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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PLAY THE GAME! ***

PLAY THE GAME!

BY

RUTH COMFORT MITCHELL



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**TO
MY BROTHERS**

Books by
RUTH COMFORT MITCHELL

CORDUROY
NARRATIVES IN VERSE
JANE JOURNEYS ON
PLAY THE GAME

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
New York London

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PLAY THE GAME!

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CHAPTER I

There was no denying the fact that Honor Carmody liked the boys. No one ever attempted to deny it, least of all Honor herself.

When she finished grammar school her mother and her gay young stepfather told her they had decided to send her to Marlborough rather than to the Los Angeles High School.

The child looked utterly aghast. "Oh," she said, "I wouldn't like that at all. I don't believe I *could*. I couldn't *bear* it!"

"My dear," her mother chided, "don't be silly! It's a quite wonderful school, known all over the country. Girls are sent there from Chicago and New York, and even Boston. You'll be with the best girls, the very nicest——"

"That's just it," Honor interrupted, forlornly.

"What do you mean?"

"*Girls*. Just girls. Oodles and oodles of nothing but girls. Honestly, Muzzie, I don't think I could *stand* it." She was a large, substantial young creature with a broad brow and hearty coloring and candid eyes. Her stepfather was sure she would never have her mother's beauty, but he was

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almost equally sure that she would never need it. He studied her closely and her actions and reactions intrigued him. He laughed, now, and his wife turned mildly shocked eyes on him.

"Stephen, dear! Don't encourage her in being queer. I don't like her to be queer." Mrs. Lorimer was not in the least queer herself, unless, indeed, it was queer to be startlingly lovely and girlish and appealing at forty-one, with a second husband and six children. She was not an especially motherly person except in moments of reproof and then she always spoke in a remote third person. "Honor, Mother wants you to be more with girls." Then, as if to make it clear that she was not merely advancing a personal whim,— "You need to be more with girls."

"Why?"

"Why—why because Mother says you do." Mrs. Lorimer did not like to argue. She always got out of breath and warm-looking.

Her daughter dropped on the floor at her feet. Mrs. Lorimer had small, happy-looking, lily-of-the-field hands and Honor took one of them between her hard brown paws and squeezed it. "I know, but—*why* do you say so? I don't know anything about girls. Why should I, when I've had eight boy cousins and five boy brothers and"—she gave Stephen Lorimer a brief, friendly grin—"and two boy fathers!" Her stepfather was not really younger than his wife but he was incurably boyish. The girl grew earnest. "Please, *pretty-please*, let me go to L. A. High! I've counted on it so! And"—she was as intent and free from self-consciousness as a terrier at a rat hole—"all the boys I know are going to L. A. High! And *Jimsy's* going, and he'll *need* me!"

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Her stepfather laughed again and lighted a cigarette. "She has you there, Mildred. He will need her."

"Of course he will." Honor turned a grateful face to him. "I'll have to do all his English and Latin for him, so he can get signed up every week and play football!"

Mrs. Lorimer did not see why her daughter's finishing need be curtailed by young James King's athletic activities and she started in to say so with vigor and emphasis, but her husband held up his long beautifully modeled hand rather in the manner of a traffic policeman and stopped her.

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"Look here, Mildred," he said, "suppose you and I convene in special session and consider this thing from all angles and then let her know what it comes to,—shall we? Run along, Top Step!"

"All right, Stepper," said the child, relievedly. "*You* explain it to her." She went contentedly away and a moment later they heard her robust young voice lifted on the lawn next door,— "Jim-zee! Oh, Jimsy! Come-mawn-out!"

"You see?" Mrs. Lorimer wanted rather inaccurately to know. "That's what we've got to stop, Stephen."

He smiled. "But—as your eldest offspring just now inquired—why?"

"*Why?*" She lifted her hands and let them fall into her lap again, palm upward, and regarded him in gentle exasperation. "Stephen, you know, really, sometimes I feel that you are not a bit of help to me with the children."

"Sometimes you do, I daresay," he granted her, serenely, "but most of the time you must be simply starry-eyed with gratitude over the brilliant way I manage them. Come along over here and we'll talk it over!" He patted the place beside him on the couch.

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"You mean," said his wife a little sulkily, going, nevertheless, "that you'll talk me over!"

"That is my secret hope," said Stephen Lorimer.

It was all quite true. He did manage her children and their children—there were three of each—with astonishing ease and success. They amused him, and adored him. He understood them utterly. Honor was seven when her own father died and nine when her mother married again. Stephen Lorimer would never forget her first inspection of him. Nursemaids had done their worst on the subject of stepfathers; fairy tales had presented the pattern. He knew exactly what was going on in her mind, and—quite as earnestly beneath his persiflage as he had set himself to woo the widow—he set himself to win her daughter. It was a matter of moments only before he saw the color coming back into her square little face and the horror seeping out of her eyes. It was a matter of days only until she sought him out and told him, in her mother's presence, that she believed she liked him better than her first father.

"Honor, *dear!* You—you mustn't, really—" Mildred Lorimer insisted with herself on being shocked.

"Don't *you*, Muzzie? Don't you like him better?" the child wanted persistently to know. "He was very nice, of course; I did like him awfully. But he was always 'way off Down Town ... at The Office. We didn't have any fun with him. Stepper's always home. I'm glad we married a newspaper one this time."

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"Stephen, that dreadful name.... What will people think?"

Her new husband didn't in the least care. He and Honor had gravely considered on that first day what they should call each other. It seemed to Stephen Lorimer that it was hardly fair to the gentleman who had stayed so largely at The Office to have his big little daughter and his tiny

sons calling his successor Father or Dad, and *Papa* with all its shades and shifts of accent left him cold. "Let's see, Honor. 'Stepfather' as a salutation sounds rather accusing, doesn't it? 'Step-pa,' now, is less austere, but——"

"Oh, Stephen, *dear!*" They were not consulting Mrs. Lorimer at all.

"I've got it! It's an inspiration! 'Stepper!' Neat, crisp, brisk. Means, if any one should ask you, 'Step-pa' and also, literally, stepper; a stepper; one who steps—into another's place."

"*Stephen——*"

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"Well, haven't I, my dear?" He considered the three young Carmodys, nine, seven, and five. "Steps yourselves, aren't you? Honor's the top step and——"

"Oh, Stepper, call me Top Step! I like that."

"Right. And Billy's Bottom Step and Ted's the Tweeny! Now we're all set!"

"Yes," said Honor, contentedly. She herded her little brothers out of the room and came back alone. "But—what'll I tell people you *are*?"

"Why, I think," he considered, "you're young enough and trusting enough to call me A Writer."

"I mean, are you Muzzie's step-husband, too?"

It was the first time she had seen the lightness leave his eyes. "No. *No*. I am your moth—I am her husband. There is no step there." He got up and walked over to where his wife was sitting and towered over her. He was a tall man and he looked especially tall at that moment. "Her plain—husband. Extremely plain, as it happens"—he was himself again for an instant—"but—*her husband*." It seemed to the child that he had forgotten which one of them had asked him the question and was addressing himself to her mother by mistake. He seemed at once angry and demanding and anxious, and she had never seen her mother so pink. However, her question had been answered and she had affairs of her own. She went away without a backward glance so she did not see her stepfather drop to his knees beside the chair and gather the quiet woman roughly into his arms, nor hear his insistent voice. "Her husband. The *first—husband—she—ever had*. Say it, *Mildred*. Say it."

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And now Honor was thirteen and a half, and tardily ready for High School, and there were three little Lorimers, twins and a six months' old single. Stephen Lorimer, who had been a singularly footloose world rover, had settled down securely in the old Carmody house on South Figueroa Street. He was intensely proud of his paternity, personal and vicarious, and took it not seriously but joyously. He was dramatic critic and special writer for the leading newspaper of Los Angeles, and theoretically he worked by night and slept by day, but as a matter of puzzling fact he did not sleep at all, unless one counted his brief morning naps. His eyes, in consequence, seemed never to be quite open, but nothing, nevertheless, escaped them.

An outsider, looking in on them now, the erect, hot-cheeked, imperious woman, a little insolent always of her beauty, and the lolling, lounging man with the drooping lids, would have placed his odds unhesitatingly on her winning of any point she might have in mind. Even Mildred Lorimer herself, after four years and a half of being married to him, thought she would win out over him this time. Honor was the only daughter she had, the only daughter she would ever have, for she had definitely decided, at forty-one, to cease her dealings with the long-legged bird who had flapped six times to her roof, and it seemed intolerable to her that—with five boys—her one girl should be so robustly ungirlish.

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"Now, then, let's have it. You want Honor to go to Marlborough. As she herself asked and I myself repeated,—why?"

"And as I answered you both," said his wife, trying hard to keep the conversation spinning lightly in the air as he did, "it's because I want her to be more like other girls."

"And I," said her husband, "do not." This was the place for Mildred Lorimer to fling her own *why* but her husband was too quick for her. "Because she is so much finer and sounder and saner and sweeter as she is. Mildred, I have never seen any living creature so selfless. What was the word they coined in that play about Mars?—'*Otherdom*?' That's it, yes; otherdom. That's Honor Carmody. She could have finished grammar school at twelve, but Jimsy needed her help."

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"That's just it! Can't you see how wrong that is?"

"No. I'm too much occupied with seeing how right it is. Good Lord, my dear, in a world given over to the first person perpendicular, can't you see the amazing beauty and rarity of your child's soul? Every day and all day long she gives herself,—to you, to me, to the kiddies, to her friends. She is the eternal mother." Mildred Lorimer was not the eternal mother. She was not in fact a mother at all. The physical fact of motherhood had six times descended upon her and she was doing her gentle, well-bred, conscientious best in six lively directions, but under it all she was forever Helen, forever the best beloved. She was getting rather beyond her depth but she was not giving up. Stephen, in discussion, had an elusive way of soaring into hazy generalities. She brought him down.

"I can't see why it should make her any less unselfish to attend the best girls' school than to—run with the boys." She brought out the little vulgarism with a faint curl of her lovely lip.

"Run with the boys!" That has a positively Salem flavor, hasn't it? Almost as deadly, that 'with,' as 'after,'" He loved words, Stephen Lorimer; he played with them and juggled them. "Yet isn't that exactly what the girls of to-day must and should do? Isn't it what the girls of to-morrow—naturally, unrebuked—will do? Not running after them, slyly or brazenly; not sitting at home, crimped and primped and curled, waiting to be run after. No," he said hotly, getting up and beginning to swallow up the room from wall to wall with his long strides, "*no!* With them. Running with them, chin in, chest out, sound, conditioned, unashamed!" He believed that he meant to write a tremendous book, one day, Honor's stepfather. He often reeled off whole chapters in his mind, warm and glowing. It was only when he got it down on paper that it cooled and congealed. "Running with them in the race—for the race—" his hurtling promenade took him to the window and he paused for an instant. "Come here, Mildred. Look at her!"

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Mildred Lorimer came to join him. On the shabby, rusty lawn of the King place, next door, all the rustier for its nearness to their own emerald turf, sat Honor Carmody and Jimsy King, jointly and severally lacing up a football.

"Yes, look at her!" said her mother with feeling.

"Leave her alone, Mildred. Leave her alive!"

The two children were utterly absorbed. The boy was half a head taller than the girl, heavier, sturdier, of a startling beauty. There was a stubborn, much reviled wave in his bronze hair and his eyes were a dark hazel flecked with black. His skin was bronze, too, bronzed by many Catalina summer and winter swims at Ocean Park. It made his teeth seem very white and flashing.

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The window was open to the soft Southern California air, and the voices came across to the watchers.

"*Hold it!*"

"I *am* holding it!"

A handsome man of forty came up the tree-shaded street, not quite steadily, and turned into the King's walk. His hat was pulled low over his eyes and the collar of his coat was turned up in spite of the mildness of the day. He nodded to the boy and girl as he went past them and on into the house.

"*Again!*" said Mrs. Lorimer, tragically. "That's the second time this week!"

"Rough on the kid," said her husband. "See him now."

Jimsy King had turned his head and was following his father's slow progress up the steps and across the porch and into the house. "Be in in a minute, Dad!" he called after him.

"Loyal little beggar. I saw him steering him up Broadway one morning, just at school time. Pluck."

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Honor had looked after James King, the elder, too, and then at his son, and then at the football in her hands again. "Hurry up," she commanded. "Pull it tighter! *Tighter!* Do you call that pulling?" Inexorably she got his attention back to the subject in hand.

"That makes it all the worse," said Mrs. Lorimer. "Of course they're only children—babies, really—but I couldn't have anything.... It's bad blood, Stephen. I *couldn't* have my child interested in one of the 'Wild Kings!'"

"Well, you won't have, if you're wise. Let 'em alone. Let 'em lace footballs on the front lawn ... and they won't hold hands on the side porch! Why, woman dear, like the well-known Mr. Job, the thing you greatly fear you'll bring to pass! Shut her up in a girls' school—even the best and sanest—and you'll make boys suddenly into creatures of romance, remote, desirable. Don't emphasize and underline for her. She's as clean as a star and as unself-conscious as a puppy! Don't hurry her into what one of those English play-writing chaps calls—Granville Barker, isn't it?—Yes,—*Madras House*—'the barnyard drama of sex.... Male and female created He them ... but men and women are a long time in the making!'"

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The lacing of the football was finished. The boy lifted his head and looked soberly at the door through which his father had entered, not quite steadily. Then he drew a long breath, threw back his shining bronze head, said something in a low tone to the girl, and ran into the house.

Honor Carmody got to her feet and stood looking after him, the odd mothering look in her square child's face. She stood so for long moments, without moving, and her mother and her stepfather watched her.

Suddenly Stephen Lorimer flung the window up as far as it would go and leaned out.

"It's all right, Top Step," he called, meeting the leaping gladness of her glance. "We've decided, your mother and I. You're going to L. A. High! You're going—" but now he dropped his voice and spoke only for the woman beside him, slipping a penitent and conciliatory arm about her, his eyes impish, "you're going to run with the boys!"

The "Wild Kings" had lived in their fine old house ever since the neighborhood could remember. The first and probably the wildest of them had come out from Virginia when Los Angeles was still a drowsing Spanish village, bringing with him an aged and excellent cellar and a flock of negro servants. Honor's Carmody grandmother could remember the picturesqueness of his entourage, of James King himself, the hard-riding, hard-drinking, soft-spoken cavalier with his proud, pale wife and his slim, high-stepping horses and his grinning blacks. The general conviction was, Grandmother Carmody said, that he had come—or been sent—west to make a fresh start. There was something rather pathetically naïve about that theory. There could never be a fresh start for the "Wild Kings" in a world of excellent cellars and playing cards. In a surprisingly short time he had re-created his earlier atmosphere for himself—an atmosphere of charm and cheer and color ... and pride and shame and misery, in which his wife and children lived and moved and had their being. In the early eighties he built the big beautiful house on South Figueroa Street, moved the last of his negro servitors and the last of his cellar and his young family into it and died. Since that day Kings had come and gone in it, big, bonny creatures, liked and sighed over, and the house was shabby now, cracked and peeling for the want of paint, the walks grass-grown, the lawn frowzy, lank and stringy curtains at the dim windows. There were only three bottles of the historic cellar left now, precious, cob-webbed; there was only one of the blacks, an ancient, crabbed crone of the second generation, with a witch's hand at cookery and a witch's temper. And there were only James King III and James King IV, his son, Honor's Jimsy, left of the line in the old home. The negress fed and mended them; an infrequent Japanese came in to make futile efforts on house and garden.

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The neighbors said, "How do you do, Mr. King? Like summer, really, isn't it?" and looked hastily away. One never could be sure of finding him quite himself. Even if he walked quite steadily he might not be able to talk quite steadily, but he was always a King, always sure of his manner, be he ever so unsure of his feet or his tongue. He had been worse since his wife died, when the boy was still a toddler. She was a slim, sandy-haired Scotch girl with steady eyes and a prominent chin, who had married him to reform him, and the neighbors were beginning to think she was in a fair way to compass it when she died. No one had ever been able to pity Jeanie King; she had been as proud as the pale lady who came with the first "Wild King" from Virginia. There was that about the Kings; it had to be granted that their women always stuck; they must have had compensating traits and graces. No King wife ever gave up or deserted save by death, and no King wife ever wept on a neighbor's shoulder.

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And now they had all wandered back to Virginia or up to Alaska or down to Mexico, and there was not an uncle or cousin of his tribe left in Los Angeles for Jimsy King; only his bad, beloved father, coming home at noon in rumpled evening dress, but wearing it better and more handily, for all that, than any other man on the block.

It was agreed that there was no chance for Jimsy to escape the heritage of his blood. People were kind about it, but very firm. "If his mother had lived he might have had a chance, the poor boy," Mrs. Lorimer would sigh, "but with that father, and that home life, and that example——"

"My dear," said Stephen Lorimer, "can't you see what you are doing? By *you* I mean the neighborhood. You are holding his heredity up like a hoop for him to jump through!"

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Honor's stepfather held that there might be a generous share of the firm-chinned Scotch mother in Jimsy. Certainly it was a fighting chance; he was living in a day of less warmth and color than his father and his forbears; there were more outlets for his interest and his energy. His father, for instance, had not played football. Jimsy had played as soon as he could walk alone—football, baseball, basketball, handball, water polo; life was a hard and tingling game to him. "It's an even chance," said Stephen Lorimer, "and if Honor's palling with him can swing it, can we square it with ourselves to take her away from him?" He carried his point, as usual, and the boy and the girl started in at Los Angeles High on the same day. Honor decided on the subjects which Jimsy could most safely take—the things he was strongest in, the weak subjects in which she was strong. There was an inexorable rule about being signed up by every teacher for satisfactory work on Friday afternoon before a Saturday football game; it was as a law of the Medes and Persians; even the teachers who adored him most needs must abide by it. There was no cajoling any of them; even the pretty, ridiculously young thing who taught Spanish maintained a Gibraltar-like firmness.

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"You'll simply have to study, Jimsy, that's all," said Honor.

"Study, yes, but that's not learning, Skipper!" (She had been that ever since her first entirely seaworthy summer at Catalina.) "I can study, if I have to, but that's not saying I'll get anything into my sponce! I'm pretty slow in the head!"

"I know you are," said Honor, sighing. "Of course, you've been so busy with other things. Think what you've done in athletics!"

"Fast on the feet and slow in the head," he grinned. "Well, I'll die trying. But you've got to stand by, Skipper."

"Of course. I'll do your Latin and English and part of your Spanish."

"Gee, you're a brick."

"It's nothing." She dismissed it briefly. "It's my way of doing something, Jimsy, that's all. It's the only way I can be on the team." She glowed pinkly at the thought. "When I sit up on the bleachers and see you make a touchdown and hear 'em yell—why I'm *there!* I'm on the team because I've helped a little to keep you on the team! It almost makes up for having to be a girl. Just for the moment, I'm not sitting up high, clean and starched and safe; I'm on the field, hot and muddy and with my nose bleeding, *doing* something for L. A.! I'm *there!*"

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Jimsy slapped her on the shoulder like a man and brother. "You're *there* all the time, Skipper! You're there a million!"

He made the first team the first day he went out to practice. There was no denying him. He captained the team the second year and every year until he graduated, a year late for all his friend's unwearying toil. As a matter of fact they did not make a special effort to get him through on time; the team needed him, the squad needed him, L. A. needed him. It was more like a college than a High School in those days, with its numbers and its spirit, that strong, intangible evidence of things not seen. There was something about it, a concentrated essence of Jimsy King and hundreds of lesser Jimsy Kings, which made it practically unconquerable. In the year before his final one the team reached its shining perfection and held it to the end. It is still a name to conjure with at the school on the hill, Jimsy King's. The old teachers remember; the word comes down. "A regular old-time L. A. team—the fighting spirit. Like the days of Jimsy King!"

Other teams might score on them; frequently they could not, but when they did the rooting section was not dashed. It lifted up its multiple voice, young, insolent, unafraid, in mocking song, and Honor Carmody, just on the edge of the section, beside her stepfather, sang with them:

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*You can't beat L. A. High!
You can't beat L. A. High!
Use your team to get up steam
But you can't beat L. A. High!*

It rolled out over the football field and echoed away in the soft Southern California air. It was gay, inexorable; you *couldn't* beat L. A. High, field or bleachers.

Stephen Lorimer never missed a game. His wife went once and never again.

"I suppose I am too sensitive," she said, "but I can't help it. It's the way I'm made. I simply cannot endure seeing anything so brutal. I can't understand those young girls ... and the *mothers!*" Two of her own were on the second team, now, but she never saw them play, and they came in the back way, after games and practice, sneaking up to Honor's room with their black eyes and their gory noses for her capable first aid. She was not one, Mildred Lorimer, into whose blood something of the iron had entered. Her boys bewildered her as they grew and toughened out of baby fiber. She was a little unhappy about it, but she was more beautiful than she had ever been in her life, and freer, with the last little Lorimer shifting sturdily for himself and his father more in love with her than ever. She had more or less resigned her active motherhood to him. The things she might have done for Honor, the selection of her frocks and hats, the color scheme of her room, her parties, the girl at seventeen did efficiently for herself. Her childish squareness of face and figure was rounding out rather splendidly and she had a sure and dependable sense of what to wear. Her things were good in line and color, smartly simple. She had thick braids of honey-colored hair wound round her head; her brow was broad and calm, her gray eyes serene; she had a fresh and hearty color. Stephen Lorimer believed that she had a voice. She sang like one of the mocking birds in her garden, joyously, radiantly, riotously, and her stepfather, who knew amazingly many great persons, persuaded a famous artist to hear her when she gave her concert in Los Angeles.

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"Yes," she said, nodding her head, "it is a voice. It is a voice. A little teaching, yes; this Barrett woman who was once my pupil, she will be safe with her. Not too much; not too much singing. Finish your school, my little one. Then you shall come over to me for a year, yes? We shall see what we shall see!" She patted her cheek and sent her out of the room ahead of Stephen.

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"Well?" he wanted to know.

"But yes, a voice, as I have said. Send her to me when her schooling is over."

"She has a future?"

The great contralto shrugged her thick shoulders. "I fear not. I think not."

His face lengthened. "Why?"

"Because, my friend, she will care more for living. She will not care so greatly to *get*, that large child. She will only *give*. She has not the fine relentless selfishness to make the artist. Well, we shall see. Life may break her. Send her to me. In two years, yes? No, no, I will have no thanks. It is so small a thing to do.... One grows fat and old; it is good to have youngness near. Now, go, my friend. I shall gargle my throat and sleep." She gave him a hot, plump hand to kiss.

Honor was not especially impressed. She rather thought, when the time came, she should prefer to go to Stanford, but she liked her music lessons, meanwhile. It filled up her time, the business of singing, in that last year when she was more or less marking time and helping Jimsy through.

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Her stepfather watched her with growing amazement. So far as any one might judge, and to Mrs.

Lorimer's tearful relief, Honor's attitude toward the last of the "Wild Kings" was at seventeen what it had been at twelve, at six.

"I was right, wasn't I?" Stephen wanted to know.

"Well ... if you can only keep on being right about it! I'm so thankful about her singing. That year abroad will be wonderful. She'll meet new people ... real men."

"Young Jimsy is exhibiting every known symptom of becoming a real man."

"Yes, but he's a King."

"That appears to be the universal opinion regarding him."

"Stephen *dear*, don't be ridiculous! You've always been as bewitched about the boy as Honor herself." Mrs. Lorimer was dressed for a luncheon and her husband, heavy-eyed and flushed of face, had cut short his late morning sleep to drive her. She was still for him the everlasting Helen.

"Mildred," he said, quitting the battlefield for the eternal balcony, "do you know that you are lovelier this instant than you were the day I married you?" [Pg 25]

Mrs. Lorimer knew it quite well. It was due somewhat to good management as well as luck, and she liked having the results appreciated. She let him kiss her, carefully, because she had her hat on.

The elder James King did not seem to age with the years. "He is," Stephen Lorimer said facetiously, "only too well preserved!" His manner and mode of life remained the same, save that he lost more heavily at cards. For the first time in its history the old King place was mortgaged. In a day when every one who was any one, as Honor's mother put it, was getting a motor car, the Kings had none. Jimsy, of course, rode regally in every one else's. The Lorimers had two, an electric in which Honor's mother glided softly with her little whirring bell from clubs to luncheons and from luncheons to teas, and a rough and ready seven-passenger affair into which the whole tribe might be piled, and which Honor Carmody drove better than her stepfather, who was apt to dream at the wheel. On Sundays Stephen Lorimer took them all, Jimsy, Honor, Billy and Ted Carmody, the Lorimer twins and the last little Lorimer, on motor picnics to the beach. They drove to Santa Monica, down the Palisades, up the narrow, winding, wave-washed road to the Malibou Ranch and built a fire and broiled chops and made coffee and baked potatoes, after their swim, ate like refugees and slept like puppies on the sand. In the afternoon, when they came back to the gracious old house in its wide garden on South Figueroa Street Mildred Lorimer would be waiting, in a frock he loved, to give her husband his tea, cool, lovely, remote from the rougher fun of life. [Pg 26]

In the evenings—Sunday evenings—Honor held her joyous At Homes. Three or four favored girls and a dozen boys came to supper, a loud, hilarious meal. Takasugi, the cook, and Kada, the second boy, were given their freedom. Honor, in the quaint aprons her stepfather had picked up here and there over the world, pink, capable, with the assistance of Jimsy and her biggest brothers, got supper.

It was a lively feast. Jimsy King, in one of Kada's white jackets, waited on the table. They ate enormously, and when they had finished they pronounced their ungodly grace—a thunderous tattoo on the table edge, begun with palms and finished with elbows—

None-but-the-righteous-shall-be-SAVED!—

followed, while the cups and plates were still leaping and shuddering, with its secular second verse— [Pg 27]

My-sister-Mary-walks-like-THIS!

"Well, Top Step," said Stephen one of those evenings, "eleven boys beside the stand-by Jimsy. Fair to middling popularity, I should say!"

"Popularity?" She opened her candid eyes wide at him. "Why, Stepper, you know it's not that! They don't come to see me! They don't mind me, of course, but it's the eats, and meeting each other,—and mostly Jimsy, I guess! Mercy,—the chocolate's boiling over!"

She clearly believed it, and it was more or less true. The Carmody home of a Sunday night was a sort of glorified club house without rules or dues or by-laws. It was the thing to do, if one were so lucky. It rather placed a boy in the scheme of things to be one of "the Sunday-night bunch." Jimsy was the Committee on Membership.

"Let's have that Burke boy out to supper Sunday, shan't we?" Honor would say. "He's doing so well on the team."

"No," Jimsy would answer, definitely. "Not at the house, Skipper." Honor accepted his judgments unquestioningly. Some way, with the deep wisdom of boys, he knew, better than she could, that the young Burke person was better on the field than in the drawing-room. There was nothing snobbish in their gatherings; shabby boys came, girls who had made their own little dimity dresses. It was the intangible, inexorable caste of the best boyhood, and Honor knew, comfortably, that her particular King could do no wrong. [Pg 28]

The rooting section had a special yell for Jimsy, when he had sped down the field to a touchdown or kicked a difficult goal. It followed the regular High School yell, hair-lifting in its fierceness:

King! King! King!
K-I-N-G, King!
G-I-N-K, Gink!
He's the King Gink!
He's the King Gink!
He's the King Gink!
K-I-N-G, King! KING!

and Honor utterly agreed with them.

CHAPTER III

[Pg 29]

The house across the street from the Carmody place was suddenly sold. People were curious and a little anxious. Every one on that block had been there for a generation or so; there was a sense of permanence about them all—even the Kings.

"Eastern people," said Mrs. Lorimer. "A mother, rather delicate-looking, and one son, eighteen or nineteen I should say. He's frail-looking, too, and he limps a little. I imagine they're very nice. Everything about them"—her magazine reading had taken her quite reasonably to a front window the day the newcomers' furniture was uncrated and carried in—"seems very nice." She hoped, if it developed that they really were desirable that they would be permanent. Los Angeles was coming to have such a floating population....

Honor and Jimsy observed the boy from across the street, a slim, modish person. "Gee," said Jimsy, "it must be fierce to be lame!—to have your body not—not do what you tell it to! I wonder what he does? He can't do *anything*, can he?" His eyes were deep with honest pity.

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"Oh, I suppose he sort of fills in with other things," Honor conceded. "I expect, if people can't do the things that count most, they go in for other things. He seems awfully keen about his two cars."

"They're peaches, both of 'em," said Jimsy without envy.

"And of course he has time to be a wonder at school, if he wants to be."

"Yep. Looks as if he might be a shark at it." He grinned. "Slow on his feet but fast in the head."

"Muzzie's going to call on his mother, and then we'd better ask him to supper, hadn't we? He must be horribly lonesome."

"I'll float over and see him," the last King suggested, "and sort of size him up. Give him the once-over. We don't want to start anything unless he's O. K. Might as well go now, I guess."

"All right. Come in afterward and tell me what you think of him."

He nodded and swung off across the street. It was an hour before he came back, glowing. "Gee, Skipper, I'm strong for that kid! Name's Van Meter, Carter Van Meter. He's got a head on him, that boy! He's been everywhere and seen everything—three times abroad—Canada, Mexico! You ought to hear him talk—not a bit up-stagy, no side at all, but interesting! I asked him for supper, Sunday night. You'll be crazy about him—all the bunch will!" Thus Jimsy King on the day Carter Van Meter limped into his life; thus Jimsy King through the years which followed, worshiping humbly the things he did not have in himself, belittling his own gifts, enlarging his own lacks, glorifying his friend. He had never had a deeply intimate boy friend before; the team was his friend, the squad; Honor had sufficed for a nearer tie. It was to be different, now; a sharing. She was to resent a little in the beginning, before she, too, came under the spell of the boy from the East.

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Mrs. Lorimer came smiling back from her call. "Very nice," she told her husband and her daughter, "really charming. And her things are quite wonderful ... rare rugs ... portraits of ancestors. A widow. Here for her health, and the boy's health; he's never been strong. All she has in the world ... wrapped up in him. *Very Eastern!*"—she laughed at the memory. "She said, 'And from what part of the East do you come, Mrs. Lorimer?' When I said I was born here in Los Angeles she almost *gasp*ed, and then she flushed and said, 'Oh, really? Is it possible? But I met some people on shipboard, once—the time before last when I was crossing—who were natives, and they were *quite* delightful.'"

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"The word 'native' intrigues them," said Stephen, drawing off her long, limp suede gloves and smoothing them. "I daresay she'll be looking for war whoops and tomahawks. And if it comes to that, we can furnish the former, especially Sunday night."

"Muzzie, did you meet the boy?" Honor wanted to know.

"Yes. He came in for tea with us. A beautifully mannered boy. Very much at ease. We must have him here, Honor."

"Yes, Jimsy's already asked him for Sunday night, Muzzie. Jimsy likes him."

"Well, he may. He has a something ... I don't know what it is, exactly, but he will be good for all of you."

"We'll be good for him, too," said her daughter, calmly. "It must be fearfully dull for him, not knowing any one, and being lame."

He came to supper, a trim young glass of fashion, and it was he, the stranger, who was entirely at his ease, and the "bunch," the gay, accustomed bunch, which was a little shy and constrained. Jimsy stood sponsor for him and Honor was an earnest hostess. He said he enjoyed himself; certainly he made himself gently agreeable to Mrs. Lorimer, to the girls. Honor's stepfather observed him with his undying curiosity. He was a plain boy with a look of past pain in his colorless face, a shadowed bitterness in his eyes, a droop at the corners of his mouth when he was not speaking. For all his two motor cars and his rare old rugs and the portraits of ancestors and his idolized only sonship, life had clearly withheld from him the things he had wanted most. There was a baffled imperiousness about him, Stephen decided.

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"A clever youngster," he told his wife, watching him from across the room. "Brains. But I don't like him."

"Stephen! Why not?"

He shook his head. "I don't know yet. But I know. I had a curious sense, as he came limping into the room to-night, of '*Enter the villain*.'"

"My dear,—that poor, frail boy, with his lovely, gentle manners!"

"I know. It does sound rather piffle. Daresay I'm wrong. The kids will size him up."

When Carter Van Meter came to tell his hostess good-by, he smiled winningly. "This has been very jolly, Mrs. Lorimer. It was good of you to let me come. Mother asked me to say how much she appreciated it. But"—he hesitated—"May I come in some afternoon when—just you and Miss Honor are here?" He looked wistful, and frailer at the end of the evening than he had at the beginning.

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"Of course you may, my dear boy!" Mrs. Lorimer gave him the glory of her special smile. "Come soon!"

He came the next day but one, and as her mother was at a bridge afternoon it was Honor who entertained him. She had just come home from High School and she wore a middy blouse and a short skirt and looked less than her years. "Let's sit in the garden, shan't we?—I hate being indoors a minute more than I can help!" She led the way across the green, springy lawn to the little rustic building over which the vivid Bougainvillæa climbed and swarmed, and he followed at his halted pace. "Besides, we can see Jimsy from here when he comes by from football practice, and call him in. I just didn't happen to go to watch practice to-day, and now"—she smiled at him,—"I'm glad I didn't." There was something intensely pitiful about this lad to her mothering young heart, for all his poise and pride.

He waited gravely until she had established herself on a bench before he sat. "Tell me about this fellow King. Every one seems very keen about him."

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Honor leaned back and took a serge-clad knee between two tanned hands. "Well, I don't know how to begin! He's—well, he's just Jimsy King, that's all! But it's more than any other boy in the world."

"You're great friends, aren't you?"

"Jimsy and I? I should say we are! We've known each other ever since—well, before we could walk or talk! Our nurses used to take us out together in our buggies. We were born next door—in these two houses, on the same day. Jimsy's just about an hour older than I am!"

"I have never had many friends," said Carter Van Meter. "I've been moving about so much, traveling ... other things have interfered." He never referred, directly or indirectly, to his ill health or his limp.

"Well, you can have all you want now," said Honor, generously. "And Jimsy likes you!" She bestowed that like a decoration. "Honestly, I never knew him to take such a fancy to any one before in all his life. He likes every one, you know,—I mean, he never dislikes anybody, but he never gets crushes. So, it means something to have him keen about you. If *he's* for you, *everybody* will be for you."

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"Why do people like him so?"

"Can't help it," said Honor, briefly. "Even *teachers*. He's not terribly clever at school, and of course he doesn't have as much time to study as some do, but the teachers are all keen about him. They know what he is. I expect that's what counts, don't you? Not what people have, or do, or know; what they *are*. Why, one time I happened to be in the Vice-Principal's office about something, and it was a noontime, and there was a wild rough-house down in the yard. Honestly, you couldn't hear yourself *think*! The Principal—he was a new man, just come—kept looking out of the window, and getting more and more nervous, and finally he said, 'Shouldn't we stop that, Mrs. Dalton?' And she looked out and laughed and said, 'Jimsy King's in it, and he'll stop it before

we need to notice it!' *That's* what teachers think of him, and the boys—I believe they'd cut up into inch pieces for him."

"I suppose it's a good deal on account of his football. He's on the team, isn't he?" His eyes disdained teams.

"On the team? He *is* the team! Captain last year and this,—and next! Wait till you see him play. He's the fastest full back we've ever had, since anybody can remember. There'll be a game Saturday. We play Redlands. Will you come, and sit with Stepper and me?" [Pg 37]

"Thanks. I don't care very much for—" he stopped, held up by the growing amaze in her face. "Yes, I'd like very much to go with you and Mr. Lorimer. I don't care much about watching games where I don't know the people"—he retrieved and amended his earlier sentence—"but you'll explain everything to me."

She grinned. "I'm afraid I won't be very nice about talking to you. I get simply wild, at games. I'm right down there, in it. I've never gotten over not being a boy! But Jimsy's wonderful about letting me have as much share in it as I can. You'll hear all sorts of tales about him, when you come to know people,—plays he's made and games he's won, and how he never, *never* loses his head or his temper, no matter what the other team does. If we should ever have another war, I expect he'd be a great general." Her face broke into mirth again at a memory. "Once, we were playing Pomona—imagine a high school playing a college and *beating* them!—and somebody was out for a minute, and Jimsy was standing waiting, with his arms folded across his chest, and he had on a head guard, and it was very still, and suddenly a girl's voice piped up—'*Oh, doesn't he look just like Napoleon?*' He's never heard the last of it; it fusses him awfully. I never knew anybody so modest. I suppose it's because he's always been the leader, the head of things, ever since he started kindergarten. He's *used* to it; it seems just natural to him." [Pg 38]

The new boy shifted his position uneasily.

Honor thought perhaps he was suffering; his face looked pinched. "Shall we go in the house? Would you be more comf"—she caught herself up—"perhaps you're not used to being out of doors all the time? Eastern people find this glaring sun tiresome sometimes."

"It's very nice here. You go to Los Angeles High School, too?" He didn't care about changing his position but he wanted intensely to change the subject, even if he had started it by his query. "Odd, isn't it, that you don't go to a girls' school?"

Honor laughed. "That's what Muzzie thinks. She did want me to go, but I didn't want to, and Stepper—my stepfather, you know,—stood up for me. I never liked girls very much when I was little. I do now, of course. I've two or three girl friends who are *wonders*. I adore them. But I still like boys best. I suppose"—he saw that her mind came back like a needle to the pole—"it's on account of Jimsy. Wait till you really know him! You will be just the same. Honestly, he's the bravest, gamest person in the world. Once, a couple of years ago, Stepper noticed that he was limping, and he made him go to see the doctor. The doctor told us about it afterwards—he's the doctor who took care of our mothers when we were born. Jimsy came in and said, 'Doc, I've got a kind of a sore leg.' And the doctor looked at it and said, 'You've got a broken leg, that's what you've got! Go straight home and I'll come out and put it in a plaster cast.' You see"—she illustrated by putting the tips of her two forefingers together—"it was really broken, cracked through, but it hadn't slipped by. Well, the doctor had to stay and finish his office hours, and about an hour later he looked up and there was Jimsy, and he said, 'Say, Doc, would you just as soon set this leg to-morrow? You see, I've got a date to take Skipper—he always calls me Skipper—to a dance to-night. I won't dance, but I'll just—' and the doctor just roared at him and told him to go home that instant, and Jimsy went out, but when the doctor got to his house he wasn't there, and he had to wait about half an hour for him, and he was *furious*—he's got a terrible temper but he's the dearest old thing, really. Pretty soon Jimsy came wandering in with his arms full of books and games and puzzles and things he'd got to amuse himself while he was laid up! Of course the doctor expected him to keep perfectly still in bed, but he found he could make a sort of a raft of two table extension boards and slide downstairs to his meals. He had an awful time getting up again, but he didn't care. The first day he was laid up he had exactly nineteen people to see him, and he took the bandages off the leg and all the boys and teachers wrote their autographs and sentiments on the cast. He called it his Social Register and his Guest Book!" Honor was too happily deep in her reminiscences to see that her new friend was a little bored. [Pg 39]

He got suddenly to his feet. "Yes. He must be an unusual fellow. But I'd like to hear you sing. Won't you come into the house and sing something for me?" [Pg 40]

"All right," said Honor. "I love to sing, but I haven't studied very much yet, and I haven't any decent songs. Why doesn't somebody write some?—Songs *about* something? Not just maudling along about 'heart' and 'part' and that kind of stuff! Come on! There's Stepper at the piano now. He'll play for me."

It was mellow in the long living-room after the brazen afternoon sun outside, a livable, lovable room. Stephen Lorimer had an open book on the music rack and he was thumping some rather stirring chords. [Pg 41]

"Stepper," said Honor, "here's Carter Van Meter, and he wants me to sing for him, and I was just saying how I hated all these mushy old songs. Can't you find me something different?"

"I have," said her stepfather. "I've got the words here and I'm messing about for some music to go with them."

Honor looked out as she passed the window on her way to the piano. "Wait a minute! Here's Jimsy! I'll call him!" She sped to the door and hailed him, and he came swiftly in. "Hello! How was practice?"

"Fair. Burke was better. Tried him on the end. 'Lo, Mr. Lorimer. 'Lo, Carter!"

"I've got a poem here you'll all like," said Stephen Lorimer. "No, you needn't shuffle your feet, Jimsy. It's your kind. Sit down, all of you. I'll read it."

"So long as it hasn't got any 'whate'ers' and yestereves' and 'beauteous,'" the last King grinned. "Shoot!"

"It's an English thing, by Henry Newbolt,—about cricket, but that doesn't matter. It's the thing itself. I may not have the words exactly,—I read it over there, and copied it down in my diary, from memory." He looked at the boys and the girl; Honor was waiting eagerly, sure of anything he might bring her; Jimsy King, fresh from the sweating realities of the gridiron, was good-humoredly tolerant; Carter Van Meter was courteously attentive, with his oddly mature air of social poise. He began to read, to recite, rather, his eyes on their faces:

[Pg 42]

There's a breathless hush in the Close to-night,
Ten to make and the match to win;
A bumping pitch and a blinding light,
An hour to play and the last man in,
And it's not for the sake of a ribboned coat
Or the selfish hope of a season's fame,
But his Captain's hand on his shoulder smote—
Play up! Play up! and—Play the Game!

Jimsy King, who was lolling on the couch, sat up, his eyes kindling. "Gee...." he breathed. Honor's cheeks were scarlet and she was breathing hard and fast. Only the new boy was unmoved, his pale face still pale, his shadowed eyes calm. Stephen Lorimer kept that picture of them always in his heart; it was, he came to think, symbol and prophecy. He swung into the second verse, his voice warming:

[Pg 43]

The sand of the desert is sodden red;
Red with the wreck of a square that broke;
The gatling's jammed and the colonel dead,
And the regiment blind with dust and smoke:
The River of Death has brimmed his banks;
And England's far, and Honor a name,
But the voice of a school boy rallies the ranks—
Play up! Play up! and—Play the Game!

His own voice shook a little on the last line and he was a trifle amused at his emotionalism. He tried to bring the moment sanely back to the commonplace. "Corking for a song, Top Step. I'll hammer out some chords ... doesn't need much." He looked again through the strangely charged atmosphere of the quiet room, at the three big children. Jimsy King was on his feet, shaken out of the serene insolence of his young stoicism, his hands opening and shutting, swallowing hard, and Honor, the boy-girl, Jimsy's sturdy Skipper, was crying, frankly, unashamed, unaware, the tears welling up out of her wide eyes, rolling down her bright cheeks. Only Carter Van Meter sat as before, a little withdrawn, a little aloof, in the shadow.

CHAPTER IV

[Pg 44]

When they told Marcia Van Meter (Mrs. Horace Flack) that her little boy would always be lame, that not one of the great surgeon-wizards on either side of the Atlantic—not all the king's horses and all the king's men could ever weight or wrench or force the small, thin left leg down to the length of the right, she vowed to herself that she would make it up to him. She was a pretty thing, transparently frail and ethereal-looking, who had always projected herself passionately into the lives of those about her—her father's and mother's—the young husband's who had died soon after her son was born—and now her boy's. While he was less than ten years old it seemed to her that she compassed it; if he could not race and run with his contemporaries he rode the smartest of ponies and drove clever little traps; if he might not join in the rough sports out of doors he had a houseful of brilliant mechanical toys; he lived like a little Prince—like a little American Prince with a magic bottomless purse at his command. But when he left his little boyhood behind she discovered her futility; she discovered the small, pitiful purchasing power of money, after all. She could not buy him bodily strength and beauty; she could not buy him fellowship in the world of boys; he was forever looking out at it, wistfully, disdainfully, bitterly, through his plate glass window.

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She spent herself untiringly for him,—playmates, gifts, tutors, journeys. Her happiest moments

were those in which he said, "Mother, I'd like one of those wireless jiggers,"—or a new saddle-horse, or a new roadster—and she was able to answer, "Dearest, I'll get it for you! Mother'll get it for you to-morrow!"

But the days when she could spell omnipotence for him were fading away. He wanted now, increasingly, things beyond her gift. He was a clever boy, proud, poised. He learned early to wear a mask of indifference about his lameness, to affect a coolness for sports which came, eventually, to be genuine. He studied easily and well; he could talk with a brilliancy beyond his years. He learned—astonishingly, at his age—to get his deepest satisfactions from creature comforts—his quietly elegant clothes, his food, his surroundings. Mrs. Van Meter had high hopes of the move to Los Angeles; he was to be benefited, body and brain. She was a little anxious at finding they had moved into a neighborhood of boys and girls; Carter was happier with older people, but he seemed to like these lively, robust creatures surprisingly. Weeks, months, a year, went by. Carter, less than a year older than Jimsy King but two years ahead of him in his studies, was doing some special work at the University of Southern California, but his time was practically his own—to spend with Honor and Jimsy. Honor and Jimsy showed, each of them, the imprint of their association with him. They had come to care more for the things he held high ... books ... theaters ... dinners at the Crafts Alexandria ... Grand Opera records on the victrola ... more careful dress.

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"Carter has really done a great deal for those children," Mildred Lorimer told her husband, complacently.

"Yes," Stephen admitted. "It's true. He has. And"—he sighed—"they haven't done a thing for him."

"Stephen dear,—what could they do—crude children that they are, beside a boy with his advantages? What could they do for him?—Make him play football? What did you expect them to do?"

"I don't know," he said, moodily, "but at any rate they haven't done it."

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Jimsy King was going—by the grace of his own frantic eleventh hour efforts and his teachers' clemency and Honor Carmody—to graduate. Barring calamities, he would possess a diploma in February. Honor was tremendously earnest about it; Carter, to whom learning came as easily as the air he breathed, faintly amused. She thought, sometimes, for brief, traitorous moments, that Carter wasn't always good for Jimsy.

"You see," she explained to her stepfather, "Carter doesn't realize how hard Jimsy has to grind for all he gets. Even now, Stepper, after being here a year, he actually doesn't realize the importance of Jimsy's getting signed up to play. It's a strange thing, with all his cleverness, but he doesn't, and he's always taking Jimsy out on parties and rides and things, and he gets behind in everything. I think I'll just have to speak to him about it."

He nodded. "That's a good idea, Top Step. Do that."

She grew still more sober. "Another thing, Stepper ... about—about Mr. King's—trouble. Of course, you and I have never believed that Jimsy *had* to inherit it, have we?"

"No. Not if people let him alone. His life, his training, his environment, are very different—more wholesome, vital. The energy which his grandfather and his uncles and his father had to find a vent for in cards and drink Jimsy's sweated out in athletics."

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"Yes. But—just the same— isn't it better for Jimsy to keep away from—from those things?"

"Naturally. Better for anybody."

She sighed. "Carter doesn't think so. He says the world is full of it—Jimsy must learn to be near it and let it alone."

"That's true, in a sense, T. S...."

"I know. But—sometimes I think Carter deliberately takes Jimsy places to—test him. Of course he thinks he's doing right, but it worries me."

Stephen Lorimer smoked in silence. He had his own ideas. "Better have that talk with him," he said.

Honor found the talk oddly disturbing. Carter was very sweet about it as he always was with her, but he held stubbornly to his own opinion.

"Look here, Honor, you can't follow Jimsy through the world like a nursemaid, you know."

"Carter! I don't mean—"

"He's got to meet and face these things, to fight what somebody calls 'the battle of his blood.' You mustn't wrap him up in cotton wool. If he's going, to be bowled over he might as well find it out. He must take his chances—just as any other fellow—just as I must."

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"Oh, but, Carter, you know you're strong, and—"

Suddenly his pale face was stung with hot color. "Honor," he leaned forward, "you think I'm strong, in *any* way? You don't consider me an—utter weakling?"

She looked with comprehending tenderness at his crimson face. "Why, Carter, dear! You know

I've never thought you that! There are more ways of being—being strong than—than just with muscles and bones!"

He reached out and took one of her firm, tanned hands in his, and she had never seen him so winningly wistful, so wistfully winning. "I thought," he said, very low, "that was the only kind of strength that counted with you. Then—I do count with you, Honor? I do?"

She was a little startled, a little frightened, wholly uncomfortable. There was something in Carter's voice she didn't understand ... something she didn't want to understand. She pulled her hand away and managed her boyish grin. "Of course you do,—goose! And you'll count more if you'll help me to look after Jimsy and have him graduate on time!" She got up quickly as her stepfather came into the room, and Carter went home, crossing the street with the rather pathetic arrogance of his halting gait, his head held high, tilted a little back, which gave him the expression of looking down on a world of swift striders.

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He found his mother reading before a low fire. "Well, dearest?" She smiled up at him, yearningly.

He stood looking down at her, his face working. "Mother, I want Honor Carmody."

"Carter!"

"I want Honor Carmody." He rode over her murmured protests. "I know I'm only nineteen. I know I'm too young—she's too young. I'd expect to wait, of course. But—*I want her.*"

Marcia Van Meter's heart cried out to her to say again as she had said all through his little-boy days, "Dearest, Mother'll get her for you! Mother'll get her for you to-morrow!" But instead her gaze went down to the page she had been reading ... the last scene in "Ghosts," where Oswald Alving says:

"*Mother, give me the sun! The sun!! The Sun!!!*" She shivered and shut the book with emphasis and threw it on a near-by chair. She spoke brightly, reassuringly. "I'm sure she's devoted to you, dear. You are the best of friends, and that's enough for the present, isn't it?"

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"No."

"Dearest, you've said yourself that you realize you're too young for anything serious, yet. Why can't you wait contentedly, until—"

"There's some one else. There's Jimsy."

"Carter, I'm sure they're like brother and sister. They have been playmates all their lives. That sort of thing rarely merges into romance."

"Doesn't it?" His voice was seeking, hungry. "Honestly?"

"*Very* rarely, dear, believe me!" She sped to comfort him. "Besides, her people, her mother, would never want anything of that sort ... the taint in his blood ... the reputation of his family.... Mrs. Lorimer says they've always been called the 'Wild Kings.' Of course Jimsy seems quite all right, so far, and I hope and pray he always may be—he's a dear boy and I'm very fond of him—but, as he grows older and is beset by more temptations—"

The boy relaxed a little from his pale rigidity and sat down opposite his mother. He held out his hands to the fire and she saw that they were trembling. "Yes," he said, "I've thought of that. I've thought of that. Perhaps, when he gets to college—up at Stanford, away from Honor—I've thought of that!" He bent his head, staring into the fire.

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His mother did not see the expression on his face. "Besides, dear, Honor's going abroad next year, for her voice. She'll meet new people, form new ties—"

"That doesn't cheer me up very much, Mother."

"I mean," she hastened, "it will break up the life-long intimacy with Jimsy. And perhaps you and I can go over for the summer, and take her to Switzerland with us. Wouldn't that be jolly? You know, dear," she hesitated, delicately, "while we know that money isn't everything, you are going to have far more to offer a girl, some day, than poor Jimsy King."

"And less," said Carter Van Meter.

He found Honor a little constrained at their next meeting and he hurried to put her at her old time ease with him. He steered the talk on to the coming football game and Honor was herself. Los Angeles High School, champion of Southern California, was to meet Greenmount, the northern champion, and nothing else in the world mattered very much to her and to Jimsy.

"It's so perfect, Carter, to have it come in Jimsy's last year,—to win the State Championship for L. A. just before he leaves."

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"Sure of winning?"

"It will be pretty stiff going. They're awfully good, Greenmount. Not as good as we are, on the whole, but they've got a punter—Gridley—who's a perfect *wizard!* If they can get within a mile of our goal, he can put it over! But—we've got to win. We've simply got to—and 'You can't beat L. A. High!'"

She went to watch football practice every afternoon and Carter nearly always went with her. In the evenings Jimsy came over for her help with his lessons. He had studied harder and better, this last year; his fine brain was waking, catching up with his body, but he was busier than ever, too, and his "Skipper" had still to be on deck. He was discovered, that last year, to have an unsuspected talent, Jimsy King. He could act. His class-play was an ambitious one, a late New York success, a play of sport and youngness, and Jimsy played the lead. "No," the pretty Spanish teacher said, "he didn't play that part; he *was* it!" It was going to be fine for him at Stanford, Honor's mothering thought raced ahead. The more he had to do, the more things he was interested in....

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He came in grinning a few nights before the championship game. "Say, Skipper, what do you think they gave me on that essay? A *B*. A measly *B*. Made me so sore I darn near told 'em who wrote it!"

"Jimsy! You wrote it yourself, really. I just smoothed it up a little."

"Yep, just a little! Well, either they're wise, or they just figured it couldn't be a top-notch if I'd written it!" He cast himself on the couch. "Gee, Skipper, I can't work to-night! I'm a dying man! That dinner Carter bought me last night—"

"Jimsy! You didn't—break training?"

"No. But I skated pretty close to the edge. You know, it's funny, but when I'm out with Carter I feel like such a boob, not daring to eat this or that, or smoke or—or anything." Heresy this, from the three years' captain of L. A. High who had never considered any sacrifice worth a murmur which kept him fit for the real business of life. "Somehow, he's so keen, he makes me wish I had more in my head and—and less in my heels! You know what I mean, Skipper. He does make me look like a simp, doesn't he?"

"No," said Honor, definitely. "Why, Jimsy, you're a million times bigger person than Carter. Everybody knows that. *Knowing* things isn't everything—knowing what to wear and how to order meals at the Alexandria and reading all the new books and having been to Europe. Those things just fill in for him; they make up—a little—for the things you've had."

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"Do you mean that, Skipper? Is that straight?"

"Of course, Jimsy—cross my heart!" It was curious, the way she was having to comfort Jimsy for not being Carter, and Carter for not being Jimsy.

CHAPTER V

[Pg 56]

It rained the day of the game. It had been sulking and threatening for twenty-four hours, and Honor awakened to the sound of a sluicing downpour. She ran to her window, which looked out on the garden. The long leaves of the banana tree were flapping wetly and the Bougainvillæa on the summerhouse looked soaked and sodden. Somewhere a mocking bird was singing deliriously, making his tuneful fun of the weather. Honor went down to breakfast with a sober face.

They had a house-guest, a friend of her stepfather's, an Englishwoman, a novelist. She was a brisk, ruddy-skinned creature, with crisp sentences and sturdy legs in thick stockings, and she was taking a keen interest in American sport. "Oh, I say," she greeted Honor, "isn't this bad for your match?"

"Yes, Miss Bruce-Drummond, it is. We were hoping for a dry field. They're more used to playing in the mud than we are. But it'll be all right."

"I'm fearfully keen about it.—No, thank you—my mother was Scotch, you see, and I don't take sugar to my porridge. Salt, please!" She turned to Stephen Lorimer. "I've been meaning to ask you what you think of Arnold Bennett over here?"

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Honor's stepfather flung himself zestfully into the discussion. He liked clever women and he knew a lot of them, but he had been at some pains not to marry one. Mildred Lorimer, beside the shining copper coffee percolator, looked a lovely Vesta of the hearth and home.

Honor wished she might take a pleat in the fore-noon. She didn't see how she was going to get through the hours between breakfast and the time to start for the game. It was a relief to see Jimsy coming across the lawn at ten o'clock. She ran out to meet him.

"Hello, Jimsy!"

"Lo, Skipper. Isn't this weather the deuce?"

"Beastly, but it doesn't really matter. We're certain to——" she broke off and looked closely at him. "Jimsy, what's the matter?"

"Oh ... nothing."

"Yes, there is! Come on in the house. There's no one home. Stepper's driving Miss Bruce-Drummond and Muzzie's being marcelled." She did not speak again until they were in the living

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room. "Now, tell me."

"Why—it's nothing, really. Feeling kind of seedy, that's all. Didn't have much sleep."

"Jimsy! You didn't—you weren't out with Carter?"

"Just for a little while. We went to a Movie. Coach told us to—keep our minds off the game. But I was home and in the house at nine-thirty. It was—Dad. He came in about midnight. I—I didn't go to bed at all."

"*Oh...*" Her eyes yearned over him, over them both. "Jimsy, I'm so terribly sorry. Is he—how is he now?"

"Sleeping. I guess he'll sleep all day. Gee—I wish I could!" His young face looked gray and strained.

The girl drew a long breath. "Jimsy, you've got to sleep now. You've got to put it—you've got to put your father away—out of your mind. You don't belong to him to-day; you belong to the team; you belong to L. A.... No matter what's happening to *you*, you've got to do your best—and—and *be* your best."

"If I can," he said, haggardly.

"Lie down on the couch."

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"Oh, I don't want to lie down, Skipper—I'll just—"

"Lie down on the couch, Jimsy!" She herded him firmly to the couch, tucked a soft, flat pillow under his head, threw a light afghan over him. Then she opened a window wide to the wet sweet air and drew the other shades down, and came to sit on the floor beside him, talking all the time, softly, lazily, about the English lady novelist who didn't take sugar "to" her porridge ... about the giddy mocking bird, singing in the rain ... about a new book which Carter thought was wonderful and which she couldn't see through at all ... until his quick, burdened breathing yielded to a long relaxing sigh like that of a tired puppy, and the hope of L. A. High and the last of the "Wild Kings" slept. She mounted rigid guard over him for three hours, banishing the returned stepfather and house-guest, keeping her noisy little brothers at bay. She had ordered a strictly training-table luncheon for one o'clock for her charge, and while the clock was striking the hour Kada brought the tray. Jimsy was still sleeping. Honor looked at him, hesitating, then she ran to the piano and struck her stepfather's rousing chords and began to sing:

There's a breathless hush in the Close to-night,
Ten to make and the match to win—

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At the first line he stirred, at the second he rubbed his eyes, and at the third he was sitting up and listening. She swung into the finish, and as always, it ran away with her. She had never gotten over the first choking thrill at the words:

Play up! Play up! and—Play the Game!

Jimsy King came to stand beside her. His hair was mussed and his face flushed, and there was a sleep-crease on one cheek, but his eyes were clear and steady. "It's O. K., Skipper," he said. "I can. I'm going to. I will."

Carter Van Meter drove Honor and Stephen Lorimer and Miss Bruce-Drummond in his newest car and the four of them sat together on the edge of the rooting section.

It was still raining a little, teasingly, reluctant to leave off altogether, and the field was a batter of mud. The rooting section of L. A. High was damp but undaunted. The yell leaders, vehement, piercingly vocal, conducted them into thunderous challenges:

*Ali beebo! Ali by-bo!
Ali beebo by-bo bum!
Catch 'em in a rat trap,
Put 'em in a cat trap,
Catch 'em in a cat trap,
Put 'em in a rat trap!
Ali beebo! Ali by-bo!
Ali beebo by-bo bum!*

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The bleachers rocked and creaked and swayed with the rhythm of it. "My word!" said Miss Bruce-Drummond. She listened fascinatedly to their deafening repertoire. Greenmount's supporters, a rather forlorn little group of substitutes, with the coach and trainer and a teacher or two, and a pert fox terrier wearing their colors on his collar, elicited a brief, passing pity from Honor. They looked strange and friendless, these smart Northern prep-schoolers. The L. A. rooters conscientiously gave their opponents' yell and received a spatter of applause. The Northerners trotted out on the field and were hospitably cheered.

"There, Stepper," said Honor, tensely, "that's Gridley—the tallest one,—see? Last on the right?"

"So, that's the boy with the beamish boot, eh?"

"Yes. He mustn't get a chance. He *mustn't*."

Miss Bruce-Drummond looked at her friend's stepdaughter. "You're frightfully keen about it, aren't you?" [Pg 62]

"Yes," said Honor, briefly.

"I daresay I shall find it very different from Rugby, but I expect I shall be able to follow it if you'll explain a bit."

Honor did not answer. She was standing up, yelling with all the strength of her lusty young lungs, as the Southern champions came out. Then the rooting section made everything that they had said and done before seem like a lullaby; it seemed to the Englishwoman she had never known there could be such noise. Her head hummed with it:

King! King! King!
K-I-N-G, King!
G-I-N-K, Gink!
He's the King Gink!
He's the King Gink!
He's the King Gink!
K-I-N-G, King! KING!

Honor sat down again, her fists clenched, her lower lip between her teeth. If only it were time to begin ... time for the kick-off! This was always the worse part, just before.... It was L. A.'s kick-off. The whistle sounded, mercifully, and with the solid, satisfying impact of leather against leather she relaxed. It was on. It had started. All the weeks of waiting for the championship game were over. This was the game, and it was just like any other game; Jimsy was there—here, there, everywhere, and they would fight, fight. And you couldn't beat L. A. High. The mud was horrible. It took grace and fleetness and made a mock of them; both teams were playing raggedly. Well, of course they would, at first; it was so frightfully important. They would shake down into form in a moment. [Pg 63]

"I don't believe," cut in the fresh, crisp voice of Miss Bruce-Drummond, "that I quite understand what a 'down' is. Would you mind explaining it to me?"

"Why," said Honor, without turning her head, "they have three downs in which to make—" she was on her feet again, screaming, "Come on! Come on! Come—oh—"

Jimsy King, with the mud-smearred ball under his arm, had made fifteen precious yards before he was tackled. He was up in a flash, wiping the mud off his face, grinning. The rooters split the soft air asunder.

Stephen Lorimer looked at Honor and at Carter Van Meter. He always felt sorry for the boy at a game; he looked paler and frailer than ever in contrast with the hearty young savages on the field, and he was never able really to give himself to the agony and wild joy of it. [Pg 64]

Honor forced herself to sit still, her elbows on her knees, her hot face propped on her clenched hands. They were playing better now, all of them, but it wasn't brilliant football; it couldn't be. It would be a battle of dogged endurance.

"I say, my dear, is *that* a down?" the English novelist wanted to know.

"Yes," said Honor, patiently. "That's a down, and now there'll be another because they have—" again she cut short her explanation and caught hold of her stepfather's arm. "Stepper! Look! *Gridley isn't playing!*"

He stared. "Really, Top Step? Why, they surely—"

"I tell you he isn't playing. See,—there he is, on the side-lines, in the purple sweater!"

"Well, so much the better for L. A.," said Carter, easily.

Honor shook her head. "I don't understand it." She began, oddly, to feel herself enveloped in a fog of depression, of foreboding. Again and again her eyes left the play to rest unhappily on the silent figure in the purple sweater. Jimsy was playing well; every man on the team was playing well; but they were not gaining. Jimsy King, on whose heels were always the wings of Mercury, could not get up speed in that mud,—a brief flash, no more. She began to bargain with the gods of the gridiron; at first she had been concerned with scoring in the first five minutes of play; then she had remodeled her petition ... to score in the first half. Now, her throat dry, she was aching with the fear of being scored upon ... counting the minutes yet to play, speeding them in her heart. It was raining hard again. The rooting section, in spite of the frantic effort of the hoarse yell leaders, was slowing down. What was it?—The rain? The mud? Was Jimsy not himself, not the King Gink? Was his heart with his father in the darkened room in the old King house? [Pg 65]

"Of course, I'm not up on this at all, but I'm rather afraid your young friends are getting the worst of it, my dear!" said Miss Bruce-Drummond, cheerily.

"It's the longest first half I ever saw in my life," said Honor, between clenched teeth.

"Ah, yes,—I daresay it does seem so to you, but I expect they keep the time very carefully, don't you?" She looked the girl over interestedly. "The psychology of this sort of thing is ver-r-ry [Pg 66]

entertaining," she said to Stephen Lorimer.

"Less than five minutes, T. S.," said her stepfather, comfortingly.

"You know, I'm afraid you'll think me fearfully dull," said the Englishwoman, conversationally, "but I'm still not quite clear about a 'down.' *Would* you mind telling me the next time they do one?—Just when it begins, and when it ends?"

"One's ended now," said Honor, bitterly, "and we've lost the ball,—on our twenty yard line. We've lost the ball."

"Ah, well, my dear, I daresay you'll soon get it back!"

Honor sprang to her feet with a cry which made people turn and look at her. "Look there! *Look!* See what they're doing?" One of the Greenmount players had been called out by the coach and had splashed his way to the side-lines, to be patted wetly on the back and wrapped in a damp blanket. That was well enough. That was the usual thing. But the unusual, the astounding thing was that two of the Greenmount team had slopped to the side-lines and picked up Gridley, divested now of his purple sweater, bodily, in their arms, and carried him, dry-shod, over the slithering mud. Honor gave a gasping moan. "I *knew*...." There was a dead, sick silence on the bleachers. The rain sluiced down. Somewhere in a near-by garden another giddy mocking bird sang deliriously in the stillness. Tenderly as two nurses with a sick man, the bearers set Gridley down. Slowly, solemnly, he stepped off the distance to the quarter back; briskly, but with dreadful thoroughness, the men who had carried him wiped the mud from his feet with a towel and took their places to defend him from the wild-eyed L. A. men, poised, breathless, menacing. There was a muttering roar from the bleachers, hoarsely pleading, commanding—"Block-that-kick! *Block-that-kick!* BLOCK-THAT-KICK!" The kneeling quarter back opened his muddy hands; the muddied oval came sailing lazily into them.... There was the gentle thud of Gridley's toe against the leather, and then—unbelievably, unbearably, it was an accomplished fact, a finished thing. Gridley had executed his place kick. They were scored on. It stood there on the board, glaring white letters and figures on black:

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GREENMOUNT 4 L. A. HIGH 0

At first Honor's own woe engulfed her utterly. For the first instant she wasn't even aware of Jimsy King, standing alone, his arms folded across his chest, staring down the field; of his men, wiping the mud out of their eyes and looking at him, looking to him; of the stunned rooters. But at the second breath she was awake, alive again, tense, tingling, bursting with her message for them all, keeping herself by main force in her place. Jimsy King never saw any one in a game; he never knew any one in a game; people ceased to exist for him while he was on the field. But today, in this difficult hour, she was to see him turn and face the bleachers and rake them with his aghast and startled eyes until he found her. She was on her feet, in her white jersey suit and her blue hat and scarf—L. A.'s colors—waving to him, looking down at him with all her gallant soul in her eyes. It seemed to her as if she must be saying it aloud; as if she must be singing it:

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Play up! Play up! and—Play the Game!

Then the bleachers and the players saw the Captain of the L. A. team turn and wade briskly down the field to Gridley. They saw him hold out his muddy hand; they heard his clear, "Peach of a kick!" They saw him give the Northerner's hand a hearty shake; they saw him fling up his head, and grin, and face the grandstand for a second, his eyes seeking.... They saw him rally his men with a snapped-out order,—and then they were on their feet, shouting, screaming, stamping, cheering:

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KING! KING! KING!

The yell leaders couldn't get hold of them; there was no need. Every man was his own yell leader. They yelled for Gridley and for Greenmount (why worry, when Jimsy clearly wasn't worried?) and for their own team, man by man, and the call of time for the first half failed to make the faintest dent in their enthusiasm.

"But"—said Miss Bruce-Drummond, her mouth close to Honor's ear—"you haven't won, have you?"

"Not yet!" Honor shouted. "Wait!" She began to sing with the rest:

*You can't beat L. A. High!
You can't beat L. A. High!
Use your team to get up steam,
But you can't beat L. A. High!*

It was gay, mocking, scatheless, inexorable. You *couldn't* beat L. A. High. Honor swayed and swung to it. Use your team and your tricks and your dry-shod men to kick, but you couldn't beat L. A. High. And it appeared, in fact, that you couldn't, for Jimsy King's team went into the second half like happy young tigers, against men who were a little tired, a little overconfident, and in the first ten minutes of play the King Gink, mud-smear'd beyond recognition, grinning, went over the line for a touchdown, and nobody minded much Burke's missing the goal because they had won anyway:

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and the championship, the state championship, stayed south, and it suddenly stopped raining and the sun came out gloriously after the reckless manner of Southern California suns, and everything was for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

Honor, star-eyed, more utterly and completely happy and content than she had ever been in her life, turned penitently to Miss Bruce-Drummond. "When we get home," she said, "I'll explain to you exactly what a 'down' is!"

They waited to see the joyous serpentine, to watch Jimsy's struggles to get down from the shoulders of his adorers who bore him the length of the field and back, and then Carter drove them home and went back for the Captain, who would be showered and dressed by that time. They were both dining with Honor, but Jimsy looked in on his father first. [Pg 71]

"Gusty says he's slept all day," he reported to Honor. He kept looking at her, with an odd intensity, all through the lively meal. She had changed her wet white jersey for one of her long-lined, cleverly simple frocks of L. A. blue, and her honey-colored braids were like a crown above her serene forehead.

"You know, Stephen," said Miss Bruce-Drummond while they were having their coffee in the living room, "of course you know that both those lads are in love with your nice girl."

"Do you see it, too?"

She laughed. "I may not know what a 'down' is, but I've still reasonably sharp eyes in my head. And the odd thing is that she doesn't know it."

"Isn't it amazing? I'm watching, and wondering."

"It's a pretty time o' life, Stephen," said one of the clever women he hadn't wanted to marry.

"Youth's sweet-scented manuscript,' Ethel," said Honor's stepfather.

"Jimsy, will you come here a minute?" Honor called from the dining-room door.

"Yes, Skipper!" He was there at a bound. [Pg 72]

"Don't you think your father would like this water-ice? I think he could—I believe he might enjoy it."

He took the little covered tray out of her hands. "I'll bet he will, Skipper. You're a brick. Come on over with me, will you—and wait on the porch?"

She looked back into the roomful. "Had I better? I don't suppose they'll miss me for a minute—"

But Carter Van Meter was coming toward them, threading his way among people and furniture with his slight, halting limp. He looked from one to the other, questioningly.

"Taking this over to my Dad," Jimsy explained. "Back in a shake."

"I see. How about a ride to the beach? Supper at the ship-hotel? Celebrate a little?"

"Deuce of a lot of work for Monday," Jimsy frowned. "Haven't studied a lick this week."

Carter laughed. "Oh, Monday's—Monday! Come along! We can't"—he turned to Honor—"be by ourselves to-night, with the celeb. here. Honor has to stay and play-pretty with her."

"Well ... if we don't make it too late—"

Jimsy turned and sped away with Honor's offering for James King.

Honor looked at Carter. His eyes were very bright; he looked more excited, now, some way, than he had at the game. Poor old Carter. He wanted, she supposed, to do something for Jimsy ... to give him a wonderful party ... to spend money on him ... to excel and to shine in *his* way. But—the ship-hotel—and his father over there all day in the darkened room—For the first time in her honest life she stooped to guile. "I'll be down in a minute, Carter," she said and ran upstairs, through the hall, down the backstairs, cut through the kitchen and across the wet and springy lawn to the King place. [Pg 73]

She waited in the shadow of the house until he came out.

"Jimsy!"

"Skipper!"

"I slipped out—sh ... Jimsy, I—*please* don't go with Carter to-night! I don't mean to interfere or—or nag, Jimsy,—you know that, don't you?" She slipped a little on the wet grass in her thin slippers, and laid hold of his arm to steady herself. "But—it worries me. You're the finest, the most wonderful person in the world, and I trust you more than I trust myself, but—I know how boys are about—things—and—" she turned her face to the dark house where so many "Wild Kings" had lived and moved and had their unhappy being—"I couldn't *bear* it if—"

It began to rain again, softly, and they moved unconsciously toward the shelter of the porch. [Pg 74]

"You were so splendid to-day! I haven't had a chance to tell you ... shaking hands with him, being so——"

"You made me," said Jimsy King. Then, at her murmured protest. "You did. You made me, just as you've made me do every decent thing I've ever done. I'm just beginning to see it. I guess I'm the blindest bat that ever lived. Of course I won't go with Cart' to-night. I won't do anything you don't ——"

Honor had mounted two steps, to be under the roof of the porch, and now, turning sharply in her gladness, the wet slipper slipped again, and she would have fallen if he had not caught her.

"*Skipper!*"

"It's—it's all right!" said Honor in a breathless whisper. "I'm all right, Jimsy. Let me——"

But Jimsy King would not let her go. He held her fast with all his football strength and all his eighteen years of living and loving, and he said over and over in the new, strange voice she had never heard before, "*Skipper! Skipper! Skipper!*"

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"Jimsy ... what—what is happening to us? Jimsy, dear, we never before—Jimsy, are we—are we—*Is this being—in love?*"

And the mocking-bird of the morning, mounted on the wet Bougainvillæa on the summerhouse in Honor's garden, explained to them in a mad, exultant, thrilling burst of song.

CHAPTER VI

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"At least," Mildred Lorimer wept, "at *least*, Stephen, make them keep it a secret! Make them promise not to tell a living soul—and not to act in such a way as to let people suspect! I think"—she lifted tragic, reproachful eyes to him—"you ought to do what you can, now, considering that it's all your fault."

"Some day," said her husband, sturdily, "it will be all my cleverness ... all my glory. I did honestly believe it was a cradle chumship which wouldn't last, Mildred. I thought it would break of its own length. But I'm glad it hasn't."

"Stephen, how *can* you? One of the 'Wild Kings'—I cannot bear it. I simply cannot bear it." She clutched at her hope. "She must go abroad even sooner than we planned—and *stay* abroad. Stephen, you will make them keep it a secret from every one?"

"They've already told Carter. Told him just after they'd told me."

"Oh, poor, poor Carter!" There was a note of fresh woe in her voice.

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He turned sharply to look at her. "So, that's where the pointed patent leather pinches, Mildred?"

"What do you mean?"

"You've been hoping it would be Carter?"

"Dearest, I've looked upon them all as children.... It was the merest ... idea ... thought. Mrs. Van Meter is devoted to Honor, Carter is an unusual boy, and they're exceptional people. And he—of course, I mean in his boyish way—*adores* Honor. This will be a cruel blow for him." She grieved. "Poor, frail boy...."

Stephen Lorimer smoked in silence for a moment. "I fancy Carter will not give up hope. There's nothing frail about his disposition. His will doesn't limp."

"Well, I certainly hope he doesn't consider it final. I don't. I consider it a silly boy-and-girl piece of sentimental nonsense, and I shall do everything in my power to break it up. I consider that my child's happiness is at stake."

"Yes," said her husband, "so do I." He got up and went round to his wife's chair and put penitent arms about her and comforted her. After all, he could afford to be magnanimous. He was going to win his point in the end, and meanwhile it would be an excellent thing for the youngsters to have Mildred doing everything in her pretty power to break it up. She might just as well, he believed, try to put out the hearth fire with the bellows.

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With her daughter she became motherly and admonitory in her official third person. "Mother wants only your happiness; you know that, dear."

"Well, then, there's nothing to worry about," said Honor, comfortably, "for you want me to be happy and I can't be happy unless it's with Jimsy, so you'll have to want me to have Jimsy, Muzzie!"

"Mother wants real happiness for you, Honor, genuine, lasting happiness. That's why she wants you to be sure. And you cannot possibly be sure at your age."

"Yes, I can, Muzzie," said Honor, patiently. "Surer than sure. Why,—haven't I always had Jimsy,—ever since I can remember? *Before* I can remember? He's part of everything that's ever happened

to me. I can't imagine what things would be like without him. *I won't imagine it!*" Her eyes darkened and her mouth grew taut.

"But you'll promise Mother to keep it a secret? You'll promise me faithfully?"

"Of course, Muzzie, if you want me to, but I can't see what difference it makes. I'll never be any surer than I am now,—and I can't ever know Jimsy any better than I do now. Why"—she laughed—"it isn't as if I had fallen in love at eighteen, with a new person, some one I'd just met, or some one I'd known only a little while, like Carter! If I felt like this about Carter I'd think it was reasonable to 'wait' and be 'sure.'" She was aware of a new expression on her mother's lovely face and interpreted it in her own fashion. "I'm sorry if you don't like our telling Carter, Muzzie. We did it before you asked us not to, you know. He's always with us and I'm sure he'd have found out, anyway." She smiled. "Carter's funny about it. He acts—amused—as if he were years and years older, and we were babies playing in a sand box or making mud pies." It was clear that his amusement amused her, just as her mother's admonition amused her: nothing annoyed or disturbed her,—her serenity was too deep for that. Her fine placidity was lighted now with an inner flame, but she was very quiet about her happiness; she was not very articulate in her joy.

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"Mother cannot let you go about unchaperoned with Jimsy, Honor. People would very soon suspect——"

"I don't think they would, Muzzie," said Honor, calmly. "None of the other mothers are so particular, you know. Most of the girls go on walks and rides alone. But we won't, if you'd rather not. Stepper will go with us, or Billy, or Ted."

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Mrs. Lorimer sighed. She could envisage just how much efficient, deterrent chaperonage her husband would supply.

She watched them set off for the Malibou Ranch the next Sunday morning rather complacently, however. She had seen to it that Carter was of the party. To be sure, he was in the tonneau with Stephen Lorimer and the young Carmody's and Lorimer's and the heroic-sized lunch box and the thermos case, while Jimsy and Honor sat in front, but at least he was there. There would be no ignoring Carter, as they might well ignore her husband and sons.

Carter, talking easily and intelligently to his host about the growing problem of Mexico, quietly watched the two in front. They were not talking very much. Jimsy was driving and he kept his eyes on the road for the most part, and Honor sat very straight, her hands in her lap. Only once Carter saw, from the line of his arm, that Jimsy had put his left hand over hers, and when it happened he stopped short in the middle of his neat sentence and an instant later he said, coloring faintly,—*"I beg your pardon, Mr. Lorimer,—you were saying?"*

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Stephen Lorimer felt an intense pity for him but he did not see any present or future help for his misery. Therefore, when they had finished their gypsy luncheon and the younger boys were settling it by a wild rough-house before their swim and Jimsy rose and said, "Want to walk up the coast, Skipper?" and Honor said, "Yes,—just as soon as I've put these things away," he went deliberately and seated himself beside Carter and began to read aloud to him from the Sunday paper.

He looked up from the sheet to watch the boy's face as the others set off. Carter pulled himself to his feet. He ran his tongue over his lips in rare embarrassment. "I—don't you feel like a stroll, too, Mr. Lorimer? After that enormous lunch, I——"

Honor's stepfather grinned. "Well, I don't feel like a stroll in that direction, Carter. Let 'em alone,—shan't we?" He included him in the attitude of affectionate indulgence. "I've been there myself, and you will be there—if you haven't been already." He patted the sand beside him. "Sit down, old man. This editorial sounds promising."

But Carter would not be denied. "Mr. Lorimer, you don't consider it—*serious*, do you?"

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"About the most serious matter in the world, I should say, Carter."

The boy refused the generalization. "I mean, between Honor and Jimsy?" He was visibly expecting a negative answer. "I know that Mrs. Lorimer doesn't."

"Well, I disagree with her. I should say, with average youngsters of their age that it was as transient as—as the measles. But they aren't average, Carter."

"I know that. At least, Honor isn't."

"Nor Jimsy. I sometimes think, Carter, that fellows of our type, yours and mine," he was not looking at him now, he was running his long fingers lazily through the hot and shining sand, "are apt to be a little contemptuous in our minds of his sort. Being rather long on brain, we fancy, we allow ourselves a scorn of the more or less unadorned brawn. And yet,—they're the salt of the earth, Carter; they're the cities set on hills. They do the world's red-blooded vital jobs while we—think. And Honor's not clever either; you know that, Carter. All the sense and balance and character in the world, Top Step, God love her, but not a flash of brilliancy. They're capitally suited. Sane, sound, sweet; gloriously fit and healthy young animals—" this was calculated cruelty; Carter might as well face things; there would be a girl, waiting now somewhere, no doubt, who wouldn't mind his limp, but Honor must have a mate of her own vigorous breed,—Honor who had always and would always "run with the boys,"—"who will produce their own sort

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again."

The boy's mouth was twisted. "And—and how about his blood—his heredity? Isn't he one of the 'Wild Kings'?"

"You know," Stephen lighted a cigarette, "I don't believe he is! He's got their looks and their charm, but I'm convinced he's two-thirds Scotch mother,—that sturdy soul who would have saved his father if death hadn't tricked her. And I'm rather a radical about heredity, anyway, Carter. It's gruesomely overrated, I think. What is it?—Clammy hands reaching out from the grave to clutch at warm young flesh—and pollute it? Not while there are living hands to beat them off!" He began to get vehement and warm. There was to be a chapter on heredity in that book of his, one day. "It's a boggy. It goes down before environment as the dark before the dawn. Why, environment's a vital, flesh and blood thing, fighting with and for us every instant! I could take the offspring of Philip the Second and Great Catherine and make a—*a* Frances Willard or a Jane Addams of her,—*if* people didn't sit about like crows, cawing about her parents and her blood and her heritage. Even dry, statistical scientists are beginning—"

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And while like the Ancient Mariner he held Carter Van Meter on the sunny sand Honor and Jimsy walked sedately up the shore. They were a little ill at ease, both of them. It was the first time since—as Honor put it to herself—"it had happened" that they had been quite alone with each other in the hard, bright daylight. There had been delectable moments on the stairs, on the porch, stolen seconds in the summerhouse, but here they were on a blazing Sunday afternoon under a turquoise sky, with a salt and hearty wind stinging their faces, all by themselves. They would not be quite out of sight of the rest, though, until they rounded the next turn in the curving road. Jimsy looked back over his shoulder, obviously taking note of the fact. He knew that Honor knew it, too, and the sight of her hot cheeks, her resolute avoidance of his eyes put him suddenly at ease.

"I guess," he said, casually, "this is kind of like Italy. Fair enough, isn't it?"

"Heavenly," said Honor, a little breathlessly. "Italy! Just think, Jimsy,—next year at this time I'll *be* in Italy!"

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"Gee," he said, solemn and aghast, "*gee!*" They had passed the turn and instantly he had her in a tense, vise-like hug. "No, you won't. No, you won't. *I won't let you.* I won't let you go 'way off there, alone, without me. I won't let you, Skipper, do you hear?" Suddenly he stopped talking and began to kiss her. Presently he laughed. "I've always known I was a poor nut, Skipper, but to think it took me eighteen years to discover what it would be like to kiss you!" He took up his task again.

"Oh," said Honor, gasping, pushing him away with her hands against his chest—"you wouldn't have had *time!*"

"I could have dropped Spanish or Math'," he grinned. "Come on,—let's go further up the coast. Some of those kids will be tagging after us, or Carter."

"Not Carter. Stepper's reading to him. He won't let him come."

"One peach of a scout, Stephen Lorimer is," said the boy, warmly. "Best scout in the world."

"He's the best friend we've got in the world, Jimsy," she said gravely.

"I know it. Your mother's pretty much peeved about it, Skipper."

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"Yes, she is, just now. Poor Muzzie! I'm afraid I've never pleased her very much. But she gets over things. She'll get over it when—when she finds that we *don't* get over it!" She held out her hand to him and he took it in a hard grip, and they swung along at a fine stride, up the twisting shore road. They came at last to the great gate which led into the Malibou Ranch and they halted there and went down into a little pocket of rocks and sand and sun and sat down with their faces to the shining sea.

He kissed her again. "No; you can't go to Italy, Skipper. That's settled."

"Then—what are we going to do, Jimsy dear?"

"Why, we'll just get—" his bright face clouded over. "Good Lord, I'm talking like a nit-wit. We've got to wait, that's all. What could I do now? Run up alleys with groceries? Take care of gardens?"

"Not *my* garden! You don't know a tulip from a cauliflower!"

"No, I'll have to learn to do something with my head and my hands,—not just my legs! I guess life isn't all football, Skipper."

"But I guess it's all a sort of game, Jimsy, and we have to 'play' it! And it wouldn't be playing the game for our people or for ourselves to do something silly and reckless. This thing—caring for each other—is the wisest, biggest thing in our lives, and we've got to keep it that, haven't we?"

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He nodded solemnly. "That's right, Skipper. We have. I guess we'll just have to grit our teeth and wait—*gee*—three years, anyway, till I'm twenty-one! That's the deuce of a long time, isn't it? Lord, why wasn't I born five years before you? Then it would be O. K. Loads of girls are married at eighteen."

"You weren't born five years before me because then it would have spoiled everything," said Honor, securely confident of the eternal rightness of the scheme of things. "You would have been marching around in overalls when I was born, and when I was ten you would have been fifteen, and you wouldn't have *looked* at me,—and now you'd be through college and engaged to some wonderful Stanford girl! No, it's perfectly all right as it is, Jimsy. Only, we've just got to be sensible."

"Well, I'll tell you one thing right now, Skipper, I'm not going to wait five or six years. I'm going to go two years to college, enough to bat a little more knowledge into my poor bean, and then I'm coming out and get a job,—and get you!" He illustrated the final achievement by catching her in his arms again.

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When she could get her breath Honor said, "But we needn't worry about all of it now, dear. We haven't got to wait the four—or six years—all at once! Just a month, a week, a day at a time. And the time will fly,—you'll see! You'll have to work like a demon—"

"And you won't be there to help me!"

"And there'll be football all fall and baseball all spring, and theatricals, and we'll write to each other every day, won't we?"

"Of course. But I write such bone-headed boob letters, Skipper."

"I won't care what they're like, Jimsy, so long as you tell me things."

"*Gee* ... I'm going to be lost up there without you, Skipper."

"You'll have Carter, dear."

"I know. That'll help a lot. Honestly, I don't know how a fellow with a head like his puts up with me. He forgets more every night when he goes to sleep than I'll ever know. He's a wonder. Yes, it sure—will help a lot to have Carter. But it won't be you."

"Jimsy, have you told—your father?"

He nodded. "Last night. He was—he's been feeling great these last few days. He was sitting at his desk, looking over some old letters and papers, and I went in and—and told him."

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"What did he say?"

"He didn't say anything at first. He just sat still for a long time, staring at the things he'd been reading. And then he got out a little old leather box that he said was my mother's and unlocked it and took out a ring." Jimsy thrust a hand deep into a trouser pocket and brought out a twist of tissue paper, yellowed and broken with age. He unwrapped it and laid a slender gold ring on Honor's palm.

"*Jimsy!*" It was an exquisite bit of workmanship, cunningly carved and chased, with a look of mellow age. There were two clasped hands,—not the meaningless models for wedding cakes, slim, tapering, faultless, but two cleverly vital looking hands, a man's and a woman's, the one rugged and strong, the other slender and firm, and the wrists, masculine and feminine, merging at the opposite side of the circle into one. "Oh ..." Honor breathed, "it's wonderful..."

"Yes. It's a very old Italian ring. It was my great-grandmother's, first. It always goes to the wife of the eldest son. My Dad says it's supposed to mean love and marriage and—and everything—'the endless circle of creation,' he said, when I asked him what it meant, but first he just said, 'Give this to your girl and tell her to *hold hard*. Tell her we're a bad lot, but no King woman ever let go."

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Suddenly and without warning, as on the day when Stephen Lorimer had first read the Newbolt poem to them, Honor began to cry.

"Skipper! Skipper, *dearest*—" she was in the young iron clasp of his arms and his cheek was pressed down on her hair. "What is it? Skipper, tell me!"

"Oh," she sobbed, clinging to him, "I can't bear it, Jimsy! All the years—all those splendid men, all those faithful women, 'holding hard' against—against—"

He gathered her closer. "My Dad's the last of 'em, Skipper. He's the last 'Wild King.' It stops with him. I told him that, and he believes me. Do you believe me, Skipper?"

She stopped sobbing and looked up at him for a long moment, her wet eyes solemn, her breath coming in little gasps. Then—"I do believe you, Jimsy," she said. "*I'll never stop believing you.*"

He kissed her gravely. "And now I'll show you the secret of the ring." He took it from her and pressed a hidden spring. The clasped hands slowly parted, revealing a small intensely blue sapphire. "That's for 'constancy,' my Dad says." He put it on her finger. "It just fits!"

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"Yes. And it just fits—us, too, Jimsy. The jewel hidden ... the way we must keep our secret. Muzzie won't let me wear it here, but I'll wear it the minute I leave here,—and every minute of my life. It was wonderful for your father to let us have it—when we're so young and have so long to wait!"

"He said—you know, he was different from anything he's ever been before, Skipper, more—more like his old self, I guess—he said it would help us to wait."

"It will," said Honor, contentedly, tucking her hand into his again. They sat silently then, looking out at the bright sea.

CHAPTER VII

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Honor was surprised and pleased to find how little she minded living abroad, after all. They had arrived, the boy and herself, in the months between their secret understanding and their separation, at the amazed conclusion that it was going to be easier to be apart until that bright day when they might be entirely and forever together. At the best, three interminable years stretched bleakly between them and marriage; they had to mark time as best they could. She liked Florence, she liked the mountainous *Signorina*, her stepfather's friend, and she liked her work. If it had not been for Jimsy King she would without doubt have loved it, but there was room in her simple and single-track consciousness for only one engrossing and absorbing affection. She wrote to him every day, bits of her daily living, and mailed a fat letter every week, and every week or oftener came his happy scrawl from Stanford. Things went with him there as they had gone at L. A. High,—something less, naturally, of hero worship and sovereignty, but a steadily rising tide of triumph. He chronicled these happenings briefly and without emphasis. "Skipper dear," he would write in his crude and hybrid hand, "I've made the Freshman team all right and it's a pretty fair to middling bunch and I guess we'll stack up pretty well against the Berkeley babes from what I hear, and they made me captain. It seems kind of natural, and I have three fellows from the L. A. team,—Burke and Estrada and Finley."

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He was madly rushed by the best fraternities and chose naturally the same one as Carter Van Meter,—one of the best and oldest and most powerful. He made the baseball team in the spring, and the second fall the San Francisco papers' sporting pages ran his picture often and hailed him as the Cardinal's big man. Honor read hungrily every scrap of print which came to her,—her stepfather taking care that every mention of Jimsy King reached her. It was in his Sophomore year that he played the lead in the college play and Honor read the newspapers limp and limber—"James King in the lead did a remarkable piece of work." "King, Stanford's football star, surprised his large following by his really brilliant performance." "Well-known college athlete demonstrates his ability to act." Honor knew the play and she could shut her eyes and see him and hear him in the hero's part, and her love and pride warmed her like a fire.

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She had not gone home that first summer. Mildred Lorimer and Carter's mother managed that, between them, in spite of Stephen's best efforts, and, that decided, Jimsy King went with his father to visit one of the uncles at his great *hacienda* in old Mexico. Mrs. Van Meter and her son spent his vacation on the Continent and had Honor with them the greater part of the time. She met their steamer at Naples and Carter could see the shining gladness of her face long before he could reach her and speak to her, and he glowed so that his mother's eyes were wet.

"Honor!" He had no words for that first moment, the fluent Carter. He could only hold both her hands and look at her.

But Honor had words. She gave back the grip of his hands and beamed on him. "Carter! Carter, dear! Oh, but it's wonderful to see you! It's *next* best to having Jimsy himself!"

Marcia Van Meter winced with sympathy, but her son managed himself very commendably. They went to Sorrento first, and stayed a week in a mellow old hotel above the pink cliffs, and the boy and girl sat in the garden which looked like a Maxfield Parrish drawing and drove up to the old monastery at Deserto and wandered through the silk and coral shops and took the little steamer across to Capri for the day while Mrs. Van Meter rested from the crossing. She was happier that summer than she had been since Carter's little-boy days, for she was giving him, in so far as she might, what he wanted most in all the world, and she saw his courage and confidence growing daily. She was a little nervous about Roman fever, so they left Italy for Paris, and then went on to Switzerland, and for the first few days she was supremely content with her choice,—Carter gained color and vigor in the sun and snow, and Honor glowed and bloomed, but she presently saw her mistake. Switzerland was not the place to throw Honor and Carter together,—Switzerland filled to overflowing with knickerbockered, hard muscled, mountain climbing men and women; Honor who should have been climbing with the best of them; who would be, if Jimsy King were with them; and her son, in the smart incongruities of his sport clothes ... limping, his proud young head held high.

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They found Miss Bruce-Drummond at Zermatt, brown as a berry and hard as nails with her season's work, and she was heartily glad to see Honor.

"Well, my dear,—fancy finding you here! Your stepfather wrote me you were studying in Florence and I've been meaning to write you. What luck, your turning up now! The friend who came on with me has been called home, and you shall do some climbs with me!"

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"Shall I?" Honor wanted to know of her hostess, but it was Carter who answered.

"Of course! Don't bother about us,—we'll amuse ourselves well enough while you're hiking,—won't we, Mater?" He was charming about it and yet Honor felt his keen displeasure.

"Yes, do go, dear," said Mrs. Van Meter, quickly. "Make the most of it, for I think we'll be moving

on in a very few days. I—I haven't said anything about it because you and Carter have been so happy here, but the altitude troubles me.... I've been really very wretched."

"Oh," said Honor penitently, "we'll go down right away, Mrs. Van Meter,—*to-day!* Why didn't you tell us?"

"It hasn't been serious," said Carter's mother, conscientiously, "it's just that I know I will be more comfortable at sea level." It was entirely true; she would be more comfortable at sea level or anywhere else, so long as she took Carter out of that picture and framed him suitably again. "But we needn't hurry so madly, dear. Suppose we go on Friday? That will give you a day with your friend." She sent Carter for her cloak and Honor and the Englishwoman strolled to the end of the veranda.

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"I don't believe we ought to wait even a day, if she feels the altitude so," said Honor, troubled. "She's really very frail."

"I expect she can stick it a day," said Miss Bruce-Drummond, calmly. "She looks fit enough. But—I say—where's the other one? Where's your boy?"

The warm and happy color flooded the girl's face. "Jimsy is in Mexico with his father, visiting their relatives there on a big ranch."

"You haven't thrown him over, have you?"

"Thrown Jimsy over? Thrown—" she stopped and drew a long breath. "I could just as easily throw *myself* over. Why, we—*belong!* We're part of each other. I just—can't think of myself without thinking of Jimsy—or of Jimsy without thinking of me." She said it quite simply and steadily and smiled when she finished.

"I see," said the novelist. "Yes. I see. But you're both frightfully young, aren't you? I expect your people will make you wait a long time, won't they?"

"Well," said Honor, earnestly, "we're going to try our very best to wait three years,—three from the time when we found out we were in love with each other, you know,—two years longer now. Then we'll be twenty-one." She spoke as if every one should be satisfied then, if they dragged out separate existences until they had attained that hoary age, and Miss Bruce-Drummond, hard on forty-one, grinned with entire good nature.

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"And I daresay they'll keep you over here all the while,—not let you go home for holidays, for fear you might lose your heads and bolt for Gretna Green?"

"Mercy, no!" Her eyes widened, startled. "I shall go home for all summer next year! I meant to go this year, but Muzzie thought I ought to stay, to be with Carter and Mrs. Van Meter, when they'd made such lovely plans for me,—and it was really all right, this time, because Jimsy ought to be with his father on the Mexican trip." Her smooth brow registered a fleeting worry over James King the elder. "But next summer it'll be home, and Catalina Island, and Jimsy!"

But it wasn't home for her next summer, after all. Mildred Lorimer decided that she wanted three months on the Continent with her husband and her daughter.

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"Right," said Stephen Lorimer, amiably, "so long as we take the boy along."

"You mean Rodney?" she wanted to know, not looking at him. (Rodney was the youngest Lorimer.)

"I mean Jimsy King, naturally, as you quite well know, Sapphira," he answered, pulling her down beside him on the couch and making her face him.

"Stephen, I don't think Mr. King can afford to send him."

"Then we'll take him."

"Jimsy wouldn't let us. He is very proud,—I admire it in him."

"Do you, my dear? Then, can't you manage to admire some of his other nice young virtues and graces?"

"I do, Stephen. I give the boy credit for all he is, but—"

"But you don't intend to let him marry your daughter if by the hookiest hook and crookedest crook you can prevent it. I observed your Star Chamber sessions with Mrs. Van Meter last year; I saw you wave her and her son hopefully away; I observed, smiling with intense internal glee, that you welcomed them back with deep if skillfully dissembled disappointment. Top Step, God love her, sat tight. Don't you know your own child yet, Mildred? Don't you know the well and favorably known chemical action of absence on young and juicy hearts? Don't you know"—he broke off to stare at her, flushed and a little breathless as she always was in discussions and unbelievably youthful and beautiful still, and finished in quite another key—"that you're getting positively lovelier with each ridiculous birthday—and your aged and infirm spouse more and more besottedly in love with you?"

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She did not melt because she was tremendously in earnest. She was pledged in her deepest heart to break up what she felt was Honor's silly sentimentality—sentimentality with a dark and sinister background of mortgages and young widows and Wild Kings and shabby, down-at-the-heel

houses and lawns.

"Woman," said Stephen Lorimer, "did you hear what I said? It was a rather neat speech, I thought. However, as you did not give it the rapt attention it merited I will now repeat it, with appropriate gestures." He caught her in his arms as youthfully as Jimsy might have done with Honor, and told her again, between kisses. "You lovely, silly, stubborn thing, kiss your wise husband once more in a manner expressive of your admiration for his unfailing sapience, and he will then, with surprising agility for one of his years, lope across the intervening lawn and tell James King that his son goes to Europe with us in June." He grinned back at her from the door. "You'll do your little worst to prevent it, my dear, that I know, but Jimsy King goes with us!"

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Honor and Jimsy wrote each other rapturously on receipt of the news, but they were not fluent or expressive, either of them, and they could only underline and put in a reckless number of exclamation points. "*Gee*," wrote Jimsy King, "isn't it immense? Skipper, I can't tell you how I feel—but, by golly, I can *show* you when I get there!"

And Honor, reading that line, grew rosily pink to the roots of her honey-colored hair and flung herself into an hour of practice with such fire and fervor that the *Signorina* came and beamed in the doorway.

"So," she nodded. "News? Good or bad?"

"Good," said Honor, swinging round on the piano stool. "The best in the world!"

"So? Well, it does not greatly matter which, my small one. It does not signify so much whether one feels joy or grief, so long as one feels. To feel ... that is to live, and to live is to sing!"

Honor sprang up and ran to her and put her arm as far around her as it would go. She was a delicious person to hug, the *Signorina*, warm and soft and smelling faintly of rare and costly scents.

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"*So?*" said the great singer again. "It is of some comfort, then, to embrace so much of fatness, when your arms ache to feel muscles and hard flesh? There, there, my good small one," she patted her with a puffy and jeweled hand, "I jest, but I rejoice. It is all good for the voice, this."

"*Signorina*," said Honor, honestly, "I've told you and told you, but you don't seem to believe me, that I'm only studying to fill up the time until they'll let me marry Jimsy. I love it, of course, and I'll always keep it up, as much as I can without neglecting more important things, but——"

"Mother of our Lord," said the Italian, lifting her hands to heaven, "'more important things' says this babe with the voice of gold, who, by the grace of God and my training might one day wake the world!"

"More important to *me*," said Honor, firmly. "I know it must seem silly to you, *Signorina*, dear, but if you were in love——"

"Mothers of all the holy saints," said the fat woman, lifting her hands again, "when have I not been in love? Have I not had three husbands already, and another even now dawning on the horizon, not to mention—but there, that is not for pink young ears. I will say this to you, small one. Every woman should marry. Every artist *must* marry. Run home, then, in another year, and wed the young savage, and have done with it. Stay a year with him—two if you like—until there is an infant savage. Then you shall come back and give yourself in earnest to the business of singing."

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But Honor, scarlet-cheeked, shook her head. "I can't imagine coming back from—from *that*, *Signorina*!" Her eyes envisaged it and the happy color rose and rose in her face. "But I've got a good lesson for you to-day! Shall I begin?"

"Begin, then, my good small one," said her teacher indulgently, "and for the rest, we shall see what we shall see!"

Honor flung herself into her work as never before, and counted the weeks and days and hours until the time when Jimsy should come to her, and Jimsy, finishing up a sound, triumphant Sophomore year, saw everything through a hazy front drop of his Skipper on the pier at Naples.

But Jimsy King did not go abroad with Mr. and Mrs. Lorimer, after all, and Honor did not see him through the whole dragging summer. Stephen Lorimer, sick with disappointment for his stepdaughter, would have found relief in fixing the blame on his wife, for her lovely and complacent face mirrored her satisfaction at the turn of events, but he could hardly hold her responsible. James King was taken suddenly, alarmingly ill with pneumonia two days before they left Los Angeles to catch their steamer at New York, and it was manifestly impossible for his son to leave him. The doctors gave scant hope of his recovery.

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Therefore, it was Carter Van Meter who took Jimsy's ticket off his hands and Jimsy's place in the party and the summer plans, leaving his happy mother to spend three flutteringly hopeful months alone.

James King, greatly to the surprise of his physicians, did not die, but he hovered on the brink of it for many thin weeks and his son gave up his entire vacation to be with him. The letters he sent Honor were brief bulletins of his father's condition, explosive regrets at having to give up his summer with her, but Jimsy was not a letter writer. In order properly to fill up more than a page it was necessary for him to be able to say, "Had a bully practice to-day," or, "Saw old Duffy last night and he told me all about—" He was not good at producing epistolary bulk out of empty and idle days. Stephen Lorimer, often beside Honor when she opened and read these messages in English Cathedral towns or beside Scotch lakes, ached with sympathy for these young lovers under his benevolent wing because of their inability to set themselves down on paper. He knew that his stepdaughter was very nearly as limited as the boy.

"Ethel," he said to Miss Bruce-Drummond who had met up with them for a week-end at Stirling, "those poor children are so pitifully what Gelett Burgess calls 'the gagged and wordless folk'; it would be so much easier—and safer—for them if they belonged to his 'caste of the articulate.'" [Pg 106]

She nodded. "Yes. It's rather frightful, really, to separate people who have no means of communication. Especially when—" she broke off, looking at Carter who was pointing out to Honor what he believed to be the Field of Bannockburn.

Stephen Lorimer shook his head. "No danger there," he said comfortably. "Top Step is sorry for him—a creature of another, paler world ... infinitely beneath her bright and beamish boy's. No, I feel a lot safer to have Carter with her than with Jimsy King."

The Englishwoman stared. "Really?"

"Yes. I daresay I exaggerate, but I've always seen something sinister about that youth."

Miss Bruce-Drummond looked at Carter Van Meter and observed the way in which he was looking at Honor. "He wants her frightfully, doesn't he, poor thing?"

"He wants her frightfully but he isn't a poor thing in the very least. He is an almost uncannily clever and subtle young person for his years, with a very large income and a fanatically devoted mother behind him, and he's had everything he ever wanted all his life except physical perfection,—and my good Top Step." [Pg 107]

"Ah, yes, but what can he do, after all?"

Honor's stepfather shrugged. "He knows that she would not be allowed to marry the lad if he went the way of the other 'Wild Kings,'—that she is too sound and sane to insist on it. And I think—I thought even in their High School days—that he deliberately steers Jimsy into danger."

"My word!" said the novelist, hotly. "What are you going to do about it, Stephen?"

"Watch. Wait. Stand ready. I shall make it my business to drop in at the fraternity house once or twice next season, when I go north to San Francisco,—and into other fraternity houses, and put my ear to the ground. And if I find what I fear to find I'll take it up with both the lads, face to face, and then I'll send for Honor."

"Right!" said Miss Bruce-Drummond, her fine, fresh-colored face glowing. "And I'll run down to Florence at the Christmas holidays and take her to Rome with me, shall I?"

"It will be corking of you, Ethel."

"I shall love doing it."

He looked at her appreciatively. She would love doing it; she loved life and people, Ethel Bruce-Drummond, and she was able therefore to put life and people, warm and living, on to her pages. She was as fit and hardy as a splendid boy, her cheeks round and ruddy, her eyes bright, her fine bare hands brown and strong, her sturdy ankles sturdier than ever in her heavy knitted woolen hose and her stout Scotch brogues. He had known and counted on her for almost twenty years—and he had married Mildred Carmody. "Ethel," he said, suddenly, "in that book of mine I mean to have—" [Pg 108]

"Ah, yes, that book of yours, Stephen! Slothful creature! You know quite well you'll never do it."

"Never do it! Why,"—he was indignant—"I've got tons of it done already, in my head! It only wants writing down."

"Yes, yes," said his friend, penitently, "I make no doubt. It only wants writing down. Well?"

"I'm going to have a chapter on friendship, and insert a really novel idea. Friendship has never been properly praised,—begging pardon in passing of Mr. Emerson and his ilk. I'm going to suggest that it be given dignity and weight by having licenses and ceremonies, just as marriage has. It has a better right, you know, really. It's a much saner and more probable vow—to remain friends all one's life, than in love. In genuine friendship there is indeed no variableness, neither shadow or turning. You and I, now, might quite safely have taken out our friendship license and plighted our troth,—twenty years, isn't it?" [Pg 109]

"Yes," said Miss Bruce-Drummond, gently, "it's twenty years, Stephen, and that's a quite beautiful idea. You must surely put it in your book, old dear." Her keen eyes, looking away across the ancient battlefields were a little less keen than usual, but Stephen Lorimer did not notice that because he was looking at his watch.

"Do you know it's nearly five, woman, and Mildred waiting tea for us at the Stirling Arms?" So he called to the boy and girl and fell into step beside his friend and swung down the hill to his tea and his wife, a little thrilled still, as he always would be to the day of his death, at being with her again after even the least considerable absence.

It seemed to Honor Carmody that three solid summers had been welded together for her soul's discipline that year; there were assuredly ninety-three endless days in July. She was not quite sure whether having Carter with them made it harder for her or easier. He was an accomplished traveler; things moved more smoothly for his presence, and—as she wrote Jimsy—he knew everything about everywhere. On the whole, it was pleasanter, more like home, more like the good days on South Figueroa Street, to have him about; she could sometimes almost cajole herself into thinking Jimsy must be there, too, in the next room, hurrying up the street, a little late for dinner, but there, near them. It was only when Carter talked to her of Jimsy that she grew anxious, even acutely unhappy. It wasn't, she would decide, thinking it over later, lying awake in the dark, so much what Carter had said—it was what he hadn't said in words. It was the thing that sounded in his voice, that was far back in his eyes.

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"Yes," he would say, smiling in reminiscence, "that was a party! Nothing ever like it at Stanford before in the memory of the oldest inhabitant, they say. And old Jimsy—I wish you could have seen him! No, I don't really, for you wouldn't have approved and the poor old scout would have been in for a lecture, but it was——"

"Carter," Honor would interrupt, "do you mean, can you possibly mean that Jimsy—that he's—" She found she couldn't say it after all; she couldn't put it into the ugly definite words.

"Oh, nothing serious, Honor! Nothing for you to worry about! He has to do more or less as others do, a man of his prominence in college. It's unavoidable. Of course, it might be better if he could steer clear of that sort of thing altogether—" he would stop at a point like that and frown into space for a moment, as if remembering, weighing, considering, and Honor's heart would sink coldly. Then he would brighten again and lay a reassuring hand on her sleeve. "But you mustn't worry. Jimsy's got a level head on his shoulders, and he has too much at stake to go too far. He'll be all right in the end, Honor, I'm sure of that. And you know I'll always keep an eye on him!"

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And Honor twisting on her finger the ring with the clasped hands and the hidden blue stone of constancy which she always wore except when her mother was with her, would manage a smile and say, "I know how devoted you are to him, Carter. You couldn't help it, could you?—Every one is. And you mean to help him; I know that. I *am* grateful. It's next best to being with him myself." Then, because she couldn't trust herself to talk very much about Jimsy, she would resolutely change the subject and Carter would write home to his hoping mother that Honor really seemed to be having a happy summer and to enjoy everything, and that she was not very keen to talk much about Jimsy.

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He did not hear the talk she had with her stepfather the night before they were to sail for home. It came after her hour of fruitless pleading with her mother to be allowed to go back with them. Mildred Lorimer had stood firm, and Stephen had been silent and Carter had sided with Honor's mother.

"It really would be rather a shame, Honor,—much as we'd love having you with us on the trip home. You're coming on so wonderfully with your work, the *Signorina* says. She intends to have you in concert this winter, and coming home would spoil that, wouldn't it?" He was very sensible about it.

Honor had managed to ask Stephen to see her alone, after the rest had gone to their rooms. They were sailing from Genoa because they had wanted to bring Honor back to Italy and the *Signorina* had joined them at the port and would take the girl back to Florence with her. Honor went upstairs and came down again in fifteen minutes and found him waiting for her in the lounge.

He got up and came to meet her and took her hands into his solid and reassuring clasp. "This is pretty rough, Top Step. You don't have to tell me."

She did not, indeed. Her young face was drained of all its color that night and her eyes looked strained. It was mildly warm and the windows were open, but she was shivering a little. "Stepper, dear, I don't want to be a goose——"

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"You're not, Top Step."

"But I'm anxious. When Jimsy gave me this ring, and told me what he had told his father—that he was not going to be another 'Wild King' and asked me if I believed him, I told him I'd never stop believing him, and I won't, Skipper. I won't!"

"Right, T. S."

"But—things Carter says,—things he doesn't say—Stepper, I think Jimsy needs me *now*."

The man was silent for a long moment. He could, of course, assert his authority or at least his power, since the girl was Mildred's child and not his, break with his good friend, the *Signorina*, and take Honor home. But, after all, what would that accomplish, unless she went to Stanford? He began to think aloud. "Even if you came home with us, Top Step, you wouldn't be near him, would you, unless you went to college? And you'd hardly care to do that now—to enter your Freshman year two years behind the boys."

"No."

"And if you stayed in Los Angeles—you might almost as well be here. The number of miles doesn't matter." [Pg 114]

"But—perhaps Jimsy wouldn't stay at Stanford then. Oh, Stepper, dear, haven't we waited long enough?"

"He's only twenty, T. S."

She sighed. "Being young is the cruelest thing in the world!"

"You are blaspheming!" said her stepfather, sternly. "T. S., that's the only stupid and wicked thing you've ever said in the years I've known you! Don't ever dare to say it—or think it—again! Being young is the most golden and glorious thing in the world! Being young—" he ran a worried hand over his thinning hair and sighed. "Ah, well, you'll know, some day. Meanwhile, girl, it looks as if you'd have to stick. That's your part in 'playing the game!' But I promise you this. I shall keep an eye on things for you; keep in touch with the boy, see him, hear from him, hear *of* him, and if the time comes when I believe that his need of you is instant and vital, I'll write—no, I'll cable you to come."

"Stepper!" The comfort in her eyes warmed him.

"It's a promise, Top Step"—he grinned,—"as you used to say when I first knew you—'cross-my-heart, hope-never-to-see-the-back-of-my-neck!' Now, hop along to bed,—and trust me!" [Pg 115]

The lift in the little hotel put its head under its wing at ten-thirty and it was now almost eleven, so Honor set out on foot to do the three flights between her and her room. She ran lightly because she felt suddenly eased of a crushing burden; Stepper, good old Stepper, was on guard; Stepper was standing watch for her. There was a little writing-room and sun parlor on the second floor, dim now, with only one shaded light still burning, and as she crossed it a figure rose so startlingly from a deep chair that she smothered a small cry.

"It's I," said Carter. He stepped between her and the stairway.

"Cartie! You did make me jump!" Honor smiled at him; she was so cozily at peace for the moment that she had an increased tenderness for their frail friend. "It was so still in the hotel it might be the 'night before Christmas,'—'not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.' You'd better go to bed," she added, maternally. "You look pale and tired."

"I'm not tired," he said shortly. He continued to stand between her and the stairs.

"Well—I'm sleepy," she said, moving to pass him. "Good—"

But Carter was quicker. He caught hold of her by her arms and held her in a tense grip. "Honor, Honor, *Honor!*" he said, choking. [Pg 116]

"Why,—Cartie! You—please—" She tried to free herself.

"Honor, I can't help it. I've got to speak. I've got to know. Don't you—couldn't you—care at all for me, Honor?"

"Carter! Not—not the way you mean! Of course I'm fond of you, but—"

"I don't want that!" He shook her, roughly, and his voice was harsh. "I want you to care the way I care. And I'm going to make you!"

"Carter," she was not angry with him, only unhappy, "do you think this is fair? Do you think you're being square with Jimsy?"

"No," he said, hotly, "and I don't care. I don't care for anything but you. Honor, you don't love Jimsy King. I know it. It's just a silly, boy-and-girl thing—you must realize that, now you're away from him! Your mother doesn't want you to marry him. What can he give you or do for you? And he'll go the way of his father and all his family—I've tried to lie to you, but I'm telling you the truth now, Honor. He's drinking already, and he'll grow worse and worse. Give him up, Honor! Give him up before he spoils your life, and let me—" with all his strength, far more than she would have thought it possible for him to have, he tried to pull her into his arms, to reach her lips. [Pg 117]

But Jimsy's Skipper, for all her two soft years in Europe, had not lost her swimming, hiking, driving, out-of-door vigor, and her muscles were better than his.

"I'm going to kiss you," said Carter, huskily. "I've wanted to kiss you for years ... always ... and I'm going to kiss you now!"

"No, you're not, Carter," said Honor. She got her arms out of his grasp and caught his wrists in her hands. She was very white and her eyes were cold. "You see? You're weak. You're weak in your arms, Carter, just as you're weak in your—in your character, in your friendship! And I despise weakness." She dropped his wrists and saw him sit down, limply, in the nearest chair and cover his face with his hands. Then she walked to the stairs and went up without a backward glance.

He was pallid and silent at breakfast next morning and Honor was careful not to look at him. It

was beginning to seem, in the eight o'clock sunlight, as if the happening of the night before must have been a horrid dream, and her sense of anger and scorn gradually gave way to pity. After all ... poor old Carter, who had so little ... Jimsy, who had so much! What Carter had said in his tirade about Jimsy's drinking she did not believe; it was simply temper; angry exaggeration. Mildred Lorimer, looking at Carter's white face and the gray shadows under his eyes and observing Honor's manner toward him, sighed audibly and was a little distant when she bade her daughter farewell. She loved her eldest born devotedly, but there were moments when she couldn't help but feel that Honor was not very much of a comfort to her....

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Stephen held the girl's hands hard and looked deep into her eyes. "Remember what I said, Top Step, 'Cross-my-heart!'"

"I'll remember, Stepper, dear! *Thanks!*" She turned to Carter and held out a steady hand. "My love to your mother, Carter, and I do hope you'll have a jolly crossing."

"Will you read this, please?" He lifted his heavy eyes to her face and slipped a note into her hand. She nodded and tucked it into her blouse. Then she stood with the *Signorina*, on the pier, waving, and with misty eyes watching the steamer melting away and away into the blue water. When she was alone she read the little letter.

"Dear Honor—" Carter had written in a ragged scrawl unlike his usual firm hand—"Will you try to forgive me? You are the kindest and least bitter person in the world; I know you can forgive me. But—and this will be harder—can you forget last night? I promise to deserve it, if you will. Will you pretend to yourself that it never happened, and just remember the good days we've had this summer, and that—in spite of my losing my head—I'm your friend, and Jimsy's friend? Will you, Honor?"

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And Honor Carmody, looking with blurred eyes at the sea, wished she might wave again and reassuringly to the boy on the steamer, facing the long voyage so drearily. Then she realized that she still could, in a sense, wave to him. The steamer stopped at Naples and she could send a telegram to him there, and he would not have to cross the wide ocean under that guilty weight. She put on her hat and sped to the telegraph office, and there, because his note had ended with a question—had been indeed all a question—and because she was the briefest of feminine creatures, and because the *Signorina* was waiting luncheon for her and did not enjoy waiting, she wired the one word, "Yes," and signed her name.

"Carter got a telegram," said Mildred Lorimer to her husband. "I wonder what it could have been. Did he say?"

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"He didn't mention it," said Stephen. "About those silk shirts which weren't finished, I daresay. Certainly not bad news, by the look of him."

When Carter Van Meter reached Los Angeles and his tearfully happy mother he drew her into the library and closed the door. "Mater," he said with an odd air of intense repressed excitement, "I'm going to show you something, but you must promise me on your honor not to breathe it to a living soul, least of all, Mrs. Lorimer."

"Oh, dearest," gasped his mother, "I promise faithfully—"

He took Honor's telegram out of his wallet and unfolded it and smoothed it out for her to read the single word it contained. Then, at her glad cry, "Sh ... Mater! It isn't—exactly—what you think. I can't explain now. But it's a hope; it may—I believe it will, one day—lead to the thing we both want!" He folded it again carefully into its creases and put it back into his wallet and he was breathing hard.

CHAPTER IX

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Ethel Bruce-Drummond was better than her word. She did not wait for the Christmas holidays but went down to Florence early in December for Honor's first concert, and she wrote many pages to Stephen Lorimer.

Of course you know by this time that the concert was a success—you'll have had Honor's modest cable and the explosive and expensive one from the fat lark! They are sending you translations from the Italian papers, and clippings in English, and copies of some of the notes she's had from the more important musical people, and I really can't add anything to that side of it. You know, my dear Stephen, when it comes to music I'm confessedly ignorant,—not quite, perhaps, like that fabled countryman of mine who said he could not tell whether the band were playing "God Save the Weasel" or "Pop Goes the Queen," but bad enough in all truth. Therefore, I keep cannily out of all discussion of Honor's voice. I gather, however, that it has surprised every one, even the *Signorina*, and that there is no doubt at all about her making a genuine success if she wants to hew to the line. She has had, I hear, several rather unusual offers already. But of course she hasn't the faintest intention of doing anything in the world but the thing her heart is set upon. It's rather pathetic, really. There's something a little like Trilby about her; she does seem to be singing under enchantment. What she really is like, though, is

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a lantern-jawed young Botticelli Madonna. She's lost a goodish bit of flesh, I should say, and her color's not so high, and she might easily have walked out of one of the canvases in the Pitti or the Uffizi, or the Belli Arti. Her hair is Botticelli hair, and that "reticence of the flesh" of which one of your American novelists speaks—Harrison, isn't it?—and that faint austerity.

She sang quantities of *arias* and groups of songs of all nations, and at the end she did some American Indian things,—the native melodies themselves arranged in modern fashion. I expect you know them. The words are very simple and touching and the Italian translations are sufficiently funny. Well, the very last of all was something about a captive Indian maid, and a young chap here who clearly adores her and whom she hasn't even taken in upon her retina played a wailing, haunting accompaniment on the flute. As nearly as I can remember it went something like:

From the Land of the Sky Blue Water
They brought a captive maid.
Her eyes were deep as the—(I can't remember what, Stephen)
But she was not afraid.
I go to her tent in the evening
And woo her with my flute,
But she dreams of the Sky Blue Water,
And the captive maid is mute.

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My dear Stephen, I give you my word that I very nearly put my nose in the air and howled. She *is* a captive maid—captive to her talent and the fat song-bird and her mother's ambition and yours, and her mother's determination not to let her marry her lad, and to that Carter chap, and the boy playing the flute—the whole network of you,—but she's dreaming of the Sky Blue Water, and dreaming is doing with that child. You'd best make up your minds to it, and settle some money on them and marry them off. My word, Stephen, is there so much of it lying about in the world that you can afford to be reckless with it? I arrived too late to see her before the concert, and I went behind—together with the bulk of the American and English colonies—directly it was over. She was tremendously glad to see me; I was a sort of link, you know. When I started in to tell her how splendidly she'd sung and how every one was rejoicing she said, "Yes,—thanks—isn't every one sweet? But did Stepper write you that Jimsy was 'Varsity Captain this year, and that they beat Berkeley twelve to five? And that Jimsy made *both* touchdowns? Do you remember that game you saw with us—and how Jimsy ran down the field and shook hands with the boy who'd scored on us? And how that gave every one confidence again, and we won? We *always* won!"—and standing there with her arms full of flowers and all sorts of really important people waiting to pat her on the head, she hummed that old battle song:

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You can't beat L. A. High!
You can't beat L. A. High!

and her eyes filled up with tears and she gave me her jolly little grin and said, "Oh, Miss Bruce-Drummond, I can hardly wait to get back to real living again!"

Honor was honestly happy over her success. It was good to satisfy—and more than satisfy—the kind *Signorina* and all the genial and interested people she had come to know there; to send her program and her clippings home to her mother; it was jolly to be asked out to luncheon and dinner and tea and to be made much of; it was best of all to have something tangible to give up for Jimsy. If she had failed, going back to him and settling quietly down with him would have seemed like running to sanctuary; now—with definite promises and hard figures offered her—it was more than a gesture of renunciation. She could understand adoring a life of that sort if she hadn't Jimsy; as it was she listened sedately to the *Signorina's* happy burblings and said at intervals:

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"But you know, *Signorina* dear, that I'm going to give it up and be married next year?"

"You cannot give it up, my poor small one. It will not give you up. It has you, one may truly say, by the throat!"

There was no use in arguing with her. The interim had to be filled until summer and home. She would do, docilely, whatever the *Signorina* wished.

Jimsy was happy and congratulatory about her concert but he took it no more seriously than Honor herself. His letters were full, in those days, of the unrest at Stanford. Certain professors had taken a determined stand against drinking; there was much agitation and bitterness on both sides. Jimsy was all for freedom; he resented dictation; he could hoe his own row and so could other fellows; the faculty had no right to treat them like a kindergarten. Honor answered calmly and soothingly; she managed to convey without actually setting it down on the page that Jimsy King of all people in the world should take care not to ally himself with the "wets," and he wrote back that he was keeping out of the whole mess.

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It came, therefore, as a fearful shock, the letters and newspapers' account of the expelling of James King of Los Angeles, 'Varsity Captain and prominent in college theatricals, from Stanford University for marching in a parade of protest against the curtailing of drinking! She was alone in

her room when she opened her mail and she sat very still for minutes with her eyes shut, her fingers gripping the tiny clasped hands on her ring. At last, "*I'll never stop believing in you,*" she said, almost aloud.

Then she read Jimsy's own version of it. She always kept his letter for the last, childishly, on the nursery theorem of "First the worst, second the same, last the best of all the game."

"Skipper dearest," he wrote, in a hasty and stumbling scrawl, "I'm so mad I can hardly see to write. I'd have killed that prof if it hadn't been for Carter. This is how it happened. I'd been keeping out of the whole mess as I told you I would. That night I was digging out something at the Library and on my way back to the House I saw a gang of fellows in a sort of parade, and some one at the end caught hold of me and dragged me in. I asked him what the big idea was and he said he didn't know, and I was sleepy and when we came to the House I dropped out and went in. I wasn't in it ten minutes and I didn't even know what it was about. But when they called for every one who was in the parade next day I had to show up, of course. Well, they asked me about it and I told them just how it happened, and they said all right, then, I could go. I was surprised and thankful, I can tell you, because they'd been chopping off heads right and left, some of the best men in college. Well, just as I was going out through the door the old prof called me back and said he had one more thing to ask me. Did I consider that his committee was absolutely right and justified in everything they'd done? Well, Skipper, what could I say? I said just what you'd have said and what you'd have wanted me to say—that I did think they had been too severe and in some cases unjust and they canned me for it."

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There was a letter from Stephen Lorimer, grave and distressed, substantiating everything that Jimsy had written. (He had taken the first train north and gone into the matter thoroughly with the men at the fraternity house, simmering with red rage, and the committee, regretful but adamant.) The college career, the gay, brilliant, adored college career of Jimsy King was at an end. Honor's stepfather had taken great care to have the real facts in Jimsy's case printed—he sent the clipping from the Los Angeles paper—and he had spent an evening with James King, setting forth the truth of the case. But the fact remained for the majority of people, gaining in sinister weight with every repetition, that the last of the "Wild Kings" had been expelled from Stanford University for drinking.

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"Top Step," her stepfather wrote, "I'm sick with rage and indignation. Your mother is taking it very hard—as is most every one else. 'Expelled' is not a pretty word. I'm doing my level best to put the truth before the public, to show that your boy is really something of a hero in this matter, in that he might be snugly safe at this moment if he had been willing to tell a politic lie. You'll be unhappy over this, T. S., that's inevitable, but—I give you my word—you need not hang your head. Jimsy played the game."

Carter, who had written seldom since the happening of the summer in spite of her kind and casual replies to his letters, sent her now six reassuring pages. She was not to worry. Jimsy was really doing very well, as far as the drinking went, and he—Carter—would not let him do anything foolish or desperate in his indignation. Three times he repeated that she must not be anxious. A dozen times in the letter he showed her where she might well be anxious. The word beat itself in upon her brain until she could endure it no longer, and she went out through the pretty streets of Florence to the cable office and sent Stephen Lorimer one of her brief and urgent messages, "*Anxious.*" Two days later she had his answer and it was as short as her own had been, "*Come.*"

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There was a stormy scene with the *Signorina*. The waves of her fury rolled up and up and broke, crashing, over Honor's rocklike calm. At last, breathless, her fat face mottled with temper, "Go, then," said the singer, and went out of the room with heavy speed and slammed the door resoundingly. But she went with Honor to her steamer at Naples and embraced her forgivingly. "Go with God," she wept. "Live a little; it is best, perhaps. Then, my good small one, come back to me."

Like all simple and direct persons Honor found relief in action. The packing of her trunks and bags, the securing of tickets, cabling, had all given her a sense of comfort. They were tangible evidences of her progress toward Jimsy. The ocean trip was difficult; there was nothing to *do*. Nevertheless the sea's large calm communicated itself to her; for the greater portion of the voyage she was at peace. The situation with Jimsy must have been grave for her stepfather to think it necessary to send for her, but nothing could be so bad that she could not right it when she was actually with Jimsy. She would never leave him again, she told herself.

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Feyther an' mither may a' gey mad,
But whistle an' I'll come to ye, my lad!

Her mother, her poor, lovely mother, to whom she had been always such a disappointment, would be mad enough in all conscience, but Stepper would stand by. And nothing—no thing, no person, mattered beside Jimsy. Friends of her mother met her steamer in New York and put her on her train, and friends of Stephen Lorimer met her in Chicago and drove and dined her and saw her off on the Santa Fe. She began to have at once a warm sense of the West and home. The California poppies on the china in the dining-car made her happy out of all proportion. When they picked up the desert she relaxed and settled back in her seat with a sigh and a smile. The blessed brown, the delicious dryness! The little jig-saw hills standing pertly up against the sky; the tiny,

low-growing desert flowers; the Indian villages in the distance, the track workers' camps close by with Mexican women and babies waving in the doorways; even a lean gray coyote, loping homeward, looking back over his shoulder at the train, helped to make up the sum of her joy. *The West!* How had she endured being away from it so long?—From its breadth and bigness, its sweep and space and freedom? She would never go away again. She and Jimsy would live here always, a part of it, belonging. [Pg 131]

She stopped worrying. She was home, and Jimsy was waiting for her, and everything would come right.

At San Bernardino her mother and stepfather and her brothers came on board, surprising her. She had had a definite picture of them at the Santa Fe station in Los Angeles and their sudden appearance almost bewildered her. Her mother was a trifle tearful and reproachful but she was radiantly beautiful in her winter plumage. Stephen's handclasp was solid and comforting. Her little brothers had grown out of all belief, and her big brothers were heroic size, and they were all a little shy with her after the excitement of the first greetings. She wondered why Jimsy had not come out with them but at once she told herself that it was better so; it would have been hard for them to have their first hour together under so many eyes,—her mother's especially. Jimsy would be waiting at the station. But he was not. There were three or four of her girl friends with their arms full of flowers and one or two older boys who had finished college and were in business. They made much of her and she greeted them warmly for all the cold fear which had laid hold of her heart. [Pg 132]

Then came the drive home, the surprising number of new business buildings, the amazing growth of the city toward Seventh Street, the lamentable intrusion of apartment houses and utilitarian edifices on beautiful old Figueroa. Honor looked and listened and commented intelligently, but —*where was Jimsy?*

The old house looked mellow and beautiful; the Japanese garden was a symphony of green plush sod and brilliant color—the Bougainvillæa almost smothering the little summerhouse and a mocking-bird who must be a grandson of the one of her betrothal night was singing his giddy heart out. Kada was waiting in the doorway, bowing stiffly, sucking in his breath, beaming; the cook just behind him, following him in sound and gesture, and the Japanese gardener, hat in hand, stood at the foot of the steps as she passed to say, "How-do? Veree glod! Veree glod! Tha's nize you coming home! Veree glod!"

Honor shook hands with them all. Then she turned to look at her stepfather and he followed her into his study. [Pg 133]

"And we've got three new dogs, Honor, and two cats, and——" the smallest Lorimer besieged her at the door but she did not turn. She was very white now and trembling.

"Stepper, where is Jimsy?"

"Top Step, I—it's like Evangeline, rather, isn't it? He went straight through from the north without even stopping over here. He's gone to Mexico, to his uncle's ranch. And Carter got a leave of absence and went with him. I—you want the truth, don't you, Top Step?"

"Yes," said Honor.

"I'm afraid Jimsy rather ran amuck, in the bitterness of it all. His father took it very hard, in spite of my explanations to him, and wrote the boy a harsh letter; that started things, I fancy. That's when I cabled you. Carter telephoned his mother from the station here as they went through—they were on that special from San Francisco to Mexico City—and she told your mother that Jimsy was pretty well shot to pieces and that Carter didn't dare leave him alone."

"Didn't he write me?"

"He may have, of course, T. S., but there's nothing here for you. Mrs. Van Meter told Carter that I had cabled for you, so Jimsy knows." [Pg 134]

"Yes." She stood still, her hat and cloak on, deliberating. "Do the trains go to Mexico every day, Stepper?"

"Why, yes, I believe they do, but you needn't wait to write, T. S. You can telegraph, and let——"

"I didn't mean about writing," said Honor, quietly. "I meant about going. Will you see if I can leave to-day, Stepper? Then I won't unpack at all, you see, and that will save time."

"Top Step, I know what this means to you, but—your mother.... Do you think you'd better?"

"I am going to Mexico," said Honor. "I am going to Jimsy."

"I'll find out about trains and reservations," said her stepfather.

CHAPTER X

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For a few moments it moved and concerned Honor to see that she was the cause of the first

serious quarrel between her mother and her stepfather. She was shocked to see her mother's wild weeping and Stephen Lorimer's grim jaw and to hear the words between them, but nothing could really count with her in those hours.

She took her mother in her arms and kissed her and spoke to her as she had to her little brothers in the years gone by, when they were hurt or sorry. "There, there, Muzzie *dear!* You can't help it. You must just stop caring so. It isn't your fault."

"People will think—people will say——" sobbed Mildred Lorimer.

"No one will blame you, dear. Every one knows what a trial I've always been to you."

"You have, Honor! You have! You've never been a comfort to me—not since you were a tiny child. And even then you were tomboyish and rough and queer."

"I know, Muzzie."

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"I never heard of anything so brazen in all my life—running after him to Mexico—to visit people you never laid eyes on in all your days, utter strangers to you——"

"Jimsy's aunt and uncle, Muzzie."

"Utter strangers to *you*, forcing yourself upon them, without even telegraphing to know if they can have you——"

"No. I don't want Jimsy to know I'm coming."

"Where's your pride, Honor Carmody? When he's done such dreadful things and got himself expelled from college—a young man never lives *that* down as long as he lives!—and gone the way of all the 'Wild Kings,' and hasn't even written to you! That's the thing I can't understand—your running after him when he's dropped you—gone without a word or a line to you."

"He may have written, Muzzie. Letters are lost, you know, sometimes."

"Very seldom. *Very* seldom!" Mrs. Lorimer hotly proclaimed her faith in her government's efficiency. "I haven't lost three letters in forty years. No. He's jilted you, Honor. That's the ugly, shameful truth, and you're too blind to see it. If you knew the things Carter told his mother——"

"I don't want to know them, Muzzie."

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"Of course you don't. That's just it! Blind! Blind and stubborn,—determined to wreck and ruin your whole life. And I must stand by, helpless, and see you do it. And the *danger* of the thing! With Diaz out of the country it's in the hands of the brigands. You'll be murdered ... or worse! Well—I know whose head your blood will be on. Not mine, thank Heaven!" There was very little that day, Mildred Lorimer felt, that she could thank Heaven for. It was not using her well.

"You know that Stepper will give me letters and telegraph ahead to the train people," said Honor. "And you mustn't believe all the hysterical tales in the newspapers, Muzzie dear. Here's Stepper now."

Stephen Lorimer was turning the car in at the driveway and a moment later he came into the house. He looked very tired but he smiled at his stepdaughter. "You're in luck, Top Step! I've just come from the Mexican Consulate. Met some corking people there, Mexicans, starting home tomorrow. They'll be with you until the last day of your trip! Mother and father and daughter,—Menéndez is the name. Fascinating creatures. I've got your reservations, in the same car with them! Mildred," he turned to his wife, still speaking cheerily but begging for absolution with his tired eyes, "Señora Menéndez—Menéndez y García is the whole name—sent her compliments and said to tell you she would 'guard your daughter as her own.' Doesn't that make you feel better about it?"

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"She can defend her from bandits, I suppose?"

"My dear, there will be Señor Menéndez, and they tell me the tales of violence are largely newspaper stuff,—as I've told you repeatedly. They will not only look after Honor all the way but they will telegraph to friends to meet her at Córdoba and drive her out to the Kings' *rancho*—I explained that she wished to surprise her friends. I don't mind telling you now that I should have gone with her myself if these people hadn't turned up."

"Stepper, dear!"

"And I'll go now, T. S., if you like."

"No, Stepper. I'd rather go alone, really—as long as I'm going to be so well looked after, and Muzzie needn't worry."

"Needn't worry!" said Mildred Lorimer, lifting her hands and letting them fall into her lap.

"Honestly, Muzzie, you needn't. If you do, it's because you let yourself. You must know that I'll be safe with these people."

"Your bodily safety isn't all," her mother, driven from that corner, veered swiftly. "The thing itself is the worst. The *idea* of it—when I think—after all that was in the paper, and every one talking about it and pitying you—*pitying* you, Honor!"

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Her daughter got up suddenly and crossed over to her mother. "Every one but you, Muzzie? Can't you manage to—pity me—a little? I think I could stand being pitied, just now." It was indeed a day for being mothered. There was a need which even the best and most understanding of stepfathers could not fill, and Mildred Lorimer, looking into her white face and her mourning eyes melted suddenly and allowed herself to be cuddled and somewhat comforted but the heights of comforting Honor she could not scale.

"I think," said the girl at length, "I'd like to go up to my room and rest for a little while, if you don't mind, Muzzie,—and Stepper."

"Right, T. S. You'll want to be fresh for to-morrow."

"Do, dear—and I'll have Kada bring you up some tea. Rest until dinner time, because Mrs. Van Meter's dining with us," she broke off as she saw the small quiver which passed over her daughter's face and defended herself. "I had to ask her, Honor. I couldn't—in common decency—avoid it. She's so devoted to you, and think what she's done for you, Honor!"

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Honor sighed. "Very well. But will you make her promise not to let Carter know I am coming?"

"My dear, how could she? You'll be there yourself as soon as a letter."

"She might telegraph." She turned to her stepfather. "Will you make her promise, Stepper?"

"I will, Top Step. Run along and rest. I daresay there will be some of the Old Guard in to see you this evening." He walked with her to the door and opened it for her. The small amenities of life had always his devoted attention. He smiled down at her. "*Rest!*" he said.

"I can rest, now, Stepper." It was true. When she reached the haven of her big blue room she found herself relaxed and relieved. Again the direct simplicity of her nature upheld her; she had not found Jimsy, but she would find him; she was going to him without a day's delay; she could "rest in action."

The soft-footed, soft-voiced Kada brought her a tea tray and arranged it deftly on a small table by the window. He smiled incessantly and kept sucking in his breath in his shy and respectful pleasure. "Veree glod," he said as the gardener had said before him, "Veree *glod!* I lige veree moach you comin' home! Now when thad Meestair Jeemsie comin' home too, happy days all those days!" He had brought her two kinds of tiny sandwiches which she had favored in the old tea times, chopped olives and nuts in one, cream cheese and dates in the other, and there was a plate of paper-thin cookies and some salted almonds and he had put a half blown red rose on the shining napkin.

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"Kada, you are very kind. You always do everything so beautifully! How are you coming on with your painting?"

"Veree glod, thank-you-veree-moach!" He bowed in still delight.

"You must show me your pictures in the morning, Kada."

"Thank-you-veree-moach! Soon I have one thousand dollar save', can go study Art School."

"That's fine, Kada!"

"*Bud*"—his serene face clouded over—"veree sod leavin' theeze house! When you stayin' home an' thad Meestair Jeemsie here I enjoy to work theeze house; is merry from moach comedy!"

He bowed himself out, still drawing in his breath and Honor smiled. "Merry from much comedy" the house had been in the old gay days; dark from much tragedy it seemed to-day. What would it be to her when she came back again? But, little by little, the old room soothed and stilled her. There were the sedate four-poster bed and the demure dresser and the little writing desk, good mahogany all of them; come by devious paths from a Virginia plantation; the cool blue of walls and rugs and hangings; the few pictures she had loved; three framed photographs of the Los Angeles football squad; a framed photograph of Jimsy in his class play; a bowl of dull blue pottery filled now with lavish winter roses. It was like a steadying hand on her shoulder, that sane and simple girlhood room.

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The window gave on the garden and the King house beyond it. She wondered whether she should see James King before she went to Mexico. She felt she could hardly face him gently,—Jimsy's father who had failed him in his dark hour. In view of what his own life had been! She leaned forward and watched intently. It was the doctor's motor, the same seasoned old car, which was stopping before the house of the "Wild Kings," and she saw the physician hurry up the untidy path and disappear into the house. James King was ill again. She would have to see him, then. Perhaps he would have a good message for Jimsy. She finished her tea and slipped into her old blue kimono, still hanging in the closet, turned back the embroidered spread and laid herself down upon the bed. She took Jimsy's ring out of the little jewel pocket where she carried it and put it on her finger. "I will never take it off again," she said to herself. Then she fell asleep.

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"Fresh as paint, T. S.," said her stepfather when she came down.

"My dear, what an adorable frock," said her mother. "You never got *that* in Italy!"

"But I did, Muzzie!" Honor was penitently glad of the sign of fellowship. "There's a really lovely little shop in the Via Tournabouni. Wait till my big trunk comes and you see what I found for you

there! Oh, here's Mrs. Van Meter!"

She hurried to the door to greet Carter's mother. Marcia Van Meter kissed her warmly and exclaimed over her. She was thinner but it was becoming, and her gown suited her perfectly, and—they were seated at dinner now—was that an Italian ring?

"Yes," said Honor, slowly, looking first at her mother, "it is an Italian ring, a very old one. Jimsy gave it to me. It has been in the King family for generations. Isn't it lovely?"

"*Lovely*," said Mrs. Van Meter, coloring. She changed the subject swiftly but she did not really seem disconcerted. Indeed, her manner toward Honor during the meal and the hour that followed was affectionate to the point, almost, of seeming proprietary and maternal. Some boys and girls came in later and Mrs. Van Meter rose to go. "I'll run home, now, my dear, and leave you with your young friends."

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"I'll go across the street with you, Mrs. Van Meter," said Stephen Lorimer, flinging his cigarette into the fire. He had already extracted her promise not to telegraph Carter but he meant to hear it again.

"Thanks, Mr. Lorimer, but I'm going to ask Honor to step over with me. I have a tiny parcel for Carter and a message. Will you come, Honor?"

She slipped her arm through the girl's and gave it a little squeeze as they crossed the wide street. "Hasn't the city changed and grown, my dear? Look at the number of motors in sight at this moment! One hardly dares cross the street. I declare, it makes me feel almost as if I were in the East again." She gave her a small, tissue wrapped parcel for her son and came out on to the steps again with her. "Be careful about crossing, Honor!"

"Yes," said Honor, lightly. "That would hardly do,—to come alone from Italy and then get myself run over on my own street. What's that Kipling thing Stepper quotes:

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To sail unscathed from a heathen land
And be robbed on a Christian coast!

Well, good-night, Mrs. Van Meter, and good-by, and I'll write you how Carter is!"

The older woman put her arms about her and held her close. "Dearest girl, Carter told me not to breathe to any one, not even to your mother, about—about what happened last summer—and—and what he asked you, and I haven't, but I *must* tell you how glad..." then, at the bewilderment in Honor's face in the light of the porch lamp,—"he showed me the telegram you sent him to the steamer."

"Oh,—I remember!" Her brief wire to him, promising to forgive and forget his wild words of the evening before. She had quite forgiven, and she had so nearly forgotten that she could not imagine, at first, what his mother meant. And now, because the older woman was trembling, and because Carter must have told her of how he had lost control of himself and been for a moment false to his friend, she gave back the warm embrace and kissed the pale cheek. "Yes. And I *meant* it, Mrs. Van Meter!"

"You *blessed* child!" Marcia Van Meter wiped her eyes. "You've made me very happy."

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Honor ran across Figueroa Street between flashing headlights on automobiles, and her heart was soft within her. *Poor* old Cartie! How he must have grieved and reproached himself, and how seriously he must have taken it, to tell his mother! Fancy not forgiving people! Her stepfather had marked a passage for her in her pocket "R. L. S."... "The man who cannot forgive any mortal thing is a green hand in life," Stevenson had said. Honor believed him. She could even forgive James King, poor, proud, miserable James King, for failing Jimsy. It was because he cared so much. As she started up her own walk some one called to her from the steps of the King house.

"That you, Honor?"

"Yes, Doctor! I just came home to-day. How are you?" She ran over to shake hands with him. "Is Mr. King very sick?"

"He's dying."

"Oh, Doctor *Deering!*"

"Yes. No mistake about it this time. Wants to see you. Old nigger woman told him you were home. Will you come now?"

"Of course." She followed him into the house and up the long, shabbily carpeted stairs. She had never seen a dying person and she began to shiver.

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As if he read her thought the doctor spoke. "Isn't going to die while you're here. Not for a week—perhaps two weeks. But he'll never be up again." His voice was gruff and his brow was furrowed. He had been with Jeanie King when Jimsy was born and when she died, and he had cherished and scorned James King for long years.

There was a chair beside the bed and Honor seated herself there in silence. Presently the sick man opened his eyes and his worn and ravaged look of his son caught at her heart.

"So," he said somberly, "you came home."

"Yes, Mr. King. I came because Jimsy was in trouble, and to-morrow I'm going to him."

His eyes widened and slow, difficult color came into his sharply boned face. "You're going ... to Mexico?"

"Yes; alone."

The color crept up and up until it reached the graying hair, crisply waved, like Jimsy's. "No King woman ever ... held harder ... than that!" he gasped. "You're a good girl, Honor Carmody. They knew ... what to ... name you, didn't they?"

She leaned nearer, holding her hand so that the rays of the night light fell on the ring. "Didn't you know I'd 'hold hard' when you let Jimsy give me this?" [Pg 148]

He hauled himself up on an elbow and stared at it with tragic eyes. "Jeanie wore it five years.... My mother wore it thirty.... Honor Carmody, you're a good girl.... You make me ... ashamed.... Tell the boy that ... I'm sorry ... that letter. Bring him back ... in time...." He fell back, limp, gasping, and the doctor signaled to the girl to go. As she was slipping through the door the sick man spoke again, querulously. "Damn that mocking-bird ... make somebody shoot him!... There was one singing when Jimsy was born ... and when Jeanie went ... and this one now, mocking, mocking...."

She ran back to him. "Oh, Mr. King," she said, with shy fervor, "he isn't making fun of *us!*—Only of the bad, hard things! One sang out near Fiesta Park the day we thought Greenmount would win the championship, and one was singing the night Jimsy and I found out that we loved each other,—and this one was singing when I came home to-day!" It was a long speech for Honor and she was a little shy and breathless. "I *know* he doesn't mean it the way you think! He's telling us that the sad, hard, terrible things are not the real things!" Suddenly she bent and kissed his cold forehead. "Oh, Mr. King, if you listen to him with—with your *heart*—you'll hear it! He's mocking at trouble and disgrace,—and misunderstanding and silly pride! He's—*hear him now!*—he's mocking at pain and sorrow and—and *death!*" [Pg 149]

Then she ran out of the room and down the long stairs and across the lawn to her own house, where a noisy and jubilant section of the Old Guard waited.

CHAPTER XI

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It was happily clear at breakfast that Stephen Lorimer had more or less made his peace—and Honor's peace—with his wife. Like his beloved Job, whom he knew almost by heart, he had ordered his cause and filled his mouth with arguments, and Mildred Lorimer had come to see something rather splendidly romantic in her daughter's quest for her true love. Stephen, who never appeared at breakfast, was down on time, heavy-eyed and flushed, and Honor saw with a pang, in the stern morning light, that he was middle-aged. Her gay young stepfather! His spirit had put a period at nineteen, but his tired body was settling back into the slack lines of the late fifties. Her mother had changed but little, thanks to the unruffled serenity of her spirit and the skillful hands which cared for her.

"Muzzie," Honor had said, meeting her alone in the morning, "you are a marvel! Why, you haven't a single gray hair!"

"It's—well, I suppose it's because I have it taken care of," said Mrs. Lorimer, flushing faintly. "It's not a dye. It's not in the least a dye—it simply *keeps* the original color in the hair, that's all. I wouldn't think of using a dye. In the first place, they say it's really dangerous,—it seeps into the brain and affects your mind, and in the second place it gives your face a hard look, always,—and besides, I don't approve of it. But this thing Madame uses for me is *perfectly* harmless, Honor." [Pg 151]

"It's perfectly charming, Muzzie," said her daughter, giving her a hearty hug. It was a good world this morning. The breakfast table was gay, and Kada beamed. Takasugi had made countless pop-overs—Honor's favorites—and Kada was slipping in and out with heaping plates of them. "Pop-all-overs" the littlest Lorimer called them, steaming, golden-hearted. Honor had sung for them and the Old Guard the night before and even the smallest of the boys was impressed and was treating her this morning with an added deference which flowered in many passings of the marmalade and much brotherly banter. The girl herself was radiant. Nothing could be very wrong in a world like this. Suppose Jimsy had slipped once—twice—half a dozen times, when she was far away across the water? One swallow didn't make a spring and one slip (or several) didn't make a "Wild King" out of Jimsy. She was going to find him and talk it over and straighten it out and bring him back here where he belonged, where they both belonged, where they would stay. His expulsion from Stanford really simplified matters, when you came to think of it; now there need be no tiresome talk of waiting until he graduated from college. And she had not the faintest intention of going back to Italy. Just as soon as Jimsy could find something to do (and her good Stepper would see to that) they would be married and move into the old King house, and *how* she would love opening it up to the sun and air and making it gay with new colors! All this in her quiet mind while she breakfasted sturdily with her noisy tribe. Good to be with them again, better still to be coming back to them, to stay with them, to live beside them, always. [Pg 152]

Her train went at ten and the boys would be in school and her mother had an appointment with the lady whose ministrations kept her hair at its natural tint and Honor would not hear of her breaking it, so it was her stepfather only who took her to the station. She was rather glad of that and it made her put an unconscious extra fervor, remorsefully, into her farewells to the rest. Just as she was leaving her room there was a thump on her door and a simultaneous opening of it. Ted, her eldest Carmody brother, came in and closed the door behind him. He was a Senior at L. A. High, a football star of the second magnitude and a personable youth in all ways, and her heart warmed to him.

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"Ted,—dear! I thought you'd gone to school!"

"I'm just going. Sis,—I"—he came close to her, his bonny young face suddenly scarlet—"I just wanted to say—I know why you're going down there, and—and I'm for you a million! He's all right, old Jimsy. Don't you let anybody tell you he isn't. I—you're a sport to pike down there all by yourself. *You're all right, Sis! I'm strong for you!*"

"Ted!" The distance between them melted; she felt the hug of his hard young arms and there was a lump in her throat and tears in her eyes, but she fought them back. He would be aghast at her if she cried. He wouldn't be for her a million any longer. She must not break down though she felt more like it than at any time since her arrival. She kept silent and let him pat her clumsily and heavily till she could command her voice. "I'm glad you want me to go, Teddy."

"You bet I do. You stick, Sis! *And don't you let Carter spill the beans!*"

"Why, Ted, he——"

"You keep an eye on that bird," said the boy, grimly. "You keep your lamps lit!"

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She repeated his words to her stepfather as they drove to the station. "Why do you suppose he said that, Stepper?"

Stephen Lorimer shrugged. "I don't think he meant anything specific, T. S., but you know the kids have never cared for Carter."

"I know; it's that he isn't their type. They haven't understood him."

"Or—it's that they have."

"Stepper! You, too?" Honor was driving and she did not turn her head to look at him, but he knew the expression of her face from the tone of her voice. "Do you mean that, seriously?"

"I think I do, T. S. Look here,—we might as well talk things over straight from the shoulder this morning. Shall we?"

"Please do, Stepper." She turned into a quieter street and drove more slowly, so that she was able to face him for an instant, her face troubled.

"Want me to drive?"

"No,—I like the feel of the wheel again, after so long. You talk, Stepper."

"Well, T. S., I've no tangible charge to make against Carter, save that his influence has been consistently bad for Jimsy since the first day he limped into our ken. Consistently and —*persistently* bad, T. S. You know—since we're not dealing in persiflage this morning—that Carter is quite madly, crazily, desperately in love with you?"

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"I—yes, I suppose that's what you'd call it, Stepper. He—rather lost his head last summer,—the night before you sailed."

"But the night before we sailed," said her stepfather, drawing from his neatly card-indexed memory, "it was with me that you held a little last session."

"Yes,—but on my way upstairs. The lift had stopped, you know. I was frightfully angry at him and said something cruel, but the next morning he looked so white and wretched and wrote me such a pathetic letter, asking me to forgive and forget and all that sort of thing, and I sent him a wire to the steamer, saying I would."

"Ah! That was his telegram. We wondered."

"And he's been very nice since, in the few letters I've had from him."

"I daresay. But Ted's right, Top Step. In the parlance of the saints you *do* 'want to keep your lamps lit.' Carter, denied health and strength and physical glory, has had everything else he's ever wanted except you,—and he hasn't given you up yet."

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Honor nodded, her face flushed, her eyes straight ahead.

"And now—more plain talk, T. S. This is a fine, sporting, rather spectacular thing you're doing, going down to Mexico after Jimsy, and I'm absolutely with you, but—if the worst should be true—if the boy really has gone to pieces—you won't marry him?"

"No," said the girl steadily, after an instant's pause. "If Jimsy should be—like his father—I wouldn't marry him, Stepper. There shouldn't be—any *more* 'Wild Kings.' But I'd never marry any one else, and—oh, but it would be a long time to live, Stepper, dear!"

"I'm betting you'll find him in good shape,—and keep him so, Top Step. At any rate, however it comes out, you'll always be glad you went."

"I know I will."

"Yes; you're that sort of woman, T. S.,—the 'whither thou goest' kind. I believe women may roughly be divided into two classes; those who passively let themselves be loved; those who actively love. The former have the easier time of it, my dear." His tired eyes visioned his wife, now closeted with Madame. He sighed once and then he smiled. "And they get just as much in return, let me tell you,—more, I really believe. But I want you to promise me one thing."

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"What?"

"That you'll never give up your singing. Keep it always, T. S. There'll be times when you need it—to run away to—to hide in."

She nodded, soberly.

His eyes began to kindle. "Every woman ought to have something! Men have. It should be with women as with men—love a thing apart in their lives, not their whole existence! Then they wouldn't agonize and wear on each other so! I believe there's a chapter in that, for my book, Top Step."

"I'm sure there is," said Honor, warmly. They had reached the station now and a red cap came bounding for her bags. "And I won't even try to thank you, Stepper, dear, for all—"

"Don't be a goose, T. S.,—look! There are your Mexicans!"

Honor followed his eyes. "Aren't they *delicious*?" They hurried toward them. "The girl's adorable!"

"They all are." Stephen Lorimer performed the introductions with proper grace and seriousness and they all stood about in strained silence until the Señora was nervously sure they ought to be getting on board. "Might as well, T. S.," her stepfather said. She was looking rather white, he thought, and they might as well have the parting over. Honor was very steady about it. "Good-by, Stepper. I'll write you at once, and you'll keep us posted about Mr. King?" She stood on the observation platform, waving to him, gallantly smiling, and he managed his own whimsical grin until her train curved out of sight. One in a thousand, his Top Step. How she had added to the livableness of life for him since the day she had gravely informed her mother that she believed she liked him better than her own father, that busy gentleman who had stayed so largely Down Town at The Office! Stephen Lorimer was too intensely and healthily interested in the world he was living in to indulge in pallid curiosity about the one beyond, but now his mind entertained a brief wonder ... did he know, that long dead father of Honor Carmody, about this glorious girl of his? Did he see her now, setting forth on this quest; this pilgrimage to her True Love, as frankly and freely as she would have gone to nurse him in sickness? He grinned and gave himself a shake as he went back to the machine,—he had lost too much sleep lately. He would turn in for a nap before luncheon; Mildred would not be out of her Madame's deft hands until noon.

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The family of Menéndez y García beamed upon Honor with shy cordiality. Señor Menéndez was a dapper little gentleman, got up with exquisite care from the perfect flower on his lapel to his small cloth-topped patent leather shoes, but his wife was older and larger and had a tiny, stern mustache which made her seem the more male and dominant figure of the two. Mariquita, the girl, was all father, and she had been a year in a Los Angeles convent. The mother wore rich but dowdy black and an impossible headgear, a rather hawklike affair which appeared to have alighted by mistake on the piles of dusky hair where it was shakily balancing itself, but Mariquita's narrow blue serge was entirely modish, and her tan pumps, and sheer amber silk hose, and her impudent hat. The Señor spent a large portion of his time in the smoker and the Señora bent over a worn prayer book or murmured under her breath as her fingers slipped over the beads in her lap, but the girl chattered unceasingly. Her English was fluent but she had kept an intriguing accent.

"Ees he not beautiful, Mees Carmody, my Pápa?" She pushed the accent forward to the first syllable. "And my poor *Madrecita* of a homely to chill the blood? *But* a saint, my mawther. Me, I am not so good. Also *gracias a Dios*, I am not so—" she leaned forward to regard herself in the narrow strip of mirror between the windows and—a wary eye on the Señora—applied a lip stick to her ripe little mouth. She wanted at once to know about Honor's sweethearts. "*A fe mia*—in all your life but one *novio*? Me, I have now seex. So many have I since I am twelve years I can no longer count for you!" She shrugged her perilously plump little shoulders. "One! Jus' like I mus' have a new hat, I mus' have a new *novio*!"

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They were all a little formal with her until after they had left El Paso and crossed the Mexican border at Juarez, when their manner became at once easy, hospitable, proprietary. They pointed out the features of the landscape and the stations where they paused, they plied her unceasingly with the things they purchased every time the train hesitated long enough for *vendadors* to hold up their wares at the windows,—*fresas* (the famous strawberries in little leaf baskets), *higos* (fat figs), *helado* (a thin and over-sweet ice cream), and the delectable *Cajeta de Celaya*, the candy made of milk and fruit paste and magic. They were behind time and the train seemed to loiter in serenest unconcern. Señor Menéndez came back from the smoker with a graver face every day. The men who came on board from the various towns brought tales of unrest and feverish

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excitement, of violence, even, in some localities.

If his friends could not be sure of meeting Honor at Córdoba and driving her to the Kings' *hacienda* the Señor himself would escort her, after seeing his wife and daughter home. Honor assured him that she was not afraid, that she would be quite safe, and she was thoroughly convinced of it herself; nothing would be allowed to happen to her on her way to Jimsy.

"Your father is so good," she said gratefully to Mariquita.

"Yes," she smiled. "My Pápa ees of a deefereent good; he ees glad-good, an' my *Madrecita* ees sad-good. Me—I am *bad*-good! You know, I mus' go to church wiz my mawther, but my Pápa, he weel not go. He nevair say 'No' to my mawther; he ees *too* kind. Jus' always on the church day he is seek. *So* seek ees my poor Pápa on the church day!" She flung back her head and laughed and showed her short little white teeth.

But Señor Menéndez had an answer to his telegram on the morning of the day on which they were to part; his friend, the eminent *Profesor*, Hidalgo Morales, accompanied by his daughter, Señorita Refugio, would without fail be waiting for Miss Carmody when her train reached Córdoba and would see her safely into the hands of her friends. Honor said good-by reluctantly to the family of Menéndez y García; the beautiful little father kissed her hand and the grave mother gave her a blessing and Mariquita embraced her passionately and kissed her on both cheeks and produced several entirely genuine tears. She saw them greeted by a flock of relatives and friends on the platform but they waved devotedly to her as long as she could see them. Then she had a quiet and solitary day and in the silence the old anxieties thrust out their heads again, but she drove them sturdily back, forcing herself to pay attention to the picture slipping by the car window,—the lovely languid *tierra caliente* which was coming to meet her. The old *Profesor* and his daughter were waiting for her; shy, kindly, earnest, less traveled than the Menéndez', with a covered carriage which looked as if it might be a relic of the days of Maximilian. Conversation drowsed on the long drive to the Kings' coffee plantation; the Señorita spoke no English and Honor's High School Spanish got itself annoyingly mixed with Italian, and the old gentleman, after minute inquiries as to her journey and the state of health of his cherished friend, Señor Felipe Hilario Menéndez y García, sank into placid thought. It was a ridiculous day for winter, even to a Southern Californian, and the tiny villages through which they passed looked like gay and shabby stage settings.

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The *Profesor* roused at last. "We arrive, Señorita," he announced, with a wave of his hand. They turned in at a tall gateway of lacy ironwork and Honor's heart leaped—"El Pozo." Richard King.

"The name is given because of the old well," the Mexican explained. "It is very ancient, very deep—without bottom, the *peóns* believe." They drew up before a charming house of creamy pink plaster and red tiles, rioted over by flowering vines. "I wait but to make sure that Señor or Señora King is at home." A soft-eyed Mexican woman came to the door and smiled at them, and there was a rapid exchange of liquid sentence. "They are both at home, Señorita. We bid you farewell."

The servant, wide-eyed and curious, had come at his command to take Honor's bags.

"Oh—but—surely you'll wait? Won't you come in and rest? It was such a long, warm drive, and you must be tired."

He bowed, hat in hand, shaking his handsome silver head. "We leave you to the embraces of your friends, Señorita. One day we will do ourselves the honor to call upon you, and Señor and Señora King, whom it is our privilege to know very slightly. For the present, we are content to have served you."

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"Oh," said Honor in her hearty and honest voice, holding out a frank hand, "this is the *kindest* country! *Every one* has been so good to me! I wish I could thank you enough!"

The old gentleman stood very straight and a dark color surged up in his swarthy face. "Then, dear young lady, you will perhaps have the graciousness to say a pleasant word for us in that country of yours which does not love us too well! You will perhaps say we are not all barbarians." He gave an order to his coachman and the quaint old carriage turned slowly and precisely and started on its long return trip, the *Profesor*, still bareheaded, bowing, his daughter beaming and kissing her hand. Honor held herself rigidly to the task of seeing them off. Then—*Jimsy!* Where was he? She had had a childish feeling that he would be instantly visible when she got there; she had come from Italy to Mexico,—from Florence to a coffee plantation beyond Córdoba in the *tierra caliente* to find him,—and journeys ended in lovers' meeting, every wise man's son—and daughter—knew. The nods and becks and wreathed smiles of the serving woman brought her back to earth.

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"Señora King?" She asked, dutifully, for her hostess—her unconscious hostess—first.

"*Si Señorita! Pronto!*" The servant beckoned her into a dim, cool *sala* and disappeared. "Well, I know what that means," Honor told herself. "'Right away.' Oh, I *hope* it's right away!"

But it was not. The Kings, like all sensible people, were at their *siesta*; twenty racking moments went by before they came in. Richard King was older than Jimsy's father but he had the same look of race and pride, and his wife was a plain, rather tired-looking Englishwoman with very white teeth and broodingly tender blue eyes which belied the briskness of her manner.

"I am Honor Carmody."

"You are——" Mrs. King came forward, frowning a little.

"I—I am engaged to your nephew—to Jimsy King. I think you must have heard of me."

"My dear, of course we have! How very nice to see you! But—how—and where did you——"

The girl interrupted breathlessly. "Oh, please,—I'll tell you everything, in a minute. But I must know about him! I came from Italy because—because of his trouble at college. Is he—is he——" she kept telling herself that she was Honor Carmody, the tomboy-girl who never cried or made scenes—Jimsy's Skipper—her dear Stepper's Top Step; she was not a silly creature in a novel; she would not scream and beg them to tell her—*tell her*—even if they stood there staring at her for hours longer. And then she heard Richard King saying in a voice very like his brother's, a little like Jimsy's:

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"Why, the boy's all right! Ab-so-lutely all right! Isn't he, Madeline? Steady as a clock. That college nonsense——"

And then Honor found herself leaning back in a marvelously comfortable chair by an open window and Mr. King was fanning her slowly and strongly and Mrs. King was making her drink something cool and pungent, and telling her it was the long, hot drive out from Córdoba in the heat of the day and that she mustn't try to talk for a little while. Honor obeyed them docilely for what she was sure was half an hour and which was in fact five minutes and then she sat up straight and decisively. "I'm *perfectly* all right now, thank you. Will you tell me where I can find Jimsy?"

"I expect he's taking his nap down at the old well. I'll send for him. You must be quiet, my dear."

She got to her feet and let them see how steady she was. "*Please* let me go to him!"

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"But Josita will fetch him in less time, my dear, and we'll have Carter called, too, and——" Mrs. King stopped abruptly at the look in the girl's eyes. "Josita will show you the way," she said in quite another tone. "You must carry my sunshade and not walk too quickly."

Honor tried not to walk too quickly but she kept catching up with the Mexican serving woman and passing her on the path, and falling back again with a smile of apology, and the woman smiled in return, showing white, even teeth. It was not as long a walk as it seemed, but their pace made it consume ten interminable minutes. At length the twisting walk twisted once more and gave on a cleared space, meltingly green, breathlessly still, an ancient stone well in its center.

Josita gestured with a brown hand. "*Alla esta Señorito Don Diego! Adios, Señorita!*"

"*Gracias!*" Honor managed.

"*Te nada!*" She smiled and turned back along the way they had come. "It is nothing!" she had said. Nothing to have brought her on the last stage of her long quest! Jimsy was asleep in the deep grass in the shade. She went nearer to him, stepping softly, hardly breathing. He was stretched at ease, his sleeves rolled high on his tanned arms, his tanned throat bare, his crisp hair rolling back from his brow in the old stubborn wave, his thick lashes on his cheek. His skin was as clean and clear as a little boy's; he looked a little boy, sleeping there. She leaned over him and he stirred and sighed happily, as if dimly aware of her nearness. She tried to speak to him, to say—"Jimsy!" but she found she could not manage it, even in a whisper. So she sat down beside him and gathered him into her arms.

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CHAPTER XII

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They had a whole hour entirely to themselves and it went far toward restoring the years that the locusts had eaten. It was characteristic of them both that they talked little, even after the long ache of silence. For Jimsy, it was enough to have her there, in his arms, utterly his—to know that she had come to him alone and unafraid across land and sea; and for Honor the journey's end was to find him clear-eyed and clean-skinned and steady. Stephen Lorimer was right when he applied Gelett Burgess' "caste of the articulate" against them; they were very nearly of the "gagged and wordless folk." Yet their silence was a rather fine thing in its way; it expressed them—their simplicity, their large faith. It was not in them to make reproaches. It did not occur to Jimsy to say—"But why didn't you let me know you were coming?—At least you might have let me have the comfort of knowing you were on this side of the ocean!" And Honor never dreamed of saying "But Jimsy,—to rush from Stanford down here without sending me a line!"

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Therefore it was somewhat remarkable that it came out, in the brief speeches between the long stillnesses, that Honor knew that Carter had telephoned to his mother as they passed through Los Angeles, and that Mrs. Van Meter had spoken of Honor's return, and she had naturally supposed he would tell Jimsy; and that Jimsy had written her a ten page letter, telling with merciless detail of the one wild party of protest in which he had taken part, of his horror and remorse, of his determination to go to his people in Mexico and stay until he was certain he had himself absolutely in hand and had made up his mind about his future.

"Well, it will be sent back to me from Florence," said Honor, contentedly.

"Funny it wasn't there almost as soon as you were—I sent it so long ago!—The night after that party, and I didn't leave for over two weeks, and that makes it—well, anyhow, it's had time to be back. But it doesn't matter now."

"No, it doesn't matter, now, Jimsy. I won't read it when it does come, because it's all ancient history—ancient history that—that never really happened at all! But I'm glad you wrote me, dear!" She rubbed her cheek against his bronzed face.

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"Of course I'd tell you everything about it, Skipper."

"Of course you would, Jimsy."

They were just beginning to talk about the future—beyond hurrying back to Jimsy's father—when Carter came for them. He called to them before he came limping into the little cleared space, which was partly his tact in not wanting to come upon them unannounced, and partly because he didn't want, for his own sake, to find them as he knew he would find them, without warning. As a matter of fact, while Honor lifted her head with its ruffled honey-colored braids from Jimsy's shoulder, he kept his arm about her in brazen serenity.

Carter's eyes contracted for an instant, but he came close to them and held out his hand. "Honor! This is glorious! But why didn't you wire and let us meet you? We never dreamed of your coming! Of course, the mater told me you were on your way home, but I didn't tell old Jimsy here, as long as you hadn't. I knew you meant some sort of surprise. I thought he'd hear from you from L. A. by any mail, now."

"Say, Cart', remember that long letter I wrote Skipper, the night after the big smear?"

"Surely I do," Carter nodded.

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"Well, she never got it."

"It passed her, of course. It will come back,—probably follow her down here."

"Oh, it'll show up sometime. I gave it to you to mail, didn't I?"

"Yes, I remember it distinctly, because it was the fattest one of yours I ever handled."

He grinned ruefully. "Yep. Had a lot on my chest that night."

"Mrs. King thought you ought to rest before dinner, Honor."

"At least I ought to make myself decent!" She smoothed the collar Jimsy's arms had crumpled, the hair his shoulder had rubbed from its smooth plaits. "She must think I'm weird enough as it is!"

But the Richard Kings had lived long enough in the turbulent *tierra caliente* to take startling things pretty much for granted. Honor's coming was now a happily accepted fact. A cool, dim room had been made ready for her,—a smooth floor of dull red tiles, some astonishingly good pieces of furniture which had come, Mrs. King told her when she took her up, from the Government pawnshop in Mexico City and dated back to the brief glories of Maximilian's period, and a cool bath in a tin tub.

"You are so good," said Honor. "Taking me in like this! It was a dreadful thing to do, but—I had to come to him."

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The Englishwoman put her hand on her shoulder. "My dear, it was a topping thing to do. I—" her very blue eyes were pools of understanding. "I should have done it. And we're no end pleased to have you! We get fearfully dull, and three young people are a feast! We'll have a lot of parties and divide you generously with our friends and neighbors—neighbors twenty miles away, my dear! We'll do some theatricals,—Carter says your boy is quite marvelous at that sort of thing."

"Oh, he *is*," said Honor, warmly, "but I'm afraid we ought to hurry back to his father!"

"I'll have Richard telegraph. Of course, if he's really bad, you'll have to go, but we do want you to stay on!" She was moving about the big room, giving a brisk touch here and there. "Have your cold dip and rest an hour, my dear. Dinner's at eight. Josita will come to help you." She opened the door and stood an instant on the threshold. Then she came back and took Honor's face between her hands and looked long at her. "You'll do," she said. "You'll do, my girl! There's no—no royal road with these Kings of ours—but they're worth it!" She dropped a brisk kiss on the smooth young brow and went swiftly out of the room.

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To the keen delight of the hosts there was a fourth guest at dinner, a man who was stopping at another *hacienda* and had come in to tea and been cajoled into staying for dinner and the night. He was a personage from Los Angeles, an Easterner who had brought an invalid wife there fifteen years earlier, had watched her miraculous return to pink plump health and become the typical California-convert. He had established a branch of his gigantic business there and himself rolled semiannually from coast to coast in his private car. Honor and Jimsy were a little awed by touching elbows with greatness but he didn't really bother them very much, for they were too entirely absorbed in each other. He seemed, however, considerably interested in them and looked at them and listened to them genially. The Kings were thirstily eager for news of the northern world; books, plays, games, people—they drank up names and dates and details.

"We must take a run up to the States this year," said Richard King.

"It would be jolly, old dear," said his wife, levelly, her wise eyes on his steady hands. "If the coffee crop runs to it!"

"There you have it," he growled. "If the coffee crop is bad we can't afford to go,—and if it's good we can't afford to leave it!" [Pg 175]

"But we needn't mind when we've house parties like this! My word, Rich'—fancy having four house guests at one and the same blessed time!" She led the way into the long *sala* for coffee.

"Yes,—isn't it great? Drink?" Richard King held up a half filled decanter toward his guest.

The personage shook his head. "Not this weather, thanks. That enchanted well of yours does me better. Wonderful water, isn't it?"

"Water's all right, but it's a deuce of a nuisance having to carry every drop of it up to the house."

"Really? Isn't it piped?"

"Ah, but it will be one day, Rich'! I expect the first big coffee crop will go there, rather than in a trip to the States. But it is rather a bother, meanwhile."

"But you have no labor question here."

"Haven't we though? With old Diaz gone the old order is changed. This bunch I have here now are bad ones," King shook his head. "They may revolute any minute."

"Oh, Rich'—not really?"

"I daresay they'll lack the energy when it comes to a show-down, Madeline. But this man Villa is a picturesque figure, you know. He appeals to the *peón* imagination." [Pg 176]

The guest was interested. "Yes. Isn't it true that there's a sort of Robin Hood quality about him—steals from the rich to give to the poor—that sort of thing?"

"That's more or less true, but the herd believes it utterly." He sighed. "It was a black day for us when Diaz sailed."

Jimsey King had been listening. "But, Uncle Rich', they *have* had a rotten deal, haven't they?"

His uncle shrugged. "Got to treat 'em like cattle, boy. It's what they are."

"Well, it's what they'll always be if you keep on treating 'em that way!" Jimsey spoke hotly and his uncle turned amused eyes on him.

"Don't let that Yaqui fill you up with his red tales!"

"But you'll admit the Yaquis have been abused?"

"Well, I believe they have. They're a cut above the *peón* in intelligence and spirit. But—can't have omelette without breaking eggs." He turned again to his elder guest. "This boy here has been palling about with a Yaqui Indian he made me take in when he was here last time."

The great man nodded. "Yes,—I've seen them together. Magnificent specimen, isn't he?" [Pg 177]

"They are wonderfully built, most of them. This chap was pretty badly used by his master—they are virtually slaves, you know,—and bolted, and Jimsey found him one night—"

The boy got up and came over to them. "Starving, and almost dead with weakness and his wounds,—beaten almost to death and one of his ears hacked off! And Uncle Rich' took him in and kept him for me."

His uncle grinned and flung an arm across his shoulder. "And had the devil—and many *pesos* to pay to the local *jefe* and the naturally peevish gentleman who lost him. But at that I'll have to admit he's the best man on the *rancho* to-day." He threw a teasing look at Honor, glowing and misty-eyed over Jimsey's championing of the oppressed. "The only trouble is, I suppose Jimsey will take him with him when he sets up housekeeping for himself. What do you think, Maddy? Could Yaqui Juan be taught to buttle?"

"No butlers for us, Uncle Rich'!" Jimsey was red but unabashed. "We might rent him for a movie star and live on his earnings. We aren't very clear yet as to what we *will* live on!"

The personage looked at him gravely. "You are going to settle in Los Angeles?" [Pg 178]

"Yes!" said Jimsey and Honor in a breath. The good new life coming which would be the good old life over again, only better!

"Oh," said Mrs. King, "I forgot,—I asked them to come up from the quarters and make music for you! They're here now! Look!" She went to the window and the others followed. The garden was filled with vaguely seen figures, massed in groups, and there was a soft murmur of voices and the tentative strumming of guitars. "Shall we come out on the veranda? You'll want a *rebozo*, Honor,—the nights are sharp." She called back to the serving woman. "Put out the lights, Josita."

They sat in the dusk and looked out into the veiled and shadowy spaces and the dim singers lifted

up their voices. The moon would rise late; there was no light save the tiny pin points of the cigarettes; it gave the music an elfin, eerie quality.

"Pretty crude after Italy, eh, Honor?" Richard King wanted to know.

"Oh, it's delicious, Mr. King! Please ask them to sing another!"

"May we have the *Golondrina*?" the eldest guest wanted to know.

"Well—how about it, Maddy? Think we're all cheerful enough? We know that two of us are! All right!" He called down the request and it seemed to Honor that a little quiver went through the singers in the shadow. The guitars broke into a poignant, sobbing melody. [Pg 179]

"I don't know what the words mean," said the personage under his breath. "I don't believe I want to know. I fancy every one fits his own words to it."

"Or his own need," said Richard King's wife. She slipped her hand into her husband's. The melody rose and fell, sobbed and soared. Honor drew closer to Jimsy and he put his arm about her and held her hard. "Yes," he whispered. "I know." The man who had asked for *Golondrina* sat with bent head and his cigar went out. Only Carter Van Meter, as once long ago in Los Angeles, seemed unmoved, unstirred, scatheless.

There was a little silence after the music. Then the personage said, "You know, I fancy that's Mexico, that song!"

Jimsy King wheeled to face him through the dusk. "Yes, sir! It's true! That *is* Mexico,—everything that's been done to her,—and everything she'll do, some day!"

"It's—beautiful and terrible," said Honor. "I had to keep telling myself that we are all safe and happy, and that nothing is going to happen to us!" [Pg 180]

Carter laughed and got quickly to his feet. "I suggest indoors and lights—and Honor! Honor must sing for us!"

She never needed urging; she sang as gladly as a bird on a bush. The Kings were parched for music; they begged for another and another. She had almost to reproduce her recital in Florence. Jimsy listened, rapt and proud, and at the end he said—"Not too tired for one more, Skipper? Our song?"

"Never too tired for that, Jimsy!" She sat down again and struck her stepfather's ringing, rousing chords. Instantly it ceased, there in the room, to be Mexico; it was as if a wind off the sea blew past them. The first verse had them all erect in their chairs. She swung into the second, holding a taut rein on herself:

The sand of the desert is sodden red;
Red with the wreck of a square that broke;
The gatling's jammed and the colonel dead,
And the regiment blind with dust and smoke:
The River of Death has brimmed his banks;
And England's far and Honor's a name,
But the voice of a school boy rallies the ranks—
Play up! Play up! and—Play the Game!

Honor sat still at the piano. She did not mean to lift her eyes until she could be sure they would not run over. Why did that song always sweep her away so?—from the first moment Stepper had read her the words in the old house on South Figueroa Street, all those years ago? Why had she always the feeling that it had a special meaning for her and for Jimsy—a warning, a challenge? Jimsy came over to stand beside her, comfortably silent, and then, surprisingly, the personage came to stand beside Jimsy. [Pg 181]

"I've been wondering," he said, "if you hadn't better come in to see me one day, when we're all back in Los Angeles? You haven't any definite plans for your future, have you?"

"No, sir," said Jimsy. "Only that I've got to get something—quick!" He looked at Honor, listening star-eyed.

The great man smiled. "I see. Well, I think I can interest you. I've watched you play football, King. I played football, forty years ago. I like the breed. My boys are all girls, worse luck—though they're the finest in the world—"

"Oh, *yes*," said Honor, warmly.

"But I like boys. And I like you, Jimsy King." He held out his hand. "You come to me, and if you're the lad I think you are, you'll stay."

"Oh, I'll come!" Jimsy stammered, flushed and incoherent. "I'll come! I'll—I'll sweep out or scrub floors—or—or anything! But—I'm afraid you don't—" he looked unhappily at Honor. [Pg 182]

"Yes, Jimsy. He's got to know."

Jimsy King stood up very straight and tall. "You've got to know that I was kicked out of college two months ago, for marching in a parade against—"

"For telling the truth," cried Honor, hot cheeked, "when a cowardly lie would have saved him!"

"But just the same, I was kicked out of college, and——"

"Lord bless you, boy," said the personage, and it was the first time they had heard him laugh aloud, "I know you were! And that's one reason why I want you. *So was I!*"

CHAPTER XIII

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There were telegrams from Stephen Lorimer and the doctor; James King's condition remained unchanged. Honor and Jimsy decided to return at once, but Richard King flatly refused to let them go. The next train after Honor's had been held up just beyond Córdoba by a band of brigands, supposed to be a section of Villistas, the passengers robbed and mistreated and three of the train men killed.

"Not a step without an escort," said Jimsy's uncle.

Then Jimsy's new friend came to the rescue. He was eager to get home but cannily aware of his own especial risk,—two wealthy Americans having been recently taken and held for ransom. He had influence at the Capital; he wrote and telegraphed and the replies were suave and reassuring; reliable escort would be furnished as soon as possible,—within the week, it was hoped. Meanwhile, there was nothing for it but to wait. He went back to the *hacienda* where he had been visiting, and life—the merry, lyrical life of *El Pozo*, moved forward. Jimsy's only woe was that he was condemned by her own decision to share Honor lavishly with his uncle and aunt and their friends and Carter. "Skipper, after all these years, leaving me for a darn' tea!"

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"Jimsy, dear," she scolded him, "you know that it's the very least I can do, now isn't it—honestly? Think how lovely she's been to us, and how much it means to her, having people here. And we've got all our lives ahead of us, Jimsy! Be good! And besides"—she colored a little and hesitated—"it's—not kind to Cartie." Then, at the sobering of his face, "You know he—cares for me, Jimsy, and I don't believe it's just cricket for us to—to sort of wave our happiness in his face all the time."

He sighed crossly. "But—good Lord, Skipper,—he's got to get used to it!"

"Of course,—but need we—rub it in, just now?" The fact was that Honor was anxious. Carter was pallid, haggard, morose. The brief flare of composure with which he had greeted her was gone; he showed visibly and unpleasantly what he was suffering at the sight of their vivid and hearty happiness. Mrs. King had commented pityingly on it to Honor and it was simply not in the girl to go on adding to his misery. She began to be very firm with Jimsy about their long walks or rides alone; she accepted all Mrs. King's invitations and plans for them; she included Carter whenever it was possible. These restrictions had naturally the result of making Jimsy the more ardent in their scant privacy, and Honor, amazingly free from coquetry though she was, must have sensed it. Perhaps the truth was that she had in her, after all, something of Mildred Lorimer's feeling for values and conventions; having flown from Florence to Córdoba to her lover she was reclaiming a little of her aloofness and cool ladyhood by this discipline. But she was entirely honest in her wish to spare Carter so far as possible. Once, when Jimsy was briefly away with his Yaqui henchman she asked Carter to walk with her, but he decided for the dim *sala*; the heat which seemed to invigorate and vitalize Jimsy left him limp and spent.

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He brushed her generalities roughly aside. "Are you happy, Honor?"

She lifted her candid eyes to his bleak young face. "Yes, Cartie. Happier than ever before—and I've been happy all my life."

He was silent for a moment as if sorting out and considering the things he might say to her. "Well, you have a marvelous effect on Jimsy. I don't believe he's taken a drop since you've been here."

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"He hasn't touched a drop since he came to Mexico, Carter,—Mr. King told me that, and Jimsy told me himself!" Honor was a little declamatory in her pride and he raised his eyebrows.

"Really?" He limped over to the table where the smoking things were and the decanter of whiskey and siphon of soda. "Let me have a look...." He picked up the decanter and held it to the light. "The last time I looked at it, it came just to the top of the design here,—and it does yet. Yes, it's just where it was."

"Carter! I call that spying!"

He turned back to her without temper. "I call it looking after my friend," he said gently. "I don't suppose you've let him tell you very much about what happened at college?"

"No, Carter. What's the use of it, now? He wrote it all to me, but the letter must have passed me. It's a closed chapter now."

"I hope to God it will stay closed," he said, haggardly. "But I'm afraid, Honor; I'm horribly afraid for you."

"I'm not afraid, Carter,—for myself or for Jimsy." She got up and walked to the window; she was aware that she hated the dimness of the *sala*; she wanted the honest heat of the sun. "Look!" she said, gladly. Carter limped slowly to join her. Jimsy King was swinging toward them through the brazen three o'clock glare, his Yaqui Juan by his side. They were a sightly and eye-filling pair. They might have been done in bronze for studies of Yesterday and To-day. "Look!" said Honor again. "Oh, Carter, do you think any—any horrible dead trait—any clammy dead hand—can reach up out of the grave to pull him down?"

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Carter was silent.

A high and cleanly anger rose in the girl. "Carter, I don't want to hurt you,—oh, I know I hurt you all the time, in one way, and I can't help that,—I don't want to be unkind, but—are you sure it isn't because you—care—for me that you have this hopeless feeling about Jimsy?" She faced him squarely and made him meet her eyes. "Carter! Tell me."

His unhappy gaze struggled with her level look and slipped away. "Of course I want you myself, Honor. I want you—horribly, unbearably, but I do honestly feel it's wrong for you to marry Jimsy King."

"But, Carter—see how nearly his father won out! Every one says that if his mother had lived—And his Uncle Richard! He's absolutely free from it, now. And the very look of Jimsy is enough to show you——"

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But Carter had turned and was staring moodily at the decanter. "It comes so suddenly, Honor ... with such frightful unexpectedness. Remember, when we were youngsters, the World's Biggest Snake, 'Samson,'—exhibited in a vacant store on Main Street, and how keen we all were about him?"

Honor kindled to the memory. "I adored him. He had a head like a nice setter's and he wasn't cold or slimy a bit!"

"Remember what the man told us about his hunger? How he'd go three months without anything, and then devour twenty live rabbits and chickens and cats?"

She nodded, frowning. "I know. It was awful."

"But the point was the suddenness. They never knew when the hunger would seize him. The fellow said that it came like a flash. He was gentle as a lamb for weeks on end—and then it came. He'd pounce on the keeper's pet rabbit—his dog—the man himself if he were within reach. He was an utterly changed creature; he was just—an *appetite*." He stood staring somberly at the decanter. "That's the way it comes, Honor."

It seemed to be getting dimmer and dimmer in the *sala*. Honor found herself wishing with all her heart for her stepfather. Stephen Lorimer would know how to answer; how to parry,—to combat this thing. She felt her own weapons clumsy and blunt, but such as they were she would use them.

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"But it isn't coming ever again, Carter! I tell you it isn't coming! And I want you to stop saying and thinking that it is! Now I'm going to Jimsy!"

In the wide out-of-doors, under the unbelievably blue sky and the stinging sun, with Jimsy and Yaqui Juan, life was sound and whole again. The Indian, tall as a pine, looked at her with eyes of respectful adoration and smiled his slow, melancholy smile, as she swung off with the boy, down the path which led to the old well.

"Juan approves of me, doesn't he?" said Honor, contentedly.

"Of course; you're my woman!" She loved his happy impudence. "Aren't you, Skipper?" They had passed the twist in the path—the path which was like a moist green tunnel through the tropic jungle—which hid them from the house and she halted and went swiftly into his arms.

"Yes, Jimsy! *Yes!* And—I've been stingy and mean to you but I won't be, any more. Carter must just—stand things."

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"*Skipper!*" He wasn't facile with words, Jimsy King, but he was able to make himself clear.

"Jimsy, isn't it wonderful—the all-rightness of everything? Being together again, and——"

"Going to be together always! And my job waiting! Isn't the old boy a wonder? I saw him, just now. He says he's heard from Mexico City and it's O. K. to start Thursday. They're going to send the escort."

"In two days," said Honor, blissfully, "we'll be on our way home! Jimsy, in two days!"

But in two days dizzyingly, terrifyingly much had happened. The pleasant little comedy of life at *El Pozo* had changed to melodrama, crude and strident. They had been attacked by a band of *insurrectos*, a wing of Villa's hectic army, presumably; the *peóns*, with the exception of the house servants and Yaqui Juan, had gone gleefully over to the enemy; Richard King had been wounded in his hot-headed defense of his *hacienda*, shot through the shoulder, and was running a temperature; the telephone wires were cut; infinitely worse than all, the besiegers had taken possession of the well and they were entirely without water.

There had been, of course, the usual supply in the house at the time of the attack and it had been made to last as long as was humanly possible, the lion's share going to the wounded man, but they had arrived, now, at the point of actual suffering. His rôle of helpless inaction was an intolerable one for Jimsy King to play. To know that—less than a quarter of a mile away, down the moist green path through the tropic verdure—was the well; to see Honor's dry lips and strained eyes, Carter's deathly pallor, to hear his uncle, out of his head, mercifully, most of the time, begging for water, meant a constant battle with himself not to rush out, to make one frantic try at least, but he knew that the deeper courage of patient waiting was required of him. They could only conjecture what the invaders meant to do,—whether they intended to have them die of thirst, whether they meant to rush the house when it suited their pleasure—raggedly fortified and guarded by Jimsy and Carter and the half dozen of the faithful. Jimsy had talked the latter probability over steadily with Honor and she understood.

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"Jimsy," she managed not to let her teeth chatter, "it's like a play or—or a Wild West tale, isn't it? Like a 'Frank Merriwell'—remember when you used to adore those things?"

"No, Skipper, it's not like a 'Frank Merriwell'; he could always *do* something...." Jimsy's strong teeth ground together.

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"Yes—'Blooley, blooley! Fifteen more redskins bit the dust!'"

"Skipper, you *wonder!* You brick!"

"Jimsy, I—there's no use talking about things that may never happen, because *of course* help will get here, but if it should not—if they should rush us, and we couldn't keep them out"—her hoarse voice faltered but her eyes held his—"you won't—you wouldn't let them—take me, Jimsy?"

"No, Skipper."

"Promise, Jimsy?"

"Promise, Skipper. 'Cross my heart!'" The old good foolish words of the old safe days, here, now, in this hideous and garish present!

With that pledge she was visibly able to give herself to a livelier hope. "But of course Yaqui Juan got through to the Grants' *hacienda!* Can you imagine him failing us, Jimsy?"

He shook his head. "He'll make it if any man living could." The Indian had slipped through the *insurrectos* in the first hour, as soon as it had been known that the wires were cut. Unless the Grants, too, were besieged, they would be able to telephone for help for *El Pozo*, and if they were likewise in duress, Yaqui Juan would go on to the next *rancho*,—on and on until he could set the wheels of rescue in motion. "I wish to God I had his job. *Doing something—*"

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Carter came into the *sala*. He was terrifyingly white but with an admirable composure. "Steady, old boy," he said, putting his frail hand on Jimsy's shoulder. "Sit tight! We depend on you. And you're doing"—he looked at the decanter, as if measuring its contents with his eye—"gloriously, splendidly, old son! I know the strain you're under. You're a bigger man even than I thought you were, Jimsy."

Honor went away to sit with Mrs. King and the sick man and both boys stared unhappily after her. "If Skipper were only out of this—" Jimsy groaned.

"And whose fault is it that she's in it?" Carter snarled. Two red spots sprang into his white cheeks.

"Why—Cart'!" Jimsy backed away from him, staring.

"Whose fault is it, I say?" Carter followed him. "If she hadn't been terrified over you, if she hadn't the insane idea of duty and loyalty to you, would she have come? Would she?"

Jimsy King sat down and looked at him, aghast. "Good Lord, Cart'—that's the truth! That shows what a mutt I am. It hasn't struck me before. It's all my fault."

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"Whatever happens to Honor—*whatever happens to her*—and death wouldn't be the worst thing, would it?—it's your fault. Do you hear what I say? It's all your fault!" In all the years since he had known him Jimsy had never seen Carter Van Meter like this,—cool Carter, with his little elegancies of dress and manner, his studied detachment. This was a different person altogether,—hot-eyed, white-lipped, snarling. "Your fault if she dies here, dies of thirst; your fault if they get in here and carry her off, those filthy brutes out there."

"They'll never ... get her," said Jimsy King. His face was scarlet and he was breathing hard and clenching and unclenching his hands.

"Yes," Carter sneered, "yes! I know what you mean! You feel very heroic about it. You feel like a hero in a movie, don't you? Noble of you, isn't it? Slay the heroine with your own hands rather than let her—"

"Oh, for God's sake, Cart'!" Jimsy got up and came toward him. "Cut it out! What's the good of talking like that? We're in it now, all of us, and we've got to stick it out. I know it's harder on you because you're not strong, but—"

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"Damn you! 'Not strong—' Not built like an ox—muscles in my brain instead of my legs! Because I

cared for something else besides rolling around in the mud with a leather ball in my arms—"

"Key down, old boy." Jimsy was cool now, unresentful; he understood. Poor old Cart' ... he couldn't stand much suffering.

"That's how you got Honor, when she was a child, with no sense of values, but you haven't held her! You can't hold her."

"Cart', I'm not going to get sore at you. I know you're about all in. You don't know what you're saying."

"Don't I? Don't I? You listen to me. Honor Carmody never really loved you; it was a silly boy-and-girl, calf love affair, and when she realized it she stood by, of course,—she's that sort. She kept the letter of her promise, but she couldn't keep the spirit."

"Key down, old top," said Jimsy King again, grinning. "I'm not going to get sore, but I don't want to use up my breath laughing at you. *Skipper*—going back on me!" He did laugh, ringingly.

"She hasn't gone back on you; except in her heart. Good God, Jimsy King, what do you think you are to hold a girl like that—with her talent and her success and her future? She's only stuck by you because it was her creed, that's all." [Pg 196]

"Look here, Cart', I'm not going to argue with you. It's not on the square to Skipper even to talk about it, but don't be a crazy fool. Would she have come to me here—from Italy, if she didn't—"

"Yes. Yes, she would! She's pledged to see it through—to stand by you as all the other miserable women have stood by the men of your family,—if you're cad enough to let her."

That caught and stuck. "If I'm—cad enough to let her," said Jimsy in a curiously flat voice. But the mood passed in a flash. "It's no use talking like that, Carter. Of course I know I'm not good enough or brainy enough—or *anything* enough for Skipper, but she thinks I am, and—"

"You poor fool, she doesn't think so. I tell you she's only standing by because she said she would. I tell you she cares for some one else."

"That's a lie," said Jimsy King with emphasis but without passion. The statement was too grotesque for any feeling over it.

Carter stopped raving and snarling and became very cool and coherent. "I think I can prove it to you," he said, quietly. [Pg 197]

"You can't," said Jimsy, turning and walking toward the door.

"Are you afraid to listen?" He asked it very quietly.

"No," said Jimsy King, wheeling. "I'm not afraid. Go ahead. Get it off your chest."

"Well, in the first place,—hasn't she kept you at arm's length here? Hasn't she insisted on being with other people all the time,—on having me with you?"

"Cart', I hate to say it, but that's because she's sorry for you."

"And for herself."

The murky dimness of the *sala* was pressing in on Jimsy as it had on the girl, that other day. He was worn with vigil and torn with thirst, sick with dread of what might any moment come to them,—with remorse for bringing Honor there, tormented with his helplessness to save her. Even at his best he was no match for the other's cleverness and now he was in the dust, blaming and hating himself. He stood there in silence, listening, and Carter's hoarse voice, Carter's plausible words, went on and on. "But I don't believe it," Jimsy would say at intervals. "She doesn't care for you, Cart'. She's all mine, Skipper is. She doesn't care for you." [Pg 198]

"Wait!" Carter took out his wallet of limp leather with his initials on it in delicately wrought gold letters and opened it. "I didn't mean to show you this, but I see that I must. It was last summer. I—I lost my head the night before we sailed, and let Honor see.... Then I asked her.... I didn't say, 'Will you marry me?' because I knew there was no hope of that so long as she thought there was a chance of saving you by standing by you. I asked her—something else. And she sent me this wire to the boat at Naples."

Jimsy did not put out his hand to take the slip of paper which Carter unfolded and smoothed and held toward him. It was utterly still in the *sala* but from an upper room came the sound of Richard King's voice, faint, thick, begging for water, and from somewhere in the distance a muffled shot ... three shots.

Carter held the message up before Jimsy's eyes:

Carter Van Meter care Purser S. S. *Canopic Naples*

Yes.

HONOR.

If Stephen Lorimer, far to the north in the safe serenity of the old house of South Figueroa Street, could have envisaged the three of them that day his chief concern would not have been for their bodily danger. It would have seemed to him that the intangible cloud settling down over them was a more tragic and sinister thing than the *insurrectos* besieging them, than the thirst which was cracking their lips and swelling and blackening their tongues.

He was to remember and marvel, long afterward, that his thought on that date had tugged uneasily toward them all day and evening. Conditions, so far as he knew, were favorable; the escort for the personage would be a stout one and under his wing the boy and girl would be safe, and James King was waiting for them, spinning out his thread of life until they should come to him. Nevertheless, he found himself acutely unhappy regarding them, aware of an urgent and instant need of being with them.

They had never, in all their blithe young lives, needed him so cruelly. He could not have driven back the bandits, but he could have driven back the clouds of doubt and misery and misunderstanding; he could not have given them water for their parched throats but he could have given them to drink of the waters of understanding; he could have relieved the drought in their wrung young hearts. He would have seen, as only a looker-on could see, what was happening to them. He would have yearned over Honor, fronting the bright face of danger so gallantly but stunned and crushed by the change in Jimsy, over Jimsy himself, setting out to do an incredibly stupid, incredibly noble deed, absolutely convinced by the sight of her one-word telegram that she loved Carter (and humbly realizing that she might well love Carter, the brilliant Carter, better than his unilluminated self), seeing the thing simply and objectively as he would be sure to do, deciding on his course and pursuing it as definitely as he would take a football over the line for a touchdown. He would even have yearned over Carter, at the very moment when the youth fulfilled his ancient distrust of him. He would have understood as even Carter himself did not, by what gradual and destructive processes he had arrived at the point of his outbreak to Jimsy; would have realized in how far his physical suffering—ininitely harder for him than for the others—had broken down his moral fiber; how utterly his very real love for Honor had engulfed every other thought and feeling. And he would have seen, in the last analysis, that Carter was sincere; he had come at last to believe his own fabrications; he honestly believed that Honor's betrothed would go the way of all the "Wild Kings"; that Honor would be ruining her life in marrying him.

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But Stephen Lorimer was hundreds and thousands of miles away from them that day of their bitter need, making tentative notes for a chapter on young love for his unborn book, listening to the inevitable mocking-bird in the Japanese garden, waiting for Mildred Lorimer to give him his tea ... wearing the latest of his favorites among her gowns....

Madeline King was spent with her vigil and Honor had coaxed her to lie down for an hour and let her take the chair beside Richard King's bed.

"Very well, my dear. I'll rest for an hour. I'll do it because I know I may want my strength more, later on." She seemed to have aged ten years since the day Honor had come to *El Pozo*, but she came of fighting blood, this English wife of Jimsy's uncle. "I'm frightfully sorry you're let in for this, Honor, but it's no end of a comfort, having you. Call me if he rouses. I daresay I shan't really sleep."

Honor sat on beside him, fanning him until her arm ached, resting it until he stirred again, trying to wet her dry lips with her thickened tongue. She wasn't thinking; she was merely waiting, standing it. It was a relief not to talk, but she must talk when she was with the boys again; it helped to keep them up, to keep an air of normality about things.

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Jimsy King had read the message Carter held up to him and gone away without comment, and Carter had stayed on in the *sala*. It was almost an hour before Jimsy came back. Honor's stepfather would have marked and marveled at the change so brief a little space of time had been able to register in the bonny boy's face. The flesh seemed to have paled and receded and the bones seemed more sharply modeled; more insistent; and the eyes looked very old and at the same time pitifully young. He was very quiet and sure of himself.

"Jimsy," said Carter, "I shouldn't have told you, *now*, but I went off my head."

Jimsy nodded. "The time doesn't matter, Cart'. I just want to ask you one thing, straight from the shoulder. I've been thinking and thinking ... trying to take it in. Sometimes I seem to get it for a minute, that Skipper cares for you instead of me, and then it's gone again. All I can seem to hang on to is that telegram." The painful calm of his face flickered and broke up for an instant and there was an answering disturbance in Carter's own. "I keep seeing that ... all the time. But there's no use talking about it. What I want to ask you is this, Cart'"—he went on slowly in his hoarse and roughened voice—"you honestly think Skipper is sticking to me only because she thinks it's the thing to do? Because she thinks she must keep her word?"

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Carter swallowed hard and tried to moisten his aching throat, and he did not look at his friend.

"Is that what you honestly believe, Cart'?"

Carter brought his eyes back with an effort and his heart contracted. Jimsy King—*Jimsy King*—

the boy he had envied and hated and loved by turns all these years; Jimsy King, idolized, adored in the old safe days—the old story book days—

King! King! King!
K-I-N-G, KING!
G-I-N-K, GINK!
He's the King Gink!
He's the King Gink!
He's the King Gink!
K-I-N-G, King! KING!

The Jimsy King, the young prince who had had everything that all the wealth of Ali Baba's cave couldn't compass for Carter Van Meter ... standing here before him now, his face drained of its color and joy, begging him for a hope. There was a long moment when he hesitated, when the forces within him fought breathlessly and without quarter, but—long ago Stephen Lorimer had said of him—"*there's nothing frail about his disposition ... his will doesn't limp.*" He wrenched his gaze away before he answered, but he answered steadily.

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"That is what I believe."

Jimsy was visibly and laboriously working it out. "Then, she's only sticking to me because she thinks I'm worth saving. If she thought I was a regular 'Wild King,' if she believed what her mother and a lot of other people have always believed, she'd let go of me."

"I believe she would," said Carter.

"Then," said Jimsy King, "it's really pretty simple. She's only got to realize—to *see*—that I'm not worth hanging on to; that it's too late. That's all."

"What do you mean?"

He walked over to the little table and picked up the decanter of whisky and looked at it, and the scorn and loathing in his ravaged young face were things to marvel at, but Honor Carmody, coming into the room at that moment, could not see his expression. His back was toward her and she saw the decanter in his hand.

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"*Jimsy!*" She said it very low, catching her breath.

His first motion was to put it down but instead he held it up to the fast fading light at the window and grinned. "It's makin' faces at me, Skipper!"

"*Jimsy,*" she said again, and this time he put it down.

Honor began hastily to talk. "Do you think Juan will try to come back, or will he wait and come with the soldiers?"

"He'll come back," said Jimsy with conviction. "He must have found the wires down at the first place he tried, or he'd have been here before this. Yes—as soon as he's got his message through, he'll come back to us. I hope to God he brings water."

"But did he realize about the well? He got away at the very first, you know, and they weren't holding the well, then."

"He'll have his own canteen, won't he?" said Jimsy crossly.

Honor's eyes mothered him. "Mrs. King really slept," she said cheerfully. "She said she had a good nap, and dreamed!" She sat down in a low chair and made herself relax comfortably; only her eyes were tense. She never did fussy things with her hands, Honor Carmody; no one had ever seen her with a needle or a crochet hook. She was either doing things, vital, definite things which required motion, or she was still, and she rested people who were near her. "Well, he'll be here soon then," she said contentedly. "And so will the soldiers. Our Big Boss will have us on his mind, Jimsy. He'll figure out some way to help us. Just think—in another day—perhaps in another hour, this will all be over, like a nightmare, and we'll be back to regular living again. And *won't* we be glad that we all stood it so decently?" It was a stiff, small smile with her cracked lips but a stout one. "You know, I'm pretty proud of all of us! And won't Stepper be proud of us? And your dad, Jimsy, and your mother, Cartie!" Her kind eyes warmed. "I'm glad she hasn't had to know about it until we're all safe again." She was so hoarse that she had to stop and rest and she looked hopefully from one to the other, clearly expecting them to take up the burden of talk. But they were silent and presently she went on again. "You know, boys, it's like being in a book or a play, isn't it? We're—*characters*—now, not just plain people! I suppose I'm the leading lady (though Mrs. King's the real *heroine*) and we've got two heroes and no villain. The *insurrectos* are the villain—the villain in bunches." Suddenly she sat forward in her chair, her eyes brightening and a little color flooding her face. "Boys, it's our song come true! Now I know why I always got so thrilled over that second verse,—even the first time Stepper read it to us,—remember how it just bowled me over? And it seemed so remote from anything that could touch our lives,—yet here we are, in just such a tight place." They were listening now. "There isn't any desert or regiment or gatling, and Mr. King isn't dead, only dreadfully hurt, but it fits, just the same! We've got this thirst to stand ... and it's a good deal, isn't it? Those *insurrectos* down there,—planning we don't know what, perhaps to rush the house any moment—

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The River of Death has brimmed his banks;
And England's far, and Honor's a name—

That means to us that L. A. is far, and South Figueroa Street ... all the safe happy things that didn't seem wonderful then...."

"*Honor's a name*," said Jimsy under his breath.

"Oh," said the girl, "I never noticed that before! Isn't that funny? Well—

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The voice of a school boy rallies the ranks!

That fits! And won't we be thankful all our lives—all our snug, safe, prosy lives—that we were sporting now?— That we all played the game?" Her eyes were on Jimsy, reassuring him, staying him. "When this is all over—"

He cut roughly into her sentence. "Oh, for God's sake, Skipper, let's not talk!"

Again he had to bear the mothering of her understanding eyes. "All right, Jimsy. We won't talk, then. We'll sit here together"—she changed to the chair nearest his and put her hand on his arm—"and wait for Juan and—"

He sprang to his feet. "I wish you'd leave me alone!" he said. "I wish you'd go upstairs and stay with Aunt Maddy and Uncle Rich'. I want to be by myself."

She did not stir. "I think I'll stay with you, Jimsy."

His voice was ugly now. "When I don't want you? When I tell you I'd rather be alone?"

Honor was still for a long moment. She rose and went to the door but she turned to look at him, a steady, intent scrutiny. "All right, Jimsy. I'll go. I'll leave you alone. I'll leave you alone because—I know I *can* leave you alone." She seemed to have forgotten Carter's presence. She held up the hand which wore the old Italian ring with the hidden blue stone of constancy. "I'm 'holding hard,' Jimsy."

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Soon after dark Yaqui Juan came. He had been waiting for three hours, trying to get past the sentries; it had been impossible while there was any light. He was footsore and weary and had only a little water in his canteen, but he had found the telephone wires still up at the second *hacienda*, the owner had got the message off for him, and help was assuredly on the way to them. There was the off chance, of course, that the soldiers might be held up by another wing of the *insurrectos*, but there was every reason to hope for their arrival next day. Jimsy King sent the Yaqui up to Honor with the canteen, and the Indian returned to say that the Señorita had not touched one drop but had given it to the master.

Carter dragged himself away to his room and Jimsy and Yaqui Juan talked long together in the quiet *sala*. It was a cramped and halting conversation with the Indian's scant English and the American's halting Spanish; sometimes they were unable to understand each other, but they came at last to some sort of agreement, though Juan shook his head mutinously again and again, murmuring—"No, no! Señor Don Diego! No!"

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It was almost midnight when Jimsy called them all down into the *sala*. They came, wondering, one by one, Carter, Mrs. King,—Richard King had fallen asleep after his half dozen swallows of water—and Honor, and Josita, her head muffled in her *rebozo*, her brown fingers busy with her beads.

Jimsy King was standing in the middle of the room, standing insecurely, his legs far apart, the decanter in his hand, the decanter which had been more than half full when Honor left the room and had now less than an inch of liquor in it. Yaqui Juan, his face sullen, his eyes black and bitter, crouched on the floor, his arms about his knees.

Honor did not speak at all. She just stood still, looking at Jimsy until it seemed as if she were all eyes. "*It comes so suddenly*,"—Carter had told her—"like the boa constrictor's hunger ... *and then he was just—an appetite*."

"Ladies'n gem'mum," said Jimsy, thickly, "goin' shing you lil' song!" Then, in his hoarse and baffled voice he sang Stanford's giddy old saga, "The Son of a Gambolier."

They all stiffened with horror and disgust. Mrs. King wept and Josita mumbled a frightened prayer, and Carter, red and vehement, went to him and tried to take the decanter away from him. Only Honor Carmody made no sign.

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I'm a son of a son of a son of a gun of a son of a Gambolier,

sang Jimsy King. He looked at every one but Honor.

Like every honest fellow, I love my lager beer—

—"And my 'skee!" he patted the decanter.

Madeline King put her arms about Honor. "Come away, my dear," she said. "Come upstairs."

"No," Jimsy protested. "Don' go 'way. Got somep'n tell you. Shee this fool Injun here? Know wha' he's goin' do? Goin' slide out'n creep down to ol' well. Says *insur—insur-rectos* all pretty drunk

now ... pretty sleepy.... Fool Injun's goin' take three—four—'leven canteens ... bring water back for you. Not f' me! *I* got some'n better. 'Sides, he'll get killed ... nice'n dead ... *fancy* dead ... cut ears off ... cut tongue out firs'! Not f' me! *I'm* goin' sleep pret' soon. Firs' I'll shing you lil' more!"
Again the rasping travesty of melody:

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Some die of drinkin' whisky,
Some die of drinkin' beer!
Some die of diabetes,
An' some——

"Shut up, you drunken fool!" said Carter, furiously.

"Oh," said Jimsy, blinking his eyes rapidly, bowing deeply. "Ladies present. I shee. My mishtake. My mishtake, ladies! Well, guesh I go sleep now. Come on. Yac', put me to bed 'fore you go. Give you lil' treat. All work'n no play makes Yac' a dull boy!" He roared over his own wit. The Indian, his face impassive, had risen to his feet and now Jimsy cast himself into his arms and insisted on kissing him good-night, clinging all the while to the decanter with its half inch of whisky.

Carter wrenched it away from him. "You'll kill yourself," he said, in cold disgust.

"Well," said his friend, reasonably, "ishn't that the big idea? Wouldn't you rizzer drink yourself to death'n die of thirst?"

They were making for the door now in a zigzag course, and when they passed Honor, Jimsy stayed their progress. He held out his hand and spoke to her, but he did not meet her eyes. "Gimme ring," he said, crossly.

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"What do you mean?" said Honor.

"Gimme back ring ... busted word ... busted engagement ... want ring *anyway* ... maybe nozzer girl ... *you* can't tell!" His hoarse voice rose querulously. "Gimme ring, I shay!"

Honor shrank back from him against Mrs. King. "Jimsy," she said, "when the boy that gave me this ring comes and asks me for it, he can have it. *You* can't!"

His legs seemed to give way beneath him, at that, and Yaqui Juan half led, half dragged him out of the room.

Mrs. King wept again but Honor's eyes were dry. Carter started to speak to her but she stopped him. "Please, Carter ... I can't ... talk. I think I'd like to be alone."

"Oh, my dear, please come up with me," Mrs. King begged, "it's so cold here, and——"

"I have to be alone," said Honor in her worn voice.

"Then you must have this," said the older woman, finding comfort in wrapping her in her own *serape*. It was a gay thing, striped in red and white and green, the Mexican colors; it looked as if it had been made to wear in happy days.

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They went away and left her alone in the *sala*. She didn't know how long she had sat there when she saw a muffled figure crawling across the veranda. She opened the door and stepped out, nodding to the *peón* on guard there, leaning on his gun. "Juan?" she called softly.

The crouching, cringing figure hesitated. "Si," came the soft whisper. He kept his head shrouded. She knew that he was sick with shame for the lad he had worshiped; he did not want to meet her gaze. She could understand that. It did not seem to her that she could ever meet any one's eyes again—kind Mrs. King's, Carter's—her dear Stepper's. Suddenly it came to her with a positive sense of relief and escape that perhaps there would be no need for facing any one after to-night.... Perhaps this was to be the last night of all nights. It might well be, when Jimsy King slept in a drunken stupor and a Yaqui Indian slave went out with his life in his hands to help them. She crossed the veranda and leaned down and laid her hand on the covered head. Her throat was so swollen now that she could hardly make herself heard. "*Tu es amigo leal, Juan*," she said. "Good friend; good friend!" Then in her careful Spanish—"Go with God!"

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He had been always an impassive creature, Yaqui Juan, his own personal sufferings added to the native stoicism of his race, but he made an odd, smothered sound now, and caught up the trailing end of her bright *serape* and pressed his face against it for an instant. Then he crept away into the soft blackness of the tropic night and Honor went back into the empty *sala*. She wished that she had seen his face; she was mournfully sure she would never see it again. It did not seem humanly possible for any one to go into the very midst of their besiegers encamped about the well, fill the canteens and return alive, but it was a gallant and splendid try, and she would have liked a memory of his grave face. It would have blotted out the look of Jimsy King's face, singing his tippy song. She thought she would keep on seeing that as long as she lived, and that made it less terrible to think that she might not live many more hours.

They would not leave her alone. Carter came to stay with her and she sent him away, and then Madeline King came, her very blue eyes red rimmed and deep with understanding, but Honor could not talk with her nor listen to her. She went away, shaking her head, and Josita came in her place. Honor did not mind the little Mexican serving woman. She did not try to talk to her. She just crouched on the floor at her feet and prayers slipped from her tongue and her fingers:

Padre Nuestra qui estás en los cielos—

and presently:

Santa Maria—

Honor found herself listening a little scornfully. Was there indeed a Father in the heavens or anywhere else who concerned Himself about things like this? Josita seemed to think so. She was in terror, but she was clinging to something ... somewhere.... Honor decided that she did not mind the murmur of her voice; she could go on with her thinking just the same. *Jimsy. Jimsy King* —Jimsy—"Wild"—King. What was she going to do? What had she promised Stepper that day on the way to the train? It all came back to her like a scene on the screen—the busy streets—the feel of the wheel in her hands again—Stepper's slow voice—"But, if the worst should be true, if the boy really has gone to pieces, you won't marry him?" And her own words—"No; if Jimsy should be —like his father—I wouldn't marry him, Stepper. There shouldn't be any *more* 'Wild Kings.'" [Pg 217]

That was her promise to her stepfather, her best friend. But what had been her promise to Jimsy, that day on the shore below the Malibou Ranch when they sat in the little pocket of rocks and sand and sun, and he had given her the ring with the clasped hands? Hadn't she said—"I do believe you, Jimsy. I'll never stop believing you!" Yes, but how was she to go on believing that he would not do the thing she saw him do? How compass that? Her love and loyalty began to fling themselves against that solid wall of ugly fact and to fall back, bruised, breathless.

Jimsy King of the hard muscles and wingèd heels, the essence of strength and sunny power; Jimsy King, collapsed in the arms of Yaqui Juan, failing her in the hour of her direst need. Jimsy, her lover, who had promised her she should never go alive into those dark and terrible hands ... Jimsy, who could not lift a finger now to defend her, or to put her beyond their grasp. It became intolerable to sit still. She sprang up and began to walk swiftly from wall to wall of the big room, her heels tapping sharply on the smooth red tiles. Josita lifted mournful eyes to stare at her for an instant and then returned to her beads. Honor paused and looked out of the window. She could see nothing through the inky blackness. Perhaps Yaqui Juan was creeping back to them now, the canteens of precious water hung about his neck,—and perhaps he was dead. There had been no shots, but they would not necessarily shoot him. There were other ... awfuller ways. And Jimsy King was asleep. What would he be like when he awakened, when he came to himself again? Could he ever face her? Would he *live*?... And suppose she cast him off,—then, what? She would go back to Italy, to the mountainous *Signorina*. She would embrace her warmly and there would emanate from her the faint odor of expensive soap and rare and costly scents, and she would pat her with a puffy hand and say—"So, my good small one? The sun has set, no? Ah, then, it does not signify whether one feel joy or sorrow, so long as one feels. To feel ... that is to live, and to live is to sing!" And she would go to work again, and sing in concert, and take the place offered to her in the opera. And some day, when she went for a holiday to Switzerland (she supposed she would still go on holidays; people did, no matter what had happened to them) she would meet Ethel Bruce-Drummond, hale and frank as the wind off the snow, and she would say—"But where's your boy? I say, you haven't thrown him over, have you?" [Pg 218]

Well, could you throw over what fell away from you? Could you? She realized that she was gripping the old ring with the thumb and fingers of her right hand, literally "holding hard." Was this what James King had meant? Had Jeanie King, Jimsy's firm-chinned Scotch mother who so nearly saved her man, had she held on in times like this? Surely no "Wild King" had ever failed his woman as Jimsy had failed her, in the face of such hideous danger. But did that absolve her? After all (her love and loyalty flung themselves again against the wall and it seemed to give, to sway) *was* it Jimsy who had failed her? Wasn't it the taint in his blood, the dead hands reaching up out of the grave, the cruel certainty that had hemmed him in all his days,—the bitter man-made law that he must follow in the unsteady footsteps of his forbears? [Pg 219]

It wasn't Jimsy! Not *himself*; not the real boy, not the real man. It was the pitiful counterpart of him. The real Jimsy was there, underneath, buried for the moment,—buried forever unless she stood by! (The wall was swaying now, giving way, crumbling.) Her pride in him was gone, perhaps, and something of her triumphant faith, but her loyalty was there and her love was there, bruised and battered and breathless; not the rosy, untried, laughing love of that far-away day in the sand and sun; a grave love, scarred, weary, argus-eyed. (The wall was down now, a heap of stones and mortar.) She went upstairs to Jimsy's room and knocked on the door. There was no answer. She knocked again, and after an instant she tried to open it. It was locked, and she could not rouse him, and a sense of bodily sickness overcame her for the moment.

Madeline King came out of her husband's room and hurried to her. "Ah, I wouldn't, my dear," she said. "Wait until he—wait a little while." She put her arm about her and pulled her gently away.

"I'll wait," said Honor in her rasping whisper. "I'll wait for him, no matter how long it is." [Pg 221]

The Englishwoman's eyes filled. "My dear!" she said. "Do you mind sitting with Richard a few moments? I find it steadies me to move about a bit."

"Of course I'll sit with him," said Honor, docilely, "but I'll always be waiting for Jimsy." She sat down beside Richard King and took up the fan.

"He's been better ever since that bit of water," said his wife, thankfully. "And Juan will fetch us more! Good soul! If ever we come out of this, Rich' must do something very splendid for him."

Carter went down into the *sala*. Honor had asked him to leave her, but he found that he could not stay away from her; the remembrance of her eyes when she looked at Jimsy was intolerable in the loneliness of his own room. The big living room was empty but he supposed Honor would be back presently, and he sat down in an easy chair and leaned his head back and stared at the ceiling. He had arrived, very nearly, at the end of his endurance. He knew it himself and he was husbanding his failing strength as best he could. All his life, at times of illness or stress, he had been subject to fainting fits; miraculously, in these dreadful days, he had not fainted once, but now waves were rising about him, almost submerging him. If the Indian came soon with the water ... if he could once drink his fill ... if he could drink even a few drops ... he could hold out. But the Indian had been gone for more than an hour, and there was grave doubt of his ever coming back. [Pg 222]

His eyes, skimming the ceiling, dropped to the shelves of books which ran about the room and rose almost to meet it. They came to a startled halt on a vase of ferns on a high shelf. A vase of ferns. There must have been water in it. *Perhaps there was water in it now!* He was so weak that it was a tremendous effort for him to drag himself out of his chair and across the room, to climb up on the book ladder and reach for it. He grew so dizzy that it seemed as if he must drop it. He shook it. *Water!* He lifted out the ferns and looked. It was almost full. He stood there with it in his hand, his eyes on the doors. He wanted with all his heart to call Honor, to share it. His heart and his mind wanted to call her, but his hands lifted the vase to his dry lips and he drank in great gulps. He stopped himself before he was half satisfied. He was equal to that. Then he put the ferns back in the vase and the vase back on the shelf and went into the hall and called upstairs to her.

Honor came at once. "Oh, Carter, has Juan come?" [Pg 223]

"No, not yet! But I think—I hope—I've made a discovery! Look!" He pointed to the vase.

She caught her breath. "There might be water in it?"

"Yes, I'm sure there is." Again, more steadily this time, he mounted the little sliding book ladder and reached for the vase, and Honor stood watching him with wide eyes, her cracked lips parted.

"*Water?*" she whispered.

He nodded solemnly, shaking the tall vase for her to hear the heartening sound of it. When he stood on the floor he held it toward her. "You first, Honor."

"No." She was trembling. "We'll pour it out into a pitcher. If there's enough to divide, we'll all have some. If there's just a little, we'll give it to Mr. King." She went away, walking a little unsteadily, putting out a hand here and there against the wall or the back of a chair, and in a moment she came back with a tall glass pitcher. "Careful, Cartie ... mustn't spill a drop...."

There was less than a cupful of dark, stale water, with bits of fern fronds floating in it.

"Only enough for him," said Honor, her chin quivering. "Oh, Cartie, I'm so thirsty ... so crazy thirsty...." [Pg 224]

"You must take it yourself," said Carter, sternly. "Every drop." He held the pitcher up to her.

Honor hesitated. "Cartie, I couldn't trust myself to drink it out of the pitcher ... I'm afraid ... but I'll pour out about two teaspoonfuls for each of us...." She poured an inch of water into a tiny glass. "You first, Carter."

"No," said Carter, "I'm not going to touch it. It's for you and the Kings."

"Carter! You're wonderful!" She drank her pitiful portion in three sips. "There ... now you, please, Cartie! Just one swallow!"

But Carter shook his head. "No; I don't need it. Shall I take this to Mrs. King?"

"Yes." Her sad eyes knighted him.

Carter took the pitcher of water to Mrs. King without touching a drop of it and helped her to strain the fern bits out of it through a handkerchief before she began to give it to her husband in spoonfuls. With the first sip he ceased his uneasy murmuring and she smiled up at the boy. "Thank you, Carter. It's very splendid of you. Won't you take a sip for yourself?"

Carter said he did not need it.

"You do look fresher, really. You've stood this thing extraordinarily well. Did you give Honor some?" [Pg 225]

"She would take only a taste."

Madeline King's eyes filled. "This is a black night for her, Carter. The thirst—and the *insurrectos*—are the least of it for Honor."

Carter's eyes were bleak. "But she had to know it some time. She had to find it out, sooner or later. She couldn't have gone on with it, Mrs. King."

She sighed. "I never was so astounded, so disappointed in all my life. One simply cannot take it in. He has been so absolutely steady ever since he came down,—and so fine all through this trouble! And to fail us now, when we need him so,—with Honor in such danger—" She gave her husband the last of the water and then laid on his forehead the damp handkerchief through which she had strained it. "It will break his uncle's heart. He was no end proud of him."

"She had to know it some time," said Carter, stubbornly. "Is there anything I can do, Mrs. King?"

"Nothing, Carter."

"Then I'll go back to Honor."

Something in his expression, in the way his dry lips said it, made the woman smile pityingly. "Carter, I—I'm frightfully sorry for you, too."

He drew himself up with something of the old concealing pride. "I'm quite all right, thank you." [Pg 226]

She was not rebuffed. "You are quite all wretched," she said, "you poor lad, and I'm no end sorry, but—Carter, don't think this ill wind of Jimsy's will blow you any good."

He flushed hotly through his strained pallor.

"Ah," said the Englishwoman, gently, "you were counting on it. It's no good, Carter. It's no good. Not with Honor Carmody."

Carter did not answer her in words but there was angry denial in the tilt of his head as he limped away, and she looked after him sadly.

He found Honor limply relaxed in a long wicker chair. "Carter," she whispered, "I wish I'd asked you to give Jimsy a taste of that water."

"You think he deserves it?" He couldn't keep the sneer out of his voice.

"No," she answered him honestly. "I don't think he deserves it ... but he needs it."

The words repeated themselves over and over in the other's mind. He didn't deserve it, but he needed it. That was the way—the weak, sentimental, womanish way in which she would reason it out about herself, he supposed ... Jimsy King didn't deserve her, but he needed her. He was deep in his bitter reflections when he realized that she was speaking to him. [Pg 227]

"Cartie, I must tell you how fine I think you are! You were splendid ... about the water ... not taking any ... when I know how you're suffering." She had to speak slowly, and if Stephen Lorimer had stood out in the hall he would never have recognized his Top Step's voice. "Of course we believe help is coming ... that we'll be safe in a few hours ... but because we may not be ... this is the time for telling the truth, isn't it, Carter? I want to tell you ... how I respect you.... Once I said you were weak, when I was angry at you.... But now I know you're strong ... stronger than—Jimsy ... with the best kind of strength. I want you to know that I know that, Carty."

"*Honor!*" The truth and the lie spun round and round in his aching head; he *was* stronger than Jimsy King; he hadn't made a drunken beast of himself; suppose he had taken the first sip of the water?—He hadn't taken it all. He was a better man than Jimsy King. He made a swift motion toward her, saying her name brokenly in his choked voice, but he crumpled suddenly and slid from his chair to the floor and was still.

Honor flew to the foot of the stairs and called Mrs. King. "Carter has fainted! Will you help me?" [Pg 228]

Mrs. King called the Mexican guard in from the porch to lift him to the couch, and she and the girl fanned him and chafed his thin wrists. When he came to himself he was intensely chagrined. "I'm all right," he said impatiently, sitting up. "I wish you wouldn't bother."

"Lie still for a bit," said Mrs. King. "You've had a nasty faint."

Honor saw his painful flush. "Cartie, it's no wonder you fainted,—I feel as if I might, any minute. And I did nearly faint once, didn't I, Mrs. King? The day I arrived here—remember?" She remembered all too keenly herself ... the instant of relaxed blackness that followed on the sound of Richard King's hearty voice—"Why, the boy's all right! Ab-so-lutely all right! Isn't he, Madeline? Steady as a clock. That college nonsense—" And the contrast between that day of faith triumphant and this dark night was so sharp and cruel that she could not talk any more, even to comfort Carter. They were all silent, so that they clearly heard the unlocking, the opening, the closing of the door of Jimsy's room, and then a step—a swift, sure step upon the stair.

Then Yaqui Juan walked into the *sala*.

"*Juan!*" They sprang at him, galvanized into life and vigor at the sight of him. But he stood still, staring at them with a look of scorn and dislike, his arms folded across his chest. [Pg 229]

"*Juan,*" Mrs. King faltered,—"*no agua?*" It was incredible. He was back, safely back, untouched, not even breathing hard. Where was the water he had risked his life to bring them? The Englishwoman began to cry, childishly, whimpering. "I can't bear it ... I can't bear it ... I wanted it for Rich' ... for Rich'!"

The Indian did not speak, but his scornful, accusing eyes, raking them all, came to rest on Honor, fixing her with pitiless intensity.

The girl was shaking so that she could hardly stand; she caught hold of the back of a tall chair to steady herself. "Juan,—you came out of Señor Don Diego's room?" she whispered.

"*Si, Señorita.*" He was watching the dawning light in her face, but the sternness of his own did not soften.

"You didn't go at all," wept Mrs. King, rocking to and fro and wringing her hands. "You didn't go at all!"

"*No, Señora.*"

Honor Carmody screamed, a hoarse, exultant shout. It was as she had screamed in the old good days when Jimsy King, the ball clutched to his side, tore down the field and went over the line for a touchdown. "Jimsy went! Jimsy went! *Jimsy went!* It was Jimsy! *Jimsy!*" She flung her arms over her head, swaying unsteadily on her feet. Tears streamed from her eyes and ran down over her white cheeks and into her parched mouth. In that instant there was room for no fear, no terror; they would come later, frantic, unbearable. Now there was only pride, pride and faith and clean joy. "Jimsy! *Jimsy!*" Her legs gave way beneath her and she slipped to the floor, but she did not cease her hoarse and pitiful shouting.

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"How could he?" said Carter Van Meter. "It was impossible—in that condition! Honor, he couldn't ___"

But Yaqui Juan strode to the little table where the empty decanter stood, stooped, picked up a rough jug of decorative Mexican pottery from an under shelf. Then, pausing until he saw that all their eyes were upon him, he slowly poured its contents back into the decanter. The liquor rose and rose until it reached the exact spot which Carter had pointed out to Honor—the top of the design engraved on the glass. "*Mira!*" said the Indian, sternly.

"*God,*" said Carter Van Meter.

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"He was acting! He was acting!" wept Mrs. King.

But Jimsy's Skipper sat on the floor, waving her arms, swaying her body like a yell leader, still shouting his name in her cracked voice, and then, crazily, her eyes wide as if she visualized a field, far away, a game, a gallant figure speeding to victory, she sang:

*You can't beat L. A. High!
You can't beat L. A. High!
Use your team to get up steam
But you cant beat L. A. High!*

CHAPTER XVI

[Pg 232]

The Indian looked at Honor and the bitterness in his eyes melted a little. "*Esta una loca,*" he said.

It was quite true. She was a madwoman for the moment. They tried to control her, to calm her, but she did not see or hear them. "Let her alone," said Mrs. King. "At least she is happy, Carter. She'll realize his danger in a minute, poor thing." She turned to Yaqui Juan at the sound of his voice. He told her that he was going out after his young lord. He was going to find Señor Don Diego, alive or dead. He had promised him not to leave the locked room for two hours; he had kept his word as long as he could endure it. Señor Don Diego had had time to come back unless he had been captured. Now he, Yaqui Juan, whom the young master had once saved, would go to him, to bring him back, or to die with him. The solemn, grandiloquent words had nothing of melodrama in them, falling from his grave lips. He took no pains to conceal his deep scorn for them all.

Madeline King thought of her husband, wounded, helpless. "Oh, Juan—must you leave us? If—if something has happened to him it only means your life, too!"

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"*Voy!*" said the Indian, "*I go!*" He turned and looked again at Honor, this time with a warming pity in his bronze face. "*I will bring back your man, Señorita,*" he said in Spanish. "And this great strong one"—he pierced Carter through with his black gaze—"shall guard you till I come again." Then he smiled and flung at him that stinging Spanish proverb which runs, "In the country of the blind the one-eyed man is king!" Then he went out of the house, dropping to his hands and knees, hugging the shadows, creeping along the tunnel of tropic green which led to the ancient well.

Honor stopped her wild singing and shouting then, but she still sat on the floor, striking her hands softly together, her dry lips parted in a smile of utter peace.

"Come, Honor, take this chair!" Carter urged her, bending over her.

"I don't want a chair, Cartie," she said, gently. "I'm just waiting for Jimsy." She looked up and caught the expression on Madeline King's face. "Oh, you mustn't worry," she said, contentedly. "He'll bring him back. Yaqui Juan will. He'll bring him back *safe*. Why, what kind of a God would

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that be?—To let anything happen to him, *now?*" Her defense was impregnable.

"Let her alone," said Mrs. King again. "She'll realize, soon enough, poor child. Stay with her, Carter. I must go back to my husband." She went away with a backward, pitying glance which yet held understanding. She knew that danger and death and thirst were smaller things than shame, this wife of a King who had held hard in her day.

Carter sat down and watched her drearily. He wasn't thinking now. He was nothing at all but one burning, choking thirst, one aching resentment ... Jimsy King, who had won, after all ... who had won alive or dead.

Honor was silent for the most part but she was wholly serene. Sometimes she spoke and her speech was harder to hear than her happy stillness. "You know, Cartie, I can be glad it happened." She seemed to speak more easily now, almost as if her thirst had been slaked; her voice was clearer, steadier. "I should never have known how much I cared. It was easy enough, wasn't it, to look at my ring and talk about 'holding hard' when there wasn't really anything to hold *for*? I really found out about caring to-night ... what it means. I guess I never really loved him before to-night, Carter." She was not looking at him, hardly talking to him; she seemed rather to be thinking aloud. Even if she had looked him full in the face she would not have realized what she was doing to him; there was only one realization for her now. "I guess I just loved what he *was*—his glorious body and his eyes and the way his hair *will* wave—and what he could *do*—the winning, the people cheering him. But to-night, when I thought—when I believed the very worst thing in the world of him—when I thought he had failed me—then I found out. Then I knew I loved—*him*." She leaned her head back against the arm of the chair, and her hands rested, palm upward, in her lap. "It's worth everything that's happened, to know that." She was mercifully still again. Carter thought once that she must be asleep, she was breathing so softly and evenly, but after a long pause she asked, with a shade of difference in her tone, "How long has Juan been gone, Carter?"

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He looked at his watch. "Twenty minutes. Perhaps half an hour."

Honor rose to her feet. "Well, then," she said with conviction, "they'll be here soon! Any minute, now."

"They may not come." He could not help saying it.

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"Oh, they'll come! They'll come very—" she stopped short at the sound of a shot. "What was that?" she asked, childishly.

"That was a shot," said Carter, watching her face.

"But it wouldn't hurt Jimsy or Juan. They're nearly here! That was far away, wasn't it, Carter?" Still her bright serenity held fear at bay.

"Not very far, Honor." He wanted to see that calm of hers broken up; he wanted cruelly to make her sense the danger.

"But, Cartie," she explained to him, patiently, "you know nothing is going to happen to Jimsy now, when I've just begun really to care for him!" She opened the door and stepped out on the veranda, and he followed her. "See—it's almost morning!" The east was gray and there was a drowsy twittering of birds.

"It's the false dawn," said Carter stubbornly. "Listen—" another shot rang out, then three in quick succession. "I believe they're chasing Juan!"

The Mexican who was on guard held up a hand, commanding them to listen. They held their breath. Through the soft silence they began to get the sound of running feet, stumbling feet, running with difficulty, and in another moment, up the green lane came Yaqui Juan, bent almost double with the weight of Jimsy King across his back.

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"Honor!" Carter tried to catch her. "Come back! You mustn't—Are you crazy?"

But Honor and the Mexican who had been on guard at the steps were running, side by side, to meet them. Yaqui Juan flung a word to the *peón* and he stood with his gun leveled, covering the path.

"*Mira!*" said the Indian, proudly. "*Señorita*, I have brought back your man!"

"Skipper," cried Jimsy King in a strong voice, "get in the house! Get *in!* I'm all right!"

Then, unaccountably, inconsistently, all the terror she had not suffered before laid hold on her. "Jimsy! You're hurt! You're wounded!"

"Just a cut on the leg, Skipper! That's why I was so slow. It's nothing, I tell you,—get in the house!"

But Honor, running beside them, trying to carry a part of him, kept pace beside them until Yaqui Juan had carried Jimsy into the house and up the stairs and laid him on his own bed.

"There are five canteens," said Jimsy. "Here—one's for you, Skipper. Take the rest to Mrs. King, Juan. Skipper, drink it. Just a little at first, you know—careful! Don't you hear what I'm saying to you? Drink—the water—out of this canteen!"

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Mechanically, her eyes always on his face, Honor loosened the cap and opened the canteen and drank.

"There,—that's enough!" said Jimsy, sharply. "Now, wait five minutes before you take any more." He took the canteen away from her. "Sit down!" He was not meeting her eyes.

"Did you have any, Jimsy?"

"Gallons. I didn't have any trouble to speak of, really. Only one fellow actually on guard. We had a little rough-house. He struck me in the leg, and it bled a lot. That's what kept me. And it took—some time—with him."

"Jimsy, is it bad? Is it still bleeding? Let me see!"

He pushed her away, almost roughly. "It's all right. Juan tied it up. It'll do. I guess you can have a little more water, now,—but take it slowly.... There! Now you'd better go and see about the rest. Don't let them take too much at first."

"I'm not going away," said Honor, quietly. "I'm not going to leave you again, ever." She pulled her chair close beside the bed and took his hand in both of hers. "Jimsy, I know. I know everything."

"That darn' Indian," said Jimsy, crossly. "If he'd stayed in here, with the door locked! I'd have been back in half an hour longer." [Pg 239]

"And he poured the whisky back into the decanter. Oh, Jimsy——"

"Well, I suppose it was a fool stunt, but I knew I could put it over. I did a booze-fighter in the Junior play,—and I guess it comes pretty easy!" He turned away from her, his face to the wall. "I'd like to be alone, now, Skipper. You'd better look after Cart'. Watch him on the water. He'll kill himself if he takes too much."

"Jimsy, I'm not going to leave you."

He lifted himself on his elbow. "Skipper, dear," he said gently, "what's the use? I suppose I took a crazy kid way to show you I wasn't worth your sticking to, and I guess I'm not, if it comes to that, but the fact remains, and we can't get away from it."

"What fact, Jimsy?"

"That you—care—for Carter."

"Jimsy, have you lost your senses? I—care for *Carter*?"

"He told me."

"Then," said Honor, her eyes darkening, "he told you a lie."

He dropped back on the pillow. He had lost a lot of blood before Yaqui Juan found him and tied up his cut, and he looked white and spent. "Oh, Skipper, please.... Let's not drag it out. I saw your message to him." [Pg 240]

"What message?"

"The one you sent to the steamer, after he'd lost his head and told you he loved you,—and—asked you if you loved him." Difficult words; grotesque and meaningless, but he must manage with them. "I'm not blaming you, Skipper. I know I'm slow in the head beside Cart' and he can give you a lot that I can't. And nothing—hanging over him. You'd have played the game through to the last gun; I know that. But it wouldn't have been right for any of us. I'm glad Cart' blew up and told me."

Honor laid his hand gently back on the bedspread of exquisite Mexican drawnwork and stood up. "Carter showed you the telegram I sent him from Genoa?"

"Yes. He carries it always in his wallet."

"He told you it meant that I loved him?"

"Skipper, don't feel like that about it. It had to come out, some time." His voice sounded weary and weak.

She bent over him, speaking gently. "Be quiet, Jimsy; lie still. I'm going to bring Carter up here."

"Oh, Skipper, what's the use? You—you make me wish that greaser had finished me, down at the well. Please——" [Pg 241]

"Wait!"

He heard her feet in the hall, flying down the stairs, and he turned his face to the wall again, his young mouth quivering.

She found Carter lying on the wide couch, one arm trailing limply over the side of it, the emptied canteen dangling from his hand, and he was breathing with difficulty. His face was darkly mottled and congested but Honor did not notice it. "Carter," she said, "I want you to come with me and tell Jimsy how you lied to him. I want you to tell him what my message really meant."

"I—can't come—now," he gasped. "I can't—" he tried to raise himself but he fell back on the pillows.

"Then give me your wallet," she said, implacably, bending over him.

"No, *no!* It isn't there—wait! By and by I'll—" but his eyes betrayed him.

Roughly, with fierce haste, she thrust her hand into his coat pocket and pulled out his wallet of limp leather with the initials in slimly wrought gold letters.

"Please, Honor! Please,—let me—I'll give you—I'll find it—" he clutched at her dress but she stepped back from the couch and he lost his balance and fell heavily to the floor. [Pg 242]

When she pulled out the bit of closely folded paper with a sharp sound of triumph there came with it a thick letter which dropped on the red tiles. He snatched at it but Honor's downward swoop was swifter. She stood staring at it, her eyes opening wider and wider, turning the plump letter in her hands.

"Jimsy's letter to me," she said at last in a flat, curious tone. "The one he gave you to mail." She was not exclamatory. She was too utterly stunned for that. She seemed to be considering a course of action, her brows drawn. "I won't tell Jimsy; I'm—afraid of what he'd do. I'll let him go on believing in you, if you go away."

He looked up at her from his horrid huddle on the floor, through his bloodshot eyes, the boy who had taught her so much about books and plays and dinners in restaurants and the right sort of music to admire, and it seemed to him that her long known, long loved face was a wholly strange one, sharply chiseled from cold stone.

"If you'll go away," she went on, "I won't tell him about the letter." She was looking at him curiously, as if she had never seen him before. "All these years I've been sorry for you because you limped. But I haven't been sorry enough. I see now; it's—your soul that limps. Well, you must limp away, out of our lives. I won't have you near us. You've tried and tried to drag him down but something—somewhere—has held him up! As soon as help comes-to-morrow—to-day—I'm going to marry him, here, in Mexico, and I'll never leave him again as long as we live. Do you hear?" [Pg 243]

She turned to go, but he made a smothered, inarticulate sound and she looked down at him, and down and down, to the depths where he lay. "You poor—thing," she said, gently. "Oh, you poor thing!"

She ran up to Jimsy and sat down on the edge of his bed and gathered him into her arms, so that his head rested on her breast. "Carter—poor Carter," she said, "is too weak to come upstairs now, but I am going to tell you the whole truth, and you are going to believe me. Listen, dearest—"

They were still like that, still talking, when Madeline King rushed into the room. "Children," she cried, "oh, my dears—haven't you heard them? Don't you know?"

"No," they told her, smiling with courteous young attention.

"They're here—the soldiers! It's all right!" She was crying contentedly. "Rich' is conscious,—he understands. My dears, we're saved! I tell you we're saved!" [Pg 244]

"Oh, we knew that," said Honor, gravely.

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