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"SAY, GIRLIE, DIDN'T I TELL YOU I'D PUT THE RAISIN IN IT?"

# JANE JOURNEYS ON

BY

**RUTH COMFORT MITCHELL**

AUTHOR OF "PLAY THE GAME," ETC.



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TO  
W. C. MORROW  
GUIDE AND FRIEND,  
WHO HAS SET SO MANY  
OF US ON OUR WAY

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The Table of Contents is not printed in the book  
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**JANE JOURNEYS ON**

## CHAPTER I

With but one exception, everybody in the upper layer of life in that placid Vermont village was sure that Jane Vail was going to marry Martin Wetherby. The one exception was Jane herself; she was not sure—not entirely.

There were many sound and sensible reasons why she should, and only two or three rather inconsequent ones why she should not. To begin with, he was a Wetherby, and the family went steadily back in an unbroken line to Colonial days; it was their grave old house with the fanlight over its dignified door which had given Wetherby Ridge its name. He was doing remarkably well at the bank; it was conceded that he would be assistant cashier at the first possible moment; his habits were exemplary and he was the most carefully dressed young man in the community. His mother freely admitted at the Ladies' Aid and the Tuesday Club that he was as perfect a son as any woman ever had, and that he would one day make some girl a perfect husband.

Jane, after long and rebellious thought, could find nothing to set down on the other side of the ledger beyond the fact that he was just a little too good-looking, that he was already beginning, at twenty-six, to put on the flesh which had always been intended for him, that his hands were softer than hers, with fingers which widened puffily at the base, and that she nearly always knew what he was going to say before he said it.

She was twenty-four years old, and the immemorial custom of that village gave her a scant remaining year in which to make up her mind. All girls who ran true to pattern were either snugly married or serenely teaching by the time they were twenty-five, and the choice was not always their own. There had been more marriageable maidens than eligible youths in the set, and it was rather, Jane told herself grimly, like a game of Musical Chairs—a gay, excited scramble, and some one always left out. Now, with the exodus of a few and the marrying of many, it had narrowed down to three of them—herself, Martin Wetherby, and Sarah Farraday, who was her best friend during childhood and girlhood; and Sarah, an earnest, blonde girl with nearsighted eyes and insistent upper front teeth, had, so to speak, stopped playing. She had converted her dead father's old stable into a studio by means of art burlap and framed photographs of famous composers, and was giving piano lessons daily from ten to four. This left the field entirely to Jane, and Jane was carrying about with her an increasing conviction that she was not going to do the thing every one expected her to do.

It came curiously to a crisis on a mild and unimportant day in November. Jane spent a footless forenoon in her own room in the green-shuttered, elm-shaded house where she lived with her adoring Aunt Lydia Vail, trying to start a story. Miss Vail took great care to tiptoe whenever she passed her door, and refrained from summoning her to the telephone, but her pleasant old voice, explaining why her niece could not come, was clearly audible.

"Yes, dear, she's at home, but she's at work at her writing, and you know I never disturb her.... Yes, she's been shut away in her room since right after breakfast.... Yes, it's a new story, but I don't know what it's about. I'll ask her at dinner.... How's your mother, dear?... Oh, that's *good!* That's what I always use and it never fails to relieve me. You give her my love, won't you? I'll have Jane call you up when she comes out for dinner."

The story simply would not start. It lay inert in the back of her brain, listening for the telephone and Aunt Lydia's softly padding footfalls, and at last she gave it up and got out the paper she was to read on "The Modern Irish Dramatists" before the Tuesday Club that afternoon and went carefully over its typed pages.

"Oh," said Aunt Lydia at the dinner table, her plump face clouding over, "I'm *sorry* the story didn't go well! It wasn't because you were interrupted, was it, dear? I was especially careful this morning. You know, I believe, without realizing it, you're just the least mite nervous about your program. I know I am myself, though I know, of course, you're going to do just beautifully."

Three and a half hours later, thirty-four matrons and spinsters were warmly asserting that she had. They smiled up at her where she stood on the shallow little platform with approval and affection, and the Chairman of the Program Committee said she was sure they were all deeply indebted to Miss Vail for a most enlightening little lecture. "I am free to confess," she said, smiling, "that it is a subject upon which I, personally, have been ignorant, and I believe many of our club ladies would say the same."

Jane, looking down into their pleasant, best-family faces knew this was the fact. The word "Irish" conveyed to most of them only the red-armed minions in their kitchens; the boys who ran noisily up alleyways with butchers' parcels; the short-tempered dames in battered hats who came—or distressingly did not come—to them on Monday mornings, and who frequently bore away with them bars of perfectly new soap; and the chuckles and sobs and moonlit whimsies of Yeats and Synge and Lady Gregory did not, in their minds, connect up at all.

"And now," said the President, in her sweet New England voice, "I know you will all wish to express your appreciation both to the Chairman of our Program Committee, who has arranged so many literary treats for us, and to Miss Vail for her delightful paper by a rising vote of thanks." Then the thirty-four ladies of the Tuesday Club clutched at their gloves and handbags and came to their feet with soft rustlings of new foulards and taffetas and rich old silks, and the President declared the meeting adjourned but trusted that every one would remain for a cup of tea and a social hour.

Martin Wetherby's handsome mother took brisk and proprietary charge of Jane and shared her laurels happily. "Yes, *indeed*," she beamed, her gray crêpe arm through the girl's, "I can tell you, *we're* pretty proud of her!" She had clearly cast herself already for the rôle of adoring and devoted mother-in-law, and the Tuesday Club was just as clearly taking the same view of it.

Jane, in her wine-red velvet and her glowing, gipsy beauty against the sober blacks and grays and faded cheeks of the gathering, looking like a Kentucky cardinal alighted in a henyard, felt her smile stiffening. Sudden and inexplicable panic and rebellion descended upon her; it seemed certain that if she heard Mrs. Wetherby say "proud of this dear girl of ours" once again she would scream. She disengaged her arm and declined tea and little frosted cakes.

"I'm so sorry—it looks so tempting, doesn't it?—but I really must fly!" She looked earnestly at her wrist watch. "This very minute! Thank you all so much! You've been wonderful—quite turned my head! But I *must* hurry!"

Out in the quiet, pretty street the sense of pursuit fell away from her and she was smiling derisively at herself when she reached Sarah Farraday's house and passed through the side garden to the studio. An hour with old Sally would be good for her.

Sarah was tenderly dusting her severe-looking upright piano and putting away a pile of lesson books, and turned gladly to greet her. "Jane, dear! Why, how did you get away so early? Didn't they serve tea? I was just *sick* about not going, but the little Macey girl has had so many interruptions and is so far behind, and she does want to play at my recital, so that I felt I couldn't put her off again. How did your paper go?"

"Oh, well enough. They were very nice about it."

"I know they loved it. I want to read it!" She closed the music cabinet and came to take the typed manuscript. "Why, *Jane*! What's the matter?"

"I don't know, Sally—Yes, I do know! It's—it's Mrs. Wetherby, and every one else! She acts as if—every one acts—" it made her angrier still to feel the color mounting hotly in her cheeks.

"Well, Jane, *dear*," a faint, sympathetic flush warmed her small, pale face, "isn't that perfectly natural? Of course, I suppose it teases you, but you know how happy every one is about it."

"But there isn't anything to be happy about—yet!"

"Then it's just because you have—have held things off, dear, that's all. And I think Marty has been awfully faithful and patient—for *years*! Ever since you were tiny kiddies!" She looked anxiously at her best friend's mutinous face. "I'll tell you," she said, brightly, "let's run around to Nannie's for a moment! She'll just be giving the 'Teddy-bear' his oil rub. I'll run through the house and get my things—you wait out in front!"

Nannie Slade Hunter (Mrs. Edward R.) was their second-best friend and they had been among her bridesmaids two years earlier. A few minutes of brisk footing through the fading November afternoon delivered them at the Hunters' new, little house and in the nursery of their little son. Sarah's knowledge of schedule had been correct. Nannie, in an enveloping pinafore, her sleeves rolled high, her hands glistening, was anointing her infant with the most expensive olive oil on the market. The house was furnace heated and a small electric stove was radiating fierce warmth, and her cheeks were blazing. Jane and Sarah flung off their wraps and gave themselves whole-heartedly over to the business of worship and praise.

Little Mrs. Hunter, on whom matronhood and maternity sat with the effect of large spectacles on a small child, inquired indulgently into the activities of her friends. "Paper go nicely, Janey? Sorry I couldn't go.—Yes, he was his muzzie's lamby-lamby-boy! Yes, he was!—And how many pupils have you now, Sally?"

"Seventeen," said Sarah, thankfully, "and if everything goes well I'll have my baby-grand in four years!"

Edward R. Hunter, unmistakable father of the glistening infant, came into the room as she spoke and at once propounded a conundrum.

"Here's a good one, Jane! What's the difference between Nannie and Sally? Give it up? Why, Sally'll have a baby-grand, but Nannie has a grand baby!" The hot and breathless nursery rang with mirth; it seemed to Jane that the very pink room was growing hotter and hotter, and it smelt stiflingly of moist varnish and talcum powder and warm olive oil and expensive soap, and the baby, sitting solemnly erect for his powdering, a steadying hand at his fat back, looked like a pink celluloid Kewpie leering at her knowingly. She heard herself saying with unconsidered mendacity that she had an errand to run for her Aunt Lydia, and that Sally mustn't hurry away on her account, and presently she was down in the dim street again, with Edward R.'s jocosé reproach that old Marty Wetherby was fading away to skin and bone echoing in her ears. She went dutifully for a magazine Miss Vail had mentioned and went home the "long way 'round," so that she was barely in time for supper, which consisted of three slices of cold boiled ham, shaved to a refined thinness and spread upon an ancient and honorable platter of blue willow pattern ware, hot biscuit, a small pot of honey and two kinds of preserves, delicate cups of not-too-strong tea, sugar cookies and a pallid custard.

Her aunt was fond and proud over the afternoon's triumph but didn't quite understand her having gone away so abruptly, and feared that Mrs. Wetherby had been "just the least mite hurt about it."

"But then," she hastened to add, at Jane's impatient movement, "it'll be all right, dear! You're going to see her to-night, and I know you can—sort of smooth it over."

"I was thinking," said her niece, dark eyes on her plate, "that perhaps I wouldn't go this evening, Aunt Lyddy."

"Not *go*? Not go to Mrs. *Wetherby's*? Why,—*Jane!*" Miss Vail laid down her fork and stared, her mild eyes wide with astonishment. "You aren't sick, are you?"

"I think I'm sick of always and always going to the same places with the same person, and hearing the same people say the same things!" Instantly she wished she might recall the sharp words, satisfying as they were to herself, for little Miss Lydia was regarding her much as the aunt of the wretched girl in the fairy tale might have done,—the girl out of whose mouth a frog jumped every time she opened it. Indeed, the sentence seemed actually visible between them, like a squat and ugly small beast on the shining white cloth. "Sorry, Aunt Lyddy," said Jane, penitently. "I'm a crosspatch to-night, and I ought to sit by the fire and spin, instead of gambling."

Miss Vail's face cleared. "No, indeed, dearie, it'll be much better for you to go and have a merry time with your young companions. That paper was a nervous strain, *that's* all! Now you just eat a good supper and then run upstairs and make yourself as pretty as you can!" Her plump face broke up into sly lines and she nodded happily. "Marty'll come for you at quarter before eight; he telephoned before you got home."

Martin Wetherby was even better than his word, which was one of his most sterling traits. He arrived at twenty-five minutes before eight and waited contentedly in converse with her aunt until Jane came down. "I didn't bring the car," he said. "I thought we'd like to walk." When they reached the sidewalk he lifted her right forearm in a warm, moist grasp and held it firmly close against him. "The car's too quick, Janey," he said, huskily. "Gets us there too soon!"

"Well," said Jane, brightly, "we mustn't be late, your mother likes people to be prompt, you know!" She managed to tug her arm away the fraction of an inch.

"She likes *you*, any old time," he said, blissfully. He always got husky and thick sounding in emotion, Jane reflected, and breathed heavily.

"Aren't we going to stop by for Sally?"

"No; I asked Edward R. and Nannie to pick her up in their little old boat. No, we aren't going to have anybody—but just—*us!*" He squeezed her arm against him again. "Janey, I guess you know all right how I—"

"Oh!" cried Jane,—"*here they are, now! Hello, people!*"

"Hello yourselves!" said Edward R. Hunter, bringing his machine to a stop beside them. "Want to hop in? Plenty room."

"No, of course they don't want to hop in, goose!" said his wife, reprovingly. "Edward R. Hunter, I wonder at you! Were you never young yourself?"

"Oh, but we do!" Jane was capably opening the front door of the little car. "We're late! I kept Marty waiting! I'm going to ride with the chauffeur, and Marty can sit with the girls. When Mrs. Wetherby says 'eight o'clock' she means it, not quarter past." She was chatty and intensely friendly with them all during the brief drive. She even produced the proper degree of articulate mirth for the young father's painstaking jest about his son's nickname being Teddy b-a-r-e, bear, most of the time.

When they stopped before the Wetherby house Martin was out of the automobile with heavy swiftness and lifted Jane bodily to the sidewalk and hurried her up the walk. "All right for you, girlie," he chuckled, "all right for you! But you just wait! Wait till going home to-night!"

Jane drew Sarah Farraday aside when they were in Mrs. Wetherby's phrase, "taking off their things in the north chamber,"—a solid and dependable-looking room. "Sally, I want you to come home with me and stay over night."

"Oh, Jane, I don't believe I could,—not to-night! If I'd known sooner—I haven't anything with me."

"I'll loan you everything you need. Please, Sally! You can telephone your mother now."

"But Edward and Nannie brought me, and it seems sort of—"

"Sally, don't be a nuisance! I want you. I—*need* you!"

Sarah Farraday peered closely at her through her nearsighted eyes. "Jane! You haven't quarreled with Marty, have you? Oh, Jane!"

"No, but I shall if you don't come home with me!"

Her best friend looked long and anxiously at her and then went with a sigh to telephone her mother, and the evening, which Mrs. Wetherby described as "a little gathering of the young folks," got under way. Jane played cards sedately for the earlier part of it and joined with conscientious liveliness in the games which came later, just before Mrs. Wetherby's conception of "light refreshments" was served,—pineapple and banana salad with whipped cream and maraschino cherries on it, three kinds of exceptionally sweet and sticky cake, thick chocolate with melted marshmallows floating on its surface, and large quantities of home-made fudge in crystal bonbon dishes.

To Martin Wetherby, watching her contentedly out of his small, bright eyes, Jane Vail was what he and his mother termed the life of the party, but although she played an unfaltering part in the comedy of, "Well, *partner!* Didn't you get my signal? *Now* who's asleep?" and the sprightly games which followed, and exclaimed prettily over the decked supper table, deep under the high-piled masses of her dark hair, dark thoughts were stirring. She seemed to herself to be marching inexorably to the crossroads, which was silly, because she had spent exactly that sort of day and evening hundreds of times before and would again, she told herself impatiently, but the feeling was not to be eluded. She held herself up to her own high scorn. Why this dramatizing of the pleasant and placid course of Wetherby Ridge events? Why shouldn't she do as the other girls of the set had done? Was she, then, so much finer clay? If she didn't want to be another Nannie—hot pink nursery in a shining little new house—expensive olive oil—home-coming husband in punning mood—pink celluloid Kewpie—half a dozen of everything in flat silver and two *really* good rugs to start with—then why couldn't she cast herself serenely for the Sarah Farraday sort of thing, substituting a typewriter for a piano? There was nothing so bleak and dreadful about that; old Sally was busily happy, toiling hopefully for her baby-grand. *She* was enormously lucky, as a matter of fact, lucky beyond her deserts. She could be, it appeared, a Nannie or a Sarah, as she chose, and the time for choosing had arrived. And presently the girls were exclaiming that it was twenty minutes past eleven and they really *must* go, but it was Mrs. Wetherby's fault for always giving them such a perfectly wonderful time that they forgot to watch the clock, and Mrs. Wetherby was beaming back at them and insisting that she had enjoyed it all just as much as they had, and that she hoped she could always keep young at heart.

Sally lagged behind as they went down the steps. "Come along!" Jane called back to her. "I know you'll talk half of what's left of the night, and I want to get you started as soon as possible."

"She going to stay all night with you?" There was sulky surprise in Martin's voice.

"Yes," said Jane. "But isn't 'stay *all* night' a silly expression? As if she might rise and stalk home in the middle of it! I wonder why we don't say, 'stay over night'?" She ran on, ripplingly, but her escort at one side and Sarah Farraday at the other were maintaining, respectively, a sullen and an uncomfortable silence. When they were passing her own house Sarah broke away from them with a little gasp.

"Oh,—do you mind waiting just a minute? I believe I'll just run up and get my things, Jane. You know what a fussy budget I am about my own things. And I'll just slip into another dress so I won't have to put this on for breakfast. It won't take me two *minutes*—" She flew up the front steps and let herself softly in with her latch key, and instantly ill humor fell from Martin Wetherby.

"Sally's all right," he chuckled. "I'm for Sally!" He swept Jane out of the circle of light from the street lamp, into the black shadow of the Farraday shrubbery, and into a breathless embrace. "You—little—rascal—" he said, huskily, gasping a trifle as he always did in moments of high emotion. "You—little—witch! Now I've got you—and I'm going to keep you! Now I guess you'll listen to what I've got to say and—and answer me!" His broad, warm face was coming inexorably nearer; life—the pleasant and placid pattern of Wetherby Ridge—was coming inexorably nearer; life with melted marshmallows floating on its surface!

"Oh, Marty, please!" She was fatally calm and earnest about it. "I'm so sorry—sorrrier than I can tell you,—but you mustn't say it! You mustn't make me answer you."

He was busily getting both her cool hands into the hot grasp of one of his own, and the fingers of his other hand, a little moist, were forcing themselves beneath her chin, but there was something in the honest sorriness of her tone which made him pause even in that triumphant and satisfying moment. "Why? You little—"

"Because," said Jane, steadily, "I do like you such a lot, Marty dear, and I wish you wouldn't ask me, and make me tell you that I don't—I can't—"

Then with a swift and amazing sense of rescue, of sanctuary, she heard herself saying, "Besides, you see, I'm going away!"

## CHAPTER II

While Jane's astounding utterance seemed to float and echo on the November night air, Sarah Farraday let herself as stealthily out of her front door as she had let herself in, and came softly down

the steps. "I didn't wake mother," she said in a whisper. She was in sober, every-day serge now, and pulling on her second-best cloak. She carried a small bag and was faintly pink with her haste. There was apprehension in the look she gave her friend. "Wasn't I quick, Jane?" She had left them alone to give Martin Wetherby his chance, but ancient girl loyalty had winged her heels.

"Yes," said Jane, slipping her hand through Sarah's arm. "Sally, I've just been telling Marty that I'm going away for a while."

"Jane Vail! Going *away*? What for? Where?" She stood still on the sidewalk, exploding into tiny, staccato sentences.

"To New York," Jane heard herself saying with entire conviction. "I'm going away to work."

"To *work*?" They were all in the brightness of the street light now, and Sarah brought her nearsighted gaze close to Jane's glowing face. "Have you lost your senses?"

"Neither my senses nor my cosy little hundred-a-month," said Jane. "Come along, people,—it's a scandalous hour." She started briskly up the silent thoroughfare and the others followed. "No, it's really all quite sane and simple." (The astounding thing was that she had known it less than five minutes herself, and now it was a solid and settled fact to her. Happily, gloriously, she didn't have to choose, after all. She didn't have to be either a Nannie Slade Hunter or a Sally Farraday; there was a chance to be something quite fresh and new.) "I'm going to *New York* to write. I mean, to see if I can write."

Martin Wetherby, heavily keeping step beside her, not even touching her arm at crossings, was silent, but her best friend was vocal and vehement.

"Jane Vail! I never heard anything so—so far-fetched in all my life! Going to *New York* to write! Can't you write here in your own town, in your own home? Of course you can. Why,—see what you've accomplished already."

"I haven't accomplished anything, old dear, except a few papers for the Tuesday Club and the Ladies' Aid, and—"

"You've had three stories accepted and published and one of them *paid for*,—I think you've had a *great deal* of encouragement, don't you, Martin?"

The stout young man made a husky assent.

"But Sally, you don't realize the interruptions, the distractions—"

"Interruptions! Distractions!" Sarah cut in hotly. "Why, your Aunt Lydia is perfectly wonderful about not letting you be disturbed! And anyhow—what about Harriet Beecher Stowe, writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with poverty and sickness and a debilitating climate and seven children?"

"My good woman," said Jane, cautiously, "it's entirely possible that I may not have exactly the same urge. I want to find out if I have any at all." She slipped an arm through Sarah's and through Martin's and gave each of them a gay little squeeze. "Don't be so horrified, old dears. It isn't across the world, you know, and I'll be coming home for all high-days and holidays. After I really get started I daresay I *can* work at home,—and perhaps, you know, it will be Bo-Peep herself who comes home, bringing her tales behind her!"

But Sarah Farraday was still protesting in a cross panic when they had taken leave of a subdued Martin and were creeping upstairs in Miss Lydia Vail's house.

"Look!" said Jane, nodding at the transom over her aunt's door. "She's fallen asleep again without turning off her light. You go on, Sally, I'll be right in."

Miss Lydia was propped up on two pillows, an open book before her on the patchwork quilt, and her head had sagged forward on the breast of her blue flannelette nightgown. She was making a low comedy sound which would have distressed her beyond measure if she had heard it. When Jane took the book from under her plump hands and gently removed one of the pillows she came back to consciousness with a jerk.

"I wasn't asleep," she stated with dignity. "Not really asleep; I just closed my eyes to rest them and sort of lost myself for an instant." Her eyes narrowed intently. "My dear, what is it? You look—*you look queer!* Sort of—excited!" A quick, pink blush mounted over her face. "Jane! Oh, my *darling* child—is it—has Martin"—then, disappointedly, as the girl shook her head,—"*Is it just that you've been having a wonderful time?*"

"It's just that I've been having a wonderful idea, Aunt Lyddy!" She patted the pillow. "I'll tell you tomorrow!"

"What, Jane? What *is* it? I sha'n't sleep a wink if you don't tell me!"

"I'm going away for a while, Aunt Lyddy, dear,—to New York. I want to see if I can really do something with my writing."

The little spinster paled. "Jane! Going *away*?" Her eyes brimmed up with sudden tears. "My dearest girl, aren't you happy in your home? I've tried, oh, how I've tried to take your dear, dead mother's place! But it seems——"

"Of course I'm happy,—I've always been happy, Aunt Lyddy! Now, we'll wait till morning and then talk it all over." She pulled up the gay quilt smoothly, but her aunt sat stiffly upright, her face twisted with alarm.

"My *dear* child! What *is* it?"

Jane stood looking down at her for an instant before she stooped and gathered her into a hearty hug. "It's nothing to be frightened about. It's just this, Aunt Lyddy; I do want to write, and I don't want to marry Martin Wetherby!"

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In the difficult days which followed she found Sarah Farraday the most rebellious. Miss Vail had a little creed or philosophy which was as plump and comfortable as she was herself, and which had helped to make her, Jane considered, the world's most satisfactory maiden aunt, and after a few tears and those briskly winked away, she was able to be sure that her dear girl knew best what was best for herself, *much* as she would miss her, *empty* as the house would be without her. Nannie Slade Hunter, though she disapproved, was too deeply engulfed in the real business of life to be much concerned over the vagaries of a just-about-to-be-engaged girl, and Martin Wetherby, coached, Jane knew, by the sapient father of the Teddy-bear, was presently able to translate her exodus into something very soothing to his own piece of mind. Jane could watch his mental processes as easily as she could watch the activities of a goldfish in a glass globe; he was concluding that it was the regular old startled fawn stuff ... he *had* been rushing her pretty hard ... better let her have a little time ... play around with this writing game. He'd be Asst. Cashier (that was the way he visualized it) the first of the year, and that would be a great time to get things settled.

But Sarah, in the burlapped studio, between piano pupils, was aghast and bitter. "'Going to seek your fortune!' I never heard anything so absurd, Jane! You've got more than most girls right now,—a hundred dollars a month of your very own to do just what you like with, and when your Aunt Lydia—is taken from you, you'll have that adorable old house, jammed full of rosewood and mahogany and willow pattern ware!" Wrath rose and thrived in her. "I've sometimes—I'm ashamed to admit it, but it's the truth—I've sometimes envied you your advantages, Jane,—going away to that wonderful school, and six months in Europe after you graduated—but if the result has been to make you dissatisfied with your own home and your own friends"—she was crying now—"why, then I'm thankful I've always stayed here, and never known or wanted anything different!"

Jane crossed over to her and put penitent arms about her, and at the touch Sarah began to cry in earnest.

"Oh, *Jane*! I can't stand it! I can't have you go away! Jane,—for you to *go away*——"

"Oh, Sally dear," said Jane, patting her, "it isn't really going away,—geography doesn't matter! It's just—going *on*, Sally! That's it,—I'm just going on. *And on*, I hope! And I'll write you miles of letters."

"Letters!" her friend sniffed. "What are letters?"

"Mine are something rather special, I've been told. I'll write you everything, Sally,—letters like diaries, letters like stories, letters like books. Think of all the marvelous things I'll have to write about! Why, Rodney Harrison thinks my letters from Wetherby Ridge, with nothing——"

Sarah Farraday jerked away from her, her cheeks suddenly hot, her eyes accusing. "So, that's it! That's the reason! It's the man you met on the boat!" She said it with hyphens—"The-man-you-met-on-the-boat!" She knew his name quite well, but she always spoke of him thus descriptively; it was her little way of keeping him in his place, which was well outside of the sacred circle of Wetherby Ridge.

Jane laughed. "Goose! Of course, he's part of the picture, and a very pleasant part, and it will be very nice to have him meet me and drive me opulently to Hetty Hills' sedate boarding-house. Aunt Lyddy is so rejoiced to have me there with some one from the village that I couldn't refuse, but I suspect it will be a section of the Old People's Home."

"Poor Marty!" said Sarah. "Poor old Marty! After all his years of devotion——"

"But don't you think he got large chunks of enjoyment out of them?" Her best friend's earnestness made her flippant, and it was a curious fact that good old Sally, a predestinate spinster herself, settled on her moated grange of music teaching, always took a most militant part in other people's love affairs. In every lovers' quarrel in the village, in the rare divorces, she had stood fiercely, hot dabs of color on her cheekbones, for the swain or the husband. "I still contend," she would say, "that with all his faults, and I'm not denying that he has faults, a different sort of a woman could have saved him and made something of him!"

Sarah came to stay the night with her before she was to leave in the morning, and cried herself to sleep with a thin drizzle of tears which Jane found at once flattering and touching and irritating, and



when at last the weeper was drawing long and peaceful breaths she slipped out of bed and flung on her orange-colored kimono and knelt down before the open window, her shining hair, so darkly brown that it was almost black, hanging gypsylike about her shoulders. (The greater portion of Sarah's hair was at rest upon the rosewood bureau top, coiled like a pale snake, and the remainder was done up on curlers in Topsy twists.)

Over in the east there was the first graying advance of the dawn. (There had been a "little gathering of the young folks" and then Jane had finished packing and they had talked for two hours.) Jane felt a little guilty, and a little foolish—leaping thus into the village spotlight, sallying forth into the wide world—and a little gay and thrilled. The morning was coming steadily up the sky; the daily miracle was going on. And she was going on—*on!* Old Sally's scoldings didn't matter, nor Marty's smug confidence. She shivered a little but kept her eyes on the growing glory. She was—going—*on!*

A week later Sarah Farraday tore open the first letter with the New York postmark.

SALLY DEAR, the typed page began, I meant to write at once, but I've been settling down so busily! Of course Aunt Lyddy telephoned you of my safe arrival?—Safe, my dear?—It was positively regal. Visiting royalty effect. Rodney Harrison met me and I find I had quite forgotten how very easy to look at he is! He apologized for the taxi which seemed most opulent to me, because his own speedster was in the shop, he having "broken a record and some vital organ the night before, and the mater was using the limousine and the governor was out of town with the big bus." His pretty plan was for dinner and the theater and then supper and some dancing, but I thought there was just the least bit of the King and the Beggar Maid lavishness about that, so I discreetly revised it to tea.

We purred extravagantly up the Avenue, and how horrified Aunt Lyddy would be at the taximeter! It makes me think of when we used to play Hide-and-Seek, "*Twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five, forty, forty-five, fifty—ready or not you shall be caught!*"

He had brought me a corsage of orchids and lilies-of-the-valley, and I had to wear it at tea—and the price of that tea, my dear, would feed a first family in Wetherby Ridge for a day!—and when I came up here to my room I found three dozen red roses with stems like stilts and a three-story red satin box of chocolates. Hardly a thrifty person, this man-I-met-on-the-boat, as you persist in calling him, Sally, but the last word in Reception Committees! Just as I had forgotten his charms, so he seemed to have mislaid the memory of mine, and we really made a very pleasant fuss over each other. Rodney had several bright and beamish ideas for the next few days, but I reminded him that while he may be an Idle Rich, I'm a Laboring Class, and I frugally accepted one invitation out of four. "A Country Mouse came to visit a Town Mouse—" But I can clearly see that he will greatly add to the livableness of life.

I have bought myself a second-hand, elderly, but still spry think-mobile with only a slight inclination to stutter, and a pompous-looking eraser with a little fringe of black whiskers on its chin, and I'm beginning to begin, Sally, dear!

It's going to be a marvelous place to work. Nice old Hetty Hills keeps a really super-boarding house, and the personnel isn't going to be in the least distracting,—staid, concert-going ladies, some teachers, a musician or two, a middle-aged bank clerk; only two other youngish people, both Settlement workers, a man and a woman. Her name is Emma Ellis and she's only about thirty, but she acts fifty—you know—shabby hair and dim fingernails and a righteously shining nose,—and I wish you could see her hat! It looks exactly like the lid to something. She doesn't like me at all, though I've been virtuously nice to her. The man is a big, lean Irishman, named Michael Daragh. Don't you like the sound of that, Sally? It makes me think of those Yeats and Synge things I was reading up on just before I left home. He's like a person in a book,—very tall and very thin and yet he seems like a perfect tower of strength, some way. His hair is ash blond and his eyes are gray and look straight through you and for miles beyond you, and he has splashes of good color in his thin, clear cheeks. He has a quaint, long, Irish, upper lip. I'd describe him as a large body of man entirely surrounded by conscience. (I'm describing him so fully to you because it's such good practice for me, and I know you don't mind.) His clothes are old, but not so much shabby as mellow, like old, good leather. And such a brogue, Sally! It could be eaten with a spoon! He asked me at once what I meant to do (he can't conceive, of course, that one isn't a do-er!), and when I said that I meant to write, at least, to try, he said:

"'Tis the great gift, surely. When our like"—he looked at Emma Ellis—"are toiling with our two hands and wishing they were twenty, yourself can reach the wide world over with your pen." Miss Ellis didn't seem especially impressed with his figure, but he nodded gravely and went on. "'Tis a true word. You can span the aching world with a clean and healing pen." (Isn't that delicious, Sally?) I tried to explain that I was just starting, that I was afraid I hadn't anything of especial importance to say, and then he said, very sternly—and he has the eyes of a zealot and a fighter's jaw—"Let you be stepping over to the tenements with me and I'll show you tales you'll dip your pen in tears and blood to tell!"

He's going to be enormously interesting to study.—There—I've just this instant placed the resemblance that's been teasing me! He's like the St. Michael in my favorite Botticelli, the one of Tobias led by the archangels, carrying the fish to heal his father, Tobit, you know,—there's a tiny copy of it in my room at home. Next time you stop by to see Aunt Lyddy (you're a lamb to do it so often!) run up and look at it. I loved it better than any other picture in Florence; you can't get the lovely old tones from the little brown copy, but everything else is there—Tobias, carrying his fish in the funny little strap and handle, utter trust on his lifted face, the wonderful lines of drapery, the swaying lily, the absurd little dog with his tasseled tail (I wonder if he was Botticelli's dog?) and at the side, guarding and guiding, with sword and symbol, stern St. Michael *Captain-General of the Hosts of Heaven*. This Michael Daragh is really like him, name and all. Isn't it curious?

Write me soon and much, old dear. My best to every one, and I sent the Teddy-bear a bib from the proudest baby-shop on the avenue.

Devotedly,

JANE.

P.S. You might ring up Aunt Lyddy and ask her to send me that little Botticelli picture—my bare walls are rather bleak.

### CHAPTER III

Jane settled jubilantly into the new life,—a brisk walk after breakfast, up the gay Avenue or down the gray streets below the Square, then three honest hours at the elderly typewriter, writing at top speed ... tearing up all she had written ... writing slowly, polishing a paragraph with passionate care, salvaging perhaps a page, perhaps a sentence out of the morning's toil. Then she hooded her machine, lunched, and gave herself up to an afternoon of vivid living,—a Russian pianist, or an exhibition of vehemently modern pictures screaming their message from quiet walls in a Fifth Avenue Gallery, an hour at Hope House Settlement with Emma Ellis or Michael Daragh, tea and dancing with Rodney Harrison, or dinner and a play with him, or a little session of snug coziness with Mrs. Hetty Hills, giving the exile news of the Vermont village,—nothing was dull or dutiful; the prosiest matters of every day were lined with rose. She dramatized every waking moment. She was going to *work*, she wrote Sarah.

I have been just marking time before, but now I'm marching, Sally. I was up at six-thirty, had a cold dip and a laborer's breakfast,—I'm afraid I haven't any temperament in my appetite, you know—and sped off for atmosphere *and* ozone, far below the Square, on a two-mile tramp, and now I'm about to write. Rodney Harrison, who knows everybody who *is* anybody, has introduced me to some vaudeville-powers-that-be and I am encouraged to try my hand at what they call a sketch—a one-act play. It seems that they are in need of something a little less thin than the usual article they've been serving up to their patrons,—more of a playlet; something, I suppose, to edify the wife of the Tired Business Man after he has enjoyed the Tramp Juggler and the Trained Seals. Rodney Harrison has helped me no end,—trotted me about to all the best places and helped me to study and learn from them, and now I'm ready to begin.

And—heavens—how I adore it, Sally!

It's breaking my iron schedule to write a letter in business hours but I knew you'd love to picture me here, gleefully clicking off dollars and fame. Poor lamb! I wish you were on a job like this, instead of pegging away at your piano. I wish there could be as much fun in your work as mine. Of course, music is the most marvelous thing in the world, but isn't there something of deadly monotony in it?

But I fly to my toil!

Busily,

JANE.

*January Ninth, 8.30 A.M.*

It is just one week since I wrote you. I rend my garments, Sarah Farraday, and sit in the dust. That fatuous note I sent you was a thin crust of bluff over an abyss of fright. Who am I to write a one-act play? I have sat here for eight solid horrible days with a fine fat box of extra quality paper untouched and the keyboard leering at me, and not a line, not a word, have I written! The hideous period of beginning to begin! I imagine it's like the tense moment in a football game, just before the kickoff, only those lucky youths are pushed and prodded into action, willynilly. If only a whistle would blow or a pistol crack for me!

I have come to realize that the most dangerous thing for a writer to have is uninterrupted leisure. *Now* I know how Harriet Beecher Stowe could write *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with poverty and sickness and a debilitating climate and seven children. So could I. It's the awful quiet of this orderly room, the jeering taunt of Washington Square, looking in at my window to say, "What! here you are in my throbbing, thrilling midst at last, having left your sylvan home because it ceased to nourish you,—and you have nothing to say?"

I've simulated a mad business. I've answered every letter—some that I've owed for years; I've put my bureau and chiffonier and closet in sickening order; I've mended every scrap of clothing I possess, reinforced all my buttons and run in miles of ribbon; I've visited the sick and even been to the dentist. I really ought to die just before I start a new piece of work. At no other time is my house of life in such shining order.

Sally, didn't I say something nitwitted about music? Now, indeed, I pour ashes on my head. Lucky you, who need only sit down and spill out your soul in something thoughtfully arranged for that very purpose by Mr. Chopin or Mr. Tschaikovsky! While I—"out of senseless nothing to evoke"—I wish I did something definite and tangible like plain sewing! If I don't start soon I'll sell this think-mobile for junk and put out a sign—"Mending and Washing and Going Out by the Day Taken in Here."

Just now the painted ship upon the painted ocean is a bee-hive of activity compared to me.

JANE.

*Monday Noon.*

SARAH,

Sh-h...! I'm off!

J.

*Wednesday, more than midnight.*

DEAREST S.,

I'm a dying woman but my sketch is done! I've lived on board the typewriter since twelve o'clock on Monday, coming briefly ashore for a snatch of food or sleep, but it's done and I adore it! (Says the author, modestly.) The heavenly mad haste of the actual doing makes up for all the agonies of the start, restoring the years that the locusts have eaten. I'll tell you all about it in the morning.

Drowsily but triumphantly,

JANE.

*Thursday.*

Sally, my dear, I wouldn't thank King George to be my uncle, as Aunt Lyddy would say! I never experienced anything in all my life as satisfying as pounding out that word CURTAIN!

Want to hear about it? You must,—you can't elude me.

Well, I've called it "ONE CROWDED HOUR." The scene is a lonely telegraph station on

the desert and the time is the present. The characters are: THE GIRL—THE BROTHER—THE MAN.

The setting shows the front room of the telegraph station crude and rough and bare, just the ticker on the table, another table and three chairs, yet there is a pathetic attempt at softening the ugliness,—a bunch of dried grasses, magazine covers pinned to the wall, gay cushions in the chairs, a work basket, books.

At rise of curtain GIRL is discovered alone, sewing. She is faintly, quaintly pretty in a mild New England way, no longer young, yet with a pathetic, persistent girlishness about her. A faint whistle is heard. She rises, goes to door of rear room and calls to BROTHER that the train has whistled for the bend. The two trains—east-bound and west-bound—are the events of their silent and solitary days. She brings him from rear room, her arm about him, steadying him. He is younger than his sister, frail, despondent. She seats him at the instrument and brings him a cup of hot broth, standing over him until he drinks it up.

The necessary exposition comes in brief dialogue: he has been sent west for his cough, has become so weak he is unable to do his work, has taught her, and she in reality carries on all the affairs of the lonely station. He stays in bed most of the time, only dragging himself up at train time, so that the trainmen will not suspect their secret.

The noise of the approaching limited grows louder and louder until it arrives with loud clamor just off stage. GIRL runs out with the orders and the train is heard pulling out again. She comes in and is about to help him back to bed when the instrument begins to click and instantly they are electrified.

"THE HAWK," a daring hold-up man who has baffled justice for a year, has just made off with the Bar K Ranch paysack and posses are forming, but the new sheriff has sworn to take him single-handed. BROTHER excitedly asserts that the sheriff can do it,—a regular fellow, that new sheriff,—looks and acts just like a man in a movie! He regrets that his sister was not at home the day he came to see them—the one time she'd left the station for more than an hour. She'd have liked him fine! They excitedly discuss the chances of the bandit's coming their way, for just beyond their station is the famous Pass through the mountains, through which so many rogues have ridden to freedom. In feverish haste BROTHER gets out his clumsy pistol and loads it, to her timid distress. Their drab day has turned to scarlet; he talks glowingly of the new sheriff, envies him.... Instrument clicks again. It is the sheriff, asking if they have seen a solitary horseman, and saying that he is on his way there, to watch the Pass.

BROTHER gets himself so wrought up that he brings on a fit of coughing and she makes him go back to bed.

Left alone again in the front room, she tries to settle down to her sewing, but she sings as she rocks—

"In days of old  
When knights were bold,  
And barons held their sway—"

Then, childishly, half ashamed, she begins to "pretend." She snatches off the red table cover and drapes it about herself for a train, casts the crude furniture for the roles of moat and drawbridge and castle wall, and herself for a captive princess, held by a robber chief, flinging herself into her fantasy with such abandon that she does not hear the approaching hoof beats. At the pinnacle of her big speech the door is wrenched open and THE MAN stands there, a gun in each hand, demanding—

"Who's here?"

It fits in with her make-believe so amazingly that for an instant she is dazed and can hardly tell reality from romance, but then she gathers herself and says with a little gasp—

"Why, Mister Sheriff, we aren't hiding THE HAWK!"

THE MAN, who is, of course, the bandit, instantly catches her mistake and poses as the sheriff. She asks him eagerly if she may send a message for him, to cover up her confusion as she takes off her table-cloth train. Then, realizing that she has betrayed their secret, she throws herself on his mercy and tells of her brother's failing health, and of how she has had to do the work to hold the job, and begs him not to tell. He promises, and then has her send several messages for him in the name of the sheriff, and from his expression as she is telegraphing, the audience will infer that he has good and sufficient reason to know that the sheriff will not arrive. He states to the several ranches where she wires for him that he—the sheriff—will guard the Pass.

BROTHER, roused by voices, comes silently to the door. Their backs are toward him

and they do not see him. BROTHER hears her call him "Mister Sheriff," stares, takes in the situation, his face speaking his terror. He softly pulls the door to and disappears.

GIRL and MAN talk. He is a gay, dashing, Robin Hood sort of chap and she is charmed. She asks him to step outside to see the gallant little garden she is raising in the desert. They go out, and instantly BROTHER creeps out, stumbles to table, waits until they are out of hearing, sends a quick message. Then he creeps to the door and conveys by his mutterings that he is going to untie THE HAWK's horse and let him run away. Apparently the horse doesn't go, for he reaches back, picks up a cane and leans out again. This time there is the sound of skurrying hoofs and the horse tears away. BROTHER staggers back into the rear room, closing the door.

MAN and GIRL rush in. He is desperate,—the horse,—a wild and half-broken one, has made straight for the Pass. GIRL wants to wire for another horse to be brought to him, but after a moment's grim thought, he decides to jump on the eastbound train, due in a few minutes, and go on to the next station, where he can get a good horse.

Then there is a pretty scene between them, when she confesses her pity for THE HAWK and her wicked hope that he may get away—"I can't bear to have even *things* hunted, let alone a man!"

THE MAN is touched, and tells her that he knows a good deal about the bandit; that he has had a rotten deal straight through life; that there's a streak of decency in him for all the yellow; that he's heard that THE HAWK meant to make this his last job ... to go back east again and make a fresh start....

THE GIRL, star-eyed and pink-cheeked now, tells him of her home "down east," of how keen she was to come to the wild, wonderful west, of how she thinks that "one crowded hour of glorious life" is worth a whole leaden existence. That reminds her of her graduating essay, which she digs out of the trunk, tied with baby-blue ribbon. "One Crowded Hour" was her burning topic, but her hours and days and years have been crowded only with homely toil and poverty and worries.

THE MAN, softened incredibly, tells her she is the gentlest thing he ever knew.... He takes the blue ribbon and says he's going to keep it for luck. There is a beautiful, wordless moment for her, touched by magic into girlhood again.

Then—shouts, galloping hoofs, shots! THE MAN springs to his feet, hands on his guns.

BROTHER, at door of rear room, his old pistol describing wavering circles in his shaking hand, cries hoarsely,

"Harriet Mary, you come here to me! That's not the sheriff! That's THE HAWK!"

THE MAN, with a gentle word to her, tells her to stand aside.... "They'll never put THE HAWK in a cage!"

THE GIRL, after a dazed moment, turns to a veritable fury of resolution. The east-bound train whistles. There is still a chance, if she can get him on board. Sound of posse riding nearer. She makes MAN hide under the curtain where her dresses hang.

BROTHER starts toward the front door but she seizes him roughly, pushing him back toward the bedroom.

"Listen," he gasps, "Harriet Mary—that's THE HAWK!"

"I don't care! I don't care! I don't *care*! You hush! You keep still!" She pushes him into the room so violently that he falls, coughing terribly, to the floor. A look of fleeting horror crosses her face but she bangs and bolts the door. She draws the curtain more carefully over THE MAN, flings open the front door and calls above the clamor of the on-coming train—

"He's gone! Gone! We tried to keep him—quick—through the Pass! *Don't you see the hoof-prints?*"

The posse wheels and thunders away. The train roars in. THE MAN, coming out from under the curtain, snatches up her thin hand, kisses it, dashes out. She forces herself to take the message out to the trainmen. She comes back, stands in strained and breathless listening.... The train pulls noisily out.

Little by little her tension relaxes. The magic robe of youth, renewed, falls from her thin shoulders. At a sound from the inner room she gasps, clutches her hands together on her breast, her eyes wide with terror and remorse, starts running to her brother.

CURTAIN!

Can you *see* it, Sally? Do you think it will "get across?" Will I be able to "put it over"?

Now, convoyed by Rodney Harrison, I'm off to the Booking Office with a 'script, enchantingly typed in black and scarlet, under my arm and hope in my heart.

Jauntily,

JANE.

*Later.*

P.S. They were quite wonderful to me, which is to say, they pronounced "not bad" and will cast it at once. They talk vaguely of changes and "gingering it up," and "adding a little pep," but say that can be done at rehearsals.

I started to say I preferred not to have any alterations made, but I thought it would be more tactful to wait and see.

Oh, but the forlorn wretches in the waiting room! Some of them had been there for hours and when the proud and prosperous-looking Rodney sent in his name and we were taken in at once without waiting for our turn and they looked at me with their mournful made-up eyes I felt as if my wicked French heels were on their necks. I noticed one girl, particularly; there was something so gallant about her cracked and polished shoes, her mended gloves, her collar, laundered to a cobweb thinness, and about the improbable sea-shell pink in her hollow cheeks. She had a sort of eager, sharpened sweetness in her face and a regular Burne-Jones jaw.

I refused tea and said farewell to Rodney uptown and walked home, and on the way I saw her again, standing outside of one of the white and shining *Café des Enfants*, watching the man turn the muffins. She opened a collapsed little purse and poked about in it for an instant and then shut it again and turned away. Before I knew what I meant to do, I heard myself saying, "Hello! I saw you just now at the Booking Office, didn't I? I wish you'd come in and have some coffee and butter cakes,—I detest eating alone!"

She hung back a bit but they are not formal in her world, and in we went. Sally, I wish you could have seen that poor thing eat! She's been sick and out of work and fearfully depressed. I've got her name and address and if all goes as well with this vaudeville work as Rodney thinks it will, I may be able to help her. At any rate, she's stuffed like a Christmas turkey at this moment.

Sally, I can't tell you how happy I am!

Much love, old dear,

JANE.

P.S. II. I read the act to Michael Daragh and he set the seal of his sober approval on it. He thinks I'm going personally to uplift the two-a-day.

## CHAPTER IV

*Friday.*

DEAREST SALLY:

It just happened that they need a new sketch act, so they cast "ONE CROWDED HOUR" at once and it is already in rehearsal.

BROTHER is excellent, a wistful-eyed, shabby youth who really looks convincingly ill and coughs in a way to carry conviction. Oh, but THE GIRL! My quaint New England spinster is gone and with her all the point of my playlet. They've given the part to a blooming, buxom, down-to-the-minute young person, late of "Oh, You Kewpie-Kid!" (in the chorus) and frankly contemptuous of this rôle. And THE MAN—the bandit—a fair-haired canary, an inch shorter than she is! They quarrel like fishwives and scold about the number of "sides" each other has, and refuse to play up prettily, and I'm

heartsick over it all, Sally. The producing agent says it would be utterly impossible to "put it over" with the characters as I wrote it. He was fairly mild and merciful with me (thanks to Rodney, I daresay) but unbudgably firm, and at every rehearsal some touch of coyness or kittenishness is added. As an elixir of youth, I recommend him.

The girl patronizes me until I am ready to fling myself on the floor and squeal with rage. "Listen, girlie," she cooes, "don't you worry about this lil' ol' act! You leave it to me, hon'! I'll put the raisin in it!"

Rodney Harrison is hugely amused at my woe. He says I must remember that you can't slip the Idylls of the King in between the Black-faced Comedian and the Elephant Act. I suppose I must just bear it, grinning if possible, until I have won my footing and then I won't allow so much as a comma to be changed.

BROTHER is a dear. He opened his heart and gave me a five-act play of his own to read. The stage business is much funnier than the dialogue. After a melting moment he has—"Exeunt Mother." The old lady was clearly beside herself. Also me.

Wearily,

JANE.

*Tuesday.*

DEAR SALLY,

We open Thursday afternoon at a weird little try-out theater 'way downtown. I am like to perish of weariness and exasperation. GIRL and MAN have been fighting like Kilkenny cats. Yesterday she said, "Dearie, God is my witness, he uses me like I was the dirt under his feet!" The brother of BROTHER, a lean, clean-looking chap, lounges about at rehearsals and comforts me vastly with his under-the-breath comments on them. She has worked up the bit before THE MAN arrives, when she is pretending, you remember, into screaming comedy. She assures me it will "knock 'em dead!" And they have introduced a dance! Yes. He shows her "the coyote lope." I'm telling you the solemn truth, Sarah Farraday. Do you wonder that I'm an old woman before my time?

And as if I did not have enough to annoy me, Michael Daragh has been quite superfluously unpleasant about it. I wrote you how much he liked it when I read the original 'script to him? Well, he has kept talking about the glorious privilege of doing really good work and leavening the lump, and of how the public really wants the best, only the managers haven't faith to know it, and when I had to tell him about the changes,—the comedy and the dance and so on, he just looked at me and looked at me as if I were a lost soul. It was very tiresome.

"Good gracious, Michael Daragh," I said, "you don't suppose I like it, do you? But I've got to get my foothold. You can't be high-brow in the two-a-day, it seems. You've got to capitulate. It's simply what they call 'putting it over.'"

And he said, "I should be calling it 'putting it under,'" and stalked away.

Excuse a cross letter. So am I.

J.

P.S. Just for which, I won't even tell him when or where the tryout is to be.

*Thursday Night.*

Well, my dear, they say it went fairly well. But it was absolutely the most harrowing thing I ever had to bear. BROTHER was a gem but GIRL and MAN messed up their lines and gave an alien interpretation to everything. How I hated the audience for roaring at her common comedy! They howled with delight when she pushed BROTHER over, and the coyote lope got the biggest hand of the day. I was behind the scenes, holding the 'script. Oh, but it's a grim land of disillusion back there! As she came off she gave me a kindly pat and said—

"Ain't they eatin' it up? Say, girlie, didn't I tell you I'd put the raisin in it?"

Unbelievably, heaven alone knows why, we are to open at the Palace next Monday. Some big act is canceled owing to illness and they have to have a sketch. We play two

more performances downtown and then rehearse day and night to smooth over the rough places. I ought to be bubbling with thankful joy—the Palace! But I'm not. I doubt if I go on with vaudeville work after this.

Jadedly,

JANE.

*Friday.*

DEAR S.,,

Something made me think of that girl I fed the other day and I looked her up. She was actually starving and her room rent long overdue and her landlady a regular story-book demon, so I fed her up and brought her home and coaxed Mrs. Hills to put a cot in my room for her. Her Burne-Jones jaw is sharper than ever and she has the mournfully grateful eyes of a setter. She's sleeping now as if she could never have enough,—just thirstily drinking up sleep.

Performance no better to-day. Terrific rehearsing starts early to-morrow morning.

Hastily,

JANE.

*Sunday Morning.*

DEAREST SALLY,

Rehearsal was called for nine sharp yesterday. BROTHER and his brother were waiting. GIRL and MAN appeared at ten-ten. She said—

"Dearie, I hate to tell you, but I got bad news for you." Then, turning to him, she said, compassionately, "Say, hon', you tell her! I haven't got the heart."

"Why," said the bandit, regretfully, "what she means is this: she's got a swell chance to go on tour with 'Kiss and Tell,' and she feels like she hadn't ought to turn it down. It's more her line than this kind of thing, you know."

I counted ten to myself, slowly, and then I said:

"Very well. I daresay you know of some girl who is a quick study and can get up in the part by Monday, with your help."

She stared and then began to giggle. "Say, girlie, I'm the limit. Didn't I tell you? I *married* the boy!" At my gasp she went on, confidentially, linking her arm in mine. "Yes, dearie. You see, it's like this. I gotter have somebody, anyhow, to look after luggage, and you know what this life is. A girl's gotter have protection."

When they were gone I turned to look at BROTHER. I almost thought he was going to cry, and he began to cough, just as he does in the sketch.

"Oh, please," I said, "don't keep doing that! We aren't rehearsing now."

And he stopped and said, "That's just it, Miss Vail. I'm not rehearsing. It's—that's how it is with me. That's why I knew I could get by with the part. I thought if we got good bookings, why, I'd be fixed to take a good long rest, afterwards,—out on the desert or up in the snow. It isn't bad, yet. They tell me I've got a great chance." Then his chin quivered. "That's why it kind of hits me right where I live, having this thing go on the rocks."

"It mustn't," I said. "It can't! We won't let it!" I knew it was only a miracle that could save us, in that breathlessly short time, but I have a vigorous belief in miracles. "There must be a man and a girl, somewhere——"

Then the lean, silent brother of BROTHER spoke. "I don't suppose you'd give me a whack at it, would you? I've learned every word of the whole 'script, watching every day the way I have. I can do it. I can do it if you'll let me. I don't think that fellow ever had your idea of it. Look,—the part where THE HAWK tells her what a rotten deal he's always had, isn't this how you meant it?"—and he dropped into a chair, took a knee



between his brown, lean hands, looked off into the empty theater for a moment—and then, Sally, he read the lines as I'd written them. Instantly, I was happier than I'd been since I tore the final page out of the typewriter, visualizing the thing as I meant it to be.

"It's yours," I chortled in my joy. "You can have it on a silver salver!"

"If only we can get a girl," BROTHER was worrying. "We ought to get one, easy. She needn't be so much of a looker."

"And we'll cut the comedy and the dance," I said, thankfully.

"There must be a hundred girls crazy for the job, with all the idle acts there are now. All she's got to do is walk through,—it's actress proof, that part. If we could just get a girl, not too young, kind of pathetic looking——"

Then, suddenly and serenely, I knew what I was going to do. And I knew that, sink or swim, never again was I going to "put it under." I told them to wait. I taxied opulently home. My waif was curled up in my kimono, feeding my fan-tailed goldfish. "Hurry up," I said, briskly. "You're holding the rehearsal!"

While she was scrambling, bewilderedly, into her clothes, I explained to her and dug out the old 'scripts and carbons, and on the way back I told her the story and gave her the idea of how she was to play it. She hadn't had time to put on her sea-shell tint, but the hollows in her cheeks filled up with pink excitement as I talked. When I marched in with her the men gave her one look, grinned, and heaved gusty sighs of relief. We rehearsed all day and half the night. We haven't told the office a word about the defection of the two vaude-villains. The printing is out, of course, and the old names will stand. She is stiff with fright and bodily unfit for the strain, but she's giving everything she's got, and she's delicious in quality for the part.

Yours in weary bliss,

J.

*Monday. 3.15 A.M.*

Sarah, I feel like Guido Reni (if it was Guido Reni) when he stabbed his servant to get the actual agony for the "Ecce Homo!" My girl fainted away in the middle of her big speech an hour ago. I have tucked her up in bed after a rub and a cup of hot milk and she is to sleep until noon. BROTHER'S brother tried pitifully, but he didn't get through a single speech without prompting. I'm terrified! Suppose they muddle it utterly, what will the Powers say to me—after not telling them of the change in cast? I wish I hadn't asked Michael Daragh to come to the matinée. I *must* stop. I know I won't sleep a wink, but I'll put out the light and lie down and shut my eyes.

JANE.

*Monday Midnight.*

Oh, Sally dearest, I don't know where to begin! I'll make myself start with the morning. I slipped out before my starveling was awake, leaving a cheering note for her. I took the bus up to Grant's Tomb and walked back along the river to Seventy-second Street. It was the most marvelous blue-and-gold morning; I speeded myself to a glow on shady paths or sat steeping for a moment in the sun. I held happy converse with democratic dogs and reserved and haughty babies and dawdled, but even so I found myself with a panicky margin of time on my hands. Then I bethought myself of my never-failing remedy for troublesome thoughts and I went joyously forth like a he-goat on the mountains and bought a ruinous pair of proud shoes and put them on. I knew the gloating over them would leave me small room for forebodings. You know how I've always been. You used to call me "Goody Two-Shoes." These are cunningly contrived to make my No. 4, triple A, look like a 2, and I walked upon air, narrowly missing being mown down by traffic, my eyes upon my feet. On the way to the Palace I made myself repeat that lovely thing of Gelett Burgess's—

"My feet, they haul me round the house;  
They hoist me up the stairs;  
I only have to steer them, and  
They ride me everywhere!"

I purchased an orchestra seat and inquired carelessly at what hour my sketch (only I didn't say it was my sketch) went on. I found we were sandwiched in between the newest Tramp Juggler and the Trained Seals! Then I went behind and saw my gallant little company, made up and dressed too soon, waiting in awful idleness with strained smiles and ghastly cheer. I petted and patted them all round and cast an agitated eye over the set. A grimy young stagehand made a minor change for me with a languid, not unkind contempt. "What's the big idea?" he wanted to know. "Goner slip 'em some high-brow stuff? Say, this is the wrong pew, sister. They won't stand for nothing like that here. Up in the Bronx, maybe—" I turned and basely fled. I went out in front and found my place. The orchestra rollicked through the overture and people poured in and ushers slid down the aisles and snapped down the seats. I studied the people's faces as a gladiator might have done in the arena. Thumbs up? Thumbs down? A row behind me, across the aisle, sat Michael Daragh, but he did not see me. Two petulantly pretty girls in regal furs sank into seats beyond me, and a white-spatted, rosy-wattled gentleman in a subduedly elegant waistcoat took the one on the end.

The annunciator flashed A and a pair of black-face comedians "opened the show," but they did not get it very far open for people were jamming in and elbows were silhouetted against the light. They doggedly plugged away, firing their tragic comedy, making brave capital even of the silences, but through my glasses I was sure I could see the strained anxiety of their eyes. It was a relief to have them go. Then the Trained Seals were with us, lovely things like gentle, tidy, sleek-headed little girls. My heart was going like a metronome set for a tarantella and my wrist-watch ticked breathlessly—"Coming—Coming—Coming!"

If only we were Z instead of C!

"Funny thing, you know," said the occupant of the end seat, conversationally, "they tell me they're easier than any other animal in the world to train, except a pig. Fact. Circus man told me."

He had a genial face, creased into jolly patterns, and my heart warmed to him, and to Michael Daragh and the pretty girls and the fat old lady in front of me. Nice people, kind people. It seemed certain that they must want real things, clean things.

I took out a pencil to make notes for corrections, but the annunciator said D, and a lady who would have done nicely as Venus came out attired as Cupid and the house rocked with welcome. I was cold with conjecture. *What* had happened back there? Had my poor starveling fainted again? Had BROTHER'S brother died of fright? I sat shivering through the sprightly number until C, said the electric lights, and the orchestra began softly to play—

"In days of old,  
When knights were bold—"

The curtain rose on the bleak telegraph station, on my thin spinster in her rocking chair. It was a lean vision for eyes lately ravished by the Venus lady's charms; programs rattled; the Tramp Juggler was to follow. I could see her chest rising and falling jerkily with her frightened breath and her hands shook so that she could hardly hold her sewing. From far aloft came that loud guffaw that speaks the vacant mind and one of the pretty girls next me giggled in echo. Then something seemed to go through my waif; the Burne-Jones jaw was taut; she got hold of herself; then, slowly, steadily, surely, little by little, she got hold of the house. The man on the end who had slouched comfortably down in his seat, sat sharply upright and the girls stopped whispering. BROTHER came on, and his brother as the MAN. The tempo was perfect, the acceleration blood-quickening. Laughs came at unexpected places, friendly and cordial. The girl was like a melody in low tones; she built up her climax cunningly, warming, coloring, kindling.

"Good gad!" ejaculated the spatted gentleman in the aisle seat, "you know, that girl can act!" The old lady in front lifted a frank handkerchief; the giggling girls were raptly watching. Now the GIRL'S big moment came. Her voice, faded and gentle before, was harsh and strident. "*I don't care! I don't care! You hush! You keep still!*"

When she gave him his broth she had seemed the gentlest of living creatures; now, pushing him ruthlessly to the floor, she was a fury, pitiless, obsessed. All the starved romance, all the pinched poverty of her life, all the lean and lonely years she had known cried out in hunger, not to be denied; she was a tigress doing battle for her mate.

And then, when the rattle and roar of the train died away, BROTHER'S hacking cough sounded from behind the closed door, and stark reality laid hold on her again. Her thin hands went together on her breast and then fell slackly to her sides. She seemed visibly to shrink and shrivel. Racked and spent with her one crowded hour, she stood looking into the bleak and empty vista of the years.

I was in the aisle before the curtain fell, speeding past the people, the applauding people, the beautiful, kind, understanding people, past the benediction of Michael Daragh's lifted look. The applause followed me out through the lobby—oh, Sally dear, no choir invisible could make half so celestial a sound!—and when I got behind the scenes it was still coming in—solid, genuine, hearty waves of it.

I heard hurrying feet behind me but I did not pause. I guessed who it was, but I wouldn't turn to look. In the orderly chaos of props and people—and it was an ugly land of disillusion no longer but the land of heart's desire, Sally—I found my gallant little band of fighting hope, beaming and breathless after the fifth honest curtain, coming to me on buoyant feet.

Stern St. Michael had caught up with me then, and he bent his austere head to say very humbly, "Woman, dear, I'm so high with pride for you, and so low with shame for me, that I could ever be doubting—"

But the grimy young stagehand, halting in front of me with an armful of the Tramp Juggler's playthings, cut his sentence in two.

"Say,—he held out a dark and hearty paw—"put her there, sister! Say, I guess maybe that's poor? Say, I guess maybe that's not puttin' it over!"

Jubilantly,

JANE.

## CHAPTER V

The grave Irishman, Michael Daragh, was a constant delight. He was no more aware, she saw clearly, of her as a person, as a woman, than he was of Emma Ellis of the lidlike hats and shabby hair. Nothing that was human was alien to him, certainly, and nothing that was feminine was anything more than merely human to him. It appeared, however, that he did have a sense of values of a sort, for he halted her in the hall, one dark December day, with a request. Would she be coming with him tomorrow to the Agnes Chatterton Home, where there was a girl in black sorrow?

"Why, yes, of course I'll come, but—why?" Jane wanted to know. "What makes you think I could help? I don't know very much about—that sort of thing."

He smiled swiftly and winningly and it was astonishing to see how the process lighted up his lean face. "Ah, that's the reason! She's had her fill of us, God help her. The way we've been exhorting her for days on end. You'll be bringing a fresh face and a fresh feeling to the case. And"—he stopped and looked her over consideringly—"tis your sort can help and heal."

"Why?" Jane persisted. She was finding the conversation piquantly interesting.

"Because," said Michael Daragh, and she had the startled feeling that he was not in the least paying her a compliment but rather laying a charge upon her, "you have been anointed with the oil of joy above your fellows." Then, quite as if the matter were wholly settled, he gave her directions and went his way.

Jane had never seen an Agnes Chatterton Home. She had heard of them, of course, as asylums for what the village called Unfortunate Girls, furtive and remote retreats for stricken creatures who fled the light of day, but when she found herself actually on her way to see one, the following day, she slackened her pace and made her way more slowly and with conscious reluctance. She was a little annoyed with herself for acquiescing so meekly to the big Irishman's plan. After all, she had not broken the old home ties (to put it lyrically) for this sort of thing, now, had she? She had to come to New York to seek her fortune, not to—to—whatever it was that Michael Daragh wanted her to do. And yet, she was always being drawn, willynilly, into any woe within her ken. Herself a contained creature of radiant health and placid nerves with a positively masculine aversion to scenes and applied emotion of any sort, people were always coming and confiding in her. She had been the reluctant repository for the secrets of half her little town. As a matter of fact, and this she could not know of herself, it was because she demonstrated the solid theory that one happy person was worth six who were trying to make others happy. But now she was marching deliberately into the heart of a misery which did not in the least concern her and where, she felt sure, she would be wholly unwelcome. She stood still in an unsavory thoroughfare, seriously considering a retreat, but she saw Michael Daragh waiting for her on the next corner, and she kept on.

"I very nearly turned back," she said. "And I very nearly didn't come at all. I had the most alluring invitation for matinee and tea." (Rodney Harrison had been most insistent.)

"I had your word you'd be coming," said the Irishman. He looked at her impersonally. She was

buttoned to the chin in a cloak the color of old red wine and there was a jubilant red wing in her dark turban, and it may have occurred to him that she made a thread of good cheer in the dull woof of that street, but he went at once into the story.

"Ethel's lived on at the Home ever since her baby was born. It'll be two, soon, and herself going for eighteen."

"*Eighteen?* Oh——"

"Yes. Doing grandly, she is, in the same shop as her good elder sister. Well, one day she tells the matron she has a sweetheart, a decent chap, wanting to marry her.

"'Fine,' says Mrs. Richards. 'What were we always telling you? And will he be good to the baby?'

"'He doesn't know I've the baby,' says Ethel, 'and what's more he never will!'

"'You'll be giving up your child, that you kept of your own free will, that you've worked and slaved for, and be wedding him with the secret on your soul?'

"'I will,' says the girl, and not all the king's horses and all the king's men can move her, Jane Vail." They were picking their way through a damp and squalid street and he stooped to set a wailing toddler on its unsteady feet.

"'Tis the sister's doing, we think, she the hard, managing kind and Ethel the weak slip of a thing. Coming to-day, Irene is, to carry it off to the place she's found for it—some distant kin down Boston way, long wanting to adopt and never dreaming this child is their own blood."

"Doesn't Ethel care for the baby?"

"There's the heart scald. 'Tis the light of her eyes. But Irene, d'you see, has scared her into feeling sure she'll lose him if she tells. Wait till you see the look she has on her. 'Supping the broth of sorrow with the spoon of grief,' they would be calling it, home in Wicklow."

"And I'm to talk to her—to beg her to tell him?"

He nodded.

Jane sighed. "She'll loathe me, of course,—an absolute outsider. Coming in—nobly giving up a matinée and tea—to rearrange her life for her. Oh, I don't believe I dare!"

He nodded again, comprehendingly. "I know well the way you're feeling. But with the likes of her, poor child, somebody has to rearrange the lives they've mussed and mangled!"

Jane sighed again. "I'll try, Michael Daragh. You know, your two names make me think of the wind off the three lakes on the road to Kenmare and the black line of the McGillicuddy Reeks against the sky?"

His eyes lighted. "'Tis good, indeed, to know you've seen Ireland. Whiles, I'm destroyed with the homesickness." He kept a long silence after that, his eyes brooding.

Jane watched him and wondered. "He's a mystery to me," Mrs. Hetty Hills always appended after a mention of him. (It teased her to have mysteries in her boarding-house.) "Has an income, of course—has to have, to live—doesn't earn anything worth mentioning with all this uplift work—and gives away what he does get. Emma Ellis doesn't know any more about him than I do. But I will say he's less trouble than any man I ever had under my roof. And, of course, he's not *common* Irish." (Mrs. Hills had still her Vermont village feeling of red-armed, kitchen minions, freckled butcher boys running up alley-ways, short-tempered dames in battered hats who came—or distressingly didn't come—to you of a Monday morning.)

They walked swiftly and without speech now, and Jane had again her sense of his resemblance to the Botticelli St. Michael. "He ought really to be carrying his sword and his symbol," she told herself, "and I daresay Raphael and Gabriel are beside him if I could only see them. Am I Tobias? And have I a fish to heal a blindness?"

"There's the house," said Michael Daragh, at length.

"Of course," said Jane, indignantly. "I should have known it at once, even without the hideous sign, for its smugly dreary look of good works! *Why* must they have that liver-colored glass in the door?" They mounted the worn steps. "And 'Welcome' on the mat! Oh, Michael Daragh, how ghastly! Who did that to them?"

He shook his head. "Most of our things are given, you see." He rang the bell and they heard its harsh and startling clamor.

A sullen-faced girl in a coarse, enveloping pinafore opened the door. Her hands and arms were red and dripping and from a dim region at the rear came the smell of dishwater. Down the narrow, precipitate stairway floated an infant's thin, protesting wail and Jane felt a sick sense of sudden nausea.

"Thank you, Lena," said the Irishman. "This lady is Jane Vail, a good friend come to see us."

The girl, who might have been sixteen, gave Jane a stolid, incurious look and shuffled down the hall, closing the door on a portion of the stale smell.

Mrs. Richards was in her office. She greeted Jane civilly but eyed her in some puzzlement. Here was a strange bird, clearly, to alight in this dingy barnyard.

"Jane Vail will be trying her hand at Ethel for us," Michael Daragh said.

The matron bridled a little. She was a pallid, tired woman with skeptical eyes. "Well, I'm sure that's very kind of her but I'm afraid it's no use. I've just come down from talking to her, nearly all her noon hour. She wouldn't go to the table. She's turned sullen, now. She won't take any interest in the Christmas preparations; wouldn't help the girls a bit." She sighed and looked at a table cluttered with paper paraphernalia for holiday decorations. In her world of bleak realities the tinsel trimmings for *fête* days left her cold. "I declare, Mr. Daragh, I believe we've worried with her long enough. I've about made up my mind that we'd better tell the young man ourselves and have done with it. I believe it's our duty."

"It's her right," said Michael Daragh.

"But, if she won't? They're planning to be married Monday, and Irene's coming to-day to take Billiken away with her."

"Let Jane Vail be trying her hand. Will you come up to her now?" He strode out of the room and Jane followed him, smiling back at Mrs. Richards with a deprecatory shake of her head. She wished the matron could know how much of an intruder she felt. But once out of the severe little office, mounting the stairs after Michael Daragh, her usual vivid sense of drama came back to her. This was, after all, what she had left the snug harbor for and put out to sea. This was better than tea with Sarah Farraday in the "studio"—than "little gatherings of the young people,"—than walking home with Marty Wetherby—than laughing painstakingly at the jokes of Teddy-bear's father. This was life more abundantly.

It didn't even matter that the grave Irishman took so for granted her dedication to this obscure girl's need. That had been very nice ... about the oil of joy.

"Here's where she'll be," he said, pausing at a closed door, "feeding her child."

"I'll do what I can," said Jane, lifting a look of girded resolve.

"I know that, surely," said Michael Daragh, knocking for her.

## CHAPTER VI

"Going for eighteen," he had said, but even that had not prepared Jane for the poignant youth of the girl. She looked a child, in her shrunken middy blouse, her fair hair hanging about her eyes. She was sitting on the floor, urging bread and milk on a fat and gurgling baby in a little red chair. She did not look up at first, but went on speaking to the child.

"Please, Billiken, eat for Muddie! Billiken—when it's the last time Muddie'll ever have to feed you? Take it quick or Muddie'll give it to the kitty-cat!"

"Ethel?" Jane closed the door softly and came toward her.

The other eyed her defensively and she tried to tidy her hair with hands that shook. On the left was a tiny, pinhead solitaire.

"I am Michael Daragh's friend, Ethel. He asked me to talk with you."

"Oh, my God!" Little red spots of rage flamed in her thin cheeks and she struck her hands together. "Can't they leave me alone? I've told 'em I won't talk any more. I've told 'em my mind's made up for keeps. But they keep at me and *keep* at me!"

Jane stood still. "I know I haven't any right here," she said, distressedly, "and I know you don't want me."

The girl scrambled to her feet and went to the bureau where she stood pulling and patting at her hair. "What'd you come for, then?" She muttered it under her breath, but Jane caught the words.

"Well, if you know Michael Daragh, you must know that when he asks you to do a thing, even a hard one, you—just do it!" Ethel did not comment or turn her head and Jane found the sense of drama which had borne her so buoyantly up the stairs deserting her. She wanted to go out of that drab room

and down those drab stairs and out of that drab house forever, but she resolutely forced herself to cross the room and bent down beside the giddy little red chair.

"Why do you call her Billiken?"

"Can't you see?" It was curt and sullen, not at all the tone for an Unfortunate Girl to employ toward a young lady anointed with the oil of joy. "She grins just like the Billikens do. Ever since she was a teenty thing." She gave her caller a long, rebellious stare. "You don't look like a nurse or a Do-gooder."

"I'm not," said Jane promptly. "I'm merely Michael Daragh's fr—" She broke off, catching herself up. Well, now, was she? His friend, after a few weeks of slenderest acquaintance? She had a feeling that the grave Irishman had obeyed the command to come apart and be separate. Rodney Harrison was a warm and tangible friend, but this stern and single-purposed person—"Michael Daragh asked me to talk with you," she said, sitting down beside the baby. "I'd love to feed her. May I?"

"No!" Ethel swooped down on her child, jealously snatching up the bowl. "Not when it's my last chance!" She leveled a spoonful and held it to the widely grinning Billiken. "Come! Gobble—gobble! Eat for poor Muddie!" A wave of self-pity went visibly over her and she held her head down to keep Jane from seeing her tears.

"I don't see how you can bear to give her up."

"D'you s'pose I want to?" she snarled it, savagely. Here was maternity, parenthood, another breed than that of the Teddy-bear's hot, pink nursery.

Jane picked up the baby's stubby little hand and patted it. "Then, why do you?"

Ethel's face flamed, but she looked her inquisitor more fully in the eye than she had done at any time before. "Because—Jerry! *Jerry!* That's why."

"Oh ... I see. You care more for him than for your baby?"

Now there came into the childish face a look of shrewd and calculating wisdom. "I can—I *could*—have other babies, but I couldn't ever have another—*him!*" Strength here, of a sort, it appeared, in this Weak Sister.

"It must be very wonderful to care for any one like that," said Jane, respectfully. The girl looked at her with quick suspicion, but her eyes were entirely honest. "What is he like, this Jerry person?"

Ethel relaxed a little and the tensest lines smoothed out of her face. "Well ..." she took her time to it, sorting and choosing her words, "he's not good-looking, but he looks—*good.*"

Jane nodded understandingly. "I know. I know people like that."

"Handsome men ... you can't trust 'em...." A look of wintry reminiscence came into her eyes for an instant. "I think more of Jerry than—than anybody, ever. I can't remember my folks. They died when I was just a little thing. My sister Irene, well, I guess she meant all right, only, she was so awful proper, always. She was always scared to talk about—things. I never knew *anything* till I knew—*everything!*" A small shiver went over her at that and she was still for a moment. "But Jerry!" Her mouth was young and soft again on that word. "He's different from anything I ever thought a man could be. He's almost like a girl, some ways. You know, I mean just as nice and comfortable to talk to and be with." She kept her gaze on Jane's warmly comprehending face, now. "And he's awful smart, too. The firm wants to send him to the branch store in Rochester and put him in charge of Gent's Furnishings. I guess I'd like to live there ... where everybody'd be strange. Jerry, he don't know where I live. I never let him bring me clear home. Mrs. Richards—she's the matron—she says he'll find out about me some day and hate me, but he won't find out. Nobody knows except Irene and the people here,—and nobody'd be mean enough to just go and tattle to him,—would they?"

"Oh, I don't believe any one would, intentionally. But" (how appeal to a sense of fair play where no fair play had been?) "that isn't what frightens me, Ethel."

"What? You needn't be scared about Billiken. She'll be all right. They're awful nice people, rich and everything, and they're crazy to have her. 'A blue-eyed girl with curly hair and a cheerful disposition,' they says to Irene. And they think her mother's dead."

"I wasn't thinking of Billiken."

"Oh," said Ethel, warily.

"I was thinking of Jerry. If he's as fine as you say he is—"

"He is!"

"Then I think it's pretty mean not to play fair with him, don't you? Come," said Jane with a brisk heartiness she was far from feeling, "tell him to-day, right now, when you go back."

She shook a stubborn head. "Now you're being just like all the rest of 'em. I thought you sort of—"

understood."

"I think I do. But I believe you must tell him."

"Well, it's too late now. Irene's coming today to take Billiken. It's all settled and everything. It's too late now, even if I wanted to. Besides"—she flamed with hot color again—"I couldn't tell him in the daytime ... right there in the store!"

"Oh, Ethel—in anything so big,—something that means your whole life,—time and place can't matter."

The girl began to dab at her eyes with a damp, small wad of blue-bordered handkerchief. "I just couldn't tell him in the daytime. I nearly did, last night. I meant to, 'cross-my-heart,' I did! We went for a walk, and I was just—just sort of beginning when a woman came sneaking by and—said something to him. *You* know. And he said—'Poor devil!' That's what he called her. '*Poor devil!*' That's just how he said it." Now she dropped her inadequate handkerchief and wept convulsively into her hands and a thin shaft of sunshine lighted up the meager solitaire.

Billiken leaned forward, her fat, small face filled with contrition and patted her mother on her bowed head. "Billiken gob—gobble din—din! Muddie not cly!"

It seemed to Jane that she was marching endlessly round a Jericho with walls that reached to the sky with a flimsy tin toy trumpet in her hands. How blow a blast to shatter them? "Ethel, the only thing you can bring him is the truth. Are you going to give him a lie for his wedding gift?"

She winced but her mouth was sullen. "You can make me feel terrible, but you can't make me tell."

"No," said Jane, "I can't make you tell. And Mrs. Richards can't make you tell, nor even Michael Daragh. But—your own heart can." She leaned swiftly nearer and put an arm about the flat, little figure. "Ethel, how much do you love him?"

"More'n—*anything* in the world."

"More than Irene?" The affirming nod was quick and positive. "More than the baby?" Again the nod, slower, but still sure. "But that's not enough, Ethel. You don't know anything about loving unless you love him more than you love yourself."

The girl wriggled out of her clasp and stared at her.

"Do you know what I'm trying to say to you? I don't know as much about loving as you do, Ethel. I've never loved any one—yet. But I know this! Your Jerry may never find out about your trouble, but whether he does or not, you couldn't be happy while you knew you were cheating him,—while you knew you had married him without telling him the thing it's his right to know. Ethel, you've got to love him more than yourself. You've got to love him more than you want him!"

The color ebbed slowly out of Ethel's small face and Billiken began to whimper. Far down the street the inevitable hurdy-gurdy ground out the inevitable "Marseillaise." "*La jour de gloire est arrivé!*" Was it?

"Love him,—more than I want him?" She said it over in a halting whisper. "Love him more than I—" Her lips moved inaudibly, forming the second half of the sentence. She bent over Billiken, crushing her in an embrace which made her cry. Then she caught up her foolish little hat and jammed it on without a glance at the mirror and flung herself into her coat. "I better go quick!" She was still whispering. "I better go quick!" She ran out of the room. Jane heard her on the stairs, then the slam of the front door and the sharp staccato of her feet upon the sidewalk.

Billiken, released from the spell, lifted up her voice and shrilly wept, passionately pushing away her bowl and spoon, roaring with rage when Jane tried to touch her. It seemed to Jane that there was furious accusation in the small, red countenance. "*Don't* shriek at me like that," she said, indignantly. "I'm not taking your mother away from you,—I'm trying to keep her for you!"

The door opened and Michael Daragh came in, his face glowing. "From the look she had on her when she flew by," he said, "I'm thinking you've surely won where the rest of us lost."

"I think she's going to tell him," said Jane, soberly.

"Glory be!" he said, fervently.

Jane sighed. "She's going to tell him, in the garish daylight, at the Gent's Furnishing counter. If she can! But she's left me with the 'heart-scald!'"

Michael Daragh had picked up Billiken at once and at once she had ceased to roar and soothed to a whimpering cry. "Hush, now *acushla*," he said, "hush now,—let you be still, *solis na suile!*" The baby stopped altogether, her ear intrigued by the purling Gaelic. "If you'll be slipping out now, the way she won't be noticing, I'll have her fine and fast asleep in two flips of a dead lamb's tail!"

Jane slipped out obediently and stepped softly down the precipitate stair. The matron looked up, her lips thinly compressed.

"Mr. Daragh thinks you have persuaded her to tell."

"I can't be sure. I think she meant to tell him when she left here."

"Well, I guess she'll change her mind by the time she gets to the store. She's very weak, Ethel is."

"But there isn't anything weak about the way she cares for the Jerry person."

Mrs. Richards' lips tightened to a taut line. "When they get mad crazy about a man" (the plural pronoun pigeonholed Ethel in a class) "they're like the Rock of Gibraltar."

"I'd like to stay the rest of the afternoon, if you don't mind," said Jane, at her winningest. "That is, if there's something I can do?" She looked at the littered table.

"How'd you like to cut out the paper joy-bells?" The matron melted a little. "A lady brought in the paper and the pattern yesterday, but I haven't had time to get the girls at them yet."

"But—that's magenta-colored!" Jane picked up a sheet of the paper.

"Well, I guess it isn't the regular Christmas shade, but I don't know that it matters, particularly. I expect it was some she had in the house. You might put the girls at cutting them out and you could do the Merry Christmas sign." She gave her a long and narrow placard in mustard green and shook out some pattern letters from an envelope. Then she rang a firm and authoritative bell. "I'll have the girls assemble in the dining room and they can work at the big table."

Immediately there were shuffling feet in the hall, slow feet on the stair, a heavy tread in the dining room behind them. Where was the youth in those young feet? There was something in the dragging gait that made Jane shiver. Seventeen of them seated themselves about the long table, all in huge, enveloping pinafores of dull brown stuff, coarse and stiff. They ranged in age from twenty to twelve but on every face, pretty or plain, stolid or wistful, sullen or sweet, she read the same look of crushed and helpless waiting. She spread out her materials and gave her directions and the girls set soberly to work. Seventeen heads bent in silence over the table; scissors creaked; upstairs a baby cried fretfully. There leapt into Jane's mind a memory picture of Nannie Slade Hunter before the joyfully hailed arrival of the Teddybear,—the tiny, white, enameled chiffonier with its little bunches of painted flowers spilling over with offerings—Lilliputian garments as 'fine as a fairy's first tooth'—the chortling pride of Edward R.—the beaming, nervous mother and mother-in-law—the endless flowers and books; Nannie herself, cunningly draped and swathed in Batik crêpe, prettier than ever before in her pretty life—

Jane went quickly out of the room and sat down on the bottom step of the stairs which seemed to be rushing headlong out of the house of drab tragedy.

"What is it?" Michael Daragh bent over her.

She lifted a twisting face. "Michael Daragh, I never cry, even at funerals, but I'm going to cry now!"

"Now that would be the great waste of time surely," he smiled down at her. "Masefield has the true word for it,—'Energy is agony expelled,' says he. Let you be making that Merry Christmas sign the while you're sorrowing."

"There they sit—in those awful, mud-colored pinafores—making paper joy-bells! I can't *bear* it! *Magenta* joy-bells!" The matron started upstairs and Jane drew aside to let her pass. "What are they going to have for Christmas, Mrs. Richards?"

"Well, we have a real nice dinner,—not turkey, of course, but a nice dinner," said the matron, "and every girl gets a pair of stockings and a handkerchief and a Christmas postcard—"

"With more joy-bells?" Jane wanted hotly to know, "or an angel in a nightdress and a snow scene?"

Mrs. Richards went firmly up the stairs. "We naturally cannot take much time to pick out the subjects, but every girl gets a pretty card."

Jane got swiftly to her feet. "Michael Daragh, do you know what I'm going to do?" She hadn't known herself an instant earlier. "I'm not going home to Vermont for the holidays! I'm going to stay and help with the Christmas here—and I'll spend the money I would have spent on my trip. I'm going to buy holly and greens and miles of red ribbon and acres of tissue paper and a million stickers, and seventeen presents—seventeen perfectly useless, foolish, unsuitable, beautiful things! Do you hear, Michael Daragh?"

"I hear," he said, and again his lean face lighted oddly from within, "I hear, God save you kindly, and I'm rare and thankful to you, Jane Vail!"



The doorbell cut jaggedly into Jane's exalted mood and she went into the office and sat down to work on the Merry Christmas sign. She meant to replace it with a joyful scarlet one, but meanwhile it would keep her fingers busy and give her an excuse for lingering until Ethel came back with the news of her confession and its results, and she could be planning the holiday cheer she meant to make in this melancholy house. She was still rather startled at her sudden decision but pleased with herself beyond words. To give up the festive return to the village ... her Aunt Lydia's damp-eyed delight, the "little gatherings of the young people" in her honor, the gay and jingling joy of the season ... and stay in a boarding house and make determined merriment for the Agnes Chatterton home. Then, tracing a large and ugly M, she laughed aloud. The truth was, she told herself flatly, she was pleased to the marrow of her bones to be here instead of there, not only in fresh fields and pastures thrillingly and picturesquely new, but away from the reckless necessity for settling the Marty Wetherby matter once and for all. And the big Irishman seemed almost pathetically pleased at her announcement, and it was entirely conceivable that Rodney Harrison would provide flesh-pots and diversions. All in all, she was cannily glad to abide by her hasty and handsome offer, and she worked steadily at her letters while Mrs. Richards wrote at her littered desk.

The doorbell rang again and Mrs. Richards peered out into the hall.

"Well, there's Irene, come for Billiken! That doesn't look much as if Ethel had told him." There was a good deal of triumph in the glance she flung at Jane. "Well, I can't say I'm surprised; I didn't think she'd have the courage."

Michael Daragh came in, his face grave. "Here's Irene, come for the child. I don't like the look of it."

"Well, *I'm* not surprised," said Mrs. Richards again.

A young woman presented herself at the office door. There was resolute respectability in her blue serge suit, brushed shiny, too thin for December wear. She carried a small straw telescope and her voice sounded capable and firm. "Can I go right up, Mrs. Richards?"

"Why, I suppose you may as well, Irene. You've come for Billiken?"

"Yes. I'm taking her on the night-boat."

"Wait," said the Irishman, as she turned toward the stairs. "Did Ethel tell him?"

"You mean, did she tell Jerry about—about the baby?" The good sister of the erring sister flushed painfully. "Not that I've heard of. I guess she knows better than that."

"There is no 'better than that,'" said Michael Daragh, sternly. "There is nothing better than the truth." The line of his lean jaw was salient.

"If I can once get her respectably married," said Irene, nippingly, her small face resolute, "I won't worry about what she tells or doesn't tell. It's been hard enough on *me*, I can tell you!" She went briskly upstairs and they heard her firm closing of the door.

"You see?" the matron wanted to know.

"I'm fearing we've lost the fight," said Michael Daragh.

Jane insisted on hope. "Perhaps she did tell him, and everything's all right, but she had no chance to see Irene and explain! Surely you won't let her take Billiken until we are sure?"

Then the front door opened quietly and Ethel came in to stand before them, her tragic and accusing eyes on Jane. "You made me tell," she said. "*You* made me!" And when Jane ran to her, questioning, eager, she pushed her away. "It's you! It's you did it!"

Michael Daragh strode to her and put a steadying arm about her shoulders. "Child, tell us the way of it."

Her teeth were chattering and her face seemed to grow whiter and whiter. "I told him. I told him everything. I kept saying to myself over and over, all the way to the store, just what she told me"—she flung a bruised and bitter look at Jane—"I must love him more than I want him"—and I went straight up to him at his counter, right there in the daytime. He was selling a necktie to a fat old man with a red neck. It was a dark blue tie with light blue spots on it." She added the detail carefully in her spent little voice. "I waited until he was gone and then I told Jerry. He just looked at me and *looked* at me, and made me say it again, and then—he just walked away without looking back. I had to go to work, but I watched and watched, and *watched*. He never came back to his counter. Pretty soon I just got crazy. I went over and asked. They said he was sick, and gone home." She sagged in Michael Daragh's hands and he lifted her and carried her into the matron's room, the matron hurrying beside him.

Then Jane Vail sat alone in the ugly office, contemplating the result of her eloquence. She could hear Ethel's sobbing and the matron's sharp treble, and the steady and rhythmic flow of the Irishman's voice. She rose to follow them, but the closed door halted her. They had wanted her to do this thing, to do the thing they had failed to do, and she had done it; and now they shut her away while they strove to heal where she had hurt.

Why had she done it? Why had she come at all? Why had she mixed and muddled in this sordid tangle which was none of her bright business? And why—chief of all whys—had she rashly and sentimentally offered to give up her holidays at home for the futile endeavor to make Christmas merry for these miserable girls?

Rage rose in her, rage at herself, rage at the sobbing, tarnished girlhood in there, at her sharp sister, at the matron, at the zealot who had dragged her into it all. Let him take Emma Ellis next time. This was her work, and she—Jane Vail—belonged in the world of clean and pretty things and in that world she would stay. She decided against undignified flight; she would wait for Michael Daragh and walk home with him to Mrs. Hills' boarding house, and she would be very civil about it all, but she would make it clear, even to an other-worldly settlement worker, that her brief detour into this sort of thing was finished; that she was on the highway again, speeding toward the place she had visioned for herself.

Now she drove her mind resolutely away from the Agnes Chatterton Home, to the Vermont village, then across the sea ... Florence ... the old palaces ... the Arno ... the little tea room in the Via Tornabuoni where she went sometimes at this very hour ... little heart-shaped cakes with green icing—Upstairs three babies began to scream at once, harshly and hideously, and an opened door somewhere at the rear of the house confessed to cabbage for dinner, and the present came swiftly and unbeautifully back. It came back with a bang. Jane resolutely set herself to think the thing out clearly. If the matron or the Irishman had persuaded Ethel to divulge her dark young past to her suitor, he would have repudiated her just the same; therefore she—Jane—might shake off her mantle of guilty responsibility. And after all, bleak as life looked to the little creature now, still sobbing stormily in Mrs. Richards' room, wasn't she safer than she would be married to her Jerry with that stalking secret?—"Whose happiness resteth upon a lie is as a spirit in prison." The whole world, the whole godly, gossiping, ferreting world, would have conspired together to tell him. Now she climbed nimbly to secure conviction in the eternal justice of things. The girl had gone gallantly, in garish daylight, holding her happiness in her hand, and told the truth. Now she was in the dust, but wouldn't it all come right for her in the end? Wouldn't it *have* to come right for her? The sense of helpless misery fell away from her and she was so confident of coming joy that she started toward the closed door of the matron's room. No; she would not go in, but she was warm with comfort. It seemed close and breathless in the office and she went to the street door and opened it for a swallow of the keen winter air, and stood out upon the top step, looking down into the dingy thoroughfare. There was a young man, half a block away, on the opposite side. He was walking slowly, looking at the numbers on the houses, and presently he looked across at the Agnes Chatterton Home. Then he stood quite still, staring at it.

Gladness and certainty rose in Jane and she beckoned to him.

He came over very slowly, and mounted the steps with lagging feet, and he was still staring, his eyes rather dazed.

"Oh," said Jane, "I think I know who you are!" She was a little breathless with happy excitement. "Aren't you—I don't know the rest of your name, but aren't you—Jerry?"

"Yes, ma'am," said the youth. There was a close color harmony about him; his jubilant cravat picked up the dominant note of his striped silk shirt and the royal purple of his hose struck it again, an octave lower. The removal of his velvet hat disclosed wide and flanging ears which gave his face an expression of quaint comedy, now at variance with his aghast and solemn look.

Jane's bright presence there on that dreary doorstep, her hailing of him, her knowledge of his identity, seemed to awake no wonder in him. He looked as if he had finished with surprise; as if nothing could ever startle him again.

"I want to see Ethel," he said.

"Yes!" said Jane, gladly. "Come!"

She left him in the correct and cheerless little reception room and flew up the headlong stairs and into Ethel's room, her face luminous. The good sister was just finishing her packing of Billiken's belongings into the telescope and the child, snug in tiny sweater and knitted cap, watched her absorbedly. Jane caught her up without a word and carried her out of the room.

"I'm about ready to go," the young woman called after her, sharply. "Please don't take her things off!"

Jane did not answer her. She sped down the stairs as swiftly and easily as a person in a dream, and opened the closed door boldly, without even a knock, and marched in, Billiken in her arms. She felt like an army with banners.

Ethel's first fury of grief had spent itself and she sat leaning limply back, her eyes closed, breathing in long, quivering sighs.

"Look," cried Jane, "here's Billiken!"

Billiken flung herself at her mother with a lilting squeal of joy, and Ethel's eyes opened and narrowed with a cold and appraising scrutiny. Her hands twisted together in her lap; she seemed to

be weighing and balancing. At length, with a little brooding cry, she caught the baby in her arms.

Michael Daragh smiled sunnily at Jane, but she had no instant to spare for him then. She pulled Ethel to her feet. "Come," she said, imperiously. "Come and bring Billiken!" She led her out of the room.

The matron and the Irishman followed them, wondering.

Jane was guiding the girl, her face buried against the baby's woolen cap. "Look!" she said again, at the door of the dim reception room.

Ethel halted on the threshold, peering through the gathering winter dusk. "Oh,—*Jerry?*" she gasped, uncertainly.

The young man from the Gent's Furnishings strode forward to meet her, his eyes on her blurred and swollen face. "Say, listen," he began, "say, listen—" Then his gaze dropped to the child in her arms and grew bleak, and Ethel shrank back and away from him, her eyes wide and terrified.

It seemed to Jane, standing there in the ugly hall of the Agnes Chatterton Home, between the sharp-visaged matron and the Irishman who looked like Botticelli's saint, as if all the love and pity in the world hung by a hair above the pit.

It was a new and unpleasing thing to Billiken, to find cold eyes upon her, level, unloving, hostile eyes, but she had an antidote. Gazing blithely back at him with the wide little grin which had earned her the name of "the God of Things as They Ought to Be," she held out her arms with a gurgling cry and flung herself at the young man with the gay cravat as she had flung herself at her mother two minutes before.

The hot color flooded his face, his freckles were drowned in a red sea, his flanging ears were crimson. Suddenly, gropingly, he reached out for them both, and got the two of them into his arms. "It'll be O.K.," he said, huskily, winking hard. "It'll be O.K.! Say, listen, I got it all figured out! They been wantin' me to go to the Rochester store anyway, and we don't know a livin' soul there!"

They went away, the other three, and left them there together, and there were two little dabs of color on the matron's high cheekbones and her sharp eyes looked oddly dim. "Well," she said, "well—I guess that's settled right enough. And I guess we've got you to thank for it, Miss Vail."

"We have, surely, God save you kindly," said Michael Daragh, and his face had what Jane called its stained-glass-window look.

She felt very flushed and humbled under their beaming approbation. "There's only her own courage to thank!" But she snatched up a bit of the despised decoration, her cheeks scarlet. "You know,—I'm so happy—so gorgeously, dizzily happy—I can hear that magenta-colored paper joy-bell ring a silvery chime!"

## CHAPTER VIII

It was November when Jane made her exodus from the Vermont village and her entry into New York, and by early summer she had written and sold three one-act plays for vaudeville which yielded plump little weekly royalties and gave her a reputation quite out of proportion to her output and experience. They began to advertise her sketches as "different" and to build up a vogue. "So and So in a Jane Vail act," said a pretty billboard, and Rodney Harrison gave himself jocularly proud airs as her discoverer and sponsor.

"I see clearly," said Jane, "that I must call you my Fairy God-brother!"

"I do not seem to crave the brother effect," said Mr. Harrison deliberately, before he gave his attention to a hovering head waiter. He was distinctly what her village called "not a marrying man," but he was beginning to have his moments of meaningful look and word.

"Well, then," said Jane, after agreeing to alligator pear salad, "shall we say Fairy God-cousin? That's a gay and pleasing relationship without undue responsibilities. Will that do?"

"That will do for the present," said Mr. Harrison. He regarded her across the small table with perfectly apparent satisfaction. Nothing bucolic here; a dark and gypsy beauty which glowed and kindled beside the fainter types about them, a wholly modish smartness, an elusive something to which he could not put a name, which gave him always the sense of glad pursuit. There had been in his early attitude, as she had divined, just a trifle of the King and the Beggar Maid, the Town Mouse and the City Mouse, but that was gone now. She knew his New York very nearly as well as he did himself and with her increased activities had come decreased dependence on him. She was either so gayly busy or so busily gay that she was able to accept only one invitation in four, which made it very

necessary to ask her early and often. He was a wary young man, Rodney Harrison, urban from head to heel; marriage had not entered into his calculations. Yet he was aware of his growing fondness and approval, his growing conviction that domesticity with Jane Vail need not of necessity be the curbing and cloying thing he had visioned.

It was May when he told her that his mother wanted to come to see her, and it was the following day that Jane wrote home to tell them she was coming to Vermont for the summer months. She wasn't quite ready for Rodney Harrison's mother to call on her; she wanted a little time and a little perspective, and she knew that the hour had struck for her to go back and put a firm if mournful period to the affair of Marty Wetherby. There had been constantly recurring scoldings by mail from Sarah Farraday and Nannie Slade Hunter, and, while he was the poorest and least articulate of correspondents, his stammering letters had still achieved a pathos of their own, and the thing was no longer to be shirked.

So she said good-bye at the boarding house to Mrs. Hills and Emma Ellis and Michael Daragh and at the station to Rodney Harrison; and went back in smart triumph with a wardrobe trunk full of clever clothes and the latest shining model in typewriters.

They were out in force to meet her; her Aunt Lydia Vail, happily tearful and trembling; Nannie Slade Hunter and Edward R. with the amazingly enlarged and humanized Teddy-bear, in their new roadster; Sarah Farraday, a little thinner after her hard-driven winter of teaching; and Martin Wetherby, panting a little even in his thin summer suit, removing his handsome Panama to mop a steaming brow.

The first evening was all Miss Lydia's, save that Sarah was coming over later to stay the night, and again Jane sat in the rosewood and mahogany dining room, served by the middle-aged maid who did not know that there was a servant problem, and ate the reliable stock supper—the three slices of pink boiled ham on the ancient and honorable platter of blue willow pattern ware, the small pot of honey, the two kinds of preserves, the hot biscuit, the delicate cups of not-too-strong, uncolored Japan tea, the sugar cookies, the pale custard.

Miss Vail had missed her niece acutely, as she would have missed a lovely elm from the street or the silhouette of the mountain which she got from her bedroom window, but she had wanted the dear girl to be happy, and she clearly was happy, brimmingly, radiantly, and she had gone down to her twice for merry and bewildered little visits and had come thankfully home again.

She beamed at her now across the table and insisted, as of old, that she eat two of the three slices of pink ham shaved to a refined thinness, and then they went into the pretty parlor and visited cozily until the little spinster's head began to jerk forward in the pauses, and Sarah Farraday, who had waited conscientiously until nine o'clock, appeared. Then Miss Lydia went upstairs to take off her plump, snug things and slip into her flannelette nightdress—the nights were still what she called "pretty sharp," and get into bed and "read until she got sleepy."

"Hannah says she sneaks in every night and snaps off the light after she's sound asleep," said Sarah. "It's a mercy she doesn't have to use a lamp,—she'd have burnt the house down years ago."

"She 'doesn't sleep,'" said Jane, looking tenderly after her, plodding plumply up the stairs, "she 'just rests her eyes for a moment.' Sally, let's go up to my room and have a regular, old-time talk-fest!"

So they went up the narrow stairs with their arms entwined about each other and took off their dresses and slipped into kimonos and let down their hair, but they found a strange and baffling constraint.

"Sally, *dear*," Jane determinedly broke the spell, "what's the silly matter with us?"

The blonde music teacher's eyes filled up with her ready tears. "It's—you've been away so long, and we've drifted so far apart.... Your life—your wonderful life——"

"Now, Sarah Farraday," her friend pounced upon her, "after the miles upon miles of letters I've written you, do you dare to feel that you don't know as much about my life as I do? Viper-that-bites-the-hand-that-writes-to-it! Why, I could have done another playlet—two—in the time I've taken to tell you everything!"

"You've been marvelous about letters," Sarah admitted with a grateful sniff, "but——"

"And what's more—and this admits of no argument—next winter you're coming down to me for a month of giddy gamboling and to soak your soul in symphonies and operas!"

Sarah Farraday gave a little gasp and her thin cheeks flushed. "Oh, my dear, you're a lamb to think of it, but of course I couldn't. It's wonderful, just even to *think* about it, but it couldn't possibly happen."

"Why not?"

"Because," said Sarah, doggedly, "it's much too good to be true."

"Now that," said Jane sternly, "is a wicked and immoral remark! There is nothing too good to be

true, and it's blasphemy to say so."

"Oh, well ... of course, with *you*—" She left her sentence trailing and let her thin hands fall in her lap limply, palm upward and stared at Jane. Her dark hair was shimmering and floating about her and her dark eyes were pools of light. "Janey," she leaned toward her and spoke wistfully, "are you really as impossibly happy as you look?"

"Happier," said Jane, promptly. She began to brush her dusky mane with long and sweeping strokes. "Still doing this a hundred and twenty times a night, Sally, no matter at what scandalous hour I come in."

But the other persisted with sudden sapience. "I mean, are you really as happy as you act, or are you just—gay?"

"Both," said Jane, stoutly. ("Sixty-two, sixty-three, sixty-four—) I've had a bright and shining time, work and play, with my feet very much on the earth,—or the pavements, rather. I'm satisfied, Sally."

"But oh," said Sarah, forlornly, "you said you wouldn't be really 'going away' from us, but you have! Millions of miles away—a whole world away, Jane! You've proved your point,—succeeded beyond our wildest dreams——"

"Not beyond *my* wildest dreams, old dear," said her best friend with happy impudence. "You were more modest for me than I was for myself!"

"—beyond our wildest dreams," Sarah repeated stubbornly, "and you can carry on your work just as well here, now, and wouldn't it be the loveliest, most natural thing in the world for you to stay at home? Jane—*poor* old Marty!" She ran to Jane and flung her arms emotionally about her.

"Sally, there's no more chance——"

But the other cut in, panic-stricken, "Oh,—don't make up your mind now—to-night! Wait! Just spend the summer in the dear old way, as we've always done, and see if you don't fit right into your old niche again, with—with——"

"With a steadily fattening Marty," said Jane, bright-cheeked, "and a hot, pink nursery with a fat and well-oiled Kewpie?"

"Jane," said Sarah coldly, "there are some things too sacred to——"

"To be anything but decently and sanely frank about," said Jane. "My child, the story isn't going to have that particular happy ending for which you pant. You see all my life in a proscribed pattern. Like a sentimental ballad's second verse ... back to the grassy meadows ... childhood's happy hours again.... Once again he sang—

"For you are my li—hittel—sw—heet—heart."

"Then," said Sarah with conviction, "it's either the man-you-met-on-the-boat, or that Irish missionary person!"

Jane laughed. Wasn't it amazing how good old Sally, herself conceived for celibacy, yearned to mate up every one within her ken! Nature's little way of evening up, perhaps; if Sarah herself was to carry on the race chain, was she to make it up by tireless toil in urging others on? "Sally, Michael Daragh, as I've tried to make clear, is an over-soul. His large feet lug his large frame about on this terrestrial sphere, but in reality he isn't here at all. He is quite literally absent from the body and present with the Lord. As I told you before,—a large body of man entirely surrounded by conscience. No more aware of me, as a woman, than he is of Emma Ellis—and you don't get the force of that"—she grinned shamelessly—"unless you know Emma."

"Then, how about—the other one?"

Jane considered, picking and choosing her words as she loved to do. "Well, Michael feels I am too much of the world, Rodney that I am too little; Michael is above me, spiritually speaking, and Rodney is beneath—which would, of course, make him much the pleasanter person to live with! Rodney is thoroughly and comfortably this-worldly; Michael is—other-worldly! This is the truth of the matter, Sally; Rodney Harrison is keen about my neat little brain and Michael Daragh is gravely concerned about my soul, but I think neither one is interested in my heart!"

She sprang to her feet and threw a gorgeous robe about her. "Come along, Sally! Let's go down and make some chocolate! I've come to crave nocturnal nourishment, and much as I adore talking about myself I've really had enough of the topic for to-night. How many pupils have you now? And how near is the baby-grand?"

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She stayed three months at home, tapping briskly at her typewriter in the mornings and giving her afternoons and evenings to the old innocuous routine, and it was said of her that she had changed and gotten citified, of course, but seemed very much interested in everything and everybody, and many

were the placid hours in the pink nursery, the drives with the Edward R. Hunters in the new roadster, the teas in the burlapped studio with Sarah Farraday, the meetings of the Ladies' Aid and the Tuesday Club where she gave gay little talks and readings and vague old ladies asked her gently if she was still going on with her literary work.

The only radical change was Martin Wetherby, whose case came up for decision at once, in spite of the sage counsels of the Teddy-bear's father.

The second evening at home Miss Lydia Vail had risen flutteringly and left them alone on the porch in the soft dusk, and at once he had plunged to his doom. There was no serene confidence about him this time, no snatching her into a short-breathed embrace; he was rather pathetically humble before her new poise and achievements, pleading, desperate.

"Marty, dear," said Jane unhappily, "I don't want to be unsympathetic, but indeed I don't think I'm ruining your life! You're so nice and young, and you're doing famously at the bank! Oh, I know it's just because you've held to the idea for so long—and so many other people have, and made it seem—settled. It's just your *habit*—not your heart, that's aching!"

But in spite of this cheering reassurance she had to admit to Sarah that Marty continued to droop at the corners, and to have, in spite of the assistant cashiership, a look of shaken confidence. His mother, that former arranger of little gatherings for the young people and dispenser of light refreshments, treated Jane with coolness, and had her adherents here and there in the village.

Jane went back to New York the first of September and sold immediately the one-act play she had written during the summer, and was engulfed in the business of putting it on, and presently Rodney Harrison brought her a well-known actor from the legitimate who wanted to rest and make a corpulent salary in the two-a-day, and she succeeded in fitting him to a sketch. It brought her fresh laurels and a larger audience and a better royalty, and she told herself stoutly (as Rodney Harrison had first told her) that it didn't matter in the least that he wanted a good deal of broad and rather edgy comedy and, failing to get it from her, had put it in himself, and, therefore, had his name on the program as joint author. Every one would know that the clean and clever little story was her own and the edginess his. She took great pains to write this to Sarah and to repeat it often to herself and she glowed under Rodney Harrison's pride in her and the cordial respect of the booking offices and the dazzled admiration of the boarding house.

But one humid evening, when all the vigor and backbone seemed to have melted out of the world, Michael Daragh asked her to ride with him on the top of the bus to Grant's Tomb and walk back along the river, and presently they sat down on the damp grass like a shop girl and her gentleman friend and looked off across the river, shining in the moonlight, and after a silence Jane said pleasantly, with her new admixture of aloofness and indulgence, "Well, Michael Daragh, I know you haven't marched me here merely to revel in the beauty of the evening. It's more a case of—'thank you,' said the oysters, 'we've had a pleasant run!' You may as well begin. I'm feeling very peaceful and very prosperous. Who is the poor thing you're concerned with now?"

And the big Irishman, a dull flush mounting in his lean cheeks, faced her squarely. "The poor thing I'm concerned with now, God save you kindly, is yourself, Jane Vail!"

She hadn't any words in that first dazed moment. She sat staring at him, her great eyes wide.

"It's yourself, surely," he said, sternly, "the way you've wandered from the high road and lost yourself in a bog."

She was still too startled and bewildered to be angry. "I haven't the vaguest idea what you mean. Have you?"

"I have, indeed, Jane Vail. The thing you've just written and sold, now,—are you proud in your heart of it?"

"Certainly I am," she said stoutly, her voice beginning to warm with resentment. "It isn't a classic, of course, but it's a thoroughly workmanlike, snappy little act, sure to get over, and—"

He shook his head. "Lost in the bog you are, and sinking deeper every day."

"Sinking, my good Michael? If you'll read this week's *Variety* you'll find there are those who talk about my phenomenal rise! I loathe saying things like that about myself, but you make me do it, in decent self-defense. It's simply that you don't understand these things—that you're looking at them from the wrong angle." She talked on, angrily, defensively, but inwardly she was feeling attacked and abused and crushed. There had been nothing but praise and congratulation and rejoicing now for ten months, and this shabby settlement worker dared—"I'm sure you mean to be very kind," her voice was ice and velvet, "but I'm afraid you've got rather in the way of lecturing young women, haven't you? And I really think you might save your admonitions and exhortations for those who need and want them. Personally, I'm entirely satisfied with the way I'm getting on."

"Getting on,' yes, God forgive you," he said mournfully, "and that's all you're doing, Jane Vail!"

"I consider you incapable of judging a matter like this," said Jane with cool disdain. "You see life always through a stained-glass window and it gives you distorted values. What do you mean,—only

'getting on'?"

"Wasn't it yourself told me what you said to your friend back in the village—that you were 'going on'? Woman dear," the purling brogue dropped an octave, "there's the wide world of difference between the two! 'Getting on' you are surely, the way your name screams from the billboards and your bank balance fattens like a stalled ox, but are you 'going on,' Jane Vail? Are you 'going on'? Woman, dear," the purling brogue—"the rare, high places you can climb if you will? Or will you stop content with the pavement, the likes of you that was made for the mountain peaks? Are you going on, I say? Answer me, Jane Vail!"

But instead, with flashing eyes and scorching cheeks she took leave of him, requesting him curtly not to follow, and walked alone to the Drive and hailed a bus, and sat staring darkly ahead of her as it jolted and swayed down the long blocks to Washington Square.

When Michael Daragh came down to breakfast next day he found the dining room in a state of excited conjecture. Miss Vail, dressed for a journey, had roused Mrs. Hills at six in the morning to say that she was going out of town for several weeks, and had immediately driven off in a taxi with her handbag and suitcase, her steamer trunk and her typewriter.

## CHAPTER IX

Nevertheless, when Emma Ellis came in to luncheon, a little early, the third day following, she espied at Michael Daragh's place a letter with a Boston postmark, addressed in a firm, small hand she knew. She was the only person in the room and she had time to examine it thoroughly, even as to thickness, before Mrs. Hills came in. It happened that there were mail deliveries just before the three meal times and it was the boarding-house keeper's guileless custom to sort and distribute letters at the table, thus saving a wearisome climb and much pedestrianism through long halls.

"Well, I've got a line from Jane and I'm free to say I'm relieved. I was afraid she was sick or something, rushing off like that, rousing me out of a sound sleep at six in the morning, just saying she was going out of town. *I* supposed, of course, she was going home to her Aunt Lydia Vail."

"Didn't she?"

"No, she didn't." Mrs. Hills took the note out of her apron pocket and consulted it. "No, she's going to Maine. Foot'n alone. Says she needs quiet for some special work."

"Mr. Daragh has something from her, too." Emma Ellis stood behind the Irishman's chair, her pale eyes lapping up the inscription.

"No!" said Mrs. Hills, advancing with interest, frank and unashamed. "You don't say! Well, he has! Sure's you're a foot high! Well, now, that beats me!"

Emma Ellis tucked in her lips in a way she had before making a certain type of remark. "It is rather strange.... They were out walking in the evening, and in the morning she left, precipitately."

"'Tis kinder queer," Mrs. Hills clucked. "Couldn't have quarreled or anything—never paid enough attention to each other for that."

"Oh," said Emma Ellis in a hushed voice, "don't you think Miss Vail has always devoted a great deal of attention to Mr. Daragh?"

"Well, Jane's a great one to make up to folks and be friendly; always was, as a child. I can remember her, four years old, after her folks died and she came to live with Miss Lydia. Wasn't afraid of anything or anybody, ever. Used to slip out and run off down Main Street after a peddler or a gypsy or anybody she took a fancy to. But—" she came back into the present—"Mr. Daragh's been kinder queer these last two, three days. But then, far's that goes, he's always queer. Oddest mortal I ever met up with in all my born days. Odder'n Adam's off ox."

"If it is odd," said the Settlement worker, dull color flooding her sallow skin, "for a man to turn his back on greed and gain and devote his life to altruism—"

"Now, now," said the boarding-house keeper, pacifically, "you've no call to take me up like that. Land knows I set a great store by Mr. Daragh, if he is Irish as the pigs. Never had a human being under my roof that was easier to suit and made less fuss, but he's *queer* and I'd say it on my dying bed!"

The other woman stood looking down at Jane Vail's pretty letter which managed, in spite of the plain, creamy envelope and the many alien hands through which it had passed, to retain a startling individuality, and she spoke in the little smothered voice which was her proclamation of intense feeling. "If—*she*—with the life she leads—has—has disturbed Mr. Daragh—"

"Now, then, you look here," said the Vermont villager with sudden sharpness, "I guess her life is about as important as anybody else's I might name! I guess if Mr. Daragh's 'disturbed,' as you call it, it's no worse for him than it's been for others. My land, Jane Vail could of had her choice of the town, where she comes from. There's *four* wanted her, to my certain knowledge, and they say Martin Wetherby (Wetherby Ridge is named for his family—they go back to Revolutionary days) never *will* get over it. And I guess that Mr. Harrison that rolls up here in taxis and limousines is sitting up and taking notice, sure's gun's iron! And if Mr. Michael Daragh—"

"Sh ..." said Emma Ellis.

The big Irishman came into the room, graver even than usual, but his eyes lighted warmly at sight of the missive at his place. He nodded to the watching women, tore it open and read it swiftly, and as he read the gladness spread and deepened in his face.

"I had a letter from Jane, too," said Mrs. Hills, seating herself. "Going to Maine for some special work she's got to do."

"Yes," said Michael Daragh. "Special work, indeed." He folded the letter and put it back in his pocket, and the table filled up with the other members of the household, the music students and the school teachers and the elderly concert-going ladies in their staid silks ... all the sound and sensible persons whom the missing boarder made so drab and colorless by her glowing presence. He smiled sunnily at Emma Ellis and was astonished to see tears in her light eyes, but he was used to tears and woes and secret sorrows, so he smiled again and more convincingly and went sturdily on with his meal. When he was alone in his bare and austere room on the top floor he took out Jane's letter and read it again, slowly and with thankful care.

I've decided to forgive you, Michael Daragh, it began, but it takes a bit of doing! It's easy enough to forgive any one for being in the wrong; that's a really pleasant and soothing sensation; but to pardon you for being in the right—that's taken me all these hours! I said that you always saw life through a stained-glass window and that it gave you distorted values, didn't I? That was temper, pure and simple. You were perfectly right to wail like one of your own Banshees because the likes of me—once content when the pale shadow of Pegasus passed her by—is become an ink-spattered, carbon-grimed gold digger! Ten months ago, shivering and quivering over "ONE CROWDED HOUR," I cowered back in my semi-occasional taxicab and watched the meter with a creeping scalp.... Now I can ride from Yonkers to the Square and admire the scenery all the way. But this isn't what I intended to do. It's been warm, human, jolly sort of work, knitting up the spatted broker in the box to the newsboy in the gallery and I've adored it, but I've lost my way, Michael Daragh. It isn't what I intended to do; it isn't what I intended to be; the dew is drying on my dreams and my soul shrieks S.O.S.!

For the first time in my snug, smug life I've had large chunks of truth told me; I didn't like it. I don't *enjoy* it even yet, but I've arrived at the decent stage of gratitude, Michael Daragh. Thank you—and good-by. Shall I send you bulletins of my pilgrim progress? I'm off to a lean, clean island in Maine, to live on eight dollars a week and snare back the thing I lost.

JANE VAIL.

Thereafter, Mrs. Hills and Emma Ellis were to see and to marvel over the creamy buff envelopes which came to the Irishman, now thin, now thick, postmarked in Maine, often only two or three days apart, never less frequently than once a week. The boarding-house keeper had her own pleasant little note, occasionally, and Emma Ellis had three conscientious picture postcards, but it was to Michael Daragh that the letters came in a steady stream.

"Mark my words," said Mrs. Hills, "there's nothing in it. My land, he's as offhand about 'em as if they were circulars, and I don't believe he answers one in six."

"Yet she continues to write him constantly," said Emma Ellis.

"Well, if she does, it's *her* business, that's all I've got to say," said the older woman, dangerously. "Jane Vail never ran after anybody yet and I don't believe she's going to begin now. He says—and *she* says—she's doing some special work, and I suppose maybe he's advising her about it."

"I've never understood before that Mr. Daragh was a literary authority," said the Settlement worker in her little, smothered voice.

"Well, I'm free to say it beats me. But all I know is, Jane Vail's nobody's fool."

And Michael Daragh, meanwhile, read his letters in his room, monklike in its simplicity, three times, and then he tore them up, quickly, the line of his lean jaw salient. The second one to come had been dated at six in the morning, on the wharf at Bath, and ran—

I'm shivering, Michael Daragh,—shivering in September! The incredible freshness



of this morning, the bracing miracle of cold! I left Boston on the night boat and the stewardess rapped me firmly up at three-thirty to see the sun rise. I stayed stubbornly in my berth, at first, but presently a length of Quaker gray sky interlined with faintest rose brought me to my elbow and then to the window. The little steamer was feeling her cautious way up a river of dull silver between banks of taupe and mauve. After a moment I could pick up objects here and there in somber silhouette—a windmill, a battered barn, crude landings reaching out to graze the boat. In that tremulous moment before the break of day, shore and stream and sky melted and ran together in the liquid pattern of an abalone shell. Then, suddenly, the sun shot up over the rim of the world, "out of the gates of the day," a clear persimmon, gorgeous as a Chinese lantern, and the realm of faery warmed into reality,—river and river banks, houses and little hummocky hills.

I must walk now to keep warm. There is a young old woman in shabby corduroy footing it briskly to and fro, who may be going to take my toy steamer,—tossing a mane of smoke and champing its bit at the upper wharf—and I'm going to speak to her.

*7 A.M. Going up the River.*

She was taking the down boat, but she gave her valuable experience to me. She asked me for which island I was heading, and when I said I didn't know,—that I meant to line them up and say,—"*My-mother-told-me-to-take-this,—*" she said,—"*Oh, then do take Three Meadows!*" She has been there all summer, and she thinks I can board at the same place—with Angelique Larideau Gillespie, "*Mis' Deac'n Gillespie.*" She is Canadian-French and the only woman on the island who can cook any other way than frying. The bad little hotel is closing. She was so merry and footloose and free, Michael! That's exactly the sort of old maid I mean to be—

*"Love of roving foot and joy of roving eye—"*

We have been wriggling up a cunning little river, bumping into clumsy landings here and there and now the porter-purser-steward- newsagent-cabin-boy-and-guide says the next one is mine.

Wish me luck, Michael Daragh!

J. V.

*Three Meadows, Maine,  
Friday Afternoon.*

It would be tea time anywhere else, Michael Daragh, but it gives no tea here. Eating between meals is deplored and is referred to as "*piecing.*" Will you ask Mrs. Hills to express my tea basket and two cups?

This is a lamb of an island. The land lifts away to low hills and the village has splashed a little way up on the sides. A curtain of filmy fog has just risen clear of the treetops and everything is graciously gray. No one ever comes so late in the season and this awful, little hotel is closing,—it ought to be closed and sealed forever. Everything about the tiny town is refreshing. A citizen finished up a game of checkers before he went down to consider the case of my trunk. Then it took him some time to wake up his horse, which did a bewildered Lady Macbeth up the street. I was walking beside, and suddenly a roly-poly puppy slipped away from a boy and ran straight under the clumsy hoofs.... You never heard such *ki-yi's*. You'd think he was being vivisected. There was a shrieking streak of white and he disappeared under a culvert. The old mare stopped, wide-awake and horror-stricken, and the boy—a pitiful little person with his head held tautly back, almost a hunchback—and the driver and I flew to the spot and all the village Hectors laid their helmets by and gave themselves to the hour. The sweetest old man in rusty black laid right down flat on his stomach and peeked into the dusty tunnel, calling, "*Come, pup! Come, pup! Come, dear!*" But the yammerings went on.

Finally the blacksmith next door put down a pink horseshoe and came out. I'm much obliged for blacksmiths nowadays, aren't you, Michael Daragh? I love their leaping fires and their worn, leather aprons and their dim, rich Flemish interiors,—in our soft world of push buttons.

This one said, "*Was they a string around his neck, Dan'!*" Then he went back into

his shop and returned with a long stick with a bent nail in the end and began to fish absorbedly into the culvert. Presently a wild crescendo of shrieks announced his catch. I shut my eyes and covered my ears and when I looked again he was hauling out a quivering lump of baby dog. He felt him all over with grimy, gentle fingers and "allowed they warn't nothin' broke ... just skairt him outer a year's growth," handed him back to the boy and went again to his horseshoe. The people pressed close with little clucks of sympathy and made the nicest fuss about it, and the boy turned out to be Daniel Gillespie and I went right on home with him and arranged to move there tomorrow—his mother desiring a day in which to "red up" for me. I wanted to go at once—I'm so afraid this hotel might close with a snap, with me on the inside. At noon to-day I did not crave any of the ready-to-wear effects on the zebra menu card and asked the aloof young lady under the pompadour how long the chops would take. "Bout fifteen minutes." "Very well, then," I said, "I'll take the chops." "*Ain't* any."

Don't you adore that, Michael Daragh?

*The Next Friday,  
At Deacon Gillespie's.*

The top of the morning to you, Michael Daragh! Here in the rich cream of the day we're waiting for the mail, Dan'l and I and the pup. Guess where? In the graveyard, and I'm sitting on a tumbled-over tombstone. I wish I could make you see this spot. I've always hated cemeteries, the sleek, prosperous, well-fed, well-groomed sort, but this is indeed God's Acre. You step over the broken stones of the wall into a land of gracious gray; gray stone and moss, gray sky and feathery fog. Twice only in my vista a note of color—a low-growing lobelia, intensely blue against the foot of a new grave, and further on a brave geranium, flaunting the scarlet flag of defiance at death; for the rest, the quiet gray of peace and permanence. Involuntarily, one treads softly, as in a room with sleepers ... sleepers of a long, soft sleep ... who have laid them thankfully down to rest and left no call!

I hear the *klip-klup* of Lizzie, the postman's horse, so I can't tell you about the Gillespies until next letter.

Dear M.D., I'm growing so nice you wouldn't know me for the frenzied vaude-villain of a fortnight past. Some of the old cells in my brains are coming to life again. *Thanks*, Michael Daragh! Do you know what M.D. stands for?—Do-er of Miracles. Isn't it pretty much of a miracle to make me turn my back on five orders and bring my soul up here to renovate it?

J. V.

*Tuesday.*

Michael Daragh, I'm up in my cunning little room with its heaving ceiling and its braided mats and patchwork quilt, and I can look down on the corner of the graveyard and see Dan'l and his dog waiting for Uncle Robert. He is not a real postman but he drives down for his own mail every day and "stops by" with the Gillespies'. (Not that they ever have any!) He's the old man who got down on his rusty black stomach to peek into the culvert and call "Come, pup, come, *dear!*" He's the sweetest old thing with Dan'l. The child lives in constant hope of a letter, and every day Uncle Robert (he's everybody's uncle) says, "Wall, not *to-day*, Dan'l!" And then Dan'l and the pup trot home.

Dan'l is the most appealing child! I've always fancied the freckles and splinters and grime and cheek type of little boy, but Dan'l gets into your heart, some way. He makes me think of Andrea del Sarto's young St. John in the Wilderness, for he has, in addition to the unearthly sweetness in his eyes, a warmth of coloring at variance with the drained fairness of these islanders. His Canadian mother explains that,—"*her that was Angerleek Larrydoo*," as the neighbors say, and that just expresses it. She was—but she isn't any more. She's just the Deacon's "*woman*." (That is his own gallant phrase: "I guess likely my woman'll cal'late she c'n do fer y'u," he said when I asked for board.)

She has a sort of petrified prettiness, the ghost of girlhood in a face furrowed and sagging with fretted years. Age and unhappiness have hardened about the sweetness of long ago—like a rose imbedded in ice at a country fair.

And the Deacon! I didn't know it gave his like, in these lax days. He has a

beautifully chiseled old face with an eagle beak and ice-blue eyes, and he looks as if his favorite winter sport were Turning Erring Daughters Out into the Snow.

Dan'l is the only child at home now and they both adore him,—the mother with timid tenderness and the old man with fierce repression. Even the pup takes on character from the family. I call it Sweet-Alice-Ben-Bolt, because it very nearly weeps with delight when you give it a smile and trembles with fear at your frown. The Deacon is of that large and austere order of persons who "like dogs, in their place"; S.A.B.B. wears his stumpy, little tail at half mast whenever the head of the house is near.

There is some mystery about Dan'l's watching for a letter. His mother yearns over him and says,—"But, maybe to-morrow, Dannie!" but his father sneers, and then the child seems to shrivel before my eyes.

I wish I could slip some silver-gray fog in this letter, to rub on your burning brow!

J. V.

*Some Day in October.*

My days slip by like pearl-gray beads on a rosary, Michael Daragh. I honestly haven't an idea of the date. But I know Dan'l's story. We were sitting on the toppled-over tombstone of a sturdy old patriarch who had buried four wives, just after the postman went by one day, and the child said, defensively, as if in answer to my thought—

"But I did get a letter, once!"

I kept mouse-still, and he told me. Last summer there came to Three Meadows a lazy, charming, gypsy sort of fellow from nowhere, stony broke, to whom the Deacon gave work for his board. Out of Danny's clipped phrases I could build up the rogue's personality,—the gay, lavish, careless, happy-go-lucky-ness which warmed the cockles of the little lad's hungry heart.

He was here four months, and then a pal wrote him he could get him a job as handy man with a small circus then in Vermont. But Dan'l's beloved vagabond hadn't a sou, and before he could tramp there, the show would be far on its southern way. Naturally, the Deacon refused a loan—I can just see the way his mouth would snap shut like a trap, but Dan'l, what with egg money and his tiny garden, and errand money from summer boarders, had gathered together twenty slow dollars, and he came lavishly forward. The rover blithely promised to pay him back in two monthly payments. He's never sent a penny. He wrote once; Danny showed me the letter, worn with many rapt readings,—a silly, flowing hand which looks as if it had been done up in curl papers over night—and explained that he'd been sick, and had to buy clothes, but next month, *sure!* And Dan'l was a sport and true blue and a little old pal, and he'd never forget him.

Dan'l's "bein' so puny" saved him the whole brunt of his father's rage, but this sneering scorn has been harder to bear,—and the amazing part of it is that the boy doesn't really care about the money,—lean little Islander though he is. That is merely the symbol of his friend's good faith. "Ef only he'd jest write 'n tell me things," he sighed, "th' money c'd wait. He needs it worse'n I do."

Meanwhile, with eternal-springing hope in his little flat chest he trots down to the graveyard corner every day, and every day Uncle Robert says, with a cheery chirp in italics, "Wall, not *to-day*, Dan'!"

The child is getting thinner and paler, now the sharp weather is coming. His father wrote a laborious letter by the lamp, one evening, and a week later a good gruff old doctor came over from the mainland and chaffed Danny about his pup and told him to play in the sun and drink plenty of milk and not to fret about school this year. I waylaid him privately and asked if there was anything I could get or do—a tonic, a change. He patted my shoulder and said, "Land t'goodness, no! That youngun's been a-dying ever since I borned him, fourteen years ago. He warn't meant for old bones."

Oh, Michael Daragh, I can't stand it—poor little Daniel in a Lion's Den of broken faith, and scorn, and creeping death! What can I *do?*

J. V.

## CHAPTER X

But it was well into October before the Irishman got the letter which he had been waiting for—the one which sent the color mounting gladly in his lean cheeks. It was not long, but it fairly sang with jubilation and the feel of it in his hand was warm.

### *On a Gold and Scarlet Afternoon.*

Michael Daragh, I'm at work! Steadily, sanely, surely, at work again!

Long ago, before I began to run after strange gods, I got a story back from the *New England Monthly*—that Dean of Magazines in her sober brown frock with no jewels or adornments at all,—with a quite wonderful personal note. If I had followed it up, I do believe I'd have landed on that stern and rock-bound coast, but I went over to the flesh pots instead. Now I have made a stern and rock-bound compact with myself. I'm not coming back to New York, and you are not to write me a line, until I've written a tale that brown-gowned magazine will take. "Where there is no vision, the people perish," the Deacon thundered, at a meeting. I was very near to perishing, when you scolded me awake, Michael Daragh, M.D., Miracle Do-er, God save you kindly!

That vaudeville work—and I shall do more of it, some day—was like a fast and furious game of tennis under a scorching sun; now I'm delving in a dim, cool library.

I'm going to be as patient as a locust bridge-builder. I know that flocks of long envelopes are coming back, bringing their tales behind them, but one day I shall hear a jubilant note in the *klip-klup* of Lizzie's hoofs and Uncle Robert will hand me an envelope of bewitching smallness, with a tiny typed letter inside.... "It is with very great pleasure...."

Until *that* day break, and the shadows flee away—

J. V.

It was Michael Daragh's custom to read these letters three times, carefully, and then to tear them in pieces which would be annoyingly and impossibly small to the chambermaid, and to throw them into his waste-paper basket, but this time, after his third perusal, instead of destroying it he put it away in his worn leather wallet. "I'll be keeping it, just, till the next one comes," he told himself, silently, "so I can be comparing the way she's coming on—God love her."

But the next letter to come and several following held no mention of her task. It was as if she had opened the heart of her mind further than she meant to do, and was shyly standing in front of it, now, talking of things remote and removed.

### *Friday Morning.*

I've found a way to make Dan'l happy, M.D. I was reading to him last night, and suddenly he said in his shy, repressed way, "Was you ever to a circus?" I started to say that they bored me to the bone, even in infancy, but I happened to glance up and see his eyes. He's been following his beloved vagabond about in his heart, you see. So I tried to create a circus for him—the round rag rug was the sawdust ring, the steaming kettle was the calliope, wheezing a strident song about a wooden leg, and out of thin air came the haughty ringmaster and the clown and the pink acrobats, and I remembered thankfully that I'd memorized Vachel Lindsey's "Kallyope" long ago—

"Tooting joy, tooting hope,  
I am the Kallyope!  
Hoot, toot, hoot, toot,  
Willy, willy wah hoo,  
Sizz—fizz—"

Dan'l held his breath, his eyes starry, and his mother stopped her work, and I could see that the old man was listening slyly. Do you know it, Michael? It's pure witchcraft of words.

"See the flags; snow-white tent;  
See the bear and elephant;  
See the monkey jump the rope;  
Listen to the lion roar,  
LISTEN TO THE LION ROAR!  
Listen to the Kallyope, Kallyope, Kallyope!"

(He must have been thinking of the Deacon's sort:)

"I will blow the proud folk low,  
Humanize the dour and slow,  
I will shake the proud folk down——"

Dan'l went to sleep pink and happy. So did I!

J. V.

*Wednesday.*

I haven't told you about the "Low-down Wilkes," have I? They're the pleasantest people in Three Meadows and we're very clubby. The nice old maid on the wharf at Bath told me about them and advised me to have the woman do my washing, but warned me that I should have to come unto her delicately, like Agag. Being the poorest and most destitute family on the Island they are correspondingly proud and "techy."

Shiftlessness is a fine art with them, they've carried it so far. Last winter they lived in a very good two-story house, and as it was a very bitter season and Mr. L.D.W. was "kinder run down, someway," he very ingeniously burnt it for fuel while they were living in it,—first the partitions in the second story, then the floor, then the stairs, then the downstairs walls and doors. Wasn't that clever of him? Now it's just a charred shell, and—grace of a more opulent relative—they are camping in an unused barn. They fish a little, and pick blueberries, and wonder, vaguely, "jest how they'll make out, come wintuh."

I wish you might have seen her when, after a long social call, I subtly introduced the subject of laundry and dilated on my helpless predicament. She weighed and considered and consulted with her spouse, and said at last, "Wall, I don't keer if I do—but I wunt fetch'n kerry fer nobuddy!" Since when I have myself fetched and carried my garments, and they are rapidly taking on the tinge of prevailing Island grayness. The L.D.W.'s are gentle and gay, and they love Dan'l and "Angerleek" even if she is "a furriner," and they sigh that the Deacon is "a good man, but ha'ad." His severity has driven all the older children away from home, two of them girls. (Wasn't I right about the Erring Daughters and the Snow?)

I asked Mrs. L.D.W. if I might bestow upon her a tailored suit which has almost worn me out. She hesitated, shifted the 1920 model in Low-Down Wilkes to the other hip (babies are their only lavish luxury!) and allowed she didn't mind, if I was a mind to fetch it down to the graveyard corner some night after dusk. Every human being in Three Meadows has seen me wear it and could describe it to the last stitch and button, and every one will know where she got it. Nevertheless, in a world of foot-lickers, isn't pride like that delicious?

I did for myself when I started that indoor circus effect; sentenced to be Scheherazade! Lady chariot drivers and spotted clowns and strange beasts swarm through the prim, gray farmhouse. Dan'l has stayed in bed for two days, and Uncle Robert's chirp is growing husky.

Between circus performances I'm working like a riverful of beavers. The best story I've ever written is almost ready to launch.

J. V.

*Tuesday.*

DEAR MICHAEL DARAGH, I can't *bear* it about Dan'l! I don't mean about his going,—the old doctor is right about that, but oh, that wretched rover! Dan'l makes loyal excuses for him—he must be sick again or out of work or too busy; the flame of his faith never burns dim.

This morning I went to the Deacon. "Look here," I said, "that fellow will never pay up and Dan'l is breaking his heart." He nodded. "Well," I went on, "I mean to make up a letter and put in twenty dollars and send it to a friend of mine in New York to mail back to Dan'l."

His eagle eye grew bleak. "Falsehood and forgery!" he thundered. "I'm a plain man,

sinfu, Adam's seed as we all are, but I never yet soiled my lips with a lie."

"Oh, you needn't bother about it at all," I assured him. "I'll do the whole thing. You see, my lips aren't so immaculate, or so fussy!"

"I wunt act a lie, neither," he said.

I could feel myself generating temper, and it was a relief for it deadened my grief over Dan'l to be fine and mad at his father. I looked him straight in his ice-blue eye. "Just what do you mean by that, Mr. Gillespie?"

"I wunt have the boy deceived. Ain't no peace comin' from a lie! Land t' goodness," he regarded me mournfully, "don't we have to strive night an' day, 'thout takin' any extry sins on our souls?"

"Why, no, Deacon Gillespie," I told him sweetly, "I don't have a bit of trouble being good. It just seems to come naturally to me!"

I know he yearned to box my ears. Instead, he roared, "We are as prone to evil as the sparks to fly upward!"

"*You* may be," I said. "I shouldn't wonder at all if you are. But as for me, I'm not a miserable sinner and I never was. I shouldn't know an evil impulse if I met it in my mush bowl!" Then I left him, purple with scandalized rage, and found Angelique and told her my pretty plan. Oh, Michael, if you could have seen the poor thing! Her knees fairly gave way under her and she sank into a chair and put her apron over her head. I said, "I thought if you were willing, perhaps the Deacon—" but she cried out, "No, no! One time the oldes' boy, Lem," she still has a bit of the soft *habitant* accent, "he do something bad, an' I tell a lie, so hees father shall not beat heem. By and by, he fin' out ..." she shut her eyes and shivered. "Heem he beat twice as hard ... me, he nevair believe again, all these years..."

Michael Daragh, I hate the Deacon. I know you consider hate the lowest form of human activity, but I hate the Deacon with a husky, hearty, healthy hate and it has a tonic effect which I'm sure must be good for me. I feed my fancy on boiling him in oil.

Gibbering with perfectly proper rage,

J. V.

The next note which came to the Irishman was only a line in length and a coolly typed line, but even so the letters seemed fairly to sing and to dance—

The story is done. It is good, Michael Daragh.

The letter which followed it went back to the human concerns about her.

*Friday.*

I'm sitting on the gravestone of the four-time widower, M.D., my sweater turned up about my ears, my fingers navy blue, my nose magenta. The world is bleak and bare, indoors and out. Dan'l grows hourly weaker, but he brightens at mail time, and grins his gallant little grin at disappointment. "But he *will*," he stoutly whispers.

Gentle old Uncle Robert grows fierce. "Ef I had that varmint here, I vum I c'd wring his neck!"

I'm sorry to report that I am not getting on very well with hating the Deacon. (Of course, you've kept the intervening air quivering with your admonitory wirelasses!) He is suffering so hideously, and so determinedly, like a fakir. He feels he must speed the parting soul with the Scriptures and he reads terrifying things about weird beasts, —lion-mouthed leopards with feet like bears—and when he goes downstairs I try—very clumsily, M.D.—to tell Dan'l about the God you know, the one who goes with you into dark alleys and dark hearts. I wish you were here to do it.

Dan'l's faith is indeed the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things

not seen, but I want to put a warm, tangible lie into his thin little claws before he goes.... Uncle Robert has "been an' went" since I began this letter, and again I must go up to Dan'l and tell him "Not *to-day*."

I'm a coward, M.D. I've never seen death so close before, and I want to run away. But I won't.

J. V.

P.S. I called on the Low Down Wilkes this morning. Mrs. L.D.W. was wearing my suit over a wrapper of faded red calico, but there was nothing in her manner to indicate that I had ever seen it before.

*Saturday.*

Here is my story, Michael Daragh, and it is your story, too, for you shamed me into doing it. I am sending it off to the brown-gowned monthly on the stern and rock-bound coast, and this carbon to you. Now will you write and tell me if you like it? *Honestly!* (I know I said I didn't want you to write me until I had landed a story there, but all this grief and grimness brings a sense of bleak loneliness, and *if* you think I've won back what I've lost, if you think I've found the vision which will keep my soul from perishing, tell me so.)

J. V.

*Sunday Night.*

I've been making circus all day, M.D.—

"Tooting joy, tooting hope,  
Willy wully wah hoo ...  
I am the golden dream,  
Singing science, singing steam—  
Listen to the lion roar—"

I've roared myself hoarse but I got him to sleep at last. I have figured it out and I see that I can't hear from either you or the Monthly before Wednesday at the earliest, and I won't let myself really look for anything before Friday.

J. V.

Again there came a single line—

*Monday Night.*

It's too heart-breaking to write about, M.D., even to you.

*Tuesday Morning.*

I've had to stop hating the poor old Deacon altogether; this morning he carried S.A.B.B. upstairs with his own hands and put him on the bed beside the boy.

J. V.

*Tuesday Night.*

It's very late, Michael Daragh, but there are things I must tell you before I sleep.

I went for a walk this morning, and when I came back I saw Angelique waving to me from the window. I *knew*, and I ran into the house and upstairs. The Deacon was praying aloud, a terrible, cast-iron prayer, and Angelique was sobbing and S.A.B.B. was whining and shivering. I knelt down beside Dan'l and he opened his eyes. I could just make out the whisper—"My ... letter?"

I jumped up and ran over to his father and took him by the elbow and marched him into my room and shut the door and stood with my back against it. My teeth were chattering so I could hardly speak. "He's dying," I said. "*Now* will you let me?"

He was shaking, too, but he quavered, "I wunt bear false witness! I wunt take a lie on my soul!"

Then something boiled up and over in my heart, Michael Daragh. I caught hold of him and shook him and I was so strong I scared myself. "You pitiful, craven-hearted old coward," I said, "all you can think of is your sour old self! If you loved him—if you knew the first faint beginning of love—" I snatched up the letter I had addressed to Dan'l and ran over to the dresser for my purse. "You stay in here with the truth and keep your musty little soul safe! I'm going in there and tell him a beautiful lie!"

But he fumbled some bills from his lean old wallet. "Wait! Here's twenty dollars! I'm a-comin', too!"

We went in together, and he bent over the bed and held the bills close to the boy's eyes. "Look a-here, Dan'l! Look a-here, boy! Here's your money! Here's your *money*, Dan'l!" (Wasn't it pitiful, Michael? Even then, he still thought the money meant most.)

Dan'l opened his eyes and I said, "You were right all along, Danny! You were right to trust and believe in him! He *was* grateful!"—and I held the envelope where he could see it,—the one I had addressed in a silly, flowing screed.

His pinched little face lighted up from within—cheerily, exquisitely, and his chin went up the tiniest fraction in glad pride. "*I ... knew ...*" He just barely breathed it, Michael, and then he sort of relaxed all over and gave a long, comfortable sigh, like a tired puppy, and—and went to sleep.

His mother screamed and fell down beside the bed, and the Deacon said, "Loose him an' let him go, Angerleek!"—but he lifted her up and kept his arms around her.

I went away and left them there with Dan'l and S.A.B.B. I had forgotten all about mail time, but I found myself presently at the graveyard corner. It was one of those gentle, warmed-over summer days and the air was mild and filled with little whispers. I was so happy, Michael Daragh, that in my heart I heard the "harpers harping with their harps," but by and by I was aware of a nearer, more intimate sound—not "*klip-klup*" as on other days, but *klipety-klipety-KLIPETY*—a panic of frantic speed.

Down the road they came, Old Lizzie's hoofs scattering dust and pebbles, Uncle Robert leaning far forward, laying on the lash. When he saw me he cried out:—"Oh, it ain't too late? Oh, my dear Lord'n Saviour, it *ain't* too late?"

Then he handed me a plump registered letter, addressed in a foolish, flowing screed which looked as if it had been done up in curl papers over night, and I began to cry for the first time.

"No," I said, "oh, no, it's not too late!" And I ran up to Dan'l's still little room and gave it to the Deacon and he took it with a great wonder in his ice-blue eyes and slipped it under the cold little claw, beside our merciful lie.

Then I went into my own room, and I noticed for the first time that Uncle Robert had given me two other letters and I stopped crying and stared at them.

One was a very small envelope and the name printed in the corner was that of the brown-gowned magazine on the stern and rock-bound. The other was yours.

J. V.

P.S. Guess which one I opened first, Michael Daragh, Do-er of Miracles?

## CHAPTER XI

Jane stayed on at Three Meadows until after the bleak and austere little funeral, and long enough to help Angelique soften the harshly new grave with flowers and sturdily started plants, and stopped



over at Bath and ordered a quaintly simple headstone which would be the Gillespie's pride and solace.

She was very happy on her return journey to New York,—in vastly different mood than the one of nine weeks before. Michael Daragh had written her a brief and beautiful letter, a letter she would always keep, as soon as he had read her story, and the thought of it warmed her like a summer sun, but as she went down the twisting silver river she had a vexed feeling that her postscript had been a bit of foolishness. "*Guess which one I opened first, Michael Daragh, Do-er of Miracles?*" Their relationship had shifted in these long weeks; ever since the evening on Riverside Drive when he had sternly recalled her to herself, they had gone by leaps and bounds, by hedge and byway, into a deeper and more intimate friendship, and yet, she told herself, that added line at the end of her letter to him was a High School girlish thing to have done; it presupposed something between them which wasn't there at all. She had flung it in without weighing it; she had honestly meant at the moment, that his approval of her new and serious story was more precious to her even than the editor's, but ... would Michael Daragh understand it that way?

She did not write him the exact time of her arrival, and it was the merest chance that she found him starting up the steps as her taxicab drew up at Mrs. Hills' door. They went up together and at his first hearty look and word she was able to laugh at herself for having worried an instant.

"It's rare and fine to have you back, Jane Vail," he said, glowing with gladness. "And you were good indeed to be sending me the long story letters all the while. 'Twas like a journey itself, the way I'd be following you up and down on that Island with all the queer folk and sad, and waiting at the graveyard corner for the mail!"

Jane glowed in return. "It's good to be back, Michael Daragh." (The nice, sane, sensible, dependable creature that he was! What a solid comfort it was to have him! This was exactly the way she wanted him to act and to feel and to be, and she wasn't—she was at some pains to assure herself—in the very least feeling vaguely disappointed or let down by his attitude.) "But it was the best time I ever had,—best in the sense of being the best for me." Generously and sweetly she gave him his due. "I'm still thanking you, you know, M.D.!"

He nodded gravely. "You've found your way back to the highroad in that tale you were sending me. I'm doubting you'll ever lose it again all the long days of your life."

"I won't" said Jane, stoutly. (Good to be back with him, good to hear his purling brogue and his lyrical construction. He talked like an old song.) The door of the boarding-house opened at their ring and Jane hurried in. "Here's Mrs. Hills! Hello, Mrs. Hills! Here I am!" She embraced the ex-villager warmly and espied Emma Ellis in the shadows of the hall, over her shoulder. "And Miss Ellis! How-do-you-do?"

Miss Ellis did very well, according to her own statement, but it was pathetically clear to one pair of sharp eyes at least that she would have done better if Michael Daragh had not been bringing in Jane's suitcase and handbag and umbrella while a taxi got under way in the street.

"It's so nice to be back with you all," said the returned exile, heartily. The Settlement worker came out into the light and it was to be observed that she was still more pinched and sallow than of yore and Jane's heart melted within her to swift mercy. "I found Michael Daragh on the sidewalk and pressed him into service as porter. Thanks, Michael Daragh. Am I to give you the quarter for your Poor and Needy?"

"You are, indeed," said the Irishman, firmly, taking the stairs two at a bound. "More than that, you'll be giving me for a case I know, with the proud and prosperous look you have on you this day!"

"I hope," said Emma Ellis, conscientiously, the taut lines of her face loosening a little, "you had a pleasant outing?"

"Yes," said Jane, flippantly, "but my outing was an inning—and I've delved like a riverful of beavers, and I'll be at work at nine to-morrow morning."

"That Mr. Harrison has been 'phoning and '*phoning*," Mrs. Hills announced, complacently. "And he wants you should ring him up the minute you got in—something about this evening, I guess, he was so set on having you get the message."

"That listens alluringly! I'll call him now,—may I?" She shook herself out of her topcoat and fur and sat down at the hall telephone. Mrs. Hills and Miss Ellis discreetly withdrew to the living room, but the low tones of her voice were carrying and it was presently made clear to them that gayety was afoot for the evening, a sort of gayety they two had never known, would never know ... little tables with shaded candles, lights, music, subtle, wheedling music, hovering head-waiters ... the newest play ... then more little tables, more wheedling, coaxing music, more hovering head-waiters, dancing.... The boarding-house keeper told herself, comfortably, that it would never do for *her*; and pushed a tolerant curiosity back into the ragbag of her mind, and the Settlement worker tucked in her lips and reminded herself that there would be undernourished children, *hungry* children, not a mile from where Miss Vail would be eating out-of-season delicacies, and thanked her God that she was not as other women.

Michael Daragh came into the room an instant before Jane did. She was flushed and bright-eyed and smiling. "Well! I'll have to *fly*! I won't be here for dinner, Mrs. Hills,—I'm sorry, but it seems this is a rather special party to-night."

"It's your kind of clam chowder, too," said Mrs. Hills, shaking her head.

"Oh, what a shame! But save mine for tomorrow's lunch,—I adore it warmed over! Here, Michael Daragh"—she opened her brown, beaded bag with its high lights of orange and gold—"catch!" She tossed the little suede purse to him. "That's exactly the way I feel to-night, scattering largess to the multitude, regally pitching purses about! Take what you want—all you want—for that case! I *must* fly!" She looked at her wrist watch. "Mrs. Hills, will you let Mabel come and do me up in twenty minutes? See you all at breakfast!" She ran out of the room and they heard her swift feet on the stair.

The boarding-house keeper beamed. Jane Vail was her link with the world. "I declare, she's a marvel to me! Wouldn't you think she'd be dead on her feet and want to crawl into bed quick's ever she had her supper? She won't close an eye before two o'clock in the morning if she does then, but she'll be down to breakfast, right on the dot, fresh as paint, and out for her walk, rain, hail or snow, and then she'll hammer that typewriter all the forenoon!"

"Of course," said Emma Ellis in her small, smothered voice, "Miss Vail *often* takes a little nap in the afternoon...."

Mrs. Hills was not to be diverted from her star boarder's glories. "Well, it didn't take that Mr. Rodney Harrison very long to get in action, did it?"

"It did not, indeed," said the Irishman, cheerfully. "How long till dinner, Mrs. Hills? Half an hour? Then I'll be stepping up to my room for a letter is keening to be written."

The two women were silent until they heard him mounting the stairs to the third floor. "You see?" said the elder, triumphantly. "What did I tell you? Not a thing on earth between them! Would she be tearing off with another young man, first evening home? And isn't he cool as a cucumber?"

Miss Ellis's narrow little face seemed to ease visibly into looser lines and she sighed. "Yes. You were quite right. Mr. Daragh's mind is on higher things."

The other bridled. "Well, I don't know as you've any call to put it just that way. I guess Jane Vail's a high enough thing for any man to think of! And I guess the truth is, Jane Vail's got other fish to fry!"

Jane, meanwhile, into her tub, out of her tub, flinging herself once more into urban silk and fine linen, doing her hair with swift craft, was entirely happy. It was good to have gone away, at Michael Daragh's rousing word, good to have stayed those sober weeks on the lean, clean Island, good to have done good work and to have speeded Dan'l's parting soul; and it was good to be back, to be going presently into the bright warm world with Rodney Harrison; it was best of all to find her big Irishman as she had found him. Her friend. Her *best* friend ... best for her. It was a solid satisfaction to have him tabulated and pigeonholed at last and for all time. Michael Daragh was her best friend. That was settled. And she had been a vain, light-minded goose to fancy for an instant that he would misinterpret that foolish little postscript on her last letter,—that he would *want* to misinterpret it. Michael Daragh had clearly obeyed the command to come apart and be separate, and she should never worry for an instant about him again.

And while she flew into her most satisfactory frock and stood still for Mabel's slow hookings and fastenings and then sent her down to tell the gentleman she would be with him in two minutes, her best friend, newly elected to that high estate, sat alone in his room on the third floor, and there was in his thin face none of the calm which had helped Mrs. Hills to carry her point with Emma Ellis.

There had been a little rite, the evening before, of burning such few letters as he had allowed himself to keep, but he had snatched the last one back from the blaze and cut off the final line, the postscript, with his desk scissors, and put the narrow shred of paper into his wallet. And now, hearing the sound of a taxicab in the street below, he approached his window and looked down through the fast-thickening dusk of the late fall evening. He could not see Jane's exit from the house nor her entrance into the waiting vehicle, but he remained there, his face pressed against the pane, until the machine set noisily forth upon its uptown way. Then he went back to stand before his fire, and he opened his wallet and took out the folded strip of paper and threw it on the coals without reading it again, for he knew it very well by heart, and he was still standing there when the sound of Mabel's vigorous gong summoned him down to dinner.

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Rodney Harrison was a trifle annoyed and a trifle amused at Jane's exile, frankly contemptuous of the achievement of a tale in the *New England Monthly* as compared to vaudeville bill-toppers, wholly glad to have her back. His mother was visiting her people in Boston at the moment, but as soon as she returned, he was very sure, she would want to make that long-delayed call on his young writing friend. As a matter of fact, it was the tale that did it. Mrs. Ormsby Dodd Harrison had not seen her way to the cultivation of a young woman whose end and aim in life was the writing of headline acts for the two-a-day, but a gifted young author who had two charming and thoughtful stories in the brown-gowned magazine that winter and passed likewise the sober portals of the other three of the "Big Four," was quite another thing. Before the holidays, in spite of her telescoping activities at that season, Mrs. Harrison motored down to Washington Square and called on Miss Vail at Mrs. Hills' boarding house, and asked her with just the right admixture of formality and cordiality to dine with them one evening quite simply ... just themselves.

But Miss Vail, it appeared, was not only a very hard-working and ambitious young author, but very much fêted and dated socially, and in addition, gave generously of her play time to certain worthy settlements and their concomitant affairs, and two more months elapsed before an evening could be arranged.

Jane wrote of the dinner to Sarah Farraday.

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A shame, isn't it, Sally, that we can't be frank and honest? You can't think how it would have comforted Rodney's mother in her black hand-run Spanish lace and the Harrison pearls to have me say, "Be of good cheer, dear lady! I neither design nor aspire to marry your son!"

Then she could have removed her invisible armor and laid her polished weapons by and given herself over to the delights of my sprightly chatter. Rodney's the only son and the only child, and one cannot blame her for being a bit choosy! Harrison's pater, however, seemed to think that he could bear up very cheerfully under such a contingency—charmingly cordial, the dear old thing! Rodney won't be nearly so nice at his age because he's come up in a less gracious period.

But at that he'll be very nice! He is now!

## CHAPTER XII

Before the end of her second year in New York, many things, grave and gay, came to pass. Sarah Farraday came down for a fortnight of operas and concerts and went home to spread the marvels of Jane's full and glowing life over the Vermont village; Emma Ellis reluctantly gave up her room at Mrs. Hills' and became resident superintendent of the Hope House Settlement, and Michael Daragh took his noon meal there. Jane went home twice for little visits and found changes even there,—the Teddy-bear, now trudging sturdily about in rompers, had a small sister, and Nannie Slade Hunter was prettier than ever, if a trifle too rotund, and Edward R., very prosperous and pleased with himself, had bought his wife an electric coupé, in which to take his offspring for a safe and opulent airing. Martin Wetherby, Assistant Cashier, had somehow put youth aside. His stoutness had closed in on him like an enemy. His mother admitted to Jane that he did not take sufficient exercise. "He doesn't seem to ... care," she said, and looked pointedly away. To herself she put it dramatically, with great relish; never, to the day of her death, would she forgive the girl who had ruined her son's life. Jane wished with all her good-natured heart that Marty would marry, happily and handsomely—it would be such a relief to have Mrs. Wetherby complacently triumphant instead of heavily reproachful. And even Sarah Farraday never referred to him as other than, "Poor old Marty." Jane had her moments of wishing that they might, in village parlance, "make a match of it," but they were moments only. Sarah was much too fine; she must find Sarah a suitor of parts, somehow, somewhere.

It was during the second of her visits home that Miss Lydia Vail died. There was no dreariness of illness or misery of suffering; she died exactly as she had lived, plumply and pleasantly, in the plump and pleasant faith that was hers, and Jane left the middle-aged maid in charge of the elm-shaded, green-shuttered house and went back to New York with a grief which was more pensive than poignant. She refused, thereafter, to rent the old home, but loaned it instead, the servant with it, to various and sundry of her city clan,—now the girl who had carried her first playlet to success, now to shabby music students at Mrs. Hills' whom Sarah Farraday was pledged to regale with tea and cheer in the afternoons, now to sad-eyed women of Michael Daragh's recommendation.

Sometimes she ran up herself with a little house-party,—down-at-the-heel vaudevilleans, elderly, concert-going ladies from the boarding house, Emma Ellis and another settlement worker—and made an expenditure for food and entertainment which secretly scandalized the ancient maid.

She wrote her first slim little novel which was accepted for serial publication and Rodney Harrison insisted that there was the germ of a three-act play in it. She set to work on it and labored harder than ever before in her life, happily, hot-cheeked, shining-eyed, wrote and rewrote and clipped and amplified and smoothed and polished, and one day Sarah Farraday ran over to the Hunter's house with a telegram.

"Nannie! It's accepted! Jane's three-act play is accepted! Did you ever in all your born days see such luck? She just can't fail!" Her earnest, blonde face was a little wistful. "I never knew any human being to have so much!"

Mrs. Edward R. was herding the Teddy-bear into the coupé and she handed little Sarah Anne to her friend. "Get in, Sally dear, and I'll run you home. I'm taking the children over to Mother Hunter's for the day." She steadied Sarah and her burden to a seat and then tucked herself neatly in, and started her bright vehicle competently. "Well, I don't know.... It's all very fine, of course, but I can think of a

good deal she hasn't got!"

"Oh, of course ..." said the music teacher. After a moment she sighed. "Poor old Marty.... Well, we can't lead other people's lives for them, can we?"

"No, we can't," Mrs. Edward R. admitted, contentedly. She bowled Sarah smoothly back to the burlapped studio in time for the eleven-twenty pupil.

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Jane, meanwhile, after wiring to Sarah, flew to Michael Daragh with her joyful tidings and lunched with him and Emma Ellis at Hope House. The Irishman, who had read the little play and knew its clean verve and charm, was radiant for her, and the superintendent managed grudging congratulations. They were in the sitting room after the meal, and something seemed to smite Jane, swiftly, with regard to Emma Ellis; her bright eyes traveled over the whole of her,—the shabby hair, the hot and steaming face, the moist fingers with their dull and shapeless nails,—the needlessly cruel ugliness of blouse and skirt and shoes; the utter unloveliness of her. As on the day of her return from Three Meadows, when Emma Ellis had supposed Michael Daragh had met her at the train, again her heart melted to mercy within her. Oh, the poor thing! The *poor* thing—

"Miss Ellis, I've taken your chair, haven't I?"

"It doesn't matter where I sit, Miss Vail. This one does well enough for me," she answered, virtuously.

Jane sat down on a footstool near the window. "Do take it—not that there's any cloying luxury, even there! Is it in the constitution of Hope House to have only hideous and uncomfortable furniture?"

"You cannot know much about this sort of work, Miss Vail, or you'd realize that our funds are always limited, and that we must conserve them for necessities." It was a depressingly warm day, and the superintendent felt it and showed it, and she reflected bitterly that Jane Vail was the sort of person who was warm and glowing in January, when normal people were pinched and blue, and cool and crisp in September, when those who had to keep right on working, no matter what the weather was, had pools of perspiration under their eyes and shirtwaists adhering gummily to their backs. And she always wore things in summer which gave out cunning suggestions of shady brooksides, and managed—in that theatrical way of hers—the effect of bringing a breeze in with her.

"I wonder," said Jane, "if my silly little paper people get the breath of life blown into them and my play goes over and I have regal royalties, if I couldn't do something for Hope House?"

"You could, indeed, God save you kindly for the thought," said Michael Daragh, happily. "If your play'll run to it, you could be buying us two bathtubs and—"

"The linoleum in the kitchen"—Miss Ellis forgot her bitterness for a moment—"is simply in shreds!"

"I will not!" said Jane, crisply. "Bathtubs and linoleum, indeed! Wring them out of your Board! I shall give you a Sleepy Hollow couch with bide-a-wee cushions, and deep, cuddly armchairs and a lamp or two with shades as mellow as autumn woods! And some perfectly frivolous pictures which aren't in the least inspiring or uplifting,—and every single girl's room shall have a *pink pincushion!*" Then at their blankness, she softened. "Oh, very well,—you shall have your tubs and your linoleum, if you'll let me humanize the rest of the house,—will you?" She came to her feet with a spring of incredible energy. "Come along, Miss Ellis,—let's have a look upstairs! We don't need you, M.D.—this is woman-stuff."

The superintendent pulled herself upstairs with a sticky hand on the banister, "Well, I don't know where you'd begin, Miss Vail. Everything's threadbare...."

They went through drab halls and into drab rooms where drab occupants greeted them drably, and Jane ached with the ugliness of it. Wasn't it going to be fun—*if* the play went over "big"—to vanquish this much of the hideousness of the world?

She stopped before a closed door. "What is this?"

Miss Ellis was walking past it. "That's my room."

"Well, may I see it?"

"Oh," she said, colorlessly, "I didn't suppose you'd want to fix *it* over...." She opened the door and stepped in, crossing to the undraped window and running up the stiff shade of faded and streaked olive green.

"But of course I shall," said Jane, following her in. "Well—I might have known!"

"What?" asked Miss Ellis, defensively.

"That you'd take the smallest and shabbiest room in the house for yourself."

"Oh, well ... it doesn't matter. I'm not in it very much." She walked over to the warped golden oak bureau and straightened the metal button hook with the name of a shoe shop pressed into it into line with the whisk broom. Besides these two articles there bloomed upon the bureau's top a small pincushion made from a piece of California redwood bark, and a widowed saucer enrolled as a pin-tray, and into the frame of the mirror was stuck a snapshot of an unnecessarily plain small boy.

"That's my little nephew," said Emma Ellis, seeing Jane's eye upon it. "My sister Bertha's boy."

"He—he looks *bright*, doesn't he?" said Jane, hastily. She looked about her, consideringly. "You know, I'd like to do this room in deep creamy yellow. That will make it look lighter and seem larger, and it will be nice with your hair."

"My hair?..." said Miss Ellis, limply.

"You have such nice hair, but I do wish you'd do it differently," said Jane with anxious friendliness. "You have a *mile* of it, haven't you?"

The superintendent's tucked-in lips and her whole taut figure visibly relaxed. "I *used* to have nice hair," she admitted in the time-hallowed formula. "I wish you could have seen it four years ago. It's come out something terrible! Well," she made a virtue of it—"I never spend any time fussing with it."

"But you ought to, you know! Let me play with it a minute, will you? I adore doing hair. Please sit down—I just want to try something with it—something I thought of as I watched you to-day." She pressed her into a stiff chair.

"Well ..." said Miss Ellis grudgingly. She produced a comb from a bleakly neat top drawer.

"Heavens, what neatness," said Jane. "And the brush, please! You ought to give it a hundred and twenty strokes a night,—see, like this? No, it wouldn't be wasting time! Just consider the good thoughts you could be thinking. You could memorize poetry or dates in history or say your prayers,—and you'd say a prayer of thankfulness in a year, when you looked at the result. It would shine like patent leather." Her fingers flew. "There! Now you can look. See how it brings out the good lines of your face? Wait,—where's your hand mirror? You haven't one? My word! Well, you can get the idea, even so! Will you try doing it this way? It won't take but a minute longer. Just to please me?"

"Well ..." she couldn't seem to think of anything else to say, and she had a ridiculous feeling that she might be going to cry.

"And—do you mind my saying these things?—I've always bullied my friends about their clothes and colors—I do wish you wouldn't wear white, and navy blue."

"I always supposed *white* was right for every one."

"It's wicked for most people! Cream, buff, tan, apricot, burnt orange—Let me come down and go shopping with you some day, will you? I never cared about dressing dolls but I revel in dressing people."

"Well ..." said Miss Ellis once more, and this time her stubborn chin quivered.

"Shall we go downstairs?" Jane moved ahead of her, her eyes averted, her voice cheerfully commonplace. "Simply torrid up here, isn't it? I'll come some cool morning, and we'll make lists and plans—*if* my play goes over—"

But before her gay little play had been running three months, picking up speed like a motor as it ran—she had kept her word to Hope House. She became the Lady Bountiful of the bathtubs and linoleums, of the frivolous lay pictures and the autumn shaded lamps, and she wrote impudently to Sarah Farraday that when she looked upon all that she had created she saw that it was very good.

Even Emma Ellis has undergone a sea change; she's learned to do her hair decently, and I've actually persuaded her that while it's quite right to let her light so shine before men, it's different with her nose, and you can't think what a dusting of flesh-colored powder does for her! And I've got her out of blue serge and white blouses, and into cream and buff and orange and brown, and I daresay Michael Daragh will now fall in love with her excellent qualities and her enhanced appearance, and I shall lose my best friend. (E.E. would never allow friendships.) I shall probably wish I'd left her in her state of Ugly Ducklingness, for I simply can't spare St. Michael from my scheme of things!

### CHAPTER XIII

Jane and the Irishman came into the Settlement one day to find the superintendent red-eyed, with

two books on her desk. It was clear that she had been having a luxuriously miserable time. "I've just finished two of the most powerful stories," she said, polishing the precious powder from her nose with a damp handkerchief. "Every girl should read them—and every *man!*"

"I wonder at you, Emma Ellis," said Michael Daragh, "the way you'll be keening over a printed tale, when you've your heart and head and hands full of real woes about you, surely!"

"Oh, Mr. Daragh, if you'd just sit down and read *I* and *The Narrow Path!* Both written anonymously, —and you just *feel* the human heartthrob in every line."

"I'll not be cluttering my mind with the likes of that, woman dear!"

"I've read them both," said Jane, slipping out of her furs and cuddling into one of the great new chairs, "and I'm afraid I think they're fearful piffle."

"Miss Vail!" Her face snapped back into its old lines. (Miss Vail really mustn't think that because she was so situated, financially, that she could do kind and generous things—which others would do if they could—that her word was law on every subject!)

"I'll have to be reading them, to decide between the two of you," said Michael, lighting his mellowed old pipe.

Miss Ellis winced a little as she looked at her new curtains.

"But it's good for moths," said Jane, catching her eye. "No, Michael, you needn't fuss up your orderly mind with anything so frivolous and distracting. I can tell you the gist of them both in a few well-chosen phrases! The theme of both is that when lovely—and lonely—woman stoops to earning her own living she finds—not too late, but alas, immediately—that men betray! That every prospect pleases and only man is vile! These two heroines set out to make their own way; their faces are their fortune and very nearly their finish! One is a very young girl, the other an unhappy wife, fleeing with, and, one might be pardoned for imagining, protected by, a young child. Each is a pattern of dewy innocence and determined virtue, but no matter where they hie or hide, the villains still pursue."

"Of course," said Miss Ellis in her small, smothered voice, "if you're going to make a *joke* of it——"

"My dear Miss Ellis, it *is* a joke! One of them gets no further than the station in her initial flight when she is accosted by a young millionaire—insulted. (If you were a Constant Reader of popular fiction, Michael Daragh, you'd know how difficult it is for millionaires to retain the shreds of human decency.) And that's just the prelude, but it introduces the motif which runs through the entire composition. Staid, middle-aged husbands of friends, editors, business men, authors,—Don Juans all! Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief, doctor, lawyer, Indian chief, enmesh the road the ladies are to wander in."

"Well," said Michael Daragh, shaking his head, "I'm telling you there's a rare lot of enmeshing, Jane Vail."

Emma Ellis wagged an eager head. "You can't possibly know, in your sheltered life——"

"But I've been about a bit in my day—(didn't I come from my verdant village to the wicked metropolis?)—and I've known men in all ages and stages. My feeling is that these girls must have had a small 'come-hither' in one eye at least, or occasionally men might have passed the butter without a sinister meaning, might have seen them home without attempting to abduct them!"

"You came directly to Mrs. Hills, whom you had known for years," said Emma Ellis. "And you knew that Mr. Harrison who helped you to place your writing, and you had enough money to live on."

"But I've roamed the city alone, all hours of night or day, and I used to go back and forth to boarding-school alone—a day's and a night's journey, and abroad I used to trot off to galleries and museums by myself, and——"

"But you always had your background, Jane Vail, the way you knew how safe you were."

"You can't prove these books are foolish by *your* experience, Miss Vail." Emma Ellis was glowing from the Irishman's championship.

Jane was still for a moment. "No; I don't suppose I can prove it by any experience I've had in the past," she said, slowly, "but I can prove it by an experience I'm going to have!"

"Now what do you mean by that?" Daragh wanted to know. "Are you telling your fortune?"

Jane sat up straight, warm-cheeked, excited. "No, but I'm going out, alone and unaided, under a neat new name, with some cheap, plain clothes in a cheap, plain trunk, to Chicago, with fifty dollars only between me and the cold world,—and see what I see!"

"Well, now, God save us, but that's the mad plan, surely!"

"It isn't mad at all! I want a little change,—I've been working like a dynamo—and it will be loads of fun and I'll get corking copy out of it."

"It won't be a fair test," the superintendent protested. "You'll be—you, all the time."

"That's very nice of you," Jane gave her her glad boy's grin, "but I won't be. Don't you suppose I have imagination enough to project myself into another type? For a month I'll support myself in any way I can, nursery governess, mother's helper, upstairs-work, shop, anything I can get. I'll *be* that sort of girl, dress, diction, everything. I'll write a truthful bulletin of my luck to you two, but you won't have any address, and no one will know that—let's see ... *Edna Miles*—isn't that reasonable?—that Edna Miles is the lucky Jane Vail who wrote *Cross Your Heart* and has a wicked balance in the bank!" She pulled herself up out of the depths of the great chair and put on her furs. "I'm quite keen about it! It's going to be more fun than anything I've ever done. Tell Jane good-by, old dears! You'll hear from Edna Miles before long!"

"Wait a bit till we talk it over," said Daragh. "'Tis a wild plan, I'm telling you, will waste your time and——"

But Jane was out of the door, with only the echo of her laugh behind her.

"I don't think she'll really do it," said Miss Ellis. "When she comes to think it over, and realizes how uncomfortable she'll be——"

"She'll be doing it if she says she will," said the Irishman, gloomily, "and all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't be stopping her, the way she——"

Jane thrust her bright head in at the door again. "I'll play fair, and I'll prove my point,—that you see pretty much what you look for, that you get pretty nearly what you give, that common or garden kindness is mirrored in kindness, that affection fairly boomerangs back! And after all, you know, the thing that made the lamb love Mary so is the axis on which the world turns! With which pearl of wisdom I give you good-morrow!"

This time she went in earnest, and the Settlement workers were left alone in their transformed parlor to consider the madness or merit of her little plan. Michael saw her at breakfast next morning but she was gayly uncommunicative as to her plans, and that night Mrs. Hills reported that her star boarder (who had the two best and biggest rooms, now, and a dressing-room and bath and her own telephone) had gone west for a month or so for a change.

The first letter came two days later and was addressed to Miss Emma Ellis at the Hope House Settlement, but the salutation was to them both——

DEAR EMMA ELLIS AND MICHAEL DARAGH,

I am writing this on the train as the intelligent readers will gather from the chirography. I have just had my breakfast, and it was funny to study the menu card for inexpensive nourishment with staying powers. I shared a tiny table with a large gentleman whose rubicund neck hung over his collar in back in what was distinctly not the line of beauty, a chatty soul, conversation not at all impeded by food ... needed a few table traffic regulations ... The noble head of the animal to whose tribe he belongs beamed from his lapel and his genial heart from his bright little eyes, and he worried heartily because I didn't "tuck away a regular breakfast."

I had loads of fun getting my adventure trousseau together yesterday! I flatter myself that I quite look the part,—my meek, brown serge and cotton gloves and my oldest shoes and a well-meaning little hat which took more courage than all the rest. I couldn't quite rise—or sink—to a straw suitcase. I have my shabbiest one—without labels! This is a slow, cheap train and my bye-bye box was in the upper flat, and I haven't spent a penny for chocolate or magazines, and I'm actually beginning to *be* Edna Miles!

*Next Morning, Nearly in Chicago.*

Last night the beamish Buffalo, who had chatted off and on all day and had worried over my modest luncheon from across the aisle, insisted that dinner was to be not only with but "on" him, but I only consented on the "with" plan, and paid my own little check and tip. He said I was a darned independent little piece but he liked my spunk! He asked me where I was bound and I said—sighing a little for good measure, Emma—that I was going to Chicago to earn my living. Now in *I* or *The Narrow Path* he would at once have given me his card and offered to "fix me up with something at the office," but the Buffalo merely said "That so!" mistily through his pie *à la mode* and that "Chi" was a great little old berg.

Isn't that one-in-the-eye for your theory, at the start?

Time to be brushed off. Edna Miles gives the Ethiopian only a quarter, but she

hasn't demanded any service.

JANE, THE HONEST WORKING GIRL.

*Same Night, 9.30.*

Before I get into my doll's-size bed I'll pen these sleepy lines. My room is just about the dimensions of a bath mat. It contains the aforementioned bed (I shall have to put myself into it with a shoe horn!) *an* chair, on which I sit, and a bureau. The room must have been built around them ... clearly they didn't come in through the door. My little trunk has to wait outside in the hall like a faithful dog. When I look at my face in the mirror I'm sure that Heaven will protect this particular working girl; that my face will be not my fortune but my defender. It looks as if a nervous student had been practicing facial surgery on me. The carpet is just the color of deviled ham, and on the wall is a shiny, violent-colored picture in a tarnished gilt frame which shows a dangerously fat infant in a crib with a kitten standing on its stomach.

I left the train without incident. I didn't even see the Buffalo to say good-by. In the station I purposely wandered about a bit and asked questions and suddenly a brisk little woman with "Stranger's Friend" on her bonnet dashed up and asked me where I was going. I told her I was alone in her great city, looking for work, and she told me not to worry,—that she would look after me, and she has,—oh, but hasn't she! She thought a minute and then said, "I know of a good Christian room for you." I was so intrigued by the thought of a Christian room that I could hardly wait to see it. (I'm in it. This is it.)

She told me just where to sit and wait for her, and there I dutifully sat, clutching my luggage, and she ran off to telephone and said it was all fixed—the lady would have me, and it would be five dollars a week for room, breakfast and dinner. And she would put me on the right car and tell me just where to get off, and the landlady would direct me to the Employment Agency later. Just as she was seeing me to the street I spied the Buffalo in the offing, waving to me, and I waved back, and he started briskly toward me.

"Who is that man?" the Stranger's Friend wanted to know. I said he was a kind gentleman I had met on the train but I didn't know his name. Well, the next thing I knew she had whirled me cleverly into an eddy of crowd and thence into the Ladies' Waiting-Room and was regarding me sternly. "We will wait here until he goes away. That is the very *first* thing to remember, my dear. Never talk to strange men!" And I said, "Yes, ma'am, I will," and "No, ma'am, I won't," and presently she reconnoitered and said that the coast was clear, and put me on my car, with minute directions for finding my new home.... It is easy and comforting to believe that there is, literally, no place like home, no other place. I shall call my landlady Mrs. Mussel,—it suits her so perfectly, the way she clings to her drab background, and closes up with a snap at every approach. I daresay she means well. It is necessary to believe that she does. She states that she sets only a plain home table ... and there is a sort of atmospheric menu card—coming events casting their savors before, stale memories of the past....

She marched me straight off to the Intelligence Office. There was nothing for me, but I signed up and am to be there at eight in the morning. And now, unless I stop, I shall fall asleep and out of my chair and dash my brains out on the deviled-ham carpet. The Laboring Classes keep early hours.

G—N—

J.

Thereafter the bulletins came thick and fast to Hope House, always to the two of them together, now addressed to Miss Ellis and then to the Irishman. The second followed swiftly on the heels of the first.

*The Next Night.*

I went early to the Intelligence Office. (*Intelligence!*) The other Judy O'Gradys and I sat in waiting while our sisters under the skin, the Colonel's ladies, looked us over. I registered for nursery governess, Mother's Help, second maid, or companion, with Mrs. Mussel and the S.F. for reference, but to-day all the cry for help was for kitchen mechanics!

When I reported my empty net to Mrs. Mussel on returning, she emitted a little



desolate cluck. She foresees her Christian room rent overdue, poor thing. The kind little S.F. dropped in and bade me be of good cheer. She's a brick, and I feel so guiltily aware of tricking her.

I tried to lure my landlady out to a movie, but she thriftily refused. She was watching at the window when I came home to-night and just at the steps I dropped my five cents' worth of literature and a man who was passing picked it up for me. He glanced at the page as he handed it back and grinned, "That's a great little old story!" And I agreed cordially, "It sure is!" and thanked him and ran up the steps. I wish you could have seen my landlady's face. I thought at first I would be sent to bed without my supper. When it comes to your sex, Michael Daragh, her slogan is—"Run, daughter, the Indians are upon us!"

G—N—

J.

It was several days, then, before they heard again from her, and Emma Ellis secretly considered that Miss Vail was without doubt giving up and coming home, but Michael Daragh found himself angrily anxious. But the letter was reassuring.

*On the Job.*

DEAR PEOPLE,

Edna Miles is nursery governess to the two small offspring of Mrs. Arnold Laney, an opulent, hard-finished lady who cleverly found the one pearl in the oyster bed, meaning me, this morning. I dashed thankfully home and almost jolted Mrs. Mussel out of her gloom, bought two gingham dresses for mornings and hied me to my new home. I have a cot in the nursery and one bureau drawer and two hooks in the closet and wrath in my heart, but the kiddies want a story now and I must stop. They are shallow, fretty, plain little things, but I'm conscientiously liking them as hard as ever I can. The work shouldn't be hard, and I have forty a month and three hours every Thursday afternoon and every other Sunday. I don't like my missus very much, but the master of the house is a typical T.B.M., only I should say, from my brief glimpse, that things at home make him *tireder* than his business does. I eat with the children in the breakfast room and the food is rather awful. However, the game is young. Wish me luck, old dears!

It was eight days before another letter came, and then it was headed—

*Back in my Christian Room!*

My dears, here I am! I lasted just exactly one week. But I don't care. I didn't wait to be fired—I went off—spontaneous combustion.

I did my honest best at first. It was a horrible house, spilling over with fretful people and fretful things. There wasn't a cool space to hang your eye on anywhere on the walls; you had to make your way through the furniture and bric-a-brac as through traffic. The food, save when there were guests, was wretched. The other servants—a cross cook and a sharp-tongued second-girl—were inefficient and lazy and quarrelsome.

The father was a dim, infrequent person who hardly registered on the family film at all. He looked overworked and underfed and the only time I ever heard him speak with any vigor was the night before I left, when he was vehemently insisting (their room was just across the hall from the nursery) that they simply had to cut down expenses, and she was just as vehemently maintaining that it couldn't be done.

And the children! If any one had told me, eight days ago, that there were two children loose in the land that I could not love, I should have done battle. The boy was the sort of little boy who makes you feel that Herod had the right idea, and the girl was the sort of little girl who makes you feel it was a pity to stop with the slaughter of the male infant.

It was the last day of my week. The youngsters and I had had a bad breakfast and a skimpy, cold luncheon, and I was bidden to dress them in their fussiest best and bring them in at the tag end of Mrs. Laney's bridge afternoon. They were just sitting down to tea as I came in. Tea! I was absolutely hungry after the long succession of miserable meals, ready to recite "Only Three Grains of Corn, Mother," with moving

gestures, and the sallow little wretches beside me were clear cases of malnutrition. Well, there were three kinds of delectable sandwiches and consommé with whipped cream and chocolate with whipped cream and an opulent salad and wonderful little cakes—four kinds—and candy and salted nuts. My mouth watered and I know my nostrils quivered. First, I blush to say, I thought of hungry me, and then I thought of the undernourished children, and then I thought of the badly fed and badly cared for and badly treated husband, and I looked over the other eight or ten women and catalogued them at once as Mrs. Laney's type, and suddenly I decided to give myself a treat. I reached calmly over and selected a handful of sandwiches and cakes and gave them to the youngsters and sent them up to the nursery, and then, my dears, with what solid satisfaction you cannot possibly guess, I told my mistress exactly what I thought of her. She was aghast and scared; she thought I was a maniac, a desperate fanatic.

"Edna, Edna," she gasped, "be quiet! My guests—these ladies——"

"Ladies! *Ladies!*" I pounced on it. "Do you know what 'ladies' means? Of course you don't,—you're much too ignorant. It means—'loaf-givers', providers, dispensers of bounty, care-takers, home-makers. You—all of you—with your lazy, thick bodies trussed into your straight fronts and your fat feet crammed into bursting pumps and your idle hands blazing with jewels" (I know I was bromidic there, but my Phillipic was too swift to be polished) "and your empty heads dyed and marcelled, you're not loaf-givers,—you're not givers at all, you're takers! You're loafers—cumberers of the earth—fat slugs, that's what you are, each and every one of you! *You*"—I pointed to Mrs. Laney—"you don't even see that your children are properly fed! You don't make home livable, let alone lovable for your husband, and at this moment"—I swept the feast with a fierce and baleful eye—"you're a thief!"

She shrieked at that and all the women got to their feet. It was as if I'd thrown a bomb—and I daresay they thought I might at any instant.

"A thief," I said, "takes what doesn't belong to him, and this doesn't belong to you! You're deep in debts,—bills that your poor, harassed husband cannot pay!"—and before she could emit the furious words on her lips—"Oh, no, you're not going to discharge me! You can't, for I've left already! I wouldn't stay another night in your wretched house, I wouldn't eat another of your wretched meals. You may keep my week's wage. I wish you'd buy the children beefsteak with it but I've no doubt it will go for cocktails and henna!"

Then, while they gasped and jibbered with rage and got behind each other and shook in their bulging pumps, I turned on my heel and made a stunning exit, gathered up my belongings and came away.

There was no welcome on Mrs. Mussel's mat, but I'm still glowing. Aren't you both immensely pleased with me? I am with myself!

J.

## XIV

### *The Next Night.*

MY DEARS,

You know, the woman who runs the Stupidity Bureau didn't think me a heroine at all! Quitting your job at the end of the first week, going off explosively, as I did, doesn't endear the Honest Working Girl to the management. It simply isn't done. She was so frigid that I decided to scratch domestic labor from my list. I shall join the gainful army in the busy marts.

Mrs. Mussel telephoned to the Stranger's Friend and the kind little S.F. bustled right out and took me to a stereopticon lecture on the bee. Subtle, wasn't it? Treatment by indirection.

And she gave me a note to a department store which will probably take me on.

Meanwhile,

G—N—

J.

*Next Night.*

They did, dear people, they did. In the basement. In the kitchen ware. All day long I was learning to sell clothespins and eggbeaters and wringers and cookie cutters and I wish you could see my hands! I wonder if they'd consider me up stage if I wore gloves? I'd better not chance it.

They were all ever so decent about helping me. The floorwalker was especially kind. (I can see you fling up your head like a warhorse at the smell of powder, Emma Ellis, but he's a meek young thing who likes to burble of his baby.)

But I'm a woman of my word and this chronicle is faithful and true. Coming home on the L, I saw the beamish Buffalo, and he saw me and plunged to me through the crowd, saying gleefully, "Say, girlie, I've thought of you a million times, and I—say, listen, I got in awful Dutch with the wife about you, and she said"—but I slipped nimbly into my local and the door slapped shut between us.

Your heroines, Emma, were not so light on their feet. But I honestly felt mean,—he did look so friendly and fat.

I'm to have eight a week in my basement. Mrs. Mussel gets five of it and the rest I may waste in riotous living.

Good night!

JANE.

*Three Nights Later.*

DEAR M.D. AND E.E.,

Please dash downtown and have a million service medals struck off and then rush around and pin them on all the shop girls in the world! The unutterable weariness—the aching, burning, sagging, sickening, faint *tiredness!*

If ever again, as long as I live, I'm cross to a saleswoman, no matter how cross she may be to me, then may God send a sudden angel down to grasp me by the hair and bear me far and drop me into the kitchen ware on eight a week and my throbbing feet!

JANE.

*Saturday Night.*

MY DEARS, I'm turned off. After all the trying and enduring and the dead-tiredness, I'm turned off. The kind little floorwalker hated to do it. "Say, listen, sister," he said, "it's like this. We gotter let somebuddy go. Holidays comin', people ain't goin' to buy kitchen ware. Sure they ain't. Plug up th' leakin' kettle an' buy Mummer th' rhinestone combs! Well, you're the last to come, see? You gotter be the first to go."

I bought Mrs. Mussel a shrinking bunch of violets to soften the blow, but she wondered if I couldn't get my money back (*her* money she figures, poor thing!) if I hurried right downtown with them and explained that I'd changed my mind.

Heavens, but we had a horrible supper.

Very down indeed,

JANE.

*Monday Night.*

DEAR PEOPLE,

I'm doing my best to uplift Mrs. Mussel, but she's the undisputed Queen of all the Glooms and my sprightly efforts fall on stony ground. For her peace of mind I divulged the fact that I have nearly thirty dollars left which makes me really a

capitalist, but in her eyes I am simply an Unemployed.

I rush into the house glowing and braced from a brisk walk but my cheer soon gutters out,—I might as well try to illuminate a London fog with a Christmas tree candle.

I try to help her with her errands and marketing and to-day I was staggering home under a load of parcels and slipped on the glassy pavement just in front of the house and fell flat. A smart motor which was spinning by slid to a standstill and the driver jumped out and ran back to me. He was a beautiful big youth and the machine was one of those low, classy, dachshund effects in mauve. THE MAIDEN'S DREAM picked me up and all my packages and looked us all over to make sure we weren't damaged. One of the parcels contained liver, and it became unwrapped.... (Dost like the picture, Jane Vail bearing home the liver for her frugal evening meal?) He did it up very deftly and then he asked me if he couldn't give me a lift. I said he certainly could but for the fact that I was already arrived at my destination. Then he said, "I'll give you a hand with the plunder, then. Which house?"—and THE MAIDEN'S DREAM and the liver and I mounted Mrs. Mussel's steps together. He was as big and bonny as the impossible young persons in the backs of magazines, and he said it was tough weather to be walking and I said it was tough weather to be out of a job, and he said that was tough luck. (See how I gave him an opening, E.E.?) I thanked him and he said it was nothing and sped down to his speedster and I went in to my Christian room. Mrs. Mussel had been doing her regular Sister Anne act at the window and had "seen it all," she assured me ... I will omit her Phillipic....

JANE.

*Wednesday.*

Still no gainful occupation, people! Compared to her present attitude, Mrs. Mussel was Jest and Youthful Jollity before. And the blacker things get the earlier we rise. It seems to me that no sooner have I fitted myself compactly into my doll's-size bed and closed my eyes than I hear her mournful summons to another day. Oh, the inky gloom of these murky mornings! I know that the young woman who said so lyrically, "*If you're waking, call me early, call me early, Mother dear!*" is popularly supposed to have died without issue, but that is a misconception. I shrink from putting a Spoon River scandal on her mossy tombstone, but my Mrs. Mussel is her lineal descendant.

To-day I was racked by a yearning for the flesh-pots. I made myself as near smart as possible and flew for the smartest tea-room on Michigan Avenue. If I could stay me with Orange Pekoe and comfort me with toasted crumpets and English marmalade—But just as I was blithely footing it across the threshold the S.F. rose up behind me like a genie from a bottle and plucked me back.

"Edna Miles," she gasped, "my poor child, you can't eat in there! It's the most expensive place in the city. Besides,—it is half-past four,—you'll spoil your dinner!"

Very peevisly and hollowly,

JANE.

*Thursday Night.  
On the Joyful New Job.*

Oh, my dear people, but I do believe in Fairies! I've met one personally! While we sat at melancholy mending this morning, my doleful landlady and I, after my fruitless tour of the agencies, who should dash up to our dull door but THE MAIDEN'S DREAM! In his shining chariot! Mrs. Mussel said, "Edna, you go straight upstairs and lock yourself in your room and I'll 'tend to him!" But I was at the door before he had time to ring the bell.

"Great luck," he said, "'fraid you'd be gone. Got a job yet?"

"No."

"Well, I was telling my sister about you, and she thinks she has just the place for you. Want to hop in the boat and run out to see her now and talk it over?"

Mrs. Mussel said of course he hadn't any sister, and that I ought to be ashamed of

myself and I would probably never be seen or heard of again, and she knew he had a poison needle and she rang up the Stranger's Friend, but before she got her connection I was spinning up the North Shore. THE MAIDEN'S DREAM lives in a young palace and Miss Marjorie, his sister, is also Peter Pan's sister. He explained to me, as we went, that she had been thrown from her horse and would never walk again, and so she "did things for girls, you know—keeps her busy—"

She looks exactly like a Fra Angelico angel! She kept me to luncheon in her room with her—oh, flesh-pots!—hot broth and tiny chops and pop-overs and magic salad and chocolate and ginger-bread—and told me about this extraordinary job. Then THE MAIDEN'S DREAM whizzed me home for my things (I found Mrs. M. and the S.F. holding an agitated Directors' Meeting), but when the S.F. heard Miss Marjorie's last name, she beamed and brought me out here.

Miss Marjorie explained that I'm to be more or less of a maid-companion to my pretty little mistress. She's a limp and lovely nymph who's quarreled with her husband and is in hiding in this funny old house which belonged to her family, in a weird neighborhood where none of her own set would ever discover her. The house is comfortable enough inside, but the locality is a rather rough one, and there is not even a telephone. There is a cook and a cleaner-by-the-day, and the new maid-companion, so she should be reasonably well looked after.

Whoops, my dears! Fifty dollars a month and almost nothing to do! This is the Promised Land!

Joyfully,

JANE.

*Monday.*

DEAR PEOPLE,

The cook is cross because she drinks and she drinks because she is cross, and I have persuaded my nymph to let her go and give me a try at it. The cleaner-by-the-day will do the grubby things and I shall like it. Time to get luncheon! Wish you might drop in to sample my fare!

JANE.

P.S. There is the most engaging grocery boy with red hair and a heart-twisting grin. I'm not sure I wasn't considering him when I turned kitchen mechanic. Denny Dolan is his name and God loves the Irish!

J.

*Wednesday.*

It's fun, my dears, every inch of it, from my little lady's breakfast tray to Denny's extra trips with things he "forgot."

She wanted to give me the cook's wages in addition to mine, because she says I do all the work of both places, but I modestly compromised on seventy-five and on my first day out I'm going to take Mrs. Mussel a regal present.

Opulently,

JANE.

*Friday.*

MY DEAR PEOPLE,

My nymph is ill and unhappy and grieving for her husband, but she won't send for him, and it's the time of all times when he should be with her. I went the five blocks to the drug store and telephoned Miss Marjorie about her, and she sent the old family

doctor, and when he left her eyes were red, and I suppose he was urging her to make it up.

She's such a vague, sweet, helpless thing! This dreary neighborhood is bad for her.

Denny Dolan says "there's a hard-boiled bunch hangin' around here," and warns me against venturing out after dark, even to the post-box.

JANE.

P.S. He brought me a paper bag of gum drops to-day!

*A Week Later.*

Almost too busy to write, my dears, what with cooking and catering and maiding and companioning. Besides, I'll have you to know I'm keeping company! It's walking out with Denny Dolan I am! I get the cleaning woman to stay with my nymph for an hour, and I'm stepping out with my young man. Twice to the movies we've been, and had dripping ice-cream cones afterwards!

So no more at present, for a girl would be thinking of her beau the way she has no time to be palavering on paper and he waiting in the alley!

DENNY'S GIRL.

*The Next Night.*

I went into town to-day and I met the Buffalo just as I was leaving a Loop car, and it seemed only the fair and sporting thing to let him speak to me.

He beamed more beamishly than ever. "Say, listen, girlie," he said, "I've had the deuce of a time, losin' you every time I find you! Say, I was startin' to tell you the other day,—the wife gimme fits when I told her about you. Sure, she did." I stood very still and looked at him and listened. "Yeah. Calls me a big boob. 'You big boob,' she says. 'You sleeper! Her tellin' you she was a stranger and all that, and lookin' for work, an' you never give her my address!' Honest, she trimmed me for fair. I got to beat it now, but here's her card, see?—Telephone'n everything, and she wants you to call her up. She wants to have you out to dinner, Aggie does, and have you meet some of her lady friends and get you acquainted. Say, ring her up, will you, sure? Gee, she was some sore at the old man! Bye!"

He leaped into his Express, and vanished, and I could have sat down in the midst of the scurrying crowd and wept with shame and joy and gratitude. I rang Aggie up at once, and I could just *see* her, from her cozy voice.

How about it, Emma Ellis? Do I score? I'm dining with them soon.

JANE.

P.S.—Do you realize that my month is up? And my point is won? But I'm going to stay on and see my nymph safely through her dark days.

*A Week Later.*

Denny and I went to see "Twin Hearts" this evening and in the meltingest part of the film he held my hand. I thought it was about time to unmask, so I said—retrieving my hand—that I wasn't a regular kitchen mechanic but a volunteer.

"My real job," I said, "is writing. I'm a writer."

"Sure you are!" he chuckled delightedly. "You'n me both! I wrote this spiel here! I'm Henry W. Dickens!"

I couldn't seem to convince him of anything but that I was "some little kidder." He undertook to tell the world about that. To-morrow, in the garish light of day, when he dumps his neat parcels on my spotless table, I must really explain that—

DEAR E.E. AND M.D.,

I'm perished for sleep, but I'll write what I can. Just as I got to "that" above, my nymph called me. She was ill,—terribly, terrifyingly ill, and even I saw that there wasn't an instant to lose. And not a soul to send to the telephone.

I couldn't leave her—but I had to leave her! It didn't enter my head to be afraid—only of not getting the doctor in time. Denny's warnings were forgotten. I had done one block of the five when a man stepped out of a dark hallway, and halted in front of me.

Even then, until he spoke, I wasn't really frightened. But when he did,—I tell you, Emma Ellis and Michael Daragh, all the horror and wickedness, all the filth and sin of the world seemed to be closing in on me, stifling me, blinding me, hobbling my feet. All the windows about me were blank and black; a block and a half ahead of me was a blaze of light—Boldini's Saloon—"a rotten bad one," Denny had said.

I ran, oh, how I ran, but he ran, too, faster, faster. I tried to reach out for something to cling to—for a shield—Just fragments came—"angels charge over thee ... snare of the fowler ... terror by night...."

We were almost at Boldini's Saloon, and I couldn't run any faster, and twice he had caught hold of my arm.... Suddenly another fragment came—"in all thy ways ..." *All!* I ran through the swinging doors into the saloon, out of the horrid, dark night into the horrid light, and I stumbled and went down onto my knees and pulled myself up by the bar, and I heard my voice—"Men—men—*Please*—I was going to the drug store to telephone—a woman is sick—a baby—she's all alone there—and this man—this man—" I hung onto the edge of the bar and everything spun dizzily round with me, but I saw three men bolt through the door and fall upon him.

Michael Daragh, I suppose some day I can remember with horror how they beat him, but I can't now. I can't be sorry for him. I can't be anything but gloatingly glad. They were drunk, all of them, but when they finished with him they escorted me to the drug store, one on each side and one marching on before and banged up the night man and while I telephoned the doctor they waited for me, and then they took me home.

I wanted to scream with laughter—they couldn't walk straight, two of them—and I wanted more to cry,—"*angels charge over thee*—" They were! I shook hands with them and thanked them, and they mounted guard outside the house and I flew in to my lady.

Well, presently the doctor came, and then the nurse came, and then Roderick Frost III came, a frantic young man with penitent eyes, and presently Roderick Frost IV came, a bad-tempered young tenor who protested lustily at being born in a spot so far removed from his own rightful social orbit, and then morning came, and I fell into bed for three hours of sodden sleep.

Now the haughty chef from the Lake Shore Drive is here, taking royal charge, and Edna Miles' job is over. I'm going to see little Miss Marjorie and 'fess up, and take farewell of Mrs. Mussel and my kind S.F., and then, my dears, I'm coming home,—home with palms of victory.

Haven't I won, Emma Ellis? Haven't I won, Michael Daragh? Do you dare to count the one exception that gloriously proved the rule? Didn't my three unsteady angels more than make up for one poor devil? Nearly six weeks alone in the wide, cold world, dozens of kindly conductors and policemen and L guards and clerks and fellow citizens, the kind little floorwalker and Denny Dolan, and the beamish Buffalo and THE MAIDEN'S DREAM, and my three avenging knights!

Own up, old dears! Admit you're beaten! I have walked *The Narrow Path* and found it clean and safe and good!

Triumphantly—gloatingly—

JANE.

It would be the private opinion of Emma Ellis to her dying day that Miss Vail had suppressed a good deal and had embellished a good deal, in that dramatic way of hers. She had written so much fiction and lived so much in her imagination that it was doubtful if she could (with the best intentions) tell the exact and unadorned truth about anything. Besides, even if things had happened exactly as she had chronicled them, it was not a fair test anyway; it was a very different case from those of the heroines in the two stories. Jane Vail knew she was Jane Vail, with an assured position in the literary world and a large income, and that the whole thing was only play-acting after all. But with Mr. Daragh entirely convinced and more maudlinly worshipful than ever, what was the use of saying anything? But she could *think*.

Jane swung happily into her fourth year in New York, flying home to Sarah Farraday for Christmas, meeting the young year with high hopes and canny plans, a definite part, now, of the confraternity of ink. Her circle widened and widened; important persons came down from their heights of achievement to make much of her, and the late spring saw the successful launching of another gay little play, and early fall found her deep—head, hands, and heart—in her first serious novel, but she found amazing margins of time for Rodney Harrison, for Hope House, for Michael Daragh.

Sarah Farraday, resigned but never reconciled, shared vicariously in the life-more-abundantly which had come to her best friend, and she always said, with a small sigh, that nothing Jane did or said could ever surprise her again, but she was nevertheless startled, after a long silence, to receive a fat letter bearing a Mexican stamp.

*On a Meandering Train, bound, more or less for Guadalajara*, it began, and was dated December the seventh.

SALLY DEAR,

You must be thinking me quite mad at last, not hearing from me for weeks, and then—this! Like the old woman in the fairy tale,—“Can this be I?”

I decided all in a wink to fly to California and visit my mother's cousins, the Budders. I needed a drastic change, Sally. I haven't had a real play-time for a year, and it's four years and a month since I left home for New York—can you realize it? Four lucky, beautiful, shining years. But oh, I'm tired, old dear! So tired that my brain creaks. I think there comes a time, in creative work, for playing hooky. Write and run away and live to write another day. So I wired the Budders I was coming and took the train the same day, and when I reached San Francisco I found them all packed up for this Mexican trip,—indeed, they were sitting on their trunks with a tentative ticket for me in their hands. And I was pleased pink to come. The Budders (doesn't Budder sowl as if I ad a code id by ed?) are nice, comfortable creatures,—the sort who are called the salt of the earth but in reality aren't anything so piquant. They're the boiled potatoes and graham bread and rice pudding. You, now, Sally darling, are the angel cake, and there's not half enough of you; I'm the olives and anchovies and caviar ... a little goes a long way ... and Michael Daragh is the rich and creamy milk of human kindness, always being skimmed by a needy, greedy world.

Behold me, then, ambling through Mexico, a Spanish phrase book in my lap and peace in my heart.

*Adiós!*

JANE.

P.S. I have just read this over, Sarah. Fiction of purest ray serene. I'm not tired. I don't need to play. It was a very bad time for me to leave,—my work screamed after me all across the continent. I had to fly for my life and liberty.

Sally, friend of my youth, patient receptacle of all my moods and tenses, I was falling in love. At least, I felt myself slipping. All these four years I have intended Michael Daragh to be an interesting character part in my drama of New York, down in the cast as “her best friend.” He is threatening to take the lead, and it isn't going to do at all. Sally, the man's goodness is simply ghastly; I couldn't endure having a husband so incontestably better than I am. Why, you know that all my life I've been “a wonderful influence for good” with *man*kind! Didn't I always coax sling shots away from bad little boys and make them sign up for the S.P.C.A.? And wasn't I always getting bad big boys to smoke less and drink less and pass ex'es and dance with wallflowers and write to their mothers? Really, when I think of the twigs I've bent and the trees I've inclined, I feel that there should be a tablet erected to me somewhere. But the woman who weds Michael Daragh, I don't care who she is (lie: I care enormously!) will always be burning incense to him in her lesser soul, always straining on tiptoe to breathe the air in which he lives and moves and has his being.

Michael Daragh, that time he renounced the flesh-pots and “took to bride the Ladye Povertye with perfect blitheness,” did it so thoroughly that any literal spouse will be only a sort of morganatic wife, anyway. I don't mean that he might not adore her and be wonderful to her *after* he'd ministered unto a drove of sticky immigrants and a



Settlement full of drab down-and-outs and an Agnes Chatterton Home full of Fallen Sisters, but he would really expect her to *prefer* having him assist at the arrival of the eleventh little Lascanowitz in a moldy cellar to keeping a birthday dinner date with her.

Now, Sally dear, in these four years since I left my village home (soft chords) I have labored somewhat, and I confess that I have frankly looked forward to matrimony as a sort of glorified vacation. I couldn't ever give up my work, of course,—it wouldn't give me up—and I don't crave to "sit on a cushion and sew a fine seam and live upon strawberries, sugar and cream" exclusively, but somewhere in the middle ground between that and washing dishes and "feeding the swine," I did visualize a sort of gracious lady leisure, with a vague, worshipful being in the background making me "take care of myself."

Therefore, feeling myself melting unduly on the Irish question, I fly while there is yet time.

Much love, old dear!

JANE.

*December 8th.*

That was a silly screed, yesterday, Sally dearest, but getting it off my chest was a great relief. And at that it wasn't a complete confession. There was another reason for a strategic retreat. The other reason was Rodney Harrison. Yes, the House of Harrison has capitulated, handsomely, lavishly, Mater and Pater as well, but I'm very sure that I can never be theirs. Just as I feel that Michael Daragh is too good for me, so do I feel that Rodney Harrison is not quite good enough! I mean by that not quite concerned enough with drying the world's tears. With—as G.B.S. says—"a character that needs looking after as much as my own," I feel I should have some one a little less Philistine than the cheerful Rodney. At any rate, I needed perspective on the whole situation, and who knows but I shall meet my nice new fate on this romantic pilgrimage? (Sounds more like eighteen than twenty-eight, doesn't it?) But, seriously, I've been so constantly with Michael Daragh and Rodney in these four years that I know every dip and spur, every line and leaf of their mental scenery; fresh fields and pastures new are what I need. And "one meets so many delightful people in traveling—" as witness the good Budders and their niece, Miss Vail ('sh ... they say she's a *writer!*)

Something, which is to say, *somebody*, may turn up at any moment.

Yours, Micawber-ing,

J.

P.S. I trust you won't expect to glean any useful information or statistics about Mexico from these chronicles? The Budders are deep in histories and guidebooks but I know not whether the *Chichimecs* were people or pottery and I hope I never shall!

P.S. II. Cousin Dudley, having just returned from the smoker, reports chatting with a most interesting young civil engineer—

*December 9th.*

We are now so late, Sally dear, that we have lost all social standing; we slink into sidings and wait in shame for prompt and proper trains to bustle by. But I don't mind. At this rate I shall be able to converse rippingly in Spanish by the time we reach Guadalajara. Cousin Dudley knows a professor person there who will help us to plan our trip.

Spanish is deliciously easy. It seems rather silly to make it a regular study in our schools.

I adore the stations, especially at night,—black velvet darkness studded with lanterns and torches and little leaping fires; old blind minstrels whining their ballads; the mournful voices of the sweetmeat venders chanting—"Dulce de Morelia!"—"Cajeta de Celaya!" These candies, by the way, are the most—

December 11th.

Alas, *muy Sally mia*, when I meant to add a few paragraphs to this letter diary every day! I was interrupted just there by Cousin Dudley who came in with his civil engineer, and there hasn't seemed to be any spare time since. (How is that for a demonstration of Mr. Burroughs' well-known theory about folding your hands and waiting and having your own come to you?)

He is an *extremely* civil engineer and very easy to look at. He has close-cropped, bronzy brown hair and gentian-blue eyes and his skin is burned to a glowing copper luster. He is just idling about, slaying time during a vacation too brief to warrant his going home to Virginia, and he shows strong symptoms of willingness to act as guide, philosopher and friend to wandering Touri. We are actually going to reach Guadalajara tomorrow! Some one must be giving us a tow.

*Adiós, muy amiga mía!*

JUANA.

P.S. The C.E. is going to hear my Spanish lesson now.

P.S. II. Isn't NETZAHUALCOYOTL a cunning word?

*Guadalajara,  
December 12th.*

QUERIDA SARITA,

We sight-saw all morning in this lovely, languid, ladylike city, and this afternoon we called on Cousin Dudley's friend, Professor Morales and his family. They were expecting us and as our *coche* drew up at the curb, the door flew open and *el profesor* flew out, seized Cousin Ada's hand, held it high, and led her into the house, minuet fashion. The *señora*, a mountainous lady with a rather striking mustache and the bosom of her black gown sprinkled with a snow fall of powder which couldn't find even standing room on her face, conducted Cousin Dudley in the same manner, and I fell to the lot of a beautiful youth.

The *sala* was crazy with what-nots and knick-knacks and bamboo furniture and running over with people—plump, furrily powdered *señoritas* with young mustaches, cherubs with gazelle eyes and weak-coffee-colored skin, and the oldest woman ever seen out of a pyramid.

There was an agonizing time getting us all introduced and a still more agonizing time of stage wait afterward. Then Cousin Dudley (I thirsted for his gore) said chirpily, "My niece has learned to speak Spanish, you know."

My dear, it made the Tower of Babel seem like "going into the silence." Everybody in that room talked to me at once. In my frantic boast and foolish word about the easiness of Spanish it had never occurred to me that people would talk to *me*! If the fiends had only held their tongues and let *me* ask *them* to have the kindness to do me the favor to show me which way was the cathedral, or whether it was the silk handkerchief of the rich Frenchman which the young lady's old sick father required, all would have been well, but instead—a madhouse!

Then came rescue. The sweetest, softest pussy willow of a girl with a delicious accent said, "So deed I also feel, in the covevent, when they all at once spik *inglés*!" She was in pearl gray, no powder, no mustache, slim as a reed. Her gentle name is Maria de Guadalupe Rosalia Merced Castello, but they call her "Lupe" ("Loopie," Sally, not Loop!) She is a penniless orphan, just visiting her kin at present, but lives with an uncle in Guanajuato (where delves my C.E. at his mine) and she is in disgrace because of an undesirable love affair, so the *señora* told Cousin Ada. They are taking us to the *Plaza* to-night, and meanwhile we sup.

Delightedly,

JANE.

P.S. 11.30 P.M. The *Plaza* is still the parlor in Guadalajara and it's enchanting! The staid background of the chaperones in *coches*, the slow procession of youths and maidens, two and two, boys in one line, girls in another, the eager, forward looks, the whisper at passing, the note slipped from hand to hand, the backward glances, all classes, and over all, through all, the pleading, pulsing call of the music.

Sarah, never did you make melody like that, decent New Englander that you are! It's so poignantly searching-sweet, so *sin verguenza* (without shame!) *El profesor* had them play *La Golondrina*, their national anthem, really, which means merely The Swallow, to start with, but everything else a hungry heart can pack into it. Lupe and I walked together and she was pouring out her dewy young confidences before we'd been twice round the circle. Montagues and Capulets! The rich uncle who has reared her is the bitterest enemy of her Emilo's papa who is a general of revolutionary tendencies. "Me," she said with a shrug, "I can never marry! *Vestiré los santos!*" (Which means, "I shall dress the saints!" Old maids having unlimited time for church work!)

*Buenas noches,*

J.

*December 14th.*

DEAREST SALLY,

The loveliest idea came and sat on my chest in the pearly dawn! I'm going to take María de Guadalupe Rosalía Merced Castello with me on this tour as Spanish teacher! She accepted with tears of joy and the Morales family bore up bravely. They will be frankly glad of a few nights' sleep,—Lupe's gallants come nightly to "make a serenade,"—not a lone guitar but the tenor from the opera house and a piano trundled through the streets. The more costly the musical ingredients, the greater the swain's devotion!

To-day we went with various members of the Morales clan to visit the *Hospicio* (see the Budders for dates and data!). I only remember a girl of twelve who sat by herself in the playground, the small, cameo, clear face with its sorrowing eyes, the pathetic arrogance in the lift of the chin, her withdrawal from the other noisy little orphans. I knew she must have a story, and when I asked the pretty sister in charge, she burst into eager narrative.

Twelve years ago, approximately, a young physician was called at night to the *peon* quarter, and to his amazement found that his patient was a lady, a girl whose patrician manner was proof against all her terror and suffering. She utterly refused to look at her child and threatened to smother it if he left it within her reach. He took it to the *Hospicio* to be cared for temporarily, and a few days later, going as usual to attend the young mother, he found her vanished. There was a lavish fee left for him, and a note, bidding him insolently to banish the whole matter from his memory. The neighbors knew only that they had heard a *coche* in the dead of night. The child, whom they named in their mournful fashion Dolores Tristeza—sorrows and sadness—was always the doctor's protegée. One day he came in great excitement to tell the pretty sister the sequel. He had been summoned the night before to the bedside of a dying man,—one of the great names of the city. The family was grouped about the father and among the weeping daughters he espied his mysterious patient! Afterward, when he was leaving, she looked him squarely in the eye and said, "You are a newcomer in Guadalajara? You must be, for *I have never seen you before!*" He told no one but the sister at the *Hospicio* and not even to her did he divulge the name, but two days later, in a lonely suburb of the city, he was shot and killed.

Sarah, doesn't that make your scalp creep? Dolores Tristeza! "Sorrows and Sadness!" I dashed out and bought her a gorgeous doll and she gave me a gracious smile but she was not at all overcome. She clearly feels her quality. Loads of people have wanted to adopt her but she would never go with them.

And to-morrow we are off to Querétaro to drop a silent tear on Maximilian's dressy little tomb, the Budders, Lupe, the C.E. and I. We are gathering as we roll!

*Adíos, querida mia!*

J.

*Queretaro.*

I've paid proper tribute to that poor pawn of Empire who lived so poorly and who died so well, but the real zest of this journey is Lupe! Fresh every hour! Her mental processes are delicious. I was lamenting her frank delight in bull-fights and she said,

"Oh, the firs' time I see horse keel,' I am ver' seek. *Now* they keel four, seven, eleven horse,' I like ver' moach!" When I tried to make her realize the enormity of her taste, she turned on me like a flash—"But you American girl, you go see you' brawther get keel' in football game!"

"Pussy willow," I said, "it's not a parallel case. Our brothers are free agents,—they adore doing it. They're toiling and sweating and praying for the chance—perhaps for years,—and they're heroes, and thousands are making the welkin ring with their names!"

She shrugged. "Oh—*ee* you care more for some ol' horse than you' *brawther*—"

The C.E. (although he could dispense with her society very cheerfully) helps me to understand her, and through her, Mexico, this sad, bad, pitiful, charming, lovable, hateful land!

Lupe's Emilio is by way of being a poet, it seems, and he has sent her a little song, which we have translated, and I put it into rhyme, and the C.E.—who has a very decorative voice indeed—hums it to a lonesome little tune distantly related to La Golondrina. Here it is:

"Thro' the uncolored years before I knew you  
My days were just a string of wooden beads;  
I told them dully off, a weary number ...  
The silly cares, the foolish little needs.

"But now and evermore, because I've known you,  
They've turned to precious pearls and limpid jade,  
Clear amethysts as deep as seas eternal,  
And heart's-blood rubies that will never fade.

"You never knew, and now you never will know;  
Some joys are given; mine were only lent.  
You see, I do not reckon years or distance;  
Somewhere I know you *are*; I am content.

"I do not need your pity or your presence  
To bridge the widening gulf of now and then;  
It is enough for me to know my jewels  
Can never turn to wooden beads again."

Of course, to be tiresomely exact, he's *always* known her, and she is entirely aware of his devotion, and he can reckon the time and distance quite easily with the aid of a time-table, but, as the C.E. says, "it listens well."

Off to La Ciudad de Mexico in the morning!

*Con todo mi corazon,*

JANE.

P.S. I might remark in passing that it's a perfectly good *corazon* again, sane and sound and whole, and summons only dimly a memory of New York....

*Mexico City.*

SARAH, my dear, I've given up trying to date my letters. I've lost count of time. We've been here for many golden days and silver nights, in a land of warm eyes and soft words, where *peons* take off their *sombreros* and step aside to let my Grace pass, and Murillo beggar boys are named—"Florentino Buenaventura, awaiting your commands!"

We sight-see so ardently that lazy little Lupe says she is "tired until her bones!" and when she surrenders, we go on alone, the C.E. and I. (Oh, yes, the Budders are still with us, but they are keener on facts than fancies, and we deign but seldom to go with them and improve our minds.) Yesterday, however, we consented to see Diaz' model prison. My dear, after seeing how the people live at large, one is convinced that here the wages of sin are sanitation and education. I should think ex-convicts would be hugely in demand for all sorts of positions. In the parlor we were fascinated with a display of the skulls of prisoners who had been executed there. I saw one small, round, innocent-looking one which couldn't possibly have ever contained a harsh thought, I was sure, and I indignantly read the tag to see what he had been martyred for. Sarah, the busy boy had done twenty-one ladies to death!

We listen to melting music in the Alameda, we ride in the fashion parade in the Calle San Francisco, we drive out along the beautiful Paseo de la Reforma and drink chocolate in the shadow of the Castle of Chapultepec—chocolate made with cinnamon and so rich and sweet it almost bends the spoon to stir it. Miss Vail remembers with difficulty that she is the heir of all the ages in the foremost files of time, a self-supporting young business woman who beats bright thoughts from a typewriter four earnest hours per diem ... or that she was....

*Hoy*—to-day, is very satisfying; I forget *ayer*—yesterday; *Mañana*—to-morrow, may never come!

Juana.

*Christmas Eve, Cuernavaca.*

*Felices Pascuas*, Sally dear! You in the snow and I in fairyland! It's a comic opera Christmas here, but a very fetching one,—the pretty processions of singing children through the streets, the gay, grotesque *piñatis*—huge paper dolls filled with *dulces*, the childish and merry little people, the color, the music, the smile and the sob of it all!

I wish I could have little Dolores Tristeza with me. I sent her a box of delights.

My pussy willow girl is star-eyed over a telegram and my much more than civil engineer has told me what he wants for Christmas. If he had told me on Fifth Avenue or at home, on Wetherby Ridge, I should have said at once that I was sorry, and I liked him immensely, and so on, but—but here, in Cuernavaca, in the Borda Gardens, beside the crumbling pinky palace, where the ghosts of Maximilian and Carlotta walk at the full of the moon, when he told me that all his days were wooden beads before I came, and—I don't know, Sally! I don't know! New York seems very far away ... Rodney Harrison and my St. Michael seem palely unreal.... Can it be possible, in these gay little weeks, that, as Lupe would say, "I have arrive" to love this boy?

Distractedly,

JANE.

## CHAPTER XVI

*Orizaba.*

MY DEAR SALLY,

In the market place to-day I found such a bored old bear dancing for a bored crowd. I've never seen anything quite so tired and patient as his eyes. His little old master was half asleep but he whacked his tambourine and whined his mournful song without a pause. I left Lupe and the C.E. and went out and patted the bear and asked the man (I am as handy as that with my Spanish!) how much he earned in a day. Less than fifteen cents in our money! Well, I asked him if I could buy the bear a week's vacation if I paid him three weeks' earnings in advance. He accepted thankfully and I believe he will keep his word, being just as bored as the bear. The old beast came down on his four feet with a gusty sigh and they padded peacefully away. The crowd thought me mildly mad and the C.E. was a little annoyed with me. He said he would gladly have attended to it for me if I had asked him. I answered him very impertinently—something Lupe had taught me—"Cuando tu vas, ya yo vengo!" which means in crude English, "By the time you get started I'll be on the way back!"

I purr with pleasure when I think of the bear!

JANE.

P.S. One hopes it isn't a habit with him ... being a little annoyed....

Sally, dear, this isn't a comic opera country at all, but a land of grim melodrama; stark tragedy.

We're here in the prettiest city, on the edge of the *tierra caliente*, but it's been a horrid day. It started wrong. An unsavory but beautiful cherub of eight or so, smoking a cigarette, tried to sell me a baby lizard. You remember how I've always loved lizards, but I couldn't take it on a day's sight-seeing so I gave him a copper and refused. He said in liquid Spanish, "So, Your Grace will not buy my little lizard? Very well! Behold!"—and before my horrified eyes he held it to his cigarette and burned it to death before I could jump out of the machine and get to him. I suppose I'm tired out with all this rushing about, for I just went to pieces over it, and when Lupe said sympathetically, "Oh, deed you *want* it?" it made me turn on her. I made the rest go on the drive without me and I sat down in the Plaza alone to think things over. There was a little old fountain with a gurgling drip, and I rested in the ragged shade of the banana trees and heard two hours tinkled from the crumbling, creamy-colored cathedral, and came gradually to the point of understanding that the boy was just as much an object of pity as the lizard. I knew that Michael Daragh would say—there—that's the first time, even to myself—

Well, I sat there, cooled and calmed, and presently I heard something and looked up to see two soldiers on horseback bringing a prisoner. His arms were bound behind him, and great, rough ropes ran from their saddles to his neck and the skin was rubbed raw. The horses were steaming; they must have come fast. Another soldier went on to report or something and told them to wait there, and they were halted right by me. The man's mouth was open and his swollen tongue hanging out and he was panting just like a dog. He gasped, "*Agua! Por Dios—agua!*" but his guards just laughed and shouted to the *pulquería* across the street, and a boy came out and brought them drinks. Their backs were toward me, and I got up without making a sound and crept to the fountain and filled the big iron cup to the brim and held it till he'd drained every drop, and then let him have a little more, and then I dipped my handkerchief in the water and put it in his mouth. And just at that very moment—of course!—the guards turned round and saw me, *and* the Budders and the C.E. and Lupe drove up!

My dear Sarah, they very nearly arrested *me*! The man is, they claim, a dangerous revolutionist, and I was giving aid to him. Lupe was shaking like a leaf and the C.E. was white as paper, but between them they got me off.

I don't care! I'd do it again!

It seems the whole country is simmering and seething in revolution; old Diaz' throne is tottering under him. Lupe was tearful over a wailing letter from her Emilio, begging her to return, and the C.E. is recalled to his mine, and the Budders are a little nervous and anxious to hurry northward, so we're off for Guanajuato to-morrow, but I'm not very keen about it.

I'm not very keen about anything.

Drearily,

J.

*Two Hours Later.*

P.S. We took a little *paseo* in the moonlight and things looked brighter in the dark! The only reason the C.E. gets a little annoyed is that he cannot bear to see me in distress or danger. He was very nice about promising to help me smooth the path for *Romeo* and *Juliet*.

We pass through Guadalajara and I'll run in to see Dolores Tristeza.

J.

*On the Train to Guanajuato.*

Sally, she came running to meet me and flung herself into my arms! The sister says she's never done that to any one before, and she told me the child had talked of me

constantly. They're going to let me take her out for a whole day when we come back. She called "*Hasta la vista!*"—and threw me a kiss. She has quite wiped out the lizard and the *insurrecto*.

*Later.*

This is the most fascinating place yet! I'm glad the C.E. lives here, rather than in the cloying prettiness of the *tierra caliente*. It's great fun, arriving at a new place after dark. The town is high in the hills above the station and we came up in a mule car, rattling through the twisting, narrow streets. I sat near the driver, only his soft, bright eyes showing between his high-wrapped *serape* and his low-drawn *sombrero*, and he told me that his mules were named Constantino and The Pine Tree, faithful animals both of whom he tenderly loved. The few pedestrians scuttled into doorways or flattened themselves against the walls as we caromed past, and from time to time he blew a deafening blast on a crumpled horn.

We stepped from the car straight into the office of the hotel, and then the C.E. and I set out with Lupe to escort her to her uncle's house, but at the first dark turning she gave a smothered little scream and melted into the arms of a dusky cavalier. Emilio, when he could spare the time to be introduced, proved something of a landscape,—large for a Mexican, very much the patrician with his slim hands and feet and correct Castilian manner. Guanajuato is rather old-fashioned and he wears the high class, native costume, and when Lupe is at home here, she always wears a *reboso* instead of a hat.

He is the son of so many revolutions, it must make him dizzy to remember them, but I like him and I mean to help him win his pearl maiden. He discreetly left us before we reached Lupe's house and delivered her over to a very impressive Blue-beardish sort of person who was very gracious to us and asked me to visit Lupe. I shall,—it fits in perfectly with my plans! I go there to-morrow.

Meanwhile, I go to sleep!

Drowsily,

JANE.

*At Señor Don Diego's Palacio.*

Sally, *mía*, how you'd adore this house! The floors are of dull-red tiles and they are massaged three times a day, and the whole thing is medieval in flavor,—a flock of velvet-voiced, dove-eyed servants who adore Lupe and are pledged to her cause. Old Cristina, who was her mother's nurse, is to be our stoutest ally.

Every night for an hour Emilio stands under her balcony "playing the bear." Lupe, her face shrouded in her *reboso*, leans over and whispers. I hover in the background like *Juliet's* nurse. Afterward the C.E., having ridden in from his mine, comes for me, and we sally forth in the night like the Caliph and walk slowly up and down the Street of Sad Children, where the music comes daintily to us, filtered through the trees. Sometimes "Emily," as the C.E. wickedly calls him, joins us, to talk of his two loves,—Lupe, and Mexico. Sally, never laugh again at the Mexican revolutions,—they're not funny, only pitiful.

My chief task now is to infuse a quality of hope and—*ginger*—into these little lovers. Sometimes their attitude of *Dios no lo quiso*—heaven wills otherwise—makes me want to shake them, but slowly and surely I'm rousing them to action.

To-day we visited the prison here ... not the show model of Mexico City. This one is a hold-over from the Dark Ages. Young and old, gentle and simple, murderers and thieving children—all herded in together. In the huge court, before pillars with chains, a *peon* was mopping up some dark stains.... Ugh! This is the broken heart of Mexico where tears and blood are brewing.

JANE.

All our little plans are perfected, Sally! We have to act quickly for Lupe's Tio Diego is more irate than usual, and "Emily's" papa languishes in prison, and there is a plot on foot to rescue him and make him Governor or something.

The Budders find the situation singularly lacking in thrill, and feel they would enjoy the safe and uneventful streets of San Francisco, and we start north day after tomorrow night. They are interested in my pretty *novios* and will timidly help us.

It is all very simple. In the afternoon Lupe and I will stroll to the little church where she was baptized and where the gentle old priest is a friend of "Emily's" family. Emilio and the C.E. will be waiting. Two of us are expeditiously wed. Lupe and I stroll back alone, halting to take a cup of chocolate with cinnamon in the *dulcería*; dine sedately with Tio Diego. Then I, reminding him that I am about to return to the States with my relatives, take farewell of him, thanking him (feeling a good deal of the viper that bites the hand that feeds it) for his hospitality. Lupe and I then repair to her rooms for a last chat. Presently Emilio and the C.E. arrive beneath the balcony. I emerge, join the C.E., and go briskly with him through the dusk to the street car and thence to the station where the Budders are waiting and leave for Silao on the nine-o'clock train.

Only, as the intelligent reader will have gathered, it will be Lupe who melts into the distance in my frock and cloak, with my thickest chiffon veil over her face, and Emilio who strides at her side in the C.E.'s suit and overcoat and hat and the big, dark goggles he's been diligently wearing lately, and a scarf about his neck against the menace of the night air, while the C.E. in actuality, in *caballero* costume, gazes adoringly up at me on Lupe's *Juliet* balcony! Rather neat, what?

We hold the pose, the C.E. and I, until we hear the heartening whistle of the train, when he slips away to change his clothes and I, escorted by old Cristina, go back to the hotel and follow the Budders to Guadalajara in the morning. I don't see how it can possibly fail.

Emilio's family owns large *ranchos* up in Durango, where the elopers will be quite safe in a mountain fastness, and they will arrive there by craft, not buying through tickets, doubling now and then.

This is much more fun than eloping myself!

Excitedly,

JANE.

P.S. Speaking of which, the C.E. thinks it high time his case came up for hearing, and I've promised to give it serious consideration as soon as E. and L. are on their train. He had a quaint idea that the old priest might as well make it a double wedding!

*The Next Night.*

Only think, Sally dear, this time to-morrow night it will all be accomplished! I've never been so thrilled in all my days.

And there's another reason for it beside my pussy willow maid's romance! (No, not that! Not yet, at any rate!) It was this evening, early, when she and I were walking, and they were playing *La Golondrina*. Lupe was silent, deep in her own rosy thoughts. We passed the entrance to the "Street of Sad Children" and the name and the mournful magic of the music conjured up Dolores Tristeza for me, and the thought that I should soon see her again, but only to say good-by.

Then, quite suddenly and serenely, with no bothering doubts or "if's," I knew. I knew the thing I am going to do. I'm going to take her, to have her and keep her always. I'm twenty-eight years old, sound body and sane mind, with a steadily fattening income; I defy them to say I'm not the fittest adopter they ever saw. I know she'll want to come with me, and I know I couldn't leave Mexico heart-whole without her. Just as I arrived at this satisfying conclusion I glanced up; we were passing a little *pulquería* whose name—painted gorgeously—was "The Orphan's Tear!" Wasn't that fitting?

I can't wait to see her and tell her!

JANE.



SALLY DEAREST,

We are just home from the wedding and I wish you could see Lupe's dewy-eyed joy. I ache with tenderness for her. I know now why mothers always weep at weddings—I very nearly did myself, and I know I shall in ten years or so, when I see my Dolores Tristeza, standing like that, star-eyed, quivering-lipped.

When she slips away in the dusk to-night I shall put a period to my thought of María de Guadalupe Rosalía Merced Castello. I want to keep this fragrant memory of her.

"Yet, ah, that spring should vanish with the rose! That youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!"

I refuse to fancy my pussy-willow girl, my pearl maiden, in ten years, with a mustache and no corsets and eight weak-coffee-colored babies! *Adíos, Lupe mía!* Go with God!

Everything is in readiness. The dear old Budders, trembling with excitement, will be waiting at the train. As for me—as for my own little affair—I'm pushing that away, until my *novios* are safe. I'm pushing away that moment on the balcony, when we hear the train whistle. Sally, I don't *know!* This lovely, lazy, ardent land works moon magic on staid professional women!

Mistily,

JANE.

*Guadalajara,  
Two Days Later.*

SALLY DEAREST,

It was mean to make you wait for the next thrilling installment of my Mexican best-seller, but this is the first moment when I've thought I could put down, coherently and cohesively, what happened. Happened is a palely inadequate word;—burst,—exploded—erupted, would be better!

It worked like a charm. They got away. I leaned from Lupe's balcony in the fragrant dusk and listened to their footfalls dying away. The C.E., shrouded to his eyes, looked up and whispered that "Emily's" *charro* trousers had nearly ruined everything at the last moment; he had needed vaseline and a shoehorn and a special supplication to St. James to get them on. We giggled like sixteen-year-olds. The C.E. said—

"Lettice, Lettice, let down your golden hair,  
That I may climb by a golden stair!"

I was so pleased with him for remembering his fairy-tales. I was so pleased with him and so fond of him and so happy over my *novios* that I couldn't keep my beautiful plan a secret any longer. I told him what I had decided about Dolores Tristeza.

My dear! I wish you could have heard him! He was another person entirely. He said it was the maddest, wildest, most sickly sentimental, impractical thing he'd ever heard! He raved on and on, always coming back to the point of her clouded parentage. I told him he was perfectly mid-Victorian,—that any one living in the present century knows that there are no illegitimate *children*—just illegitimate fathers and mothers! But it never budged him. He was, for the first time, a most uncivil engineer. "Besides," I said, "beauty and wit is the love child's portion!"

It must have been funny, really, raging at each other in whispers. He began to burble about heredity and I told him I was planning an environment that would bleach out the heredity of the Piper Family, and he said that it couldn't be done, and I said that he was a pagan-suckled-in-a-creed-outworn, and just then the train whistled—the signal for what was to have been our melting moment, and we were both so mad we were fairly jibbering! And at that very instant old Cristina came running to tell us to fly at once, as Don Diego had decided to have Emilio arrested!

Before we could spread a wing, a little guard of opera bouffe soldiers was rounding the corner. I just whispered—"Stick! They'd stop them at Silao!" when they were upon him. He was a brick, I must admit. He just hitched the *serape* higher and pulled the *sombrero* lower and trudged away in somber silence. It seemed the only decent and sporting thing for me to stick, too, so I flung on Lupe's cape and covered my face with

a *mantilla* and fled after them. The C.E. was furious and tried his frantic best to make me go back, but I wouldn't and I whispered to him that I'd never forgive him as long as I lived if he told and spoiled everything. My dear, they took us to that horrible prison ... with the bloodstains on the floor! The man at the desk was nearly asleep. He scribbled something in his Dream Book and produced a key three feet long at least, unlocked a door, pushed us in, and clanged it shut behind us. We were in the main court with the murderers and the newsboys and the sodden drunkards.... A guard with a gun showed us two cells opening off the court. We crouched on stools in the back of one of them and the C.E. said between his teeth, "Keep that thing over your face and keep *still!*"

Then I stopped admiring myself and realized what I had done and where I was ... a Gringo woman in a Guanajuato prison at night.... But every hour that I stayed there saw my *novios* nearer to safety, and the Budders wouldn't know and wouldn't worry. Sally, I'm glad I had a firm Vermont Scriptural upbringing! I can always find something, ready to my hand,—a staff to lean on. I thought of a funny one I've always loved—one of the Proverbs, I think—

*"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe."*

I wasn't very sure I was "a righteous" but I tried valiantly to remember all the worthy actions I had done, and I don't mind telling you they rather piled up,—from Lupe to the bored old bear. I runneth-ed into my tower and felt a good deal safer, I make no doubt, than my poor C.E.

There was a nameless age of black silence, and then there was a crowded hour of glorious life. When I heard the shouts and then the shots I tried to remember Sydney Carton and the French aristocrats taking snuff on the steps of the guillotine, and I tried to think of something handsome and dressy in the way of a farewell speech, in case it might ever be reported in the States. The C.E. was splendid, only, when the great doors clanged open and the mob streamed in calling wildly for Emilio Hernandez, he very naturally failed to hold up his hand and say "Present." We both thought that his hour had struck and you may imagine my horror and remorse. Well, they began a cell-to-cell canvass, but when they flashed the lantern on us they shouted with joyful triumph. They were not executioners but rescuers! They were revolutionists, come to save Emilio and his papa, the General. That gentleman arrived on the run, panting, demanding his son. Alarums and excursions! Explanations. I think the bitterest moment of the whole hideous time for the poor C.E. was when "Emily's" papa kissed him!

Sally, I'm running down like a mechanical toy,—I can hardly write another word. I was escorted to my hotel and thence to a dawn train for Guadalajara. The meek C.E. renewed his suit; he said I could adopt the whole *hospicio* if I wanted to, but I said "*Adios*" and I think in his head, if not his heart, he was rather relieved. Poor, dear, extremely civil engineer! His tastes are simple and his wants are few,—just a limp, lovely lady in the background of his life, waiting prettily for him to come home and tell her what to think. That man doesn't want a help-meet; he wants a *harím*.

They are unwinding several thousand miles of red tape, but at the end, like the pot of gold and the rainbow, I shall find my Dolores Tristeza, and there will be one pair of mournful eyes the less in this land of smiles and sobs.

*Adíos*, poor, pretty, passionate, shrugging Mexico! Go with God!

I'm coming *home*, Sally *mía!*

J.

P.S. The C.E.'s days before he knew me were just a string of wooden beads; afterward, they were a string of fire-crackers!

P.S. II. Michael Daragh is going to be frightfully pleased with me for wiping the orphan's tear; but he'll make me see that there's just as much poetry and more punch in wiping the orphan's nose!

## CHAPTER XVII

Once, long ago, coming home from her self-imposed exile to the lean, clean Island in Maine, Jane had dreaded, a little, her re-meeting with Michael Daragh, but on the trip home from Mexico and California she had no such feeling. Doubts were over and done with forever. The flight had been for the purpose of getting perspective; perspective made her grave Irishman, her stern St. Michael, loom

up and up until he filled her horizon. Her heart had been allowed to drift with the tide in the lyrical interlude in the lovely, lazy land she had come from, but—save perhaps for certain misty moments—it had insisted on swimming stoutly upstream. "I am going back to Michael Daragh," she told herself gladly and unashamed, and the rhythm of the train, hurrying across the continent, repeated it in a joyful, endless litany—"Going—back—to—Michael—Daragh!"

Jane leaned back in her quiet compartment (tangible evidence of solid success) and watched the desert miles and the prairie miles sliding away beside her, and warmed her heart and soul with the thought of Michael's face when he should first see her again. Now, when the swift gladness leapt up in his eyes and the color ran up in his thin cheeks and his whole face glowed from within with its stained-glass-window look, she would not turn away from him, but to him,—gladly, royally, lavishly, with all that she had and all that she was.

She wired Mrs. Hills from Chicago the day but not the hour of her return, but sent no word to Michael Daragh. That would savor of a command, a summons, and she was too happily humble for that. He would know from the boarding-house keeper that she was near, and he would be waiting for her.

Like a timid tourist, she was hatted and veiled and gloved long before they entered the grimy outskirts of the city, and sat, hot-cheeked, breathing fast, on the edge of her seat, far more thrilled and shaken than she had been, four years and more ago, when she made her exodus from the village to the wide world. The narrow strip of mirror between the windows framed her radiant face; now indeed was she *anointed with the oil of joy above her fellows*.

Between a slight delay of the train, and the snail's pace of the taxicab through the traffic, it would be quite six o'clock before she reached Mrs. Hetty Hills' house in Washington Square; he would be absolutely certain to be home.

Everything took on an especial beauty and significance,—the crowded streets, the shop windows, the lights, the people,—her heart went out to all of them—rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief; they were Michael's and they would be hers. He should have that oil of joy for his work, for his high, selfless purposes.

It was hard to wait even an instant to see him, to have him ask, and to answer, but it was wonderful to wait, in faith and utter confidence. The sense of haste and impatience fell away; it must happen as it would, serenely, naturally.

She did not mind that it took her many seconds to find the exact amount and then a lavish tip for her driver, and she noted with satisfaction that the faithful Mabel had seen her from an upper window and would spread the glad tidings.

Mrs. Hetty Hills, a little stouter and grayer and more prosperous than she had been four years earlier, stood in the doorway. "Well, now, I *am* glad!" she declared. "I'm free to say I thought it was a risk, your traipsing round Mexico with all those revolutions and epidemics and things! My, but you look fine, child! I believe my soul it's done you a world of good! 'Praise to the face is open disgrace,' but you don't look a day over eighteen and I'd swear it on a stack of Bibles!"

"*Nice* Mrs. Hills," said her star boarder, hugging her heartily. "How are you? And how is everybody?"

"Well, I'm pretty good now," said the ex-villager, earnestly, "but you can tell your folks I was miserable enough a week ago yesterday. I guess if I was the give-up kind I'd have been flat on my back. I don't know when I've ever had such a spell. My throat ached and I could hardly drag one foot after another, and even my eyeballs——"

"But you're fine now, aren't you? I'm so glad! I'm sure you'd been overdoing. And how is—how are all the others?"

"Oh ... about the same. Mrs. Ramsey doesn't get out to her concerts any more, on account of her leg, and that makes her bluer'n a whetstone, but otherwise I guess we're all pretty much of a muchness. Everybody misses—land t' goodness," she caught herself up, "I guess there *is* one piece of news! I guess there *is* one change, sure enough!"

"What?" asked Jane, sitting down suddenly on one of the stiff hall chairs.

"Why, Mr. Daragh! He's gone home to Ireland!"

("You've got to say something! You've got to make a remark!") Jane told herself, fiercely, but it seemed a fearful pause before she heard her voice and it sounded thin and queer. "Oh, is that so? Has he?"

"Yes, went off like a shot! Got a cable from some of his folks. All he said was he was called home. Awful close-mouthed for an Irishman. All the Irish *I* ever knew before—I think he gave Mabel a note to put in your room. Want I should send her up for it?" asked the landlady eagerly.

"No, thanks," said Jane, very creditably. "There isn't any hurry. And how is Emma Ellis, Mrs. Hills?" She sat chatting for ten minutes by her wrist watch and then took her leisurely way upstairs and then

she chatted another five with Mabel before she attacked the mile of mail upon the desk in her sitting room.

It was a brief little note; illness and imminent death in his family—he had time for this line only—and he wanted God to save her kindly and he was her friend, Michael Daragh. It was the sort of little note, she told herself, that a thoughtful man would write with the good Mabel in the back of his mind. She felt a sense of daze and dizziness and she sat with her hat and cloak on until the dinner gong rent the air, waiting much as Michael Daragh had waited, long ago, when he had listened for the sound of the motor, bearing her uptown with Rodney Harrison, and then had torn up the narrow strip of paper which bore her foolish little postscript. She took herself resolutely in hand and went briskly down to dinner, and regaled Mrs. Hills and the music students and the teachers and bank clerks and elderly, concert-going ladies (one of whom went no more) with the gay but expurgated text of her conquest of Mexico. There was talk of Michael Daragh, and one of the younger music students ventured, pinkly, the theory that Mr. Daragh had been called home to inherit a title.

"Yes," said Jane with quick sympathy, "I shouldn't wonder in the least! He's always seemed a belted earl sort of person, for all his other-worldly ways, hasn't he?" It was a relief to talk of him lightly and easily like this. "Or a Squire, at any rate! Something picturesque,—something story bookish!"

"Oh," giggled the music student, delighted at her backing, "won't it be thrilling to get a letter with a crest and be told that he'll never be back again?"

"Lord Lovel, he stood at his castle gate, A-combing his milk-white steed,—"

chanted Jane, merrily. "I can quite picture him, can't you? Only the milk-white steed will be immediately hitched to a delivery wagon of his worldly goods, for distribution to the poor. Yes, that is without doubt what has happened! I can see adoring yokels pulling their forelocks to him! He'll fit beautifully into that background!" Thus her tongue, running ripplingly on, while her heart, suddenly released from its numb depression, wired her blithe reassurance. "He's coming back,—coming back to *me*—coming back *soon*!"

The high mood stayed with her, even though the days and weeks slipped by without word from him. She was entirely happy and confident, but she found herself too restless to settle down to her work. She had a sense of excited waiting for something beautiful to happen, and a warm and kindly yearning to make every one else as happy as herself. She went often to Hope House and sparred with Emma Ellis; neither of them had heard from the Irishman, and while Jane was secretly able to interpret this with comfort to herself, the other was not. Miss Ellis leaned romantically toward the theory of the younger music student; Mr. Daragh had probably gone home to inherit property and assume responsibilities; she had always known there was nothing ordinary about Mr. Daragh; she had always felt that he was a great person, stooping to this life of abnegation.

"But I think," said Jane flippantly, "he's much more likely to have been a Sin-eater!"

"A—*what*?"

"A Sin-eater. I'm sure they're still being worn in Ireland. A Sin-eater is a man who has had a great sorrow or committed a great crime——"

"Miss *Vail*!"

"—and lives in a damp and dismal cave across a slimy moor and whenever any one dies unshriven, he is sent for, and he comes after dark, his face shrouded, and prays and moans all night beside the corpse, eating all he possibly can of the food which has been placed about it, and what he can't consume on the spot he takes away before dawn, in a sack, and that is his larder, you see, until the next sudden death! And, of course, the idea is that he has taken the sins of the departed upon his own soul, and that when he has done it long enough and meekly enough he will be permitted to die, himself, and other people's sins will have miraculously cleansed him of his own!"

"I never heard anything so—so revolting," said the Superintendent in her most smothered voice.

"Oh, do you find it so? To me it seems very quaint and charming." She was ashamed of her small-boy impishness but for sheer high spirits she could not seem to stop. "But perhaps," she allowed it grudgingly, "he didn't commit a crime; perhaps he was merely crossed in love, or—likeliest of all—assumed the burden of another's misdeed! A wild young brother, or The Heir! That's it,—The Heir! And Michael, with proper younger-son humility, realized that he didn't count, and took the blame and fled to the States, and now The Heir has died, first doing the decent thing in the way of death-bed remorse and confession. And, of course, there's a girl in it somewhere, and I'm sure she has waited for Michael all these years instead of marrying The Heir, aren't you?"

But for the most part her mood was one of amazing gentleness and serenity, with that insistent desire for being good enough and worthy enough for the glory about to descend upon her. She made little pilgrimages to all the people they had helped together,—to Ethel and Jerry and Billiken in Rochester, snugly prosperous and happy, with a little Jerry, now, whose ears flanged exactly as his father's did; to Chicago, to confer with little Miss Marjorie and the Roderick Frosts about the making of the old house where Roderick IV was born into a Maternity Home, and to gladden the good little Stranger's Friend with a fat check for her work, and to puncture Mrs. Mussel's gloom with substantial gifts and the bright and bonny refurnishing of the Christian room for girls such as Edna Miles

pretended to be; to catch up with the girl who had taken her "CROWDED HOUR" to success, always on tour now, in one of her playlets, and married to the brother of "BROTHER" ("BROTHER" himself having given up and gone to make the long fight on the desert). She went, fur-bundled and red-cheeked, to spend a week-end with Deacon Gillespie and "Angerleek" at Three Meadows, and found one of the daughters at home, and the old man told her that two of the sons were coming for their summer vacations. Angelique was animated with timid cheer; *he'd* been different, gentler, since Danny....

Jane went back to New York with June in her heart. Was not this a part of her life with Michael since he had sent her to that lean, clean island to snare back her soul? This was part of the harvest they had sown together, for everything she had done since coming to know him had been shared with him. There came a moment, of course, when her sense of sanctification broke like a bubble. "I feel like the Elsie Books," she said, grinning her boy's grin at herself. "I'd better go home and let Mrs. Wetherby put me in my place!"

But even in her Vermont village she found balm. They might hold, with Mrs. Hills, that "Praise to the face is open disgrace," and be chary of effusions, but Jane Vail was the brightest jewel in their crown, and it was only the deafest and dimmest old ladies who asked her if she was still going on with her literary work.

Mrs. Wetherby, although she would never forgive Jane to her dying day, was clearly thankful to have Martin all to herself. She fed him to repletion and washed and ironed his silk shirts with her own hands, and she loved to say at meetings of The Ladies' Aid or The Tuesday Club, "Well, Marty says his mother's *his* girl!" Martin himself was heavily cheerful; he could see that Edward R. Hunter was pretty much tied down. It would not be very long, now, before there was no "Asst." in front of the "Cashier" on his door at the bank.

The Hunters had now what the humorist, Edward R., called "almost three children," and they were building on a new nursery which would be, without doubt, a hot, pink one. They had a little way of saying, "What have you been writing lately, Janey?" which conveyed, pleasantly but unmistakably, that people with their full and busy lives could not be expected to keep up with all the lighter current literature. Sarah Farraday, her earnest, blonde face a little lined and sharpened, had more piano pupils than she could possibly manage; two of her older girls were taking the beginners for her, and there was a recital almost every month in the burlapped studio where once the chubby driving horses had been housed. And in the old, elm-shaded house where the middle-aged maid still held sway, and where Aunt Lydia Vail had lived and died in her plump and pleasant creed, Jane and Sarah spent the night together, and this time there was no sprightly talk of Michael Daragh or Rodney Harrison and no pungent comparisons of them and their feelings for her; she was not talking now, the nimble-tongued Miss Vail, but the friend of her youth looked long at her glowing face, her deeply joyful eyes, and wondered, and sighed a little, and went back to talk of her most brilliant pupils and the worrying way her mother had of taking hard colds and keeping them....

Jane came away from her village with an entirely clear conscience; no one needed her there. She was her own woman, without let or hindrance, with a shining sense of good work and good works she could wait for the joy which was coming as certainly as the morning.

Then she came in late, one evening, to find Michael Daragh at the dinner table, a little browned and warmed from good sea air, and Emma Ellis was there—Mrs. Hills having telephoned and asked her to come to dinner and welcome home the wanderer—and at once the old life, the old routine, the old world, seemed to open and swallow him completely.

Lying wide-eyed in the dark, hours later, Jane told herself that even in the midst of the watching boarders his look and word for her had been filled with meaning; that it was inevitable that he should take Emma Ellis home to Hope House; that there had been no opportunity to ask her to wait up for him; that she had done the only possible thing in taking a bright and cheery leave of Mrs. Hills and coming up to her rooms. She had waited an hour in her sitting room—Michael Daragh had often dropped in for a chat before she went to Mexico—but when at last she heard his feet upon the stairs, they had carried him steadily on and up to his own floor.

And the next day and the day after that she told herself that it was perfectly natural for Hope House and Agnes Chatterton and kindred calls to fill his every hour. She was waiting happily and surely, and a special delivery letter from Rodney Harrison hardly registered on her consciousness when Mabel brought it up to her one afternoon. It was a brief letter, turgid, almost fierce in its tone. Rodney Harrison was not going to be put off any longer, it appeared. He would meet Jane at the theater that evening (where she must go to pass upon the performance of a new character-man in her second gay little play) and then she was going to supper with him, and to drive in his new speedster, and to make up her mind—no, not that, he'd made it up for her, once and for all—but to settle this matter definitely and right. She read it with an indulgent smile and put it down on her desk. Good old Rodney ... good old man-she-met-on-the-boat....

Her telephone rang at her elbow. She had had a soft little sleigh bell substituted for the harsh, commercial clang and even the most utilitarian call took on a tone of revelry, but now it had an especially gay and lilting sound, she thought. Michael Daragh's voice over the wire lacked its usual quality of serenity; he sounded unsure of himself; almost—shy, and Jane's grip on the receiver grew taut and her cheeks flamed.

"It's the way I'm asking you something now I've never dared ask you before, Jane Vail," purred the

brogue, "and I'm wondering, dare I?"

"I—I'm wondering, too," said Jane.

"'Tis nothing at all you might be thinking it is! Ever since I'm back I've been screwing up my courage—but 'tis the boldest and brazenest thing my like would ever be daring to ask the likes of you!" She had never heard him talk so like a stage Irishman before; she had never known him so moved. "Whiles I'm thinking you'll say me 'yes,' and whiles I'm thinking you'll say me 'no' and whiles I'm destroyed entirely with the doubt! I'll be there inside the hour, or a half-hour itself, and let you be merciful, Jane Vail!"

"I will be waiting," she said, "and I will be merciful."

"God love you!" he cried and hung up abruptly.

She rose from her chair and stood in the middle of her clever orange and black room, icy hands clamped tightly to her burning cheeks. So! Journeys' end! She flew into the other room and with unsteady fingers divested herself of her severely smart business dress and flung a creamy cloud over her head. She justified this costume vigorously to herself. It was five o'clock—almost evening—and she wanted him to see her thus, he who had hardly ever seen her in other than the bread-and-butter garb of every day, but when she looked in the glass she shook her head. If he had at last dared to ask her to leave her sunny fields for his shadowed paths, was this the vision to reassure him?

She put on a mellow velvet of deepest brown, cunningly cut, and she had the satisfaction of knowing that it made her look like a young queen in an old frieze, but not, it was to be admitted, like a durable help-meet for a Settlement worker.

Her windows were wide to the tentative advances of spring and now she heard a ringing tread upon the pavement below, and with breathless haste she pulled off her regal raiment and flung herself into the primmest and plainest of her work frocks—a stern little brown serge with Puritan collar and cuffs, and this time she nodded approval at her reflection. Here was, indeed, a creature for human nature's daily food!

She heard his feet upon the stairs, his knuckles on the door of her sitting room, but she waited for a last long look. When she looked into that mirror again, she would see the glorified, glad face of Michael Daragh's love.

## CHAPTER XVIII

The big Irishman was pulling burdened breaths and haste had flushed his lean cheeks, and they faced each other for an instant in silence before he caught her hands in a hard clutch. "I will be swift," he said, "the way the courage won't be oozing out of me!"

"Yes, Michael Daragh!" She stood up straight and proud before him, waiting for his word. She had waited long for it, turning her back alike on prosperous, opulent love and busy and purposeful spinsterhood, knowing that happiness for her was the grave, young saint whose chief concern would be always for the world's woe. Richly dowered though she was in body and brain, fit for a man's whole devotion, she would be content to share him with the submerged, with the besmirched and befouled of the earth. And at last he was speaking.

"Many's the bold boon I've begged, but never the like of this," he said, his gray eyes holding hers, "but *never* the like of this! Would you—*could* you—be dining with a dope fiend?"

It seemed a long time to Jane before she worked her hands free of his clasp and heard her voice, "I—don't believe I understand——"

"Why would you, indeed?" he cried, penitently. "Let you sit down till I'm telling you."

She seated herself in her straight desk chair, and—"Dining with a dope fiend," she heard herself saying. "It sounds rather like a line from a comic song, doesn't it?"

"A lad he is, just," said Daragh, earnestly. "It got hold of him after a sickness in the smooth devil's way it has. Six months, now, I'm toiling with him. Times I have him on his feet, times he's destroyed again. 'Twas a terrible pity I had to be leaving him the while I was home in Ireland. Well, I found him doing rare and fine, God love him, back at his drawing again in the scrap of a studio I found for him, but a pitiful tangle of nerves and fancies. What he needs now is a friend—his own sort—some one that speaks his own tongue. He thinks the decent world will have none of him,—a weak, pitiful thing isn't worth the saving. Fair perished with the lonesomeness, he is. 'I used to know women,' he was telling me, 'pretty women, clever ones; I miss them—the sound of their voices and the look of their white hands and their making tea, and the light, gay talk we'd be having!' Then he sat, limp, with the grit gone out of him. 'Not one of them would come near me, now,' he said. 'Holding their skirts away from

me, passing by on the other side.' And then—may the devil fly away with my tongue, Jane Vail—I heard myself saying, 'There's one won't be doing that, lad! There's one, the best and fairest and cleverest of them all, the wonder-worker of the world,' I said, 'will be putting on her gayest gear and be coming here to make tea-talk with you, the way you'll think the month of June itself is happened in your studio!'" He stooped, looking down at her with anxious eyes.

Jane took her own time about looking at him, and when she did it was almost as if she had never seen him before. He was still wearing his winter suit, this soft spring weather, and it wanted pressing and his boots were far from new. He stooped a little as he stood there, waiting for her verdict, as if even the broadest shoulders wearied finally of other people's loads, and the line of his zealot's jaw was sharper than ever. She felt nothing but scorn for him. He had birth, breeding, abilities; why must he wrap himself in monkish sackcloth, in monkish celibacy? Rage rose in her, rage and ridicule for herself. So, this was the man for whom she had dressed herself three times, cunningly and provocatively? This was the man to whom she had come running with her heart held out in her hands,—her sane, sound, hitherto unassailable heart, twenty-eight years old,—when he required of her merely a service such as he might ask of any of his Settlement workers,—money from this one, work from that one, charm and cheer from her, Jane Vail.

Worry throve in his eyes. "I'm doubting I had the right to ask you. Is it too much, indeed?"

Jane rose, lifting her shoulders ever so slightly. "The right? Why, surely. You're asking me for an hour or so of my time just as you would ask me for a check. I am to lift up the light of my countenance on this young gentleman, then, and convince him that he is still socially desirable?"

"I'll be praising you all the long days of my life if you will," he said humbly, continuing to stand.

"Sit down, then, while I put on my hat," she said carelessly, quite as she would have spoken to a messenger, and moved toward her bedroom door.

"Please"—he took one step after her—"it's riot but your little brown gown would charm the birds off the bush,—and it's not that I'd be mentioning it or asking it for myself, but——"

"No," said Jane, and her voice was as bright and dry as her eyes, "one could hardly fancy you asking anything for yourself."

"I would not, indeed," he said, grateful for the exoneration, "but I'm wondering ... wouldn't you seem grander to the lad in a—a gayer frock, perhaps?"

"Very possibly I would," said Jane, reasonably. "But I shall have to keep you waiting a little longer then." She went into the other room and shut the door slowly and softly to demonstrate the perfect control of her nerves, and proceeded to make her fourth toilet for the hour. She took her time and did her best, which was very good indeed when she put her mind to it, and she hummed a snatch of song all the while, just loud enough to carry to the study, but every time she met her shamed and furious eyes in the glass her face crisped into hotter flame and she stopped singing.

She kept him waiting for twenty-five minutes, but his eyes silently acquitted her of having wasted her time. They set off at once, Jane agreeing pleasantly that it would be better to walk. Michael Daragh had never seen her more alert and alive to the things about her. Nothing escaped her darting glance,—the lyrical, first grass in the Square, the stolid and patient tiredness of an Italian crone on a bench, the pictorial quality of a hurdy-gurdy man, and yet, for all her chattiness, the smart young person beside him seemed leagues upon leagues away from him. He supposed, miserably, that she was aghast at him for this preposterous demand upon her, but he was not penitent; he would have done it again. His people's needs were to be met with anything he would buy, borrow, or beg for them, and this radiant creature's beauty and light were only given to her in trust, after all, to be dispensed and diffused.

"You've the step of a gypsy boy," he said presently, "for all the foolish shoes you will be wearing. We're here now. 'Tis here he has his little hole of a studio."

It was a decent enough place for working and living and Jane had no doubt whatever that Daragh paid the rent. Their host was discovered bending over a chafing dish which gave forth an arresting aroma. He was a sallow youth with quick hands and too-bright eyes and he spoke in nervous jerks. "How-do-you-do? How-do-you-do? Awfully good of you. Daragh says you are interested in drawings—just look round, will you? I'll have this mess ready in a minute. Daragh said he had to go up to town early, so we'll have a combination supper tea." He flew to test the coffee, sputtering in a percolator.

Jane, slipping out of her wrap, moved slowly and graciously about the little room, well and pleasantly aware of Michael's anxious eyes upon her. His wretched friend should have all the charm and cheer which he had begged for him, but he himself should sit hungry at the feast. She picked up a bold sketch in strong color and held it off with a very real exclamation of interest. "This is *good*, Mr. Randal! This thing of the old woman and pushcart! I like it a lot. And the bakeshop! It's good stuff, all of it. What are you doing with it?"

"Nothing," said the young man, sullenly, his thin fingers beginning to pluck at his face. "I've just started again. I've been ... ill. I suppose Daragh's told you—about me?"

"Yes," said Jane, easily, "he's told me everything, I think, but what I'm interested in now is—what

are you going to do with this stuff?"

"I don't know," he said, slackly. "It depends on how I feel. Some days"—his eyes shifted and fled before her gaze—"well, you know how it is yourself with your own work,—when you're in the mood—when you have an inspiration——"

"I don't know anything about that sort of piffle," said his guest, severely. "It's my mood to beat my poet's piano four solid hours a day, and I shouldn't know an inspiration if I met one in my mush bowl!"

He produced a nervous laugh. "Ah,—but you have your market! You're *there*! There's the urge—the spur——"

She looked from the crisp and living lines of his pictures to his dead, young flesh, to his fingers, locked together and straining, to keep them from their telltale plucking. "Look here," she said, "why shouldn't we do something together?"

"We—togeth—" he sat down limply on the end of his bed-couch, staring, and she heard Michael's quickened breath behind her.

"Yes! Let's try a calendar of New York. I've always had one in the attic of my mind. Twelve pictures, you know, with bits of verse, of prose,—sketches like these of yours here. There are several which would do just as they stand. This sort of thing, you know, but balanced—Grand Street pushcarts and a group of girls going into Lucy-Gertrude's on Fifth Avenue."

"I get you," he cried, jumping to his feet. "Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady——"

"But no propaganda!"

"No, no,—cut the Sob Sister stuff,—just the pattern of it all, the mosaic——"

"Yes,—done objectively!"

"Right! Gad,—that sounds like a corking idea! When can we start? Have you the text or—Good Lord—my eats!" He dashed to the noisy chafing-dish, a faint color creeping up into the unpleasant whiteness of his skin. "Everything's done! Where will you sit, Miss Vail? Give her this tray, will you, Daragh—*and* the napkin, man! Can she reach the sandwiches? Oh, I'm forgetting my perfectly good salad! Well, how is it? I'm not much of a cheffonier, but——"

"It's melt-in-the-mouth," said Miss Vail, warmly. "I'm going to have twice of everything!" She drew him out; she led him on; she kept the color in his face and his fingers quiet. By every pretty means in her power she made it clear that she was having an uncommonly good time, that he was distinctly her sort of person.

Michael Daragh sat back with deep wonder in his eyes. In all her exquisite plumage she had alighted in this dull place, filling it with freshness. And an onlooker would have gathered that the young artist and the beautiful lady who wrote were the best of merry chums, the silent man in the background a civilly tolerated outsider.

After a while something of this seemed to strike young Randal. "Look here, Daragh, you haven't to start uptown yet! Why don't you contribute something to the gayety of nations? Haven't you any parlor tricks?" Then he caught up his own work and his grin faded. "Tricks ... yes, that's what he can do, Miss Vail. Conjuring tricks. He can turn a skulking alley rat into something faintly resembling a man—but"—his courage and brightness fell from him like a masker's domino on the stroke of twelve and the fingers rose to his face, picking and plucking—"he can't keep it from turning back again."

"I can, indeed, lad," said the Irishman, stoutly.

"I don't know, Daragh ... I don't know." He leaned back on the couch, spineless with nervous exhaustion, and Jane felt a sick distaste and horror enveloping her.

"'Tis a true word, laddie," said Michael. "You don't know; none of us know—and we don't have to know, praises be, beyond the next hour, beyond the next step on the path." He rose and crossed slowly to the young man and pushed him gently down until he was resting at full length on the couch. "Easy, now! Let you lie there at your ease. Miss Vail knows how you haven't the whole of your strength in you yet, and you painting and drawing the day long!"

Young Randal muttered something brokenly and tried to rise, but the big Irishman held him firmly. "Easy, I'm telling you!" The boy relaxed, stretching out to his lank length, one arm crooked childishly over his eyes, and Michael Daragh sat down beside him, his long legs folded under him, on the floor. "'Tis the true word, surely," he said. "We don't know, indeed. And—glory be—there's many the time that the thing you've braced yourself so fine and strong to stand doesn't happen at all, and you never have to stand it. That was the way of it with Maggie Kinsella at home," he said.

Jane, seeing his intention, stepped to the door and snapped off the overhead light, and tilted the shade on the lamp until Randal's couch was in shadow.

"I'm so ashamed ... with her here ..." it was a muffled whisper from under the shrouding arm,—"so rotten weak...."



"This Maggie Kinsella makes the finest lace for miles about," said Michael, unhearing, unheeding. "Rare tales she would be telling me and I no higher than the sill of the window there, and I'd thought to find her long dead and buried surely, the way she was always as old as the Abbey itself. But no—there she was still in her bit of a cottage, the time I was just home, the oldest old woman I ever saw out of a mummy's wrappings and like a witch indeed with the poor, pockmarked face she has."

The figure on the couch was relaxing more and more now, and the Irishman sank his voice to a purling murmur of brogue.

Jane found a low chair and propped her elbow on the arm of it and leaned her cheek on her hand and closed her eyes. She did not want to look at young Randal and she found that she could not look at Michael Daragh. She was glad to be in a corner of the little room where the faint light of the lamp did not penetrate; she wished it might have been complete darkness to cover her. She was so unutterably tired ... never in her life had she been so tired. And Michael Daragh, her best friend of four good years, her—what should she say?—dream lover? Yes, that was sufficiently cheap and sentimental and maudlin for the sort of thing she had indulged in,—her dream lover for two blissful months, seemed as much of a stranger to her now, as strange and as unpleasantly distasteful as the young artist and dope fiend on the sagging bed-couch.

When the boy fell asleep, she would creep away, and *away!*

## CHAPTER XIX

Meanwhile, the Irishman's voice went steadily on.

"Well, I told her there were great tales going the world over about her lace making and her getting famous and proud through the length of the land and I mind well the cackle of a laugh she gave. 'The loveliest lace, is it? Now, isn't that the great wonder surely? The wizenedy, wrinkled old hag with the God-help-you face makes the loveliest lace—' Then she stopped short off and clapped a claw over her mouth and the scar on her pockmarked face was a pitiful thing to see.

"'The curse of the crows on my tongue,' she said. 'Is himself out there in the sun the way he'd be hearing me? No? Glory be to God then, he's off to the Crossroads, to be picking up a copper maybe and the people going by to the Fair.'

"I asked her why she didn't want her husband to be hearing her make mock of her face, and she said, 'Have you the hunger on you for a tale, still, man grown that you are? Well, then, let you sit down, lad, and listen till I'm telling you the whole of it. Time was when I had a face on me would keep a man from his sleep, and 'tis no lie I'm telling you. Tall and fine I was, hair like a blackbird's wing, skin like new milk with the flush of the dawn on it, eyes like a still pool in the deep of a wood. Larry Kinsella was ever the great lad for making verses up out of his own head. "Roses in Snow," is the silly name he would be calling me.' Then she rocked herself to and fro and crooned in the cracked old voice she had—

"Faith and hope and charity,  
A man has need of three!  
I've the faith and hope in you,  
You've charity for me!

"With your lips and cheeks the rose,  
That is blooming in the snow,  
Yourself is all the miracle  
A man would need to know!

"'The proud, brazen hussy I was, God be good to us! Tossing my head, stealing the other girls' lads the time we'd be footing it to the tune of the Kerry Dance at the Crossroads in the full of the moon! Father Quinn—may the angels spread his bed smooth—was always telling me to take heed of my soul which would last me forever, and have done with the sinful pride in the skin and the hair which would wither like grass. But I went my ways with a scandalous come-hither in my eye, leaning over a still pool till I'd see my bold face smiling back at me, and Larry Kinsella stealing behind to whisper his verses in my ear.

"Then came the sickness, the plague that shadowed five counties the way you'd see a black cloud sailing down the sky of a June day. Nary a village but paid its toll in death and doom. One of the first I was, and one of the worst. Wirra, the weeks I lay on the sill of death's door,—the gray days, the black nights.

"Came the time when I heard Father Quinn's voice and he sitting beside me, telling me slow and easy, the way you'd be talking to a child itself, that Larry Kinsella was mending and calling for me. Well, I rose up, destroyed with the weakness though I was, to be on the way to him, but there in the bit of a glass on my wall I saw my face ... my face ... Mary, be good to us ... *my face!* Back I fell in the

black pit of despair, praying for death itself. But it would not come to my bidding. In the black of the night, in the gray of the dawn, the dreams that tormented me! Larry's voice, wheedling and soft in my ear—

"With your lips and cheeks the rose,  
That is blooming in the snow——"

"And always Father Quinn, wasted and worn with care for the living and prayer for the dead, bidding me rise up on my two feet and go to the lad I loved. Love, was it? God forgive me, the way I misnamed it then.

"Well, then, in the dusk of one day I went with him, me leaning for weakness on his tired arm. Out of every house peered a face, but there was no lad begging a smile of me and no green envy at all in the glance of the girls. When we were well past the whole of them I went down on my two knees in the dirt of the road, the way I'd be praying at a shrine itself, for there was a white moon rising in the soul of me and I began to see clear. "Mary, Mother," I said, "God forbid the likes of me to be driving a bargain with yourself, but give me the one thing only and I'll never pester your ear again all the days of my life. Here in the dust I make a heap of all my sins and vanities,—the toss of my head and the tilt of my chin, the love-looks of the lads and the black hate of the girls, and I'll burn them for a sacrifice the way the heathen would be doing and go joyful on my way with the ashes in my mouth! Leave the children to run from me, me, the one-time wonder of the weeping west; leave the girls to make mock of my face; only Mary, Mother, for the sake of the joy he had in me, let Larry Kinsella only of all the world be seeing me still with the eyes of love, and see me fair!"

"Then was a glad cry sounding and the pinched face of Father Quinn shining like an altar and it lighted up for Easter itself. "Glory be to God," he cried out in a great voice. "Now let you make haste to your lad, for I heard the rustle of wings on that prayer will carry it high!"

"When Larry Kinsella heard the sound of my foot on his step he leapt up. Wirra ... down all the years I can hear the wild joy of him still—— "Core of my heart, have you come? Alannah!—*With your lips and cheeks the rose*——"

"I opened my mouth to cry shame on him, mocking my face, but then the peace of God came down on me like a deep rain on a parched field, and I knew what way it would be with the two of us all the long days of this world. Larry Kinsella was blind."

Michael had been speaking more and more slowly and softly and he did not move for many moments after he had finished his tale. Then he stealthily rose and bent over young Randal, and tiptoed away. "Asleep," his lips barely formed the word, and he motioned Jane to follow him. She caught up her wrap and crept after him.

"I wonder," Daragh paused in the outer hall, "would I better cover him up?"

Jane nodded.

"Wait, then! I'll be soon back!"

When he came out again he was smiling. "Fine and fast asleep he is. He'll never open an eye for hours! I'll look in on him again, on my way home to-night. You were the wonder of the world to him, Jane Vail. But"—he halted on the sidewalk and peered contritely at her through the soft spring twilight,—*"you are cruel weary!"*

"I am ... tired," said Jane.

His voice gathered alarm. "I've never seen you the like of this. Shall I be finding a cab to rush you home?"

Pride (where was her decent pride?) rallied in her, and took the place of the earlier, racking rage. "I am not going home. I am going uptown—to the theater. I've a new man in the character part." Suddenly she knew what she was going to do. "I am going to meet Rodney Harrison there, and we are going to have supper, and to drive!" Her voice grew decisive again. That was it. Rodney Harrison. The man-she-met-on-the-boat. He would be waiting for her, and he wanted her, and she intended to want him. She visualized his special delivery letter, lying on her desk. Rodney was quite justified. They would "settle the matter once and for all, definitely and right." She would marry Rodney Harrison, and they would live like sane human beings, comfortably, logically, merrily, and there would be no dope fiends with plucking fingers and no Fallen Sisters and self-righteous settlement workers and no drab days and drab ways in their scheme of things.

"Well, then," Michael was still staring at her, unhappily, "will it be the bus, or a taxi? Myself must go in the subway to another poor lad who is waiting in Ninety-first Street, but——"

"I may as well take the subway, too." (He was not to suppose or surmise that it bothered or burdened her to be with him.) "It will make me too early, but there's a lot to talk over with them all. I've rather neglected things lately." (Mooning in her candy-motto paradise!)

"I'm doubting the upper air is better for you, the way you're so white and weary," Michael shook his head, but they went down from the mild spring weather into the glare and blare of the world beneath.

It was the hour of the last mad homeward rush of the workers. They found seats, but at the next station the packing and jamming began, and when they left the third stop the car was a solid, cohesive mass of steaming humanity. Talk was mercifully impossible. Only once Michael spoke, when he got up to give his place to a thin girl in a soiled middy blouse.

"You could be getting out at the next, you know, to fill your lungs with decent air, and go on in the bus——"

She shook her head and smiled very reasonably. She fixed her eyes on a vehement advertisement in shrieking colors and tried to see how many small words she could make out of the large one. "L-i-n-e, line, and L-i-s-t, list"—(she would go into the leading lady's dressing room and do her hair and put some color in her cheeks before she saw Rodney. Good old Rodney! He had been faithful, as faithful and patient as Marty Wetherby!)—"i-n, in, and r-i"—the car was plunged into swift darkness and the train shrieked and jolted to a dead stop.

The girl to whom Michael had given his seat jumped up and began to emit short, gasping screams.

"There's no harm at all," said Daragh, pushing her back into her seat. "The lights will be on again in two flips of a dead lamb's tail!"

The crowd took it good-naturedly enough. There were whistles and catcalls from one end of the car and a noisy imitation of a kiss. Girls giggled nervously. A man grew querulous: "Where are we? That's all I want to know. Where are we? If we're near a station, we can get out and walk. Where *are* we?"

The minutes dragged. Men hurried by in the outer darkness with lanterns, dim and ghoulish figures. Some one's foot was trodden on and a surly scuffle ensued. "Cut that out!" said a sharp voice. "You don't want to start nothin' here!"

Then the first man began again. "Where *are* we? That's what I want to know!" A woman whimpered that she was going to faint.

"Can't!" called a gruff voice, facetiously. "There ain't room!"

But it was immediately evident that she had carried out her program for there was a shrill cry, "Oh, for God's sake! Get her up! Get her up! Get her *up*! I'm—I'm *standing* on her!"

People began to sway and mutter, to push and surge. Jane felt herself lifted and swung to her feet on the seat where she had been sitting, and the Irishman's big body was spread like a shield before her. His hands were clamped upon the thin shoulders of the girl in the middy blouse, but he twisted his head to speak to Jane. "It will be all right in a wink," he said.

"Yes," she answered.

The first man began to shout, "Open this door! Want us to die like rats in a trap! Open this *door*!" There was a sound of splintering glass and the acrid smell of smoke.

"Fire!" squealed the girl in Michael's hold, fighting to free herself.

"Steady!" he soothed. "Let you be still now, till——"

"Fire! Fire! Fire!" It ran from solo shrieks into a frantic chorus. The middy blouse girl bit and clawed herself out of the Irishman's hands and he turned and faced Jane, his grasp on the rail above them, covering her with his body. "Lay hold of me," he commanded, and she locked her arms about his neck. The smoke-laden air was filled now with the sound of smashing windows, with labored breathing and moans and gasping sobs, with the dull impact of blows, with the grinding, rasping contact of tightly packed bodies. From time to time Michael called out to them to have patience, to have courage, to wait, and other voices echoed his words, but they were drowned out in the red sea of panic. Slowly, for all its insane haste, the crowd, that portion of it still on its feet, began to work its way through the shattered windows and doors into the black passage outside. The pressure against Jane and Michael was greatly lessened and she spoke with her lips close to his ear.

"Are we just to wait here until help comes?"

"We are just to wait here."

Presently she spoke again. "I am not afraid, M.D."

"I know you are not." He added a swift line in Gaelic.

When there was a cleared space about them, they sat down again on the seat, hand in hand, like good children. The air was growing difficult. "We must just wait until they come for us, mustn't we?" She was coughing a little.

"We must just wait."

There was a shuddering groan from the floor, just at their feet, and he bent with his pocket flash. It was the gaunt girl in the middy blouse.... "Keep fast hold of my coat," said Daragh. He bent and lifted the girl on to the opposite seat. "There must be others. I must look."

"Let me hold the flash," said Jane. "That will give you both hands free. I won't let go of you." They traversed the black length of the car, doing the grim little they could do where there was anything to be done, and then they went back to their corner. Jane's teeth were chattering. "But I'm not afraid, M.D.," she said. "It's just—the ghouliness of it! The abysmal savagery—I can't *bear* it!"

"Many there were as cool as ourselves," he said, "swept on by the panic and couldn't help themselves. It was the wild few only that brought the curse. And let you remember this—for every one that pushed and fought and trampled there are twenty up there now, above ground, wondering what way they'll help us the soonest, working for us, risking, daring—"

"Yes, I know it," said Jane obediently. She leaned back in her corner. It was true that she was not afraid. She felt very peaceful and very gentle. The red rage was gone and the gray depression, and the scorn and the bitterness, and Rodney Harrison was gone. She began to talk, easily and interestedly. "You know, one looks back on this sort of thing, after it's all over, as educational. One doesn't enjoy *having* an experience like this, but *having* had it makes for growth, shouldn't you say?" His grasp on her hand tightened but he did not answer. "Well, Michael Daragh, I've crowded about every sensation into my life except—death. This is really not so bad as being in that Mexican prison was! For one thing, you're here"—she curled her fingers more tightly into his—"and there I had only my extremely civil engineer. I did my best to fall in love with him, M.D., but I couldn't seem to manage it." She stopped to cough. "The air is getting pretty awful, isn't it? But I don't believe it will be much longer, now, do you?"

"I do not," he said.

"I'm rather proud of us, aren't you, Michael Daragh?—Of course, I expect I shouldn't be so—so Nathan Hale and Casabianca and—and Lady Jane Grey—if I didn't know that we'll soon be up in the air again, safe—*breathing* ..." She coughed again, but her voice went on, husky, gallant. "If we could have looked an hour ahead an hour ago, you and I, dripping pity on that boy, feeling so utterly secure ourselves—'*Why should the spirit of mortal be proud?*' M.D., I got a silver thimble for learning that by heart when I was eight. Rollicking nursery rhyme, wasn't it? But I adored it, especially the parts I didn't understand. '*From the gilded saloon to the bier and the shroud*'—you know, for years I thought it meant one of those fascinating places with swinging half-doors and rows and rows of feet visible from the outside, into which one's nurse would never let one peer, and I thought 'shroud' was a sort of cracker to be eaten with the beer! Wasn't that funny? I remember thinking—"

But now the big Irishman stopped her with a groan which shook him from head to heel. "Core of my heart," he said, "will you hush your pretending? God forgive me for a heedless fool has dragged you down to a black death this night!"

"What," said Jane interestedly, "what was it you called me?"

He caught her up to him, fiercely, furiously, and she could feel him trembling, that tall tower of strength, like a terrified child. "Core of my heart," he said again, and now his wild kisses separated his wild words—"*Acushla ... Mavourneen ... Solis na Suile* ..." and the tide of fear which had been rising in her turned and slipped away into a sea of rose and silver bliss, and with it went forever the hot shame of the afternoon and the cold misery of the evening.

It seemed to her that she could not breathe at all now, what with the acrid air and the power of his arms about her, but it did not matter. "I that loved you from the first moment my eyes were resting on the wonder of your face and heard the harps sounding in your voice, I have brought you death!"

"No, Michael Daragh," she said hoarsely, breathlessly, "you have brought me life!"

His voice was scorched and dry with smoke, and she had to strain her ears to hear his lyric lovemaking. "Journeys' end"—she thought again as she had thought that afternoon. Sarah Farraday would say that she was making phrases, trying to be clever, even in this great and terrible moment,—to be thinking that she had taken the subway to the heights.... Presently she put a reproving hand over his lips.

"Oh, Michael Daragh! I expect I don't know God as well as you do, but I know Him better than that! *Of course* we'll be saved! *Don't* keep saying you wouldn't tell me this if we weren't dying! Nothing could happen to us ... *now* ... what do you suppose makes me so sleepy?... Do you mind if I just sleep a—f—few minutes? I'm pretty—t—tired...."

He gathered her up wholly into his arms. "No, no! Don't go to sleep! Don't be leaving me till you must!"

She cuddled down cozily like a drowsy baby. "M.D. ... did you ever play—"

"What, Acushla?"

"Babes in the Woods? That's what we are, aren't we?" and she tried to sing, huskily, gasping—

"And when they were dead,  
The robins so red  
Brought straw ... berry ... blos ... soms  
And over them—"

"Core of my heart," he cried out, "Don't be leaving me!"

"Michael Daragh, dearest," she said quite clearly and steadily, "I love you better than all the world—and I've loved the world a lot!" Her lips groped to find his and then she was limp in his clasp.

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Waves; *waves*; WAVES! Little, lulling ones, singing her to sleep; great, shining ones, splashing and crashing, lifting and flinging her; voices, tiresome, insistent, calling her, calling her, calling her in from play—

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"There, now, God love her, she'll do!" said Michael Daragh. "No, praises be, we'll not need the ambulance! I've a machine here will take us round the park till she's drunk her fill of clean air again.... No, thank you kindly, I can take her myself.... If you'll open the door, just—"

Out in the sharp night wind, memory picked its way back, hesitating, through the chaos. "Let you rest easy, now," said the Irishman's voice, steady, cheerful, reassuring. "Don't be talking yet, the way you've no breath in you at all. Drink deep of the good air, just, till—what? Well, then, 'twas an accident in the subway, and you fainted and I carried you out, and we came up a manhole."

Barren words these, naked of charm ... bleak ... bare. She beheld herself, her bright spring plumage smirched and draggled, all her pinions trailing. About the man, too, there was something lacking, something failing, something unendurably missing and gone. "Your arms ..." she said, fretfully. Speech was still a burden. She lifted his arms and laid them about her, but they fell slackly away.

"We are back in the world again, Jane Vail," he said. "You in yours and I in mine, and 'tis a far cry between the two. 'Twas the black hole of death loosed my tongue, but now—"

"Michael Daragh"—she stopped speaking and gave herself over to the task of tugging his arm about her and holding it there with both her grimy hands—"Michael Daragh, we d—died together very splendidly—b—but we're going to l—live together just as well!"

## CHAPTER XX

(TELEGRAM)

New York, N.Y. 4—10.

MISS SARAH FARRADAY, VALLEY VIEW, VERMONT.

Engaged.

JANE VAIL.

(TELEGRAM)

New York, N.Y. 4—11.

MISS SARAH FARRADAY, VALLEY VIEW, VERMONT.

Michael Daragh, of course, you goose.

JANE VAIL.

*New York,  
April Twelfth.*

SALLY DARLING,

Thanks for your two wires, though the first one—"So happy, but who is it?" was a bit feeble-minded, you must admit. Could you imagine me marrying any one in the wide world *but* Michael Daragh? Haven't I always intended to (no matter what I may have babbled of a man-I-met-on-the-boat, or of an extremely civil engineer!) from the

first instant I set my wishful eye on his zealot's brow and his fighter's jaw and heard the burbling brogue that might be eaten with a spoon?

It's taken me four years and a subway accident, but I consider the time wholly well spent. I'm snugly and securely engaged to marry Michael Daragh and he's entirely resigned to it. In fact, one might even go so far as to say, without undue exaggeration, that he is pleased!

(I'll wager you dashed right down to the Woman's Exchange and got towels! Aren't you glad V. is such a nice, easy letter to embroider?)

That subway affair was ghastly, useful as it did prove to me. We thought surely our hour had struck, but we behaved with Early Christian Martyr fortitude and much more sprightly cheer, and when Michael Daragh thought the end had come he staged a love scene which made all the love scenes I ever wrote and all the love scenes I ever read sound like time-tables or statistics! Months of misunderstanding were explained away in minutes; he honestly believed me to be secretly engaged to Rodney Harrison (there I see the fine Italian hand of Emma Ellis, poor thing, oh, *poor* thing—to want Michael Daragh and not to have him!) and he still more honestly believed that I lived and moved and had my brilliant being in a world too far removed from his shabby and cumbered one, and that he was only my more or less valued but humble friend—oh, miles of that sort of piffle! Well, when we were safe in the upper air again, he basely tried to repudiate me,—handsome speeches about not shadowing my bright life and all that—very fetching as literature but not at all satisfying to a young woman who had just achieved a betrothal after long and earnest endeavor! I foiled him! You can't think how brazen I was. I was still a bit hazy with smoke and exhaustion, and I honestly believe if he hadn't given in I'd have screamed for a policeman!

But once he gave up the fruitless struggle, he began to have a very good time indeed. I will even go so far as to state that he hugs his chains.

Yours in "a fine, dizzy, muddle-headed joy,"

JANE.

*New York.*  
*April Eighteenth.*

SALLY MACHREE,

(See how Irish she is already!) The first towel has come and makes me feel such a housekeeper! You're a lamb, but you'll finish life with a tin cup and a "Pity the Blind" sign if you go on making "stitches as fine as a fairy's first tooth."

We are to be married (see how calmly and steadily she sets down that astounding word?) in June, and domesticity has descended upon me. I read only women's magazines, household departments only, I read recipes and memorize them, I haunt linen shops and furniture stores. But, oh, I need a mother and a sister or two, and you'll simply have to come down to me for a month. Can't you? Of course you can. Your mother will feed the piano. I must have you.

I've found a house in West Ninth Street, near the blessed old Square, close enough to the Brevoort when the kitchen is bolsheviking. It is deliciously old with high ceilings and haughty chandeliers and austere marble mantels, and all sorts of inconveniences which I picturesquely adore, but which will leave the noble army of labor quite cold. I shall make the drawing-room very English, part of my precious rosewood and mahogany sent down from Valley View (though I shall keep that house largely as it is) and cunning Kensington curtains and little pots of ivy, and "set-pieces" of bead work, and that dear, dim portrait of great-grandmother Vail in cap and ringlets. The dining room will be sober, too, but there's a nook just off it which I shall use for a breakfast room, looking out into the prim, Prunella scrap of garden, and that I will make giddy-gay with chintz and Minton. There'll be a remote workroom for me, far upstairs, and a friendly brown study where Michael Daragh's lame dogs may come to be helped over their stiles.

Sarah, I'm as domestic as a setting hen! I foresee I shall be a living version of Mr. Solomon's lady of the Proverb—*working willingly with my hands, rising while it is yet night*. (M.D. keeps fearfully early hours)—*My candle going not out by night* (candles will be perfect in that house!). My husband shall, indeed, *be known in the gates*, but he won't *sitteth* there, for home will be far too attractive. Nine to one, as always, I'll ply my trade, but before and after office hours I'll be *looketh-ing well to the ways of my household* and *eateth-ing* not the bread of idleness (except at tea!). *Many*

*daughters have done virtuously* but I shall excel them all. I admit it.

JANE.

P.S. Michael Daragh is beamish with bliss. He's done himself out in purple and fine linen and yet manages, miraculously, not to look in the least like other men, and he doesn't even stoop any more. Sally, you know when he was in Ireland we all—especially Emma Ellis and the romantic music students—conjectured as to what he was when he was at home, and cast him for many fetching rôles, from a sacrificial younger son to a Sin-eater, and always a belted earl at the very least. He has told me all about himself now, naturally, and it would be a blow to Emma E. and the little music makers, so I mercifully mean never to let them know. He hasn't any immediate family, and was brought up by an uncle who had a large and prosperous wholesale grocery business in Cork! (Could anything be less lyrical, I ask you?) He wanted M.D. to go into the business after he had finished college, and M.D., quite naturally, being M.D., wouldn't and they quarreled, and M.D. came over here with just his small income from his father's small estate, and went into settlement work. He was called home to the uncle's death-bed, but the uncle, contrary to the best literary precedents, hadn't softened to any extent worth mentioning, and died as crabbed as he had lived, greatly annoyed, no doubt, to realize that his demise released certain decent little incomes from the main family estate to the stubborn nephew, but immensely pleased with himself for making his fortune over to outsiders. So, my other-worldly spouse will have a comfortable income after all, but he may divide it with dope-fiends and Fallen Sisters and their ilk to his heart's content since my royalties, like snowballs, gather as they roll!

Sally, you must come down and stay with me. "Please, pretty please!"

JANE.

*New York City,  
May Twentieth.*

Dearest Sally,

I'm distressed beyond words that your mother is still so wretched, and I see, of course, that you cannot leave her yet. But she must hurry and be well enough to let you come for the wedding,—middle or end of June.

A rather startling thing has happened. I have a *letter from Profesor Morales* in Guadalajara, saying that—after all the tangling up of the red tape in the various revolutionary merry-go-rounds—things are in order at last, and little Dolores Tristeza starts me-ward as soon as a suitable traveling companion can be found. I must admit I'm a little aghast. Six months ago, I yearned to have her as a prop for my spinsterhood, but that Dark Age is about to be folded by. Of course I must stand by what I've said, and I want to, but I've answered *Señor Morales*, explaining my approaching marriage and that I would send for Dolores in the early fall (perhaps Michael Daragh and I can go and get her!) and inclosing a fat check for her maintenance in the meantime.

But isn't it rather a comedy situation? A big little daughter suddenly bestowed upon a busy bride-elect! But she is an angel, and I'll adore having her, just as soon as I get used to the idea again.

Love and warmest wishes to your mother, and I'm sending her some books.

Devotedly,

JANE.

*New York City,  
May Twenty-seventh.*

OLD DEAR,

So glad your mother is even a wee bit better! House and clothes are coming on famously but I'm rather rebellious at not having more of M. D.'s time. My life work will be to drag him down from his pinnacle of selflessness! His chief concern just now is for his brilliant young dope fiend, and I really shouldn't begrudge M.D. to him, for if

we hadn't had supper with him that night, and gone uptown in the subway, who knows if I'd ever have won my elusive swain? Randal is doing fairly well, as regards the drug, and making some corking sketches for our joint calendar, but he needs a world of cheering and chumminess and countenance.

But one would like a little less of him, a little more of one's lover.

Rather crossly,

J.

*Friday Morning.*

Sally, dear, another letter has come from Mexico, and Dolores Tristeza is on her way! A highly proper geologist was returning to New York, and they dared not miss so excellent an opportunity of sending her.

And she'll be here day after to-morrow! I find myself rather gasping! I must telephone the steamship office, and I'll close this later.

*Next Evening.*

She will arrive on the *Pearl of Peru* at about three P.M. to-morrow, and M.D. is going with me to meet her. He is dear about it all, and so am I, now that I've got my breath! I'm remembering what a dewy-eyed little dove of a thing she is. A few days of happy holiday for her, and then the mildest and gayest school I can find, one where they have no stuffy rules about not letting the pupils come home for week-ends.

The *Profesor* explained that the *Hospicio* had fallen on evil days during the revolution and the children are now cared for in private families. The three different households which had been sheltering Dolores had been obliged from various circumstances to give her up, and Señor Morales regretted the limitations of his own establishment.

Poor, pitiful little creature ... little "Sorrows and Sadness!" I must pledge myself to make her over into Joys and Gladness—*Alegrías y Felicidad*, if I remember my Spanish at all.

I'm ashamed of those mean moments at first when I didn't want her!

Penitently,

JANE.

P.S. I mean to have her call me Aunt Jane, which will be "*Tia Juana*." Isn't that charming? I really don't care to be called "Mother" just now by a twelve-year-old daughter. It's—a bit un-bridal.

*Sunday Night.*

MY DEAR SARAH,

I wasn't up to writing you yesterday—I'm not really able to, now, but I'll try to tap you out a few feeble lines....

Oh, yes, she came. She's here! As some of my vaude-villains would say—I'll say she is!

M.D. and I met the steamer, the *Pearl of Peru*. Gentle, innocent-sounding name, isn't it? Sounds as if it might fitly convoy the dewy-eyed dove of my dreams.... It took a long time to dock and all the passengers were at the rail. I looked in vain for my daughter-to-be, but I was particularly struck by a sad, broken-looking, elderly man whose eager eyes raked the wharf. He turned to ask a question of a large girl beside him, a creature clad in strident hues, furrily powdered, bearing a caged parrot in one hand, a shivering, hairless, Mexican dog under her arm, a cigarette in her mouth. Her gaze became riveted upon me. She emitted a piercing shriek of joy.



"*Madre virgen de mi alma!*"

Then, in order that all persons present on shipboard and on the wharf might have the benefit of her remark, she translated it—"Virgin Mother of my soul!"—and every one at once laid by all other preoccupations and gave himself whole-heartedly to looking and listening.

I have never seen a more radiant expression of joy and release than that which overspread the countenance of the geologist at sight of me, and even at that instant I began to understand his emotion. It seemed an hour before the gangplank was put down. Dolores Tristeza held the parrot up so that she might see me. "Behold the virgin mother of my soul!"

"Shut your ugly mouth!" shrieked the sweet bird, happily in Spanish.

"See, little mother mine," called Dolores, shaking the cage, "Santa Catalina, the parrot of a thousand pretty talents! And here"—she held up the hairless, squirming canine—"behold little José-María, joy of my orphan heart!"

I got as close to her as possible and besought her to moderate her transports until she had landed, and I was amazed and aghast and horrified at the size of her. "But, how you've grown, Dolores!" I stammered.

She chuckled gleefully. "They lied to thee at the *Hospicio, Madrecita*. I was not twelve years but past fourteen! They desired, naturally, to keep me with them in the juvenile department. Thus am I loved wherever I go! Dost thou not burn to fold me to thy breast?"

What I burned to do at that instant was to turn the *Pearl of Peru* about and send her speeding swiftly back across the foam.

"So, now I am more than fourteen years and a half, large of my age, beautiful as all may see, of a wisdom to astonish you. In one year more, thou shalt find me a husband. Many *novios* have I had already! Four serenades were made to me the night before I left Guadalajara, and on the boat—" She turned to the elderly gentleman with a complacent and pitying smile. "But"—she took account for the first time of Michael Daragh—"¿quién es el hombrón?" (Who is the big man?) "*Tu novio?*"

I admitted that he was my betrothed.

"*No es tu esposo?*" she quivered with tentative rage.

I assured her that he was not yet my husband.

"Very well, then," she said in English, "we shall see. Only, I warn thee, if when thy children come, thou lovest them more than me, I will burn out their eyes with red-hot curling irons!" (Her English is heavily accented but perfectly—horribly—understandable.)

A merciful Providence let down the gangplank and she flung herself, her shrieking, cursing parrot, her shivering dog, into my arms. Santa Catalina's seed and water cups were emptied on my frock; José-María set his little dagger teeth in my sleeve; a fierce scent assailed my nostrils; a shower of powder frosted my shoulder.

I freed myself to speak to the geologist who seemed eager to be on his way. "I am very grateful to you," I said, mendaciously. "I hope it has not been too much trouble."

"I got her here, didn't I?" he said with an air of weary pride. He looked so haggard that my heart smote me. "*Señor Morales* should not have burdened you. You look ill and—"

"I was a well, strong man when I left Vera Cruz," he said darkly. "I wish you luck, Miss Vail." He took one step and halted. "Do you believe in corporal punishment?"

"Mercy, no! It's a relic of barbarism. No one does, now!"

"You will," he said, earnestly, "you will! Corporal punishment?—My God,—*capital!*"

"Farewell, old camel," Dolores called, kindly, after his retreating figure. "Go with God!"

"Michael Daragh," I whispered, when we at last were packed into the taxi, "couldn't we stop at some school on the way home and leave her?"

"Not in those clothes, woman dear,—not with those animals."

"*Cuidado, Hombrón!*" said my dewy-eyed dove. "If you seek to turn from me the heart of my virgin mother (she pronounces it *veergeen mawther*), I will not let her

marry with you, and you will be old sour face *soltero*, and she will dress the saints! But," she went on indulgently, "if you are good to me, I am good to you! See,—I kiss up to God!"—and she wafted a heavily scented kiss toward the ceiling of the taxicab.

Desperately,

JANE.

## CHAPTER XXI

*Wednesday.*

Well, Sally, mia, life looks a bit more rosy! I've separated Dolores from her cigarette, from her furry coat of powder, from her athletic perfume, from her circus clothes, and to-day, in spite of her incredible size (the inches and pounds she has acquired in six months!) the years have fallen from her. In a slim, brown tricotine with a wide, untrimmed hat of silky brown straw her loveliness has come back, and with it my enthusiasm.

She is docile in the main, when not too violently opposed, and I feed my fancy on the joy and pride I shall have in her, when she has finished school, in five years.

She starts on Monday, a splendid, firm, well-disciplined school where they have sensible rules about not letting the pupils come home for weekends. The head-mistress was charmed with Dolores and Dolores has "kissed up to God" her resolve to be good.

I'm honestly ashamed of my panic over first impressions. She's really an angel.

JANE.

*Thursday.*

She's really a demon.

J.

*New York City,  
June 29th.*

DEAREST SALLY,

It's weeks since I've written you, but I'm a broken woman, old before my time. I may not look quite so forlorn as the geologist did, but I feel it.

Did I write something about the rosy but dim and distant date when Dolores would be "through school?" Well, it's come. She's through school. And school, I might mention in passing, is through with her,—five of them, from Miss Trenchard's Spartan smartness to the gentle Spanish convent. She's a demon-baby. She's a cross between Carmen and Mary Maclane.

Of course the wedding has had to be postponed. Michael Daragh is angelic about it, and he hasn't been able to help me with Dolores as much as he would like because he's been engulfed with a new settlement house, and his dope fiend has been wobbling again, but our calendar is finished and accepted now, and a really nice girl is being really nice to him—liking him, trusting him, and M.D. is at peace about him.

Dolores came definitely home from the convent to-day with a clever note from the Mother Superior ... they feel that the child needs more space ... freedom....

Good heavens, so do I! *Ay de mi*, that I ever saw Mexico! And yet, the demon-baby loves me, and I love her, but I also love Michael Daragh and would like exceedingly to marry him. My house is ready, my clothes are finished, and so—nearly—am I.

But I cannot go off on a honeymoon unless I leave her in safety. Sarah, now that your mother is so improved, wouldn't you like to take a boarder? You could chain her to the baby-grand....

Distractedly,

THE VIRGIN MOTHER OF HER SOUL.

P.S. A friend, knowing of my plight, has just telephoned about a very fine New Thought school which will be glad to receive my ward. Well, they'll have some entirely new thoughts in that school which they've never had before!

J.

*July Sixth.*

SALLY DARLING,

I jibber with joy! The best and most beautiful of all my leading men was sent by a kind Providence to take tea with me to-day and talk over the new play idea, and while he was here Dolores Tristeza arrived in state and a taxi from the N.T. school, along with her trunk and her temper and her temperament and Santa Catalina and José-María. Utterly ignoring him, she launched upon a monologue of her fancied wrongs, dramatizing every incident, impersonating every one from the Principal to the taxi driver. I'd seen her through so many of these Mad Scenes that it left me quite cold, but not so my actor-man. When she had finished, spitting (dryly but venomously) upon all schools, and flung herself out of the room, he sprang to his feet.

"Good gad, Jane Vail,—don't you know what you've got here? A young Nazimova! An infant Kalich! Schools—nonsense! Teach her the A.B.C.'s—but don't touch that accent—and turn her loose on the stage!"

Sarah, he's right. It's the thing, the only thing, to do with her. I took her to see Nazimova to-night, and she sat star-eyed and hardly breathing. When we came home I told her my new ideal for her and she wept with joy. She swears by the green tail of Santa Catalina and kisses up to God that she will never be wicked again, and she believes it, and so do I, for I've touched her imagination at last. I've been trying to keep a Bird of Paradise in a chicken coop! I'll put her with the right people for training, and have her with me a great deal, and not try to muss up her poor little mind with mathematics.

She is lying sleepless and bright-eyed in her bed, and I must go in to her now, to soothe her off to the Poppy Fields with happy plans and prophesies.

*When are you coming?*

JANE.

*July Eighth.*

MY DEAR,

I float on a sea of rosy bliss. Randal's girl has almost promised to marry him, and he's a new man, and Dolores is a lamb, dreaming of the time she may begin her study for the stage, in the early fall.

We are to be married on the afternoon of the twenty-fourth, and take the night boat for Boston and thence to Maine, to Three Meadows. It was M.D. who sent me there by scolding me into realization of my grubbiness four years ago; I want to have my honeymoon there. The Deacon and "Angerleek" have a little house which they rent, and they are making it ready for us.

I'm afraid every one at home will think me quite mad to be married here instead of in my dear old house, but Sally, after all, my wedding belongs to this world, not to that. I shall be married here at Mrs. Hills' in her big old double parlors, the ugliness conquered with flowers, and I shall wear my traveling things—as the village paper would say—"the bride, attired in a modish going-away gown"—I know you'll wail for all the trimmings, Sally dear,—the veil and the train and all the rest, but that sort of thing belongs to eighteen, not twenty-eight. I'm beyond the age of opera bouffe weddings,—I don't vision myself coming down a white-ribboned aisle with wobbly

knees, covered with orange blossoms and gooseflesh! But—oh, Sally, the truth is that I would be married in a mackintosh or a bathing suit, I'm so dizzily, dazedly happy!

Dolores Tristeza, good as an angel out of a frieze, agrees to stay docilely with Emma Ellis at Hope House while we are away. She calls her "*Ella de la barba*" with reference to the small but determined little fringe on poor E.E.'s chin and I tremble—no, I don't! I'm not afraid of anything now. Everything is and will be perfect.

If only you can come, best of friends!

Happily,

JANE.

*The Day!*

MY DEAREST SALLY,

"I must be making haste,  
I have no time to waste—  
This is—this is my wedding morning!"

But my haste is done. I am radiantly ready now, and there are seven still and shining hours ahead.

My trunk is packed with jolly Island clothes; my bag stands ready to close; my sitting room is running over with gifts, little and large, proud and pitiful,—from Marty Wetherby's opulent clock and Rodney Harrison's gorgeous silver service to "Angerleek's" preserves and the hand-painted mustard pot from Ethel and Jerry and Billiken, and a virtuously ugly dusting cap from Mrs. Mussel. If only you were here, Sally dearest! But I know your mother needs you, and it must be a blessed thing to have a mother to need you!

Sally, I'm feeling very proud and very humble, very—

*Later.*

Just as I wrote that, Michael Daragh came, white, tight-lipped, more than ever like the Botticelli St. Michael; he was the "Captain-General of the Hosts of Heaven." All he needed was a sword.

"Woman, dear," he said, "I've the sad, terrible news will be breaking your heart."

"Have you decided not to marry me?" I asked, facetiously, but I didn't feel in the least humorous.

"'Tis my lad," he said, "Randal. She's thrown him over, that girl. Destroyed he is with grief and shame, bound again for the black pit."

I tried to comfort him. I said I was sure the boy was too firmly on his feet to slip now, but he knew better, or worse, and he said he dared not leave him for an hour, and then, Sarah, I began to see what it meant, and it turned me to iron and ice.

"You mean," I said, "you want to postpone our marriage?"

"Never that, Acushla, but—couldn't we be taking him with us? 'Tis the wild thing to be asking you, but after all, woman dear, we've the whole of our lives ahead, and for him it means all the world! Say we'll be taking him!"

Now, Sarah Farraday, I ask you, as a reasonable human being, what you think of that? *To take a dope fiend with us on our honeymoon!*

I seemed to see the future in one blinding flash—always our own rights, our own happiness, relentlessly pushed aside. I'm glad I can't remember all I said, but I shall remember the look on his face as long as I live. But I was right—I was right. He belongs in a painted picture, St. Michael, not in a warm, vital, human world.

So, it isn't my wedding morning after all.

J.

I'm putting a special delivery stamp on this, Sally dear, so you'll get it before the other one.

I relented in sackcloth and ashes and shame, of course, and telephoned to tell him so, but I couldn't get him because he was on his way here to tell me *he* would yield, that he wouldn't ask me to take Randal with us. Then we had another moving scene, reversed this time, I pleading penitently to take him. M.D. said he had had a good talk with the poor lad, and he had sworn to brace up alone.

I shall always be glad I yielded, but I know now *just* how Abraham felt when he found the ram caught in the bushes! And I'll always be glad that for once M.D. chose happiness for himself.

Very shakily, but gratefully,

JANE.

*Midnight,  
On the Boston Boat.*

My dear, do you remember a silly song of our childhood with a refrain like this—

"I'm not blessed with surplus wealth,  
Bump tiddy ump bump, bump tiddy ump bump,—  
Off on a honeymoon all by myself,  
Bump tiddy ump bump bay!"

Well, my dear Sarah, that is exactly the sort of wedding journey which has fallen to me.

We were married. Yes, I'm very clear about that. Dolores, my dewy-eyed dove, stood with me, and Randal, ghastly and trembling, by Michael Daragh. The solemn old minister knotted us securely. Michael kissed me. (I'm very clear about that, too.)

Suddenly, like a cyclone, like a typhoon, Dolores Tristeza cast herself upon me. "Virgin mawther of my soul," she howled, "do not leave me! I keel myself! *Ella de la barba ees nawthing to me!* Do not leave me to die with these so ugly strangers! *No tengo más amiga que tu!*" (Thou art my only friend!)

She was working up into a frenzy which made all her earlier efforts sound like lullabies with the soft pedal on, and she was shaking herself into convulsions and crying real tears. "Behold," she sobbed, "*las lágrimas de la huérfanita!*" (The tears of the little orphan!)

I counted ten. Then I turned to my new husband.

"Michael Daragh," I said, meekly, "will you take Randal with you and let me take Dolores with me?"

I wish you could have seen people's faces as we went off in a groaning taxi, ourselves, our luggage, Randal, white and protesting, Dolores, tearful but triumphant, José-María, snapping and snarling, Santa Catalina, strongly urging every one to shut his ugly mouth for the love of all the saints.

Sally, you've read a hundred stories, haven't you, which went like this—the ceremony, the good wishes, the rice, the old shoes, then—"he jerked down the curtain of the cab window,"—"Alone at last," he murmured, "my *wife!*" "He folded her in his arms."

I think Michael Daragh's feeling was that we were not *entirely* alone, and that it was a rather large order to fold in his arms a swearing parrot, a shivering, hairless dog, a robust Mexican orphan, a bride and a dope fiend, for he made not the first gesture of the above ritual.

It is after midnight. Dolores is asleep here in my stateroom, a smile of seraphic peace on her face, but in the room next door I hear the steady murmur of M.D.'s voice reading to poor Randal, who cannot sleep, who has tried to jump overboard. Michael dares not leave him for an instant, even to tell me good-night.

Sally, it *is* really funny, but I have to keep assuring and reminding myself that it is.

JANE.

*Morning,  
At Three Meadows.*

SALLY, MY DEAR,

Once again I crept up a river of mother-of-pearl in the gauzy dawn to this island sanctuary. The Deacon met us, amazed at our number, and led us to the silver gray house just beyond theirs on a little, lifting hill, where "Angerleek" will "do for us."

Morning brought counsel. While my husband (carelessly said—just like that!) while my husband looked after luggage I talked to Randal, sane again, haggard, abased. "My dear boy," I said, "*you* aren't going to be in the way at all! You'll look after yourself and be company for Michael when he wants good man-talk. It's this demon-child. If—*do* you suppose you could look after her for me!"

He wrung my hand. "Count on me! If there's anything I can do, to atone, to square myself—I'll be her nurse, her governess, her jailer!"

Then to a meek *huérfanita*, feeding her menagerie, I made oration. "Daughter of my soul, thou knowest thy presence is a joy of purest ray serene, but this Randal creature, tagging ever at the heels of my spouse—"

"Star of my heart," she said, grinding her teeth, "he is a pig and the son of a pig! Have no fear, *Madrecita*, I will herd him, like cattle, away from thy sight." She kissed up to God.

JANE.

*The Silver Gray House,  
On the Lifting Hill,  
Three Meadows.*

I have ceased to reckon time by calendars, Sally dearest, but I think we have been here, Michael Daragh and I, seven or ten days.

Oh, yes, the others are still here,—at least, they are on the island, but we never see them. They come and go like Brownies, like elves, like the "Little People" of Michael's land, bringing our meals and our mail, vanishing silently.... They stand between us and the village and the Deacon and the world. They are our shields and barriers; our sure defense; our shock absorbers. I shouldn't *think* of ever going on a honeymoon without them. We have signed them up for all our anniversary excursions, and between whiles we'll loan them to friends for wedding trips and rent them to a select public,—there'll be miles of Waiting List as soon as they are known!

Make your reservations early!

Whole islands and oceans of love, old dear!

Devotedly,

JANE VAIL DARAGH.  
(*Mrs. Michael Daragh!!!*)

P.S. Sally, dearest, remember what I said, the night before I left Wetherby Ridge for the first time?—That I wasn't really "going away" from you all, but only "going on?" I lost my way for a while, Sally; I was content with just "getting on," but he found me and herded me sternly back to the highroad, and now, always and forevermore, no credit to the likes of me, but because I've espoused the Captain-General of the Hosts of Heaven, I'll be going on—and *on*—with Michael Daragh. And, oh, my dear, but indeed—as he said of me long ago—I have been *anointed with the oil of joy above my fellows!*

J. V. D.

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