard for more than a few moments, went over to the lounge and caressed the Laundryman's face.

"That was horrid of me," she said. "It's going to last—forever, I guess."

But in spite of herself she could not keep the droop from her voice at this statement of the irrevocable, and Ernestine shook her head sadly.

"No, it ain't. You'll marry again sometime."

"I'll never do that!" Milly exclaimed impatiently.

"I s'pose it would really be the best thing for you," Ernestine admitted, looking at Milly thoughtfully. Milly was now barely thirty-four and more seductive as a woman than ever before. Ernestine's jealous heart could understand why men would desire her mate. "And this time," she continued more cheerfully, "you'll know enough to pick a good provider."

"Don't talk such nonsense."

Nevertheless Milly was pleased at this proof that she was still desirable, merely as a woman. What woman wouldn't, be? Her early romantic notion that second marriages were impure had completely changed since the failure of her marriage with Jack. Now she had merely a feeling of disgust with the married state in general and with husbands as a class.

"They ain't all bad, I expect," Ernestine remarked in a spirit of fairness. "There must be exceptions among husbands the same as in everything else in life."

"I don't care to take the risk."

"But I expect if you'd happened to marry one of those others who wanted you to you'd felt different. You'd be on easy street to-day, anyhow!... The trouble was, my dear, you trusted to your feelin' too much, and not enough to your head."

She nodded her own large head sagely.

"Perhaps," Milly agreed vaguely.... "Well, will you shut the house up?"

Ernestine went downstairs to lock the doors and see that the lights were out in the servants' quarters.

II

AT LAST, THE REAL RIGHT SCHEME

Whenever Eleanor Kemp came to New York—which happened usually at least twice a year, on her way to and from Europe—she always endeavored to see her old friend, if for only a few minutes. So when she landed this spring, she went almost immediately from her hotel to number 236, and Milly found her waiting in the little reception room on her return from her marketing.

"You see I didn't forget the number, and just came over!" Mrs. Kemp said gayly. "We docked at ten, and Walter has already disappeared to see some pictures.... How are you, dear?"

The two friends had kissed, and then still holding each other by the arms drew off for the preliminary scrutiny. Eleanor Kemp's black hair showed gray about the temples, and there were lines around the trembling mouth. "She's getting old, really," Milly thought in a flash. "But it doesn't make so much difference to her, they are so rich!"

"Milly, you are prettier than ever—you always are when I see you—how do you keep so young?" the older woman exclaimed admiringly, and drew Milly's smiling face closer for another kiss. "And you have been through so much since I saw you last—so much sadness."

"Yes," Milly admitted flatly.

Somehow she did not want to talk of her marriage and Jack's death with Eleanor Kemp, who had been so near her during the ecstatic inception of that passion.

"How pretty your house is!" Eleanor said, divining Milly's reluctance to intimacy. "I've been peeking into the next room while I waited."

"Yes, it's pleasant," Milly replied unenthusiastically. "It's small and the street is rather noisy. But it does well enough. You know it isn't my house. It belongs to a friend,—Ernestine Geyer."

"Yes, you wrote me."

"She's in business, away all day, and I keep house for her," Milly explained, as if she were eager not to have her position misunderstood.

"It must be much pleasanter for you and Virginia than being alone."

"Yes," Milly agreed, in the same negative voice, and then showed her friend over the house, which Mrs. Kemp pronounced "sweet" and "cunning." As Milly's manner remained listless, Eleanor Kemp suggested their lunching at the hotel, and they walked over to the large hostelry on the Avenue, where the Kemps usually stayed in New York.

Walter Kemp not having returned from his picture quest, the women had luncheon by themselves at a little table near a window in the ornate dining-room of the hotel. Milly grew more cheerful away from her home. It always lightened her mind of its burdens to eat in a public place. She liked the movement about her, the strange faces, the unaccustomed food, and her opportunities of restaurant life had not been numerous of late. It was pleasant to be again with her old friend and revive their common memories of Chicago days. They discussed half the people they knew. Milly told Eleanor of Vivie Norton's engagement finally to the divorced man and the marriage, "a week after he got his decree." And Eleanor told Milly of the approaching marriage of Nettie Gilbert's daughter to a very attractive youth, etc.

"You must come to visit me this summer," she declared. "Your friends are all dying to see you."

"Do you think they remember me still?"

"Remember you! My dear, they still talk about your engagement to Clarence Parker."

Milly laughed gayly.

"That!"... She added quite unexpectedly, "I suppose I ought to have married him really."

"Milly!"

"Why not?" Milly persisted in a would-be indifferent tone. "Then I shouldn't be keeping house for somebody else for my living."

Mrs. Kemp gave her a quick look, and then turned it off with,—

"You should have stayed in Chicago, whatever you did. We all miss you so!..."

In her glances about the crowded room Milly's eyes had rested upon a little woman seated at a table not far away,—a blond, fluffy-haired, much-dressed and much-jewelled creature, who was scrutinizing the long menu with close attention.

"Do you know who she is, Nelly?" Milly asked, indicating the little blond person. "It seems to me she's some one I ought to know."

Mrs. Kemp glanced out of her lowered eyes; then as the other looked up both bowed. She said in a whisper to Milly,—

"You ought to know her, Milly! She was Annie Dove."

"Who is she now?"

Eleanor Kemp paused to laugh before replying and then whispered,—

"She's who you might have been—Mrs. Clarence Parker!"

"Oh!" Milly murmured and looked again with more curiosity at the fluffy-haired little woman. "She dresses a good deal," she observed. "I wonder how Clarence likes to pay the bills."

"We saw them at Wiesbaden this spring. They seemed quite happy. He was taking the cure."

"Did it do him any good?" Milly inquired amiably....

Presently a short, bald-headed man took the place opposite their neighbor, and Milly examined him with much care. Clarence Albert was balder and whiter than ever, and his cold gray eyes were now concealed by glasses which gave him the look of an eminent financier. His wife coached him evidently about the menu. Milly thought she could hear his squeaky voice saying, "Well, now, I don't know about that." A queer little smile came around her lips as she considered that she might have occupied the seat the richly dressed, bejewelled little lady had, and be listening at that moment to Clarence Albert's observations on the luncheon menu. Just then Parker looked over, recognized Mrs. Kemp, and hurried across with outstretched hand. He did not see Milly until he reached the table, and then he stopped as if he did not know what to do next. Milly smiled and extended a hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Parker!" she said gayly. "Eleanor has just pointed out your wife to me—such a pretty woman! How are you?"

"Very well now Miss—Mrs.—"

"Bragdon," Milly supplied.

"Very well indeed, Mrs. Bragdon, and I see you are the same."

He retreated at once, and Milly glancing roguishly at Eleanor Kemp murmured,—

"I take it back.... No, I couldn't! Not even with all the clothes and jewels."

"Of course you couldn't!"

"It's fate—it's all fate!" Milly sighed. That was her way of saying that everything in this world depended upon the individual soul, and she couldn't manage her soul differently. She felt relieved.

The dessert arriving just then, Milly's attention was distracted from the Clarence Alberts and

from her soul. She took much time and care in selecting a piece of *patisserie*. French pastry, which had become a common article in New York hotels by that time, always interested Milly. She liked the sweet, seductive cakes, and they brought back to memory happy times in Paris and her visits to Gagé's with Jack.

"I am afraid they aren't very good," her hostess remarked, observing that Milly after all her research into the dish merely tasted her cake and pushed it away. "They don't seem able to make the nice French ones over here—they're usually as heavy as lead."

"No, they're not a bit like those we used to get at Gagé's. I wonder why they don't find somebody who can make real French pastry.... Now there's an idea!" she exclaimed with sudden illumination. "A cake shop like Gagé's with real cakes and a real *Madame* in black at the desk!"

She gave Eleanor a vivid description of the charms of Gagé's. Her friend laughed indulgently.

"You funny child, to remember that all this time!"

"But why not?" Milly persisted. "Everybody likes French pastry. I believe you could make heaps of money from a good cake shop in America."

"Well, when you are ready to open your cake shop, come to Chicago!... And anyway you are coming to visit me next month."

Milly readily promised to make the visit when Virginia's school closed, and shortly afterwards the friends parted.

Milly strolled home in a reverie of Eleanor Kemp, who always brought back her past, of Clarence Albert and Clarence Albert's expensive wife. "If I had—" she mused. If somehow she had done differently and instead of being a penniless widow she were happily married with ample means; if the world was this or that or the other!... But back of all her thoughts, beneath all her reverie, simmered the idea of the Cake Shop. In telling Ernestine of her day's adventure, however, she made no reference to the New Idea. This time she would not expose her conception to the chilling blast of the Laundryman's criticism until she had perfected it. She nursed it like an artist within her own breast.

III

CHICAGO AGAIN

A month later Milly and Virginia went to Chicago to visit the Kemps. Milly's heart leaped as the miles westward were covered by the rapid train. Old friends, she thought, are nearest, warmest, dearest to us, and again and again during the joyous weeks of her visit to the bustling city by the Lake, Milly felt the truth of this platitude. Everybody seemed delighted to see "Milly Ridge," as half the people she met still called her. She could not go a block without some more or less familiar figure stopping, and throwing up hands exclaiming, "Why, Milly! not *you*—I'm *so* glad." And they stopped to talk, obstructing traffic.

Milly was conscious of being at her very best. She had decided to discard her mourning altogether on going back to Chicago, and had some attractive new gowns to wear. Instead of a forlorn and weary widow, she presented herself to her Chicago public fresher and prettier than ever, beaming with delight over everything and very much alive. That is the way Chicago likes.

"Chicago *is* different," she repeated a dozen times a day, meaning by that vague comment that Chicago was more generous, kindly, hospitable, warmer and bigger-hearted than New York. Which was perfectly true, and which Chicago liked to hear as often as possible. The purely human virtues still nourished there, it seemed to Milly, in their primal bloom, while they had become somewhat faded in the more hectic air of the Atlantic seaboard. There was a feeling of frank good-fellowship and an optimistic belief in everybody and in the world as well as in yourself that was spoken of as the Spirit of the West. "In New York," Milly said to Eleanor Kemp, "unless you make a great noise all the time, nobody knows you are there. And when you fail, it's like a stone dropped into the ocean: nobody knows that you have gone under! I want to live the rest of my life in Chicago," she concluded positively.

"Yes," all her friends assented with one voice, "you must come back to us—you belong here!" (With the future, the setting sun, and all the rest of it.)

And they laid their little plans to entrap her and hold her in their midst for good,—obvious plans in which men, of course, were designedly included. They said a great many nice things about her behind her back as well as to her face.

"Milly has shown such pluck.... Her marriage was unfortunate—he left her without a cent.... And treated her quite badly, I hear," etc., etc.

Her two weeks' visit to the Kemps stretched to a month; there were many little parties and

engagements made for her, and then she went to several suburban places to visit. Unlike other American cities summer is almost the liveliest season in and around Chicago, for having its own refrigerating plant at its door Chicago prefers to stay at home during the hot weather and take its vacation in the raw spring. So Milly found life very full and gay. And she perceived after a time a new spirit in her old home,—the metropolitan spirit, which was funnily self-conscious and proud of itself. "We too," every one seemed to be saying, "are natives of no mean city." Milly heartily approved of this spirit. She liked to think and to say that after all, in spite of her husband's errancy, Chicago was also *her* city.

So she had the best of times the ten weeks she spent in the strong young metropolis, and saw a great many people new and old, and was more popular than ever. She was well enough aware of those little plans kind friends were making for her, matrimonially, but her heart seemed dead to all men. She looked at them critically, and her heart gave no sign.

"I'm going to be a business woman," she announced to the Kemps one day.

"Milly in business! What do you think of that now?" the banker responded with a good-natured laugh that covered the jeer. "What next?"

But his wife, with jealous promptitude, added,—

"Milly, you are a wonder!"

"Yes," Milly affirmed stoutly. "Wait, and you will see."

For in spite of all the good times, the flattery, and the social pleasures, the great New Idea still simmered in her head. She would do something "unusual," and "in Chicago too," which was the place for originality and venture,—this big-hearted, hopeful city whose breath of life was business, always business, and where people believed in one another and looked favorably at "the new thing."

One day Milly stepped into the shop of the smart man-milliner, where in her opulent maiden days she had got her hats,—"just to see what Bamberg has this season." After chatting with the amiable proprietor, who, like every one who had dealings with Milly, was fond of her (even if she did not pay him promptly), Bamberg called to one of his young ladies to bring Mrs. Bragdon a certain hat he wished her to try on. "One of my last Paris things," he explained, "an absolutely new creation," and he whispered, "It was ordered for Mrs. Pelham—the young one, you know, but it didn't suit her." He whispered still more confidentially, "She was too old!"

After that how could Milly help "just trying it on"?

The girl who brought the hat exclaimed with a charming smile and a decided French accent, "It cannot be—but it is—it *is* Madame Brag-donne!"

"Jeanne—Jeanine!" and they almost embraced, to the scandal of Bamberg.

It was one of the girls Milly had known at Gagé's, the chief *demoiselle* of the pastry shop. And how was Madame Catteau, the *patronne*, and when did Jeanne come to America? The hat was forgotten while the two chattered half in French and half in English about Gagé's, Paris, and Chicago....

Of course Milly bought the hat in the end,—it was such a "jewel" and became her as if "it were made for Madame Brag-donne," who, Jeanne averred, was really more than half French. (Bamberg generously cut the price to "nothing,—\$35," and Milly promised to "pay when I can, you know." Which perfectly contented the man-milliner. "We know *you*, Mrs. Bragdon," he said, conducting her himself to the Kemps' motor in which she had come.)

The negotiations over the hat, which had to be altered several times, gave Milly a chance to confide in her old friend Jeanne the New Idea. A Cake Shop—a real Paris *pâtisserie*, *chic*, and with French pastry, here in this Chicago! The idea thrilled the pretty French woman, and they discussed many of the details. "I must have a real French pastry cook, and girls, Paris girls like you," Milly said with sudden inspiration, "and a *madame*, of course, and the little marble-topped tables and all the rest" as nearly as possible like the adorable Gagé's. Jeanne thought that it would be "furiously successful." There would be nothing like it in Chicago or anywhere else in the new world, where Madame Brag-donne would admit the eating was not all that it might be in quality. Oh, yes, it was a brilliant idea and Jean remembered a sister-in-law who would make a remarkable *dame de comptoir*. She was living in strict retirement at Grenoble, the fault of a wretched man she had been feeble enough to marry....

Thus by the time the hat was hers Milly's scheme had taken definite form, and it was also time for her to return to New York. "But I shall be back soon," she told all her friends confidently, with a mysterious nod of her pretty head.

She had seen Horatio, of course, had taken Virginia to spend a Sunday with her unknown grandfather in the little Elm Park cottage. Josephine received her husband's daughter and granddaughter with a carefully guarded cordiality, which expanded as soon as she saw that Milly had nothing to ask for. Horatio was very happy over the brief visit. He was an old man now, Milly realized, but a chirping and contented old man, who still went faithfully every working day in the

year to his humble desk in Hoppers' great establishment, on Sundays to the Second Presbyterian, and in season watered the twenty-six square feet of turf before his front door. He talked a great deal about Hoppers', which had been growing with astounding rapidity, like everything in Chicago, and now covered three entire city blocks. That and the church and Josephine quite filled all the corners of Horatio's simple being. Milly promised her father another, longer visit, but with her many engagements could not "get it in." Horatio wrote her "a beautiful letter" and sent her on the eve of her departure a box of flowers from his own garden.

Milly carried the flowers back to New York with her. She had much to think over on that brief journey. Life seemed larger, much larger, than it had ten weeks before, and her appetite for it had grown wonderfully keener in the Chicago air. That was the virtue of the West, Milly decided. It put vigor and hope into one. She also felt more mature and independent. It had been a good thing for her to get away from New York, out from under Ernestine's protecting wings, which closed uncomfortably tight at times. She realized now that "she could do things for herself," and need not be so "dependent."

That, it must be observed, was the prevailing desire in Milly's new ambitions. Like all poor mortals who have not either triumphed indubitably in the world's eyes or sunk irretrievably into the mire, she hungered for some definite self-accomplishment, something that would give meaning and dignity to her own little life. All of her varied experience,—all the phases and "ideas" through which she had lived from her eager, unconscious girlhood to the present, were resolved and summed up in this at last,—the desire to have some meaning to her life, some dignity of purpose,—no longer to be the jetsam on the stream that so many women are, buffeted by storms beyond their ken, the sport of men and fate. She looked at her little daughter, who was absorbed in the pictures of a magazine, and said to herself that she was doing it all for her child, more than for herself. Virginia must have a very different kind of life from hers! Parentlike she yearned to graft upon the young tree the heavy branch of her own worldly experience. And perhaps Milly realized, also, that the world into which little Virginia was rapidly growing would be a very different sort of place—especially for women—from the one in which Milly Ridge had fluttered about with untutored instincts and a dominating determination "to have a good time...."

Tired at last with so much meditation, Milly bought a novel from the newsboy,—"*Clive Reinhard's Latest and Best*"—*A Woman's Will*, and buried herself in its pages.

IV

GOING INTO BUSINESS

"Ernestine," Milly announced gravely that first night after Virginia was tucked in bed, "I've something important to say to you."

"What is it, dearie?" Ernestine inquired apprehensively.

The Laundryman had taken a half holiday to welcome her family home after their prolonged vacation. She and the old colored cook—a great admirer of Milly's—had decorated the dining-room with wild flowers and contrived a birthday cake with eight candles for Virginia, who had celebrated her nativity a few days previously. Ernestine had also indulged in a quart of champagne, a wine of which Milly was very fond. But like poor Ernestine, in whom thrift usually fought a losing battle with generosity, she had compromised upon a native brand that the dealer had said was "just as good as the imported kind," but which Milly had tasted and left undrunk.... She had also put on her best dress, a much grander affair of black silk than the rose-pink negligee, which Milly had compelled her to bestow upon Amelia. And she had lighted the fire in the living-room and all the wax candles, though it was still warm outdoors and they had to open the street windows and endure the thunder of the traffic.

Milly, although she had received all Ernestine's efforts graciously, had been wearied by the noise,—the fierce song of New York,—and had been serious and non-communicative since her arrival. Virginia, however, had been eloquently happy to return to her own home, her own things, her own bed, and her own Amelia and Ernestine, which had somewhat made up to the Laundryman for Milly's indifference.

Now Milly stood in the middle of the room, looking straight before her, but seeing nothing. Ernestine, with hands clasped around her knees, sat in a low chair and anxiously watched her friend,—

"Well, what is it?" she demanded, as Milly's silence continued after her first announcement. Milly turned and looked at Ernestine, then said slowly,—

"I'm going into business—in Chicago."

Ernestine gave a little gasp, of relief.

"What is it this time?" she asked.

Then Milly explained her project at great length, growing more eloquent as she got deeper into the details of her conception, painting glowingly the opportunities of providing hungry

Chicagoans with toothsome delicacies, and exhibiting a much more practical notion of the scheme than she had had of her other ideas.

"Chicago is the place," she asserted with conviction. "I'm known there, for one thing," she added with a touch of pride. "And it is the natural home of enterprise. They do things out there, instead of talking about them. You ought to know Chicago, Ernestine—I'm sure you'd like it."

The Laundryman asked in a dull tone:—

"Where'll you get the money to start your cake shop? For it will take money, a sight of money, to do all those things you talk about."

Milly hesitated a moment before this question.

"I don't know yet," she said thoughtfully, "but I think I shan't have much trouble in getting what capital I need. I have friends in Chicago, who promised to help me."

(It was perfectly true that Walter Kemp had said half jestingly to Milly when he last saw her,—"When you get ready to go into business, Milly, you must let me be your banker!")

"But," Milly continued meaningly, "I wanted to talk it over with you first. That's why I came back now."

Ernestine went over and closed the windows. It was a crisis. She recognized it, indeed she had felt it coming for a long time. She would have to choose some day between Milly and her own life—the laundry business—and the day had come.

"Will you go in with me, Ernestine?" Milly asked directly...

They talked far into the night until the traffic had died to a distant rumble. Probably in any case Ernestine would have yielded to Milly's desires. Her heart was too deeply involved with Milly and Virginia—"her family"—for her to allow them to take themselves out of her life, as she saw that this time Milly would do should she refuse to share in the new move. And as it happened the choice came when a crisis in her own business was on the way. The two young men who owned all but a few shares of the Twentieth Century Laundry stock had been bitten by the trustifying germ and had agreed to go into a "laundry combine" with several other large laundries. It was one thing, Ernestine realized, to be the practical boss of a small business, and quite another to be a subordinate in a large stock-gambling venture with an unknown crew of masters.

This complication had come up in definite form since Milly's departure, and Ernestine, after much consideration, had already resolved to sell to the new company the few shares she owned in the Twentieth Century Laundry, and look about for another opening in the business she knew. But she hesitated with a woman's timidity before embarking alone in a small independent business. She did not want the responsibility of being the head of a business, especially in these days when, as she was well aware, the little pots usually get smashed by the big kettles in the stream.

So Milly's scheme happened to come at the right moment. As far as the move to Chicago was concerned, Ernestine rather welcomed the change: hers had been a monotonous treadmill in one environment. She was ready for a venture in a new city, and curious about Chicago, of which Milly had talked a great deal. But above all, the conclusive reason for her consent was Milly—her affections. She could not lose her family, cost what it might to keep them. She had no clear idea of Milly's soaring ambition to transplant a French *patisserie* to the alien soil of Chicago. A cake shop, Ernestine supposed, was some sort of retail food business like a bakeshop or delicatessen stand, and cake seemed to her almost as elementally necessary to mankind as washing or liquor. But even if the venture failed and took with it all her savings from industrious years of toil, she would do it "like a sport," as Sam Reddon had called her, and when the time came, face life anew....

"I'll go, Milly!" she said at the end, with a thump of her fist on her knee. "And I'll put my own money into the thing. With what my stock will bring and the cash in the bank, I'll have pretty nearly ten thousand dollars. That ought to be enough to start a cake shop, I should think. You won't have to go to any of your rich friends for help."

Milly thought so, too, and was surprised at the amount of Ernestine's savings. She felt relieved not to have to go to the Kemps for money and genuinely delighted to have Ernestine a partner in her venture.

"Now we must start at once!" she said gayly. "Mustn't lose a day, so that we can open before the fall season is over."

She went to bed very happy and very confident. Ernestine, if less confident, had sufficient self-reliance not to worry about the future. Thanks to her eighteen years of successful self-support, she knew that she could meet life anywhere any time, and get the best of it.

From the very next day there began for Milly the most active and the happiest period of her existence. They packed hurriedly, and moved to Chicago, Milly going on ahead to engage a house where they could live and also have their cakes baked. With Eleanor's Kemp's advice Milly wisely selected a large, old-fashioned brick house on the south side, not far from the business district. Once the handsome residence of a prosperous merchant, it had been abandoned in the movement outward from the crowded city and was surrounded by lofty office buildings and automobile

shops. Its large rooms were cool and comfortable, and the heavy cornices and woodwork gave an air of stately substantiality to the old house that pleased Milly.

When Ernestine arrived the two partners went hunting for a suitable shop. Milly wanted a location in the very centre of the fashionable retail district on the avenue, somewhere between the Institute and the Auditorium, the two most stable landmarks in the city. But the rents, even at that time, were prohibitive, and they found they must content themselves with one of the cross streets. There at last they found a grimy little old building tucked in, as if forgotten, between two more modern structures, which could be had entire for a rental that they might (with a burst of courage) contemplate. It was only a few steps from the great north and south thoroughfare and within the woman's zone. Ernestine, indeed, was for going farther away after something more modest in rental, so that they should not have to sink so much of their capital at the start. But Milly argued cogently that for the special clientèle which they wished to attract they must be in the quarter such people frequented, near the haberdashers and milliners and beauty parlors, and Ernestine yielded the point because she did not know about cake shops. When they came to the business of the lease, the good services of Walter Kemp were enlisted. After he had met Ernestine in the course of the negotiations with the agent of the property, he reported more hopefully to his wife of Milly's new undertaking.

"Anyway, she's got a good partner," he declared. "The Geyer woman is not much on looks, but she's solid—and if I'm not mistaken, she knows her business."

In this last the banker was mistaken. Ernestine was being carried along passively in the whirl of Milly's enterprise and hardly knew what she was about, it was all so unfamiliar; but she kept her mouth shut and her eyes open and was learning all the time. She had already found out that their cake shop was not to be a plebeian provision business, but an affair of fashion and taste—or, as she called it,—for the "swells," and had her first instinctive misgivings on that score. And that ten thousand dollars, which had seemed to her a substantial sum, she saw would look very small indeed by the time the doors of their shop were opened to "trade." But Milly's spirits were never higher: she sparkled with confidence and ideas. On the signing of the lease, which Walter Kemp guaranteed, they had a very jolly luncheon at the large hotel near by.

As soon as the lease had been signed Milly telegraphed—she never wrote letters any more, it was so much more businesslike to telegraph—to Sam Reddon to come on at once and superintend the rehabilitation of the premises. Ernestine would have intrusted this important detail to a scrub woman, and the agent's Chicago decorator, but Milly said promptly,—“That would spoil everything!”

Reddon responded to "Milly's Macedonian cry," as he described her telegram, with an admirable promptness, arriving the next day "with one clean shirt and no collars," he confessed. Milly took him at once to the dingy shop.

"Now, Sam," she said to him in her persuasive way, "I want you to make this into the nicest little *patisserie* you ever saw in Paris. *Vrai chic*, you know!"

"Some stunt," he replied, looking at the grimy squalor of the abandoned shop, with its ugly plate-glass windows and forbidding walls. "Don't you want me to get you a frieze for those bare walls—some Chicago nymphs taking a bath in the Lake with a company of leading citizens observing them from the steps of the Art Institute, in the manner of the sainted Puvis?"

"Don't be silly, Sam!" Milly replied in reproof. "This is business."

And Sam put it through for her. They had a good time over the transformation of the Chicago shop to something "elegant and spirituelle," as Sam called it. He entered into the spirit of the thing, as Milly knew he would, and turned out a creditable imitation of a Paris shop, with stucco marbles, black woodwork, and glass everywhere, even to red plush sofas along the walls and a row of little tables and chairs in front. It had a very gay appearance—"distinguished" in its sombre setting. "No one could help walking in to buy a cake, could they?" Sam appealed to Ernestine.

"Hope they'll have the price for more than one," the former Laundryman observed.

"Oh, you'll do a big business," Sam rejoined encouragingly. "Mostly on tick, if Milly runs the cash drawer."

"She won't!" Ernestine retorted.

The last touch was the sign,—a long, thin black board on which was traced in a delicate gilt script,—*The Cake Shop—Madame Millernine*. The firm name was Sam's personal contribution to the business. "You must have a suitable name, and who ever heard of a Bragdon or a Geyer keeping a cake shop? There are proprieties in all these things."

But long before the sign was in place, Milly had sailed away from New York for Paris. It had been discovered that a good French pastry cook was not to be found in Chicago. A few were said to exist in America, chiefly in New York hotels, but their handiwork was not up to Milly's standard and their demands for wages were exorbitant. Also real *chic* French *dames des comptoirs* were exceedingly rare. Jeanne's Grenoble sister-in-law proved to be, in Reddon's words,—“so infernally homely that she would scare the customers from the door.” So it was agreed that while Ernestine attended to the numerous details of the preparations in Chicago, Milly should make a hurried trip abroad consult with her friend, Madame Catteau, and secure among other things a competent

pastry-cook and a few good-looking girls for waitresses.

Milly enjoyed her trip immensely. She had an air of importance about her that Sam Reddon described as "diplomatic." She was a woman of affairs now—large affairs and getting larger all the time. She spent two rapturous weeks, so breathlessly absorbed in consulting with Madame Catteau (who was ravished by Milly's scheme and deplored almost tearfully her fate in having a husband and two children to keep her from returning with Madame Brag-donne) and in interviewing men cooks and young Frenchwomen, that she had no time for memories or sentimental griefs of any sort. Once, flitting through the rue Gallilée in a cab, she saw the hotel-pension where she and Jack had spent their first winter, and she conjured up a vivid picture of the chilly salon, the table of elderly English women, and the long, dull hours in her close, back room. How long ago all that was, and how young and stupid she had been then! She felt very much more alive now, an altogether new person, with her business on her hands,—but not old, oh, not that!...

An ideal man pastry-cook was finally engaged, one highly recommended by Madame Catteau as *vrai Parisien*, skilful in every sort of pastry, and also three young women were induced, for love of Madame Brag-donne, to try their fortune in the great city of Chicago. Also, Milly bought quantities of bonbons, liquors, sirops, and other specialities of the business, which she knew could not be had "really, truly French" in America. With a feeling of having accomplished much, Milly gathered her flock and set sail from Havre on the French steamer. M. Paul—the pastry-cook—insisted on having a first-class passage, and would converse with Milly whenever he found her on deck. The girls were sick in the second cabin. Milly was indulgent with them all by sympathy as well as by policy, but she was glad to see Sandy Hook. She decided that the French temperament needed occupation, and she hustled her conscripts across the city and into the Chicago train without an hour's delay.

Ernestine, Virginia, and Sam Reddon met the party at the Chicago station and escorted the exclamatory laborers to their new home on the upper floor of the old mansion. Then Milly and Sam went to see the Cake Shop, which was now ready for its sweet merchandise. Milly, though she was fresh from Paris, was much pleased with Sam's results, and praised him warmly.

"It's cost an awful sight of money," Ernestine observed lugubriously.

Milly waved one hand negligently. Ernestine was almost as bad as Grandma had been. Would she never rise to the conception of modern business? It was not the outgo that counted, but the receipts. Milly knew that already.

"I'll do you a better one next time," Sam promised, "when you open your first *succursale*, Milly."

"That will be next autumn—in New York," Milly announced.

"My stars!" said Ernestine.

V

MILLY'S SECOND TRIUMPH

They opened the Cake Shop just before the holidays, with a great party. Milly was positive that was the right procedure, though Ernestine could see no point to giving away so much "trade." Nearly a thousand finely engraved cards were sent out to Milly's friends, the friends of Milly's friends, and their friends and acquaintances, to meet "Mrs. John Bragdon and Miss Ernestine Geyer at the Cake Shop on Saturday, December the fifteenth, from two until eight o'clock." (Ernestine, to be sure, could not be "met," because she was in the cellar most of the time attending to many essential details of the occasion. But Milly was there in the shop above, prettily gowned in a costume she had managed to capture, incidentally, on her flying visit to the French capital.)

It was a tremendous, resounding, thrilling success! Nearly everybody out of the thousand must have come, they reckoned afterwards, and several more besides who knew they had not been intentionally omitted from the list of the invited. The guests began coming shortly after the doors were thrown open (by a small colored boy, habited in Turkish costume), and no sooner did any tear themselves away from the shop than twice as many squeezed their way in somehow. At first the pretty French girls in silk aprons and coquettish caps tried to execute the orders, but soon their trays were seized by enthusiastic young men and the waitresses took refuge behind the marble table beside the Madame and helped to hand out the tempting cakes and bonbons and sorbets and sirops and liqueurs. Even Milly pulled off her long white gloves, got in line with her employees, and tried to appease her hungry guests. As a final touch a dainty, gold-printed souvenir menu, with the list of delicacies to be had at the Cake Shop, was handed to every comer, as long as they lasted.

There was one long glad chorus of praise for the Cake Shop and everything it contained, from the

mirrors, the fetching decoration, the tables, the cakes (such as never had been dreamed of) to the pretty girls, who were surrounded always by a cluster of men, trying with their Chicago French to get attention.... And Milly, of course, was the heroine of the occasion. Her health was drunk, and she had to get on a chair to make a little speech of thanks and invitation to the Cake Shop as a new Chicago Institution.

Many of the women who came knew their Paris better than New York, and "adored" "this *chic* little place." It recalled to them all most delightful moments. And even in Paris they had never eaten anything so delicious as M. Paul's cakes. Henceforth they should buy all their desserts of "Madame Millernine," and there was a spatter of French phrases all over the place.

"It was a wonder!" they declared, "this idea of creating a little of Paris here in old Chicago. A touch of genius really—just like that astonishing Milly Ridge to have thought of the one thing—and the cakes were so good," etc., etc.

Milly's ears burned with the winged words, and she smiled all the time. If Ernestine only could hear this, it would cure her of doubting. She should hear! Milly felt that at last she had demonstrated herself. It was like that other occasion so many, many years ago, when she had surmounted all the difficulties and entertained her friends at "tea." Then her triumph had been indubitable. But this time it was more significant, for the affair was less childish: it meant money, Milly was sure,—much money. So every one said.

At eight Milly was rescued by a party of friends and borne to a hotel in triumph for a dinner which lasted long after midnight. Her health was drunk again in real champagne; speeches were made to impromptu toasts of "The New Woman in Business—God Bless Her." "The Poetry of the Palate," "The Creative Cake," etc.... At ten Ernestine and her aides, having succeeded in gathering the débris and straightening out the place for the public opening the next morning, went wearily home to bed. She was told that it had been a great success; she hoped that the enthusiasm would last; but all these people had eaten "a mighty sight of expensive stuff" without paying for it, which seemed to the prosaic Ernestine "bad business."

But Milly knew. She was right. Those cakes cast upon the waters of fashionable Chicago brought in a hundredfold return. The indulgent newspapers, always patriotically loud over local enterprise, noted the opening of the Cake Shop as a minor social event and so in the succeeding days all those who hadn't been invited and couldn't talk French with the waitresses crowded into the store. It was a Novelty,—the New Thing,—and became overnight a popular fad. M. Paul was hard pressed to turn off enough of his delectable tid-bits—they had to employ assistants for him almost at once, and one may suspect that the fairylike melt-in-the-mouth quality of his best work began to deteriorate from the second day. He had never baked cakes on this wholesale scale. Did these gluttonous barbarians devour them by the platterful?... Telephone orders were numerous, and Ernestine must organize an efficient delivery system, in which she was at home. Milly spent her days at the shop, where it became the fashion for men as well as women to drop in late in the afternoon, to eat a cake or six and chat with one's friends, to sip an anisette or grenadine, and maybe carry away a bagful of cakes for the little ones at home or to eke out Mary's thick-crust-ed New England pie.

So it was a Success! Milly and Ernestine worked like willing galley-slaves, getting things to run smoothly, fitting into all the corners that their excitable French assistants created daily. Milly was one broad beam these days, and went happily to bed so tired that she was asleep before she touched her pillow. Even Ernestine's heavy brows relaxed their tension, for the "queer" business seemed to be making good beyond her expectations. Milly had been right. They charged outrageous prices for their delicacies, which scandalized Ernestine, who could not believe that people would be foolish enough to pay twice and three times what things were worth. But Milly insisted. "The people we are after," she said, "like it all the better the more they have to pay." And to Ernestine's astonishment she seemed to be right again, for the present. That, Ernestine concluded, must be another freak of this "rich trade"; the "swells" expected to be done and would be disdainful if they weren't. Ernestine had a good deal of contempt for their patrons. But the glowing proof of their business success lay in the cash drawer, which literally overflowed with money, and they had accounts with half the families in Chicago who pretended to be "in society."

Business men began to compliment Milly upon her shrewdness and predicted a marvellous growth for the business. One broker seriously suggested incorporating the Cake Shop, as certain candy manufacturers had incorporated, and offered to boom the stock on the local exchange, Milly talked of opening a summer branch in Newport or Bar Harbor, she could not decide which. But she was a little timid about the east. She felt that she had been right in starting in Chicago. The west was less accustomed to Paris and had a lustier appetite for cake than New York, and the charm of their Gallic interior was more of a novelty beside Lake Michigan than it would be on Fifth Avenue. A branch in St. Louis or Omaha might pay: her mind was nimble with schemes.... She was also going out more or less all the time, to dinners and theatre parties, which with her long day's work took every ounce of her strength and more. Virginia had to get along these days the best she could. But was her mother not building up a fortune for her future?

Of course they had their troubles from the very start. M. Paul's Parisian morals, it was quickly found, could not be domesticated in a Chicago home, and quarters had to be found for him outside the house. Then the prettiest of the girls suddenly disappeared, much to Milly's grief and anxiety. The men had been specially attentive to Lulu, and it was found that she had taken a trip to the Pacific Coast with a young broker. Then in the midst of their harvest the receipts began to fall mysteriously, and Ernestine discovered an unauthorized trail from the cash drawer to the large pocket of their *dame de comptoir*. Ernestine resolutely handed her over to the police, which proved to be a very bad move indeed, for no good French substitute could be found immediately and her Nebraska successor spoke no French and twanged her English in the good Omaha way. She gave the Cake Shop the air of a Childs' Restaurant. Milly cabled her ally in Paris, Madame Catteau, for a new Queen of the Counter, but she did not arrive until their first season was drawing to a close.

There were other difficulties, new ones almost every day, but the two partners met them all pluckily,—Ernestine with a determined look and a heavy hand; Milly, with smiles and tactful suggestions. Ernestine admired the wonderful way in which Milly managed "the French help," talking to them in their own language, flattering them, finding companions and ways of forgetting their loneliness. And through their troubles both were buoyed up by the stimulating sense of success and prosperity. They were making money,—how much they did not know because the business was complex and they hadn't time to figure it all out,—but a good, deal they were sure. As the winter season came to a close there was a lull naturally because many of their patrons left the city for California and the south. It was a convenient breathing time in which they could straighten out their affairs and plan the future campaign. Trade revived at the end of May and held pretty well into July, then dropped as the country season got into swing. Ernestine was for turning the Cake Shop into a glorified ice-cream stand for the summer, but Milly would not hear of this desecration of her Vision; they were both tired and had earned a vacation. So while Ernestine took Virginia to one of the lake resorts, Milly rested in the big, cool, empty house and played around Chicago with her numerous friends.

She felt that she deserved a reward, and she took it.

VI

COMING DOWN

The Cake Shop started the autumn season rather dully. Some of its *éclat* had evaporated by the second year, and M. Paul was decidedly getting spoiled in the New World. His cakes were inferior in both quality and variety, and he demanded a sixty per cent rise in wages, which they felt obliged to give him. Another girl had drifted away during the summer, so that one lone Parisian maiden—and the homeliest of the trio—remained to "give an air" to the Cake Shop, and she, already corrupted by the free air of the west, gave it sullenly and with a Chicago heaviness. The shop itself was, of course, less fresh and dainty, having suffered from ten months of smoke, although they had spent a good deal in having it largely redecorated. Just as the cakes became heavier, tougher, more ordinary, as the months passed, so the whole enterprise suffered gradually from that coarsening and griming which seems an inevitable result of Chicago use. Much of the fine artistic flavor of Milly's conception had already been lost. It was becoming commercialized. Ernestine did not perceive these changes, to be sure, though Milly did in her less buoyant moments. What troubled Ernestine was the fact that the receipts were falling off, and the accounts were hard to collect.

She suspected that Milly had lost something of her enthusiasm for the Cake Shop. Milly certainly devoted less ardor to the enterprise. She continued to go out a good deal, more than Ernestine felt was good for her health or good for the business, and she often required the use of the house and the servants for elaborate luncheons or dinner-parties. This invariably put the machine out of order, although Milly always feed the employees liberally for their extra service. Ernestine did not like to complain, because it seemed selfish to deprive Milly of the social relaxation she craved. So she took her supper with Virgie in the latter's nursery. When she did demur finally, Milly, without a word, transferred her party to an expensive new hotel, which was not good for Milly's all-too-open purse.

Business picked up at the holiday season, but fell off again thereafter. They were not making much money this second winter, and Ernestine was becoming anxious.

"You're always worrying about something," Milly said, when Ernestine pointed out this fact to her. "If the Cake Shop fails, I'll think up something else that will put us right," she added lightly, in the rôle of the fertile creator, and tripped off to the theatre.

But that wasn't Ernestine's idea of business. She got out the books and went through them again.

The play proved to be entertaining, and Milly returned home in good spirits. From the hall she heard the sounds of voices in altercation in the rear room where Ernestine had her desk. M. Paul's excited accent could be distinguished playing arpeggios all over Ernestine's grumbling bass. "Oh, dear!" thought Milly, "Paul's off the hooks again and I'll have to straighten him out...."

"See here, my man—" Ernestine growled, but what she was going to say was cut off by a flood of Gallic impertinence.

"Your man! Ah, non, non, non! Indeed not the man of such a woman as you! I call you 'my voman'? Not by—"

Here Milly intervened to prevent a more explicit illustration of M. Paul's contempt for Ernestine's femininity.

"She call me her 'man!'" the pastry-cook flamed, pointing disdainfully at Ernestine.

"The fellow's been thieving from us for months," Ernestine said angrily, and pointing to the door she said,—*"Get out!"*

"Oh, Ernestine!" Milly protested.

But M. Paul had "got out" with a few further remarks uncomplimentary to American women, and the damage was done. Ernestine could not be made to see that with the departure of the pastry-cook, the last substantial prop to Milly's fairy structure was gone.

"The beast has been selling our sugar and supplies," Ernestine explained.

"It makes no difference what he has done!" Milly replied with justifiable asperity.

The next morning she set forth to track the fugitive pastry-cook and wile him back to their service. She found him after a time at one of the new hotels, where he had already been engaged as pastry-cook. To Milly's plea that he return to his old allegiance, he orated dramatically upon Ernestine and *la femme* in general.

"You, Madame Brag-donne, are *du vrai monde*," he testified tearfully. "But that thing—bah! 'Her man'—*canaille du peuple*,"—etc.

Milly, touched by the compliment, tried to make him understand the meaning of her partner's remark. But he shook his head wrathfully, and she was forced to depart, defeated. It was some consolation to reflect that this time it had been Ernestine's fault. Milly thought there might be something in the Frenchman's criticism of Ernestine. Her good partner lacked tact, and she was indisputably "of the people." Milly philosophized,—*"Servants always feel those things."*

She walked across the city from the hotel in a depressed frame of mind,—not so much crushed by approaching disaster as numbed. She had something of the famous "artistic temperament," which is fervid and buoyant in creation, but apt to lose interest and become cold when the gauzy fabric of fancy's weaving fails to work out as it should. She passed the Cake Shop, where through the long front windows she could see the girls idling over the marble counter, and instead of turning in, as she had meant to do, she kept on towards the Avenue. The place gave her a chill these days. All the dazzling gilt was dropping from the creature of her imagination, and it was becoming smudged, like the sign, by reality. Ernestine had seriously suggested converting the Cake Shop into a lunch-counter for the employees of the neighboring office buildings! Milly saw a horrible vision of coarse sandwiches, machine-made pies, and Bismarcks (a succulent western variety of doughnut) on the marble tables instead of Paul's dainty confections; coffee and "soft drinks" in place of the rainbow-hued "sirops." Her soul shuddered. No, they would take down the pretty sign and close the doors of the Cake Shop before admitting such desecration into the temple of her dreams....

People seemed to be hurrying towards the Avenue, their heads tilted upwards, and a crowd had gathered on the steps of the Art Institute. Milly, whose mind fortunately was easily distracted from her troubles, joined the pushing, good-natured throng of men and women, who were staring open-mouthed into the heavens. It was the opening day of Chicago's first "Air Meet," which Milly had forgotten in the anxiety caused by M. Paul. Far above the smoky haze of the city, in the dim, distant depths of the blue sky there was a tiny object floating, circling waywardly, as free apparently as a lark in the high heavens, on which the eyes of the multitude were fastened in fascination. Milly uttered a little, unconscious sigh of satisfaction. Ah, that would be to live,—to soar above the murk and the roar of the city, free as a bird in the vast, wind-swept spaces of the sky! It filled her, as it did the eager crowd, with delight and yearning aspiration. She sighed again....

"It's a pretty sight, isn't it?" a familiar voice observed close behind her. With a start Milly turned and perceived, on the step below,—Edgar Duncan. His long face had an eager, wistful expression, also, caused perhaps by the aerial phenomenon above, as much as by the sight of his lost love; but the expression took Milly back immediately to the little front room on Acacia Street, when Duncan had stood before her to receive his blow.

"There!" Duncan exclaimed quickly, before Milly could collect an appropriate remark. "He's coming down!" Speechless they both craned their heads backwards to follow the aeroplane. The airman, tired of his lofty wandering, or having done the day's stunt required of him, had begun to descend and shot rapidly towards the spectators out of the sky. As he came nearer the earth, he executed the reckless corkscrew man[oe]uvre: the great winged machine seemed to be rushing, tumbling in a perpendicular line just above the heads of the gazing crowd. There was an agonized murmur, a prolonged,—*"Ah!"* It gave Milly delicious thrills up and down her body. When the airman took another leap towards earth, her heart stopped beating altogether. With only a few hundred feet between him and the earth the airman turned his planes and began circling in slow

curves over the adjacent strip of park, as if he were judiciously selecting the best spot for alighting.

"It doesn't take 'em long to come down!" Duncan remarked, and Milly, with a swift mental comparison of the aeroplane flight and her own little fate, replied,—

"It never takes long to come down, does it?"

She looked more closely now at her former lover. Apparently his blow had not seriously damaged him. His figure was fuller and his face tanned to a healthier color than she remembered. He seemed to be in good spirits, and not perceptibly older than he was ten years before. They descended the steps with the moving throng and strolled slowly up the crowded boulevard, watching the distant flights and talking.

Edgar Duncan, she learned, had not spent the ten years nursing a wounded heart. He had doubled the acreage of his ranch, he told her, and thanks to the fatherly government at Washington, which had trebled the duty on foreign lemons, he was doing very well indeed. The big yellow balls among the glossy leaves were fast becoming golden balls. He was now on his way east to see his people and also to look after the interests of a fruit-growers' association in the matter of a railroad rate on lemons. He seemed very much alive. The blow had probably done him good, Milly concluded,—had waked him up.

There were a few hours between his trains, he explained to Milly, and so he had wandered over to the park to watch the aeroplanes, which were the first of the bird machines he had ever seen. It was almost time now for him to leave. But he lost that Washington train. For he walked home with Milly to see her little girl, stayed to luncheon, and was still at the house telling Virginia about real oranges on real orange trees when Ernestine came in. She was hot and tired, evidently much disturbed, and more than usually short with Milly's guest. Duncan left soon afterwards, and then Milly asked,—

"What's the matter, Ernestine?"

"I'd think you'd know!... If we can't get a cook, we might as well shut up the shop to-morrow."

Milly had forgotten all about the loss of the pastry-cook and the business in her surprise at meeting Edgar Duncan again and all the memories he had revived.

"All right!" she said promptly. "Do it."

"Give up the business?" Ernestine asked in amazement. She could not believe Milly meant to take her testy remark seriously. What had come over Milly!

"We might try it in Pasadena," Milly remarked after a time. "There are a lot of rich people out there."

This went beyond the bounds of Ernestine's patience.

"Pasadena!... Last time it was Palm Beach, and before that it was Newport. What's the matter with staying right here and making good?"

Milly did not reply. Ernestine's pent-up irritation overflowed still more.

"You ain't any business woman, Milly!"

"I never said I was."

"You always want to get in some society work—social pull! Rich folks!" Ernestine groaned with disgust. "That kind of furor don't last. They're too flighty in their notions."

"Like me," Milly interposed bitterly.

"Well, it ain't business to quit."

"Oh, business!" Milly exclaimed disgustedly. She felt like an artist whose great work has been scorned by the philistines.

"Yes, business!" Ernestine asserted hotly. "If you're going into business, you've got to play the game and play it *hard* all the time, too. Or you'd better marry and do the other thing."

"Perhaps I'll marry," Milly retorted with an enigmatical smile.

Ernestine stared at her agape. Was that what was the trouble with Milly? She had not meant to go so far.

VII

CAPITULATIONS

They found another pastry-cook,—a French-Canadian woman. But if her ancestors had ever seen the Isle de France, it must have been centuries ago, and the family had become fatally corrupted

since by British gastronomic ideals. Her pastry was thicker and heavier than Paul's worst, and she had "no more imagination than a cow" according to Milly. How could one make fine cakes without imagination? "They make better ones at the Auditorium Hotel even," Milly observed disgustedly. The Cake Shop had gone down another peg. Now it served afternoon tea with English wafers instead of the exotic "sirops" and "liqueurs," and advertised "Dainty Luncheons for Suburban Shoppers." (That was Ernestine's phrasing.) Milly almost never went near the place, and acted as if she wanted to forget it altogether.

In her efforts to revive her partner's waning interest Ernestine even suggested Milly's going again to Paris to engage a fresh crew, but Milly only shrugged her shoulders. "What's the use? You know we haven't the money."

"Borrow it!" Ernestine said desperately.

"When a thing is dead, it's dead," Milly pronounced, and added oracularly, "Better to let the dead past bury its dead," and murmured the lines from a celebrated new play, "Smashed to hell is smashed to hell!" If she were willing to see her creation die, Ernestine ought to be. But that was not Ernestine's nature: she was not artistic nor temperamental, as Milly often proved to her. In her dumb, heavy fashion she still tried to prop up the ill-fated Cake Shop and make it pay expenses at least, in one way or another.

The time came, as it must come, when even this was more than Ernestine could compass. She had tried every device she could think of, but, as she reflected sadly, she had not been brought up to the "food business." It was a peculiar business, like all businesses, especially the delicatessen end, and needed an expert to diagnose its cure. So the doors were closed, and a "To Rent" sign plastered on the front panes. Ernestine acknowledged defeat.

Milly was outwardly unmoved. She had divined the outcome so much sooner than her partner that she had already passed through the agonies of failure and come to that other side where one looks about for the next engagement with life. Possibly she had already in view what this was to be. She assented indifferently to Ernestine's proposal that they should meet Mr. Kemp and the agent at the Shop and decide what was to be done about the lease, which had more than a year to run.

"They'll be there shortly after noon," Ernestine reminded Milly, as the latter was about to leave the house that day.

"All right," she said evasively. "I'll try to be there, but it won't make any difference if I'm not—you know about everything."

She was not there. Ernestine knew well enough that Milly would not come to the funeral of their enterprise at the Cake Shop, and though she felt hurt she said nothing to the men and went through with the last formalities in the dusty, dismantled temple of cakes. At the end the banker asked Ernestine kindly what she meant to do. He knew that the Laundryman's capital had gone—all her savings—and that "the firm" was in debt to his bank for a loan of several hundred dollars, which he expected to pay himself and also to take care of the lease.

"I don't know yet," Ernestine replied. "I'll find some place.... And it won't be in any fancy kind of business like this, you can bet," and she cast a malevolent glance over the tarnished glories of the Cake Shop. "I got my experience and I paid for it—with every cent I had in the world. I ain't goin' to buy any more of that!"

The banker laughed sympathetically.

"What's Mrs. Bragdon going to do?" he inquired.

"I don't know—she hasn't told me yet."

Her answer was evasive because Ernestine suspected very well what Milly was likely to do.... She turned the key in the lock, handed it over to the agent, and with a curt nod to the two men strode away from the Cake Shop for the last time. (That evening the banker, reporting the occurrence to his wife, said,—"I feel sorry for that woman! She's lost every cent she had—our Milly has milked her clean." "Walter, how can you say that?" his wife replied indignantly. "It wasn't Milly's fault if the business failed, any more than hers." "Well, I'd like to bet it's a good big part the fault of our pretty friend." "Miss Geyer ought not to have gone into something she knew nothing about." "Milly bewitched her, I expect. The best thing she can do is to shake her and go back to the laundry business.")

It was not Ernestine, however, who was to "shake" Milly. That lady herself was busily evading their partnership, as Ernestine suspected. While the short obsequies were being transacted at the Cake Shop, Milly was lunching in the one good new hotel Chicago boasts with Edgar Duncan, who had returned from Washington sooner than expected and had asked Milly by telegraph to lunch with him. Seated in the spacious, cool room overlooking the Boulevard and the Lake, at a little table cosily placed beside the open window, Milly might easily have looked through the fragrant plants in the flower-box and descried Ernestine doggedly tramping homeward from her final task at the Cake Shop. Milly preferred to study the menu through her little gold lorgnette, and when that important matter had been settled to her satisfaction, she sat back contentedly and smiled upon the man opposite her, who, after a successful hearing before the Commerce Commission, had more than ever the alert air of a man who knows his own business. Outside in the summer sunlight, above the blue water of the Lake and over the dingy sward of the Park, the

airmen were man[oe]uvring their winged ships, casting great shadows as they dipped and soared above the admiring throngs.

"See," Milly pointed excitedly through the open window. "He's going up now!" And she twisted her neck to get the last glimpse of the mounting machine.

"Yes," Duncan remarked indifferently, "they're doing a lot of stunts." But he hadn't come back from Washington by the first train that left after the hearing to talk aeroplanes. And Milly let him do the talking, as she always had, listening with a childlike interest to what he had to say.

By this time the reader must know Milly well enough to be able to divine for himself what was passing in her mind as she daintily excavated the lobster shell on her plate and listened to the plea of her rejected lover. Probably this was no more able to stir her pulses to a mad rhythm today than it had been ten years before. Edgar Duncan was somewhat nearer being her Ideal,—not much. But Milly was ten years older and "had had her throbs," as she once expressed it. She knew their meaning now, their relative value, and she knew other values.

The value of a home and a stable position among her fellows, for instance, no matter how small, and so she listens demurely while the man talks hungrily of the Joy of Home and the Beauty of Woman in the Home, "where they belong, not in business." (How Ernestine would give it to him for that, and Hazel, too, Milly thought!)

"You are such a woman, Milly!" he exclaims.—"Just a woman!" and in his voice the expression has a tender, reverential sound that falls pleasantly on Milly's ears. But she says nothing: she does not mean to be "soft" this time. Yet in reply to another compliment, she admits, smiling delphically,—"*Yes, I am a woman!*"

The man takes up another verse of his song, for he has planned this attack carefully while the swift wheels were turning off the miles between Washington and Chicago.

"You want your little girl to have a home, too, don't you? A real home, *your* home, where she can get the right sort of start in life?"

"Yes," Milly assents quickly. "The proper kind of home means so much more to a girl than to a boy. If I myself had had—" But she stops before this baseness to poor old Horatio. "I want Virgie's life to be different from mine—so utterly different!"

A wave of self-pity for her loneliness after all her struggle sweeps over her and casts a cloud on her face.

"You can't be a business woman and make that kind of home for your daughter," Duncan persists, pushing forward his point.

Milly shakes her head.

"I'm afraid a woman can't!" she sighs.

(She doesn't feel it necessary to tell him that for almost one hour by the clock she has not been a "business woman," even in the legal sense of the term.)

"Oh," she murmurs, as if convinced by his logic, "I'm good for nothing—I can't even be a good mother!"

"You are good for everything—for me!"

But Milly is not ready yet. In this sort of transaction she has grown to be a more expert trader than she was once.

"It must be the right man," she observes impersonally.

And the Ranchman takes another start. He paints glowingly the freedom and the beauty of that outdoors life on the Pacific Coast,—the fragrant lemon orchard with its golden harvest of yellow balls, the velvety heavens spangled with stars each night, the blooming roses, etc., etc. But he cannot keep long off the personal note.

"I've sat there nights on my veranda, and thought and thought of you, Milly, until it seemed as though you were really there by my side and I could almost touch you."

"Really!" Milly is becoming moved in spite of herself. Somehow Duncan's words have a genuine ring to them. "I believe," she muses, "that you *are* the sort of man who could care always for a woman."

"I always have cared for one woman!"

"You are good, Edgar."

"I don't know about that. Good hasn't much to do between men and women when they love.... It's always love that counts, isn't it?"

(Milly is not as sure of that doctrine as she was once, but she is content that the man should feel that way. She does not argue the point.)

"Can't you sit there with me, Milly, and watch the stars for the rest of our lives?"

Milly evades. She must have the terms set forth more explicitly.

"It wouldn't be right to keep Virgie out there away from people all the time, would it?"

He sees the point and yields.

"We'll come here every year for the fall and see your friends."

"That would be nice," she accepts graciously. But Chicago doesn't appeal to Milly as strongly as it had on her first return to its breezy, hearty life.

"I should like to have Virgie study music," she suggests, "and travel—have advantages."

"Of course!" he assents eagerly, and bids again, more daringly,— "We'll take her to Europe."

"That would be pleasant."

"In a year or two," he explains, "the ranch will almost run itself and be making big money—with the right rate on lemons and the tariff as it is. Then we can do almost anything we please—live any place you like."

A pause here. So far it is wholly satisfactory, Milly is thinking, and she wonders what more she wants. Then,—

"Milly?"

She looks at him with kind eyes.

"You won't make me wait—much longer?"

Milly slowly shakes her head, acceptingly.

"God, how I have longed for you!"

"Silly man!"

But she is pleased. She is thinking,—

"I'm doing it for Virginia. It's her only chance—I must do it."

Which was not altogether a falsehood, and she repeats this self-defence to herself again when later on Duncan kisses her for the first time,— "It's for *her* sake—I would do anything for her." And with a sigh of unconquerable sentimentalism she seals her bargain on the man's lips. She has found a new sentimental faith,—a mother's sacrifice for her child.... But she is really very glad, and quite tender with him.

In this mood she bade her lover good-by at the door and went back into the house to meet her partner. Ernestine, who was not too obtuse to recognize what had happened without the need of many words, listened to Milly's announcement dumbly. At the end she put her hand on Milly's shoulder and looked steadily at her for several moments. She was well enough aware how false Milly had been to her, how careless of her stupid heart, how she had betrayed her in the final hour of their tribulations. Nevertheless, she said quite honestly,— "I'm so glad, dearie, for you!" and kissed her.

VIII

THE SUNSHINE SPECIAL

A few weeks later a little party gathered in the murky railroad station from which the California trains depart from Chicago. As they approached the waiting train, which bore on its observation platform the brass sign, "Sunshine Special," the negro porters showed their gleaming teeth and the conductor muttered with an appropriate smile,— "Another of them bridal parties!" At the head of the little procession the Ranchman walked, conversing with Walter Kemp. Duncan had an air of apparent detachment, but one eye usually rested on Milly, who was walking with her father and was followed by a laughing group. Eleanor Kemp was not among them. Somehow since the last evolution of Milly's affairs there had been a coolness between these two old friends, and Mrs. Kemp had not taken the trouble to leave her summer home "to see Milly off" again. She had sent her instead a very pretty dressing-case with real gold-stoppered bottles, which the new husband now handed over to the porter.

Milly's arm was caressingly placed on her father's. Horatio was older, more wizened, than when we first met him, but he was genial and happy, with a boyish light in his eyes.

"You'll be sure to come, papa!" Milly said, squeezing his arm.

"I won't miss it this time, daughter," Horatio replied slyly,— "my long-delayed trip to California." He chuckled reminiscently.

"You must bring Josephine with you, of course," Milly added hastily.

Mrs. Horatio, still stern behind her spectacles, even in the midst of a merry bridal party, relented sufficiently to say,—

"I ain't much on travelling about in cars myself."

Milly, with the amiability of one who has at last "made good," remarked patronizingly,—

"You'll get used to the cars in three days, my dear."

Horatio meanwhile was playing with little Virginia, teasing her about her "new Papa." The little girl smiled rather dubiously. She had the animal-like loyalty of childhood, and glanced suspiciously at the "New Papa." However, she had already learned from the constant mutations of her brief life to accept the New and the Unexpected without complaint. At last perceiving Ernestine, who was hurrying breathlessly down the long platform in search of the party, a huge bunch of long-stemmed roses hugged close in her arms, Virginia ran to meet her old friend and clung tight to the Laundryman.

"Take 'em!" Ernestine said, breathing hard and thrusting the prickly flowers into Milly's arms. "My! I thought I'd miss the train."

"Oh, Ernestine! why did you do that, dear?" Milly exclaimed in a pleased voice.

"It's the last of the Cake Shop!" Ernestine replied with a grim smile. And the roses were almost literally the sole remains of that defunct enterprise, having taken the last of Ernestine's dollars.

"They're perfectly gorgeous—it was lovely of you to think of bringing them for me. I'll cut the stems and put them in water and they will keep all the way to the Coast—and remind me of you," Milly said, who had formed the habit of receiving floral offerings.

She handed the awkward bunch over to "Husband," who hastened dutifully to place them in their compartment.

"He's on his job," Ernestine grinned. The banker laughed.

"That's what we men are made for, isn't it, Milly?"

"Of course!"

She was in her right element once more, the centre of the picture,—becomingly dressed in a gray travelling suit, "younger than ever," about to start on a wonderful three days' journey to a strange new land, with her faithful and adoring knight. What more was there in life?

"All aboard!" the conductor droned.

Exclamations and final embraces. Milly came to Ernestine Geyer last.

"Good-by, dear! You've been awfully good to me—I can never forget it!"

"Yes, you will—that's all right," Ernestine replied gruffly, not knowing exactly what she was saying.

"I hope you'll make a fortune in your new business—"

"Him and me," Ernestine interrupted, nodding jocularly towards the banker, "are going into the laundry business together."

"You must write me all about it!"

"I will."

In a last confidential whisper Milly said,— "And some day marry a good man, dear!"

"Marry!!" Ernestine hooted, so that all could hear. "Me, marry! Not much—I'll leave the matrimony business to you."

Then they kissed.

There were tears in Ernestine's eyes as she stood waving a pocket-handkerchief after the receding train. Milly was at the rail of the observation platform, leaning on the brass sign and waving both hands to her old friends, Chicago, her past. Little Virginia at her side waved an inch or two of white also, while the smiling ranchman stood over them benignantly, protectingly, one hand on his wife's shoulder to keep her from falling over the rail.

When the train had swept out into the yards, the little party broke up. Horatio, who was choky, turned to his wife. Mrs. Horatio was already studying through her spectacles a suburban time-card to ascertain the next "local" for Elm Park. Ernestine and Walter Kemp slowly strolled up the train-shed together. The banker was the first to break the silence:—

"Guess they'll have a comfortable journey, not too dusty.... He seems to be a good fellow, and he must have a fine place out there."

Ernestine said nothing.

"Well," the banker remarked, "Milly is settled now anyway—hope she'll be happy! She wasn't much of a business woman, eh?" He looked at Ernestine, who smiled grimly, but made no reply. "She's better off married, I expect—most women are," he philosophized, "whether they like it or not.... That's what a woman like Milly is meant for.... She's the kind that men have run after from the beginning of the world, I guess—the woman with beauty and charm, you know."

Ernestine nodded. She knew better than the banker.

"She'll never do much anywhere, but she'll always find some man crazy to do for her," and he added something in German about the eternal feminine, which Ernestine failed to get.

There was a steady drizzle from a lowering, greasy sky outside of the train-shed, and the two paused at the door. With a long sigh Ernestine emitted,—

"I only hope she'll be happy now!"

As if he had not heard this heartfelt prayer, the banker mused aloud,—

"She's Woman,—the old-fashioned kind,—just Woman!"

Ernestine looked steadily into the drizzle. Neither commented on what both understood to be the banker's meaning,—that Milly was the type of what men through the ages, in their paramount desire for exclusive sex possession, had made of women, what civilization had made of her, and society still encouraged her to become when she could,—an adventuress,—in the banker's more sophisticated phrase,—a fortuitous, somewhat parasitic creature. In Ernestine's more vulgar idiom, if she had permitted herself to express her conviction, "Milly was a little grafter." But Ernestine would not have let hot iron force the words through her lips....

"And I suppose," the banker concluded, "that's the kind of women men will always desire and want to work for."

"I guess so," Ernestine mumbled.

Had she not worked for Milly? She would have slaved for her cheerfully all her life and felt it a privilege. Milly had stripped her to the bone, and wounded her heart in addition,—but Ernestine loved her still.

"Can I put you down anywhere?" Kemp asked, as his car came up to the curb.

"No, thanks—I'll walk."

"Remember when you want some money for your new business to come and see me!"

"I owe you too much now."

"Oh," he said good-naturedly, "that account is wiped off. The partnership's been dissolved."

"That ain't the way I do business."

"I wish more of my men customers felt like *you*," the banker laughed as the car drove away.

Ernestine plunged into the drizzle, and while the Sunshine Special was hurrying the old-fashioned woman westward to the golden slopes of California, with her pretty

"face that burned the topless towers of Ilium,"

the new woman plodded sturdily through the mucky Chicago streets on her way to the eternal Job.

Milly was settled at last, and, let us assume, "lived happily ever after."

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