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## POSSESSED

by

**CLEVELAND MOFFETT**

*Author of "Through the Wall", etc.*

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## DEDICATION

Whatever the defects or limitations of this story, I can assure my readers that it is largely based on truth. Many of the incidents, including the dual personality phenomena, were suggested by actual happenings known to me. The doctor who accomplishes cures by occult methods is a friend of mine, who lives and practises in New York City. Seraphine, the medium, is also a real person. The episode that is explained by waves of terror passing from one apartment to another and separately affecting three unsuspecting persons is not imaginary, but drawn from an almost identical happening that I, myself, witnessed in Paris, France. And the truth about women that I have tried to tell has been largely obtained from women themselves, women in various walks of life, who have been kind enough to give me most of the opinions and experiences that are contained in Penelope's diary. To them I now gratefully dedicate this book.

C. M.

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*"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."*

PROVERBS, *Chapter IV, Verse 23.*

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## POSSESSED

[Pg 1]

*(June, 1914)*

### SCARLET LIGHTS

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This story presents the fulfillment of an extraordinary prophecy made one night, suddenly and dramatically, at a gathering of New Yorkers, brought together for hilarious purposes, including a little supper, in the Washington Square apartment of Bobby Vallis—her full name was Roberta. There were soft lights and low divans and the strumming of a painted ukulele that sang its little twisted soul out under the caress of Penelope's white fingers. I can still see the big black opal in its quaint setting that had replaced her wedding ring and the yellow serpent of pliant gold coiled on her thumb with two bright rubies for its eyes. Penelope Wells! How little we realized what sinister forces were playing about her that pleasant evening as we smoked and jested and sipped our glasses, gazing from time to time up the broad vista of Fifth Avenue with its lines of receding lights.

There had been an impromptu session of the Confessional Club during which several men, notably a poet in velveteen jacket, had vouchsafed sentimental or matrimonial revelations in the most approved Greenwich Village style. And the ladies, unabashed, had discussed these things.

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But not a word did Penelope Wells speak of her own matrimonial troubles, which were known vaguely to most of us, although we had never met the drunken brute of a husband who had made her life a torment. I can see her now in profile against the open window, her eyes dark with their slumberous fires. I remember the green earrings she wore that night, and how they reached down under her heavy black braids—reached down caressingly over her white neck. She was a strangely, fiercely beautiful creature, made to love and to be loved, fated for tragic happenings. She was twenty-nine.

The discussion waxed warm over the eternal question—how shall a woman satisfy her emotional nature when she has no chance or almost no chance to marry the man she longs to marry?

Roberta Vallis put forth views that would have frozen old-fashioned moralists into speechless disapproval—entire freedom of choice and action for women as well as men, freedom to unite with a mate or separate from a mate—both sexes to have exactly the same responsibilities or lack of responsibilities in these sentimental arrangements.

"No, no! I call that loathsome, abominable," declared Penelope, and the poet adoringly agreed with her, although his practice had been notoriously at variance with these professions.

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"Suppose a woman finds herself married to some beast of a man," flashed Roberta, "some worthless drunkard, do you mean to tell me it is her duty to stick to such a husband, and spoil her whole life?"

To which Penelope, hiding her agitation, said: "I—I am not discussing that phase of the question. I mean that if a woman is alone in the world, if she longs for the companionship of a man—the intimate companionship—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" snickered the poet. I can see his close cropped yellow beard and his red face wrinkling in merriment at this supposition.

"I hate your Greenwich Village philosophy," stormed Penelope. "You haven't the courage, the understanding to commit one big splendid sin that even the angels in heaven might approve, but you fritter away your souls and spoil your bodies in cheap little sins that are just—*disgusting!*"

The poet shrivelled under her scorn.

"But—one splendid sin?" he stammered. "That means a woman must go to her mate, doesn't it?"

"Without marriage? Never! I'll tell you what a woman should do—I'll tell you what I would do, just to prove that I am not conventional, I would act on the principle that there is a sacred right God has given to every woman who is born, a right that not even God Himself can take away from her, I mean the right to—"

A muffled scream interrupted her, a quick catching of the breath by a stout lady, a newcomer, who was seated on a divan, I should have judged this woman to be a rather commonplace person except that her deeply sunken eyes seemed to carry a far away expression as if she saw things that were invisible to others. Now her eyes were fixed on Penelope.

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"Oh, the beautiful scarlet light!" she murmured. "There! Don't you see—moving down her arm? And another one—on her shoulder! Scarlet lights! My poor child! My poor child!"

Ordinarily we would have laughed at this, for, of course, we saw no scarlet lights, but somehow now we did not laugh. On the contrary we fell into hushed and wondering attention, and, turning to Roberta, we learned that this was Seraphine, a trance medium who had given séances for years to scientists and occult investigators, and was now assisting Dr. W—, of the American Occult Society.

"A séance! Magnificent! Let us have a séance!" whispered the poet. "Tell us, madam, can you really lift the veil of the future?"

But already Seraphine had settled back on the divan and I saw that her eyes had closed and her breathing was quieter, although her body was shaken from time to time by little tremors as if she were recovering from some great agitation. We watched her wonderingly, and presently she began to speak, at first slowly and painfully, then in her natural tone. Her message was so brief, so startling in its purport that there can be no question of any error in this record.

"Penelope will—cross the ocean," Seraphine began dreamily. "Her husband will die—very soon. There will be war—soon. She will go to the war and will have honors conferred upon her—on the battlefield. She will—she will,"—the medium's face changed startlingly to a mask of anguish and her bosom heaved. "Oh, my poor child! I see you—I see you going down to—*to horror—to terror—Ah!*"

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She cried out in fright and stopped speaking; then, after a moment of dazed effort, she came back to reality and looked at us as before out of her sunken eyes, a plump little kindly faced woman resting against a blue pillow.

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*Now, whatever one may think of mediums, the facts are that Penelope's husband died suddenly in an automobile accident within a month of this memorable evening. And within two months the great war burst upon the world. And within a year Penelope did cross the ocean as a Red Cross Nurse, and it is a matter of record that she was decorated for valor under fire of the enemy.*

*This story has to do with the remainder of Seraphine's prophecy.*

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## CHAPTER I

(January, 1919)

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## VOICES

Penelope moved nervously in her chair, evidently very much troubled about something as she waited in the doctor's office. Her two years in France had added a touch of mystery to her strange beauty. Her eyes were more veiled in their burning, as if she had glimpsed something that had frightened her; yet they were eyes that, even unintentionally, carried a message to men, an alluring, appealing message to men. With her red mouth, her fascinatingly unsymmetrical mouth, and her sinuous body Penelope Wells at thirty-three was the kind of woman men look at twice and remember. She was dressed in black.

When Dr. William Owen entered the front room of his Ninth Street office he greeted her with the rough kindness that a big man in his profession, a big-hearted man, shows to a young woman whose case interests him and whose personality is attractive.

"I got your note, Mrs. Wells," he began, "and I had a letter about you from my young friend, Captain Herrick. I needn't say that I had already read about your bravery in the newspapers. The whole country has been sounding your praises. When did you get back to New York?"

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"About a week ago, doctor. I came on a troop ship with several other nurses. I—I wish I had never come."

There was a note of pathetic, ominous sadness in her voice. Even in his first study of this lovely face, the doctor's experienced eye told him that here was a case of complicated nervous breakdown. He wondered if she could have had a slight touch of shell shock. What a ghastly thing for a high spirited, sensitive young woman to be out on those battle fields in France!

"You mustn't say that, Mrs. Wells. We are all very proud of you. Think of having the *croix de guerre* pinned on your dress by the commanding general before a whole regiment! Pretty fine for an American woman!"

Penelope Wells sat quite still, playing with the flexible serpent ring on her thumb, and looked at the doctor out of her wonderful deep eyes that seemed to burn with a mysterious fire. Could there be something Oriental about her—or—or Indian, the physician wondered.

"Doctor," she said, in a low tone, "I have come to tell you the truth about myself, and the truth is that I deserve no credit for what I did that day, because I—I did not want to live. I wanted them to kill me, I took every chance so that they would kill me; but God willed it differently, the shells and bullets swept all around me, cut through my dress, through my hair, but did not harm me."

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"Tell me a little more about it, just quietly. How did you happen to go out there? Was it because you heard that Captain Herrick was wounded? That's the way the papers cabled the story. Was that true?" Then, seeing her face darken, he added: "Perhaps I ought not to ask that question?"

"Oh, yes, I want you to. I want you to know everything about me—everything. That's why I am here. Captain Herrick says you are a great specialist in nervous troubles, and I have a feeling that unless you can help me nobody can."

"Well, I have helped some people who felt pretty blue about life—perhaps I can help you. Now, then, what is the immediate trouble? Any aches or pains? I must say you seem to be in splendid health," he smiled at her with cheery admiration.

"It isn't my body. I have no physical suffering. I eat well enough, I sleep well, except—my dreams. I have horrible, torturing dreams, doctor. I'm afraid to go to sleep. I have the same dreams over and over again, especially two dreams that haunt me."

"How long have you had these dreams?"

"Ever since I went out that dreadful day from Montidier—when the Germans almost broke through. They told me Captain Herrick was lying there helpless, out beyond our lines. So I went to him. I don't know how I got there, but—I found him. He was wounded in the thigh and a German beast was standing over him when I came up. He was going to run him through with a bayonet. And somehow, I—I don't know how I did it, but I caught up a pistol from a dead soldier and I shot the German."

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"Good Lord! You don't say! They didn't have that in the papers! What a woman! No wonder you've had bad dreams!"

Penelope passed a slender hand over her eyes as if to brush away evil memories, then she said wearily: "It isn't that, they are not ordinary dreams."

"Well, what kind of dreams are they? You say there are two dreams?"

"There are two that I have had over and over again, but there are others, all part of a sequence with the same person in them."

The doctor looked at her sharply. "The same person? A person that you recognize?"

"Yes."

"A person you have really seen? A man?"

"Yes, the man I killed."

"Oh!"

"I told you he was a beast. I saw that in his face, but I *know* it now because I dream of things that he did as a conqueror—in the villages."

"I see—brutal things?"

"Worse than that. In one dream I see him—Oh!" she shuddered and the agony in her eyes was more eloquent than words.

"My dear lady, you are naturally wrought up by these dreadful experiences, you need rest, quiet surroundings, good food, a little relaxation—"

"No, no, no," Mrs. Wells interrupted impatiently.

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"Don't tell me those old things. I am a trained nurse. I *know* my case is entirely different."

"How is it different? We all have dreams. I have dreams myself. One night I dreamed that I was dissecting the janitor downstairs; sometimes I wish I had."

Penelope brushed aside this effort at humor. "You haven't dreamed that twenty times with every detail the same, have you? That's how I dream. I see these faces, real faces, again and again. I hear the same cries, the same words, vile words. Oh, I can't tell you how horrible it is!"

"But we are not responsible for our dreams," the doctor insisted.

She shook her head wearily. "That's just the point, it seems to me that I am responsible. I feel as if I *enjoy* these horrible dreams—while I am dreaming them. When I am awake, the very thought of them makes me shudder, but while I am dreaming I seem to be an entirely different person—a low, vulgar creature proud of the brutal strength and coarseness of her man. I seem to be a part of this human beast! When I wake up I feel as if my soul had been stained, dragged in the mire, almost lost. It seems as if I could never again feel any self-respect. Oh, doctor," Penelope's voice broke and the tears filled her eyes, "you must help me! I cannot bear this torture any longer! What can I do to escape from such a curse?"

Seldom, in his years of practice, had the specialist been so moved by a patient's confession as was Dr. Owen during Penelope's revelation of her suffering. As a kindly human soul he longed to help this agonized mortal; as a scientific expert he was eager to solve the mystery of this nervous disorder. He leaned toward her with a look of compassion.

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"Be assured, my dear Mrs. Wells, I shall do everything in my power to help you. And in order to accomplish what we want, I must understand a great many things about your past life." He drew a letter from his pocket. "Let me look over what Captain Herrick wrote me about you. Hm! He refers to your married life?"

"Yes."

The doctor studied the letter in silence. "I see. Your husband died about four years ago?"

"Four years and a half."

"I judge that your married life was not very happy?"

"That is true, it was very unhappy."

"Is there anything in your memory of your husband, any details regarding your married life, that may have a bearing on your present state of mind?"

"I—I think perhaps there is," she answered hesitatingly.

"Is it something of an intimate nature that—er—you find it difficult to tell me about?"

"I will tell you about it, doctor, but, if you don't mind," she made a pathetic little gesture, "I would rather tell you at some other time. It has no bearing upon my immediate trouble, that is, I don't think it has."

"Good. We'll take that up later on. Now I want to ask another question. I understood you to say that when you did that brave act on the battle field you really wanted to—to have the whole thing over with?"

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"Yes, I did."

"You did not go out to rescue Captain Herrick simply because you—let us say, cared for him?"

For the first time Penelope's face lighted in an amused smile. "I haven't said that I care for Captain Herrick, have I? I don't mind telling you, though, that I should not have gone into that danger if I had not known that Chris was wounded. I cared for him enough to want

to help him.”

“But not enough to go on living?”

“No, I did not want to go on living.”

He eyed her with the business-like tenderness that an old doctor feels for a beautiful young patient. “Of course, you realize, Mrs. Wells, that it will be impossible for me to help you or relieve your distressing symptoms unless you tell me what is behind them. I must know clearly why it was that you did not wish to go on living.”

“I understand, doctor, I am perfectly willing to tell you. It is because I was convinced that my mind was affected.”

“Oh!” He smiled at her indulgently. “I can tell you, my dear lady, that I never saw a young woman who, as far as outward appearances go, struck me as being more sane and healthy than yourself. What gives you this idea that your mind is affected? Not those dreams? You are surely too intelligent to give such importance to mere dreams?”

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Penelope bit her red lips in perplexed indecision, then she leaned nearer the doctor and spoke in a low tone, glancing nervously over her shoulder. Fear was plainly written on her face.

“No—it's not just the dreams. They are horrible enough, but I have faith that you will help me get rid of them. There's something else, something more serious, more uncanny. It terrifies me. I feel that I'm in the power of some supernatural being who takes a fiendish delight in torturing me. I'm not a coward, Dr. Owen,” Penelope lifted her head proudly, “for I truly have no fear of real danger that I can see and face squarely, but the unseen, the unknown—” She broke off suddenly, a strained, listening look on her face. Then she shivered though the glowing fire in the grate was making the room almost uncomfortably warm.

“Do you mind giving me some details?” Dr. Owen spoke in his gentlest manner, for he realized that he must gain her confidence.

Penelope continued with an effort:

“For several months I have heard voices about me, sometimes when no one is present, sometimes in crowds on the street, at church, anywhere. But the voices that I hear are not the voices of real persons.”

“What kind of voices are they? Are they loud? Are they distinct? Or are they only vague whispers?”

“They are perfectly distinct voices, just as clear as ordinary voices. And they are voices of different persons. I can tell them apart; but none of them are voices of persons that I have ever seen or known.”

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“Hm! I suppose you have heard, as a trained nurse, of what we call clairaudient hallucinations?”

“Yes, doctor, and I know that those hallucinations often appear in the early stages of insanity. That is what distresses me.”

“How often do you hear these voices—not all the time? Do you hear them in the night?”

“I hear them at any time—day or night. I have tried not to notice them, I pretend that I do not hear them. I do my best to forget them. I have prayed to God that He will make these voices cease troubling me, that He will make them go away; but nothing seems to do any good.”

“What kind of things do these voices say? Do they seem to be talking to you directly?”

“Sometimes they do, sometimes they seem to be talking about me, as if two or three persons were discussing me, criticizing me. They say very unkind things. It seems as if they read my thoughts and make mischievous, wicked comments on them. Sometimes they say horrid things, disgusting things. Sometimes they give me orders. I am to do this or that; or I am not to do this or that. Sometimes they say the same word over and over again, many times. It was that way when I went out on the battlefield to help Captain Herrick. As I ran along, stumbling over the dead and wounded, I heard these voices crying out: 'Fool! Fool! Don't do it! You mustn't do it! You're a coward! You know you're a coward! You're going to be killed! You're a little fool to get yourself killed!'"

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“And yet you went on? You did not obey these voices?”

“I went on because I was desperate. I tell you I wanted to die. What is the use of living if one is persecuted like this? There is nothing to live for, is there?”

He met her pathetic look with confidence.

“I think there is, Mrs. Wells. There is a lot to live for. Those hallucinations and dreams are not as uncommon as you think. I could give you cases of shell shock patients who have suffered in this way and come back to normal health. You have been through enough, my

young friend, to bring about a somewhat hysterical condition that is susceptible of cure, if you will put yourself in favorable conditions. Do you mind if I ask you straight out whether you have any objections to marrying a second time?"

"N—no, that is to say I—er——" The color burned in her cheeks and Owen took note of this under his grizzled brows.

"As an old friend of the family—I mean Herrick's family—may I ask you if you would have any objection to Captain Herrick as a husband—assuming that you are willing to accept any husband?"

"I like Captain Herrick very much, I—I think I care for him more than any man I know, but —"

"Well? If you love Herrick and he loves you——" Owen broke off here with a new thought, "Ah, perhaps that is the trouble, perhaps Captain Herrick has not told you that he loves you? I hope, dear lady, I am not forcing your confidence?"

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"No, doctor, I want you to know. Captain Herrick cares for me, he loves me, he has asked me to marry him, but—I have refused him."

"But why—if you love him? Why refuse him?"

"Oh, can't you see? Can't you understand? How could I think of such a thing, knowing, as I do, that something is wrong with my mind? It is quite impossible. Besides, there is another reason."

"Another reason?" he repeated.

"It has to do with my married life. As I said I would rather tell you about that some other time—if you don't mind?"

He saw that she could go no farther.

"Exactly, some other time. Let us say in about two weeks. During that time my prescription for you is a rest down at Atlantic City with long walks and a dip in the pool every morning. Come back then and tell me how you feel, and don't think about those dreams and voices. But think about your past life—about those things that you find it hard to tell me. It may not be necessary to tell me provided you know the truth yourself. Will you promise that?" He smiled at her encouragingly as she nodded. "Good! Now be cheerful. I am not deceiving you, Mrs. Wells, I am too sensible an old timer to do that. I give you my word that these troubles can be easily handled. I really do not consider you in a serious condition. Now then, until two weeks from today. I'll make you a friendly little bet that when I see you again you'll be dreaming about flower gardens and blue skies and pretty sunsets. Good morning."

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He watched her closely as she turned with a sad yet hopeful smile to leave the room.

"Thank you very much, doctor. I'll come back two weeks from today."

Then she was gone.

For some minutes Owen sat drumming on his desk, lost in thought. "By George, that's a queer case. *Her other reason is the real one. I wonder what it is?*"

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## CHAPTER II

### WHAT PENELOPE COULD NOT TELL THE DOCTOR

[Top](#)

*(Fragments from Her Diary)*

*Atlantic City, Tuesday.*

I cannot tell what is on my mind, I cannot tell *anyone*, even a doctor; but I will keep my promise and look into my past life. I will open those precious, tragic, indiscreet little volumes bound in red leather in which I have for years put down my thoughts and intimate experiences. I have always found comfort in my diary.

I am thirty-three years old and for ten years, beginning before I was married, I have kept this record. I wrote of my unhappiness with my husband; I wrote of my lonely widowhood and of my many temptations; I wrote of my illness, my morbid cravings and hallucinations.

There are several of these volumes and I have more than once been on the point of burning them, but somehow I could not. However imperfectly I have expressed myself and however mistaken I may be in my interpretation of life, I have at least not been afraid to speak the truth about myself and about other women I have known, and truth, even the smallest fragment of it, is an infinitely precious thing.

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What a story of a woman's struggles and emotions is contained in these pages! I wonder what Dr. Owen would think if he could read them. Heavens! How freely dare I draw upon these intimate chapters of my life? How much must the doctor know in order to help me—to save me?

Shall I reveal myself to him as I really was during those agitated years before my marriage when I faced the struggle of life, the temptations of life—an attractive young woman alone in New York City, earning her own living?

And how shall I tell the truth about my unhappy married life—the torture and degradation of it? The truth about my widowhood—those two gay years before the great disaster came, when, with money enough, I let myself go in selfish pursuit of pleasure—playing with fire?

As I turn over these agitated pages I feel I have tried to be honest. I rebel against hypocrisy, I hate false pretense, often I make myself out worse than I really am.

In one place I find this:

“There is no originality in women. They do what they see others do, they think what they are told to think—like a flock of sheep. Their hair is a joke—absurd frizzles and ear puffs that are always imitated. Their shoes are a tragedy. Their corsets are a crime. But they would die rather than change these ordered abominations. So would I. I flock with the crowd. I hobble my skirts, wear summer furs, powder my nose, wave my hair (permanently or not) according to the commands of fashion, but I hate myself for doing it. *I am a woman!*”

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I am a woman and most women are liars—so are most men—but there is more excuse for women because centuries of oppression have made us afraid to tell the truth. I try to be original by speaking the truth—part of it, at least—in this diary.

On one page I find this:

“The truth is that women love pursuit and are easily reconciled to capture. Why else do they deck themselves out in finery, perfume themselves, bejewel themselves, flaunt their charms (including décolleté charms and alluring bathing suit charms) in every possible way? I do this myself—why? I have a supple figure and I dance without corsets, or rather with only a band to hold up my stockings. I wear low cut evening gowns, the most captivating I can afford. I love to flirt. I could not live without admiration, and other women are the same. They all have something that they are vain about—eyes, nose, mouth, voice, teeth, hair, complexion, hands, feet, figure—*something that they are vain about*. And what is vanity but a consciousness of power to attract men and make other women envious? *There are only two efforts that the human race take seriously (after they have fed themselves): the effort of women to attract men, the effort of men to capture women.*”

Wednesday.

In searching back through the years for the cause of this disaster that has brought me to the point where a woman's reason is overthrown, I see that I was always selfish, absorbed in my own problems and vanities, my own disappointments, grievances, emotions. It was what I could get out of life, not what I could give, that concerned me. I was vain of my good looks. I craved admiration.

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Once I wrote in my diary:

“I often stand before my mirror at night before I go to bed and admire my own sombre beauty. I let my hair fall in a black cloud over my shoulders, then I braid it slowly with bare arms lifted in graceful poses. I sway my hips like Carmen, I thrust red flowers into my bosom. I move my head languidly, letting my white teeth gleam between red lips. I study my profile with a hand glass, getting the double reflection. I smile and beckon with my eyes. Yes, I am a beautiful woman—primeval, elemental—I was made for love.”

Again I wrote, showing that I half understood the perils that beset me:

“Women are moths, they love to play with fire. They are irresistibly driven—like poor little birds that dash themselves against a lighthouse—towards the burning excitements connected with the allurements of men. They live for admiration. The besetting sin of all women is vanity; *vanity is a woman's consciousness of her power over men.*”

And again:

“It is almost impossible for a fascinating woman not to flirt a little—sometimes. For example, she passes a man on the street, a distinguished looking man. She does not know him, but their eyes have met in a certain way and she feels that he is attracted by her. She has on a pretty dress with a bunch of violets. She wonders whether this man has turned back to look at her—she is sure he has—she longs to look back. No matter how much culture and breeding she has, *she longs to look back!*”

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No wonder that, with such thoughts and inclinations, I was always more or less under temptation with men, who were drawn to me, I suppose, just as I was drawn to them. And I tried to excuse myself in the old way, as here:



"It is certain that some women have strong emotional desires, whereas other women have none at all or scarcely any. This fact has an evident bearing upon the question of women's morality. Some women must be judged more leniently than others. I have wondered if there are similar differences in men. I doubt it!"

Of course I had agitating experiences with men because I half invited them. It seemed as if I could not help it. As I said to myself, I was a moth, I wanted to play with fire.

On the next page I find this:

"Seraphine disapproves of my attitude towards men. She gave me a great talking to last night and said things I would not take from anyone else. Dear old Seraphine, she is so fine and kind! She says there is nothing in my physical makeup that compels me to be a flirt. I can act more discreetly if I wish to. It is my mental attitude toward romantic things that is wrong. Thousands of women just as pretty as I am never place themselves in situations with men that are almost certain to lead them into temptation. They will not start an emotional episode that may easily, as they know quite well, have a dangerous ending. But I am always ready to start, confident that my self-control will save me from any immediate disaster. And so far it always has.

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How earnestly Seraphine sounded her warning. I wrote down her words and promised to heed them: "*Remember, dear, that emotional desire deliberately aroused in 'harmless flirtations' and then deliberately repressed is an offense against womanhood, a menace to the health, and a degradation to the soul.*"

*Thursday night.*

I am horribly sad tonight—lonely—discouraged. The doctor wants to know about my married life, about my husband. Why was I unhappy? Why is any woman unhappy? Because her love is trampled on, degraded—the spiritual part of it unsatisfied. Women are made for love and without love life means nothing to them. Women are naturally finer than men, they aspire more strongly to what is beautiful and spiritual, but their souls can be coarsened, their love can be killed. They can be driven—they have been driven for centuries (through fear of men) into lies and deceits and sensuality or pretence of sensuality.

The great tragedy of the world is sensuality, and it may exist between man and wife just as much as between a man and a paid woman. I don't know whether the Bible condemns sensuality between man and wife, but it ought to. I remember a story by Tolstoy in which the great moralist strips off our mask of hypocrisy and shows the hideous evil that results when a man and a woman degrade the holy sacrament of marriage. That is not love, but a perversion of love. How can God bless a union in which the wife is expected to conduct herself like a wanton or lose her husband? And she loses him anyway, for sensuality in a man inevitably leads him to promiscuousness. I know this to my sorrow!

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Perhaps I am morbid. Perhaps I see life too clearly, know it too well. I do not want to be cynical or bitter. Oh, if only those old days of faith and trust could come back to me! When I think of what I was before I married Julian I see that I was almost like a child in my ignorance of the animal side of man's nature....

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*Friday.*

Dr. Owen thinks my trouble is shell shock, but he is mistaken. I have taken care of too many shell shock cases not to recognize the symptoms. Can I ever forget that darling soldier boy from Maryland who mistook me for his mother? "They're coming! They're coming!" he screamed one night; you could hear him all over the hospital. Then he jumped out of bed like a wild man—it took two orderlies and an engineer to get him back under the covers. I can see his poor wasted face when the little doctor came to give him a hypodermic. There he lay panting, groaning: "Oh those guns! Oh those guns! They break my ears!" Then he sprang up again, his eyes starting out of his head: "Look out, there! On the ammunition cart! Look out, Bill! Oh my God, they've got Bill—my pal! Blown him to hell! Oh, oh, oh!" and he put his head down and sobbed like a woman. That is shell shock. I have nothing like that. I know what I am doing.

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There was a storm today with great crashing waves, then everything grew calm under a golden sunset. I take this as a good omen. I feel happier already. The infinite peace of Nature is quieting my soul. I love the sea. I can almost say my prayers to the sea.

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The swimming master pays me extravagant compliments every morning when I splash about in the pool. I know my body is beautiful. Thank God, I have never imprisoned it in corsets.

I love the exercises I do in my room every morning. They bring back the play spirit of my childhood. When I get out of bed I slip into a loose garment, then I lie on the floor and stretch my spine along the carpet—it's wonderful how this exhilarates me. After that I take deep breaths at the open window, raising and lowering my arms—up as I draw my breath in, down as I throw it out. Then I lie down again and lift my legs straight up, the right, the left, then both together. I do this twenty times, resting between changes and taking deep breaths.

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I sit cross-legged on the floor with my feet on a red and gold cushion and rotate my waist like an oriental dancer. I stand on my head and hands and curve my body to right and left in graceful flexings. I do this no matter how cold it is. I do not feel the cold, for I am all aglow with health and strength. Then, before my bath, I do dumb-bell exercises in front of the mirror.

I remember dining with my husband one night in a pink lace peignoir—we had been married about three years—and during the dessert, I excused myself and went into my bedroom and, posing before a cheval glass, I let the peignoir slip off my shoulders, and stood there like a piece of polished marble, rejoicing in my youth and loveliness!

How I hated my husband that night! He had taught me to drink. He had made me sensual. He had not yet assumed the coarse, red-faced brutish aspect that he wore later, but he had a coarse, red-faced brutish soul. Alas! his body was still fine enough to tempt me. And his mind was devilishly clever enough to captivate my fancy. He took away my faith, *even my faith in motherhood*. That was why I chiefly hated him.

For three years my husband disgusted me with his unfaithfulness. No woman was too high or too low, too refined or too ignorant, for his passing fancy, if only she had physical attractiveness—just a little physical attractiveness. Anything for variety, shop girl or duchess, kitchen maid or society leader, they were all the same to Julian. He confessed to me that he once made love to a little auburn-haired *divorcée* while they were in a mourning carriage going to her sister's funeral. *Et elle s'est laissée faire!*

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He was like a hunter following his prey, like an angler fishing, he cared only for the chase, for the capture. That was the man I had married!

What a liar he was! He poisoned my mind with his lies, assuring me that all men were like himself, hypocrites, incapable of being true to one woman. And I believed him. The ghastly part of it is I still believe him. I can't help it. I have suffered too much. I can never have faith in another man, not even in Captain Herrick. That is why I shall never marry again—that is one reason.

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Sunday.

A wonderful day! I strolled along the board walk in my new furs, and met a young mother pushing a baby carriage with two splendid baby boys—one of them sucking at his bottle. Such babies! She let me hold the little fellow and I cuddled him close in my arms and felt his soft cheeks and his warm little chubby hands on my face. How I long for a baby of my own! I have thought—hoped—dreamed—

I went to the movies this evening with some friends and laughed so hard that I thought I would break something in my internal machinery.

When I returned to the hotel I found a letter from Captain Herrick—so manly and affectionate. He loves me! And I love him, more than anything in the world. I feel so well today, so glad to be alive that if Chris were here, I think I would promise him whatever he asked. I long to give myself entirely—*my beauty, my passion, everything*—to this man that I love.

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And yet—alas!

Am I bold and vain to call myself beautiful?

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I find myself in my diary siding strongly with women against men in anything that has to do with emotional affairs, although I like men better than women. My tendency is always to blame the man. This is partly because of the hideous wrong that was done me by my husband and partly because I like to believe that, however blame-worthy women are in the sex struggle and, whatever *faiblesses* they may be guilty of, the fundamental cause of it all

must be found in centuries of men's wickedness and oppression.

I have written about this with much feeling. In one place I say:

"Sometimes I feel as if there were a conspiracy of men—all kinds of men, including the most serious and respectable—against the virtue of attractive women. What a downfall of masculine reputations there would be if women should tell a little of what they know about men! Only a little! But women are silent in the main—through loyalty or through fear."

And again:

"What happens to an attractive woman who is forced to earn her own living? In the business world? In the artistic world? Anywhere? I do not say that men are a pack of wolves, but—I had such a heartbreaking experience, especially in my brief musical career. I might have had a small part in grand opera at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York City, so one particular musical wolf assured me, if I would show a little sympathy with his desire to assist me in some of the rôles—occasional private rehearsals, and so on. Oh, the beast!... He gave the part to another girl (her voice did not compare with mine) who was less particular, and she made her début the next season. I went to work at Wanamaker's store!"

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And still men pursued me.

I find this entry:

"Roberta took me to dinner yesterday at the Lafayette with her friend Mr. G—, a man of sixty, red-faced, fat and prosperous, the breezy Westerner type. He is giving a grand party at Sherry's and wants me to come. I said I was afraid I couldn't, my real reason being that I have no dress that is nice enough. He said nothing at the time, but kept his eyes on me, and this evening, when I got home, there was a perfectly stunning dinner gown—it must have cost \$250.—with a note from Mr. G— begging me to accept it as I would a flower, since it meant absolutely nothing to him.

"How I longed to keep that gown! I think I should have kept it if Seraphine had not happened in.

"'Isn't this lovely?' I said, holding it up. 'Do you think I can accept it?' Then I told her what Mr. G— had said.

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"She looked at me out of her kind, wise eyes.

"'Do you like him?'

"'Well—rather.'

"'Is he married or unmarried?'

"'I think he's married.'

"'Is he the man who gave Roberta her sables?'

"'Y-yes,' I admitted.

"She looked at me again.

"'I can't decide for you, Pen; you must settle it with your own conscience; but I am sure of one thing, that, if you accept this dress, you will pay for it, and probably pay much more than it is worth.'

"It ended in my sending the gown back and missing the dinner party, which made Mr. G — furious, he blamed Roberta for my resistance, and a little later he threw her over. Like most men of that type who promise women wonderful things, he was hard, selfish and exacting—a cold-blooded sensualist. And poor Roberta, indolent and luxurious, was obliged to go back to work—up at seven and on her feet all day for twenty dollars a week. She had been spending twenty dollars a day!

"What is a woman to conclude from all this?" I wrote despairingly. "I know there are decent men in the world; there are employers who would never think of becoming unduly interested in their good-looking women assistants, who would never intimate that they had any claim upon the evenings of pretty stenographers or secretaries; there are lawyers who would never force odious attentions upon an attractive woman whose divorce case they might be handling—'*Dear lady, how about a little dinner and a cabaret show tonight?*'—There are old friends of the family, serious middle-aged men who would never take advantage of a young woman's weakness or distress; but, oh dear God! there are so many others who have no decency, no heart! A woman is desperate and must confide in someone. She has lost her position and is struggling to find another. She craves innocent pleasure—music, the theatre, the dance. *She is so horribly lonely.* Help me, counsel me, she pleads to some man whom she trusts—any man, the average man. Does he help her? Yes, on one condition, that she use her power as a woman. Not otherwise. This is a great mystery to women—how men, who are naturally kind, can be so cruel, so persistent, so infernally clever in forcing women to use their power for their own undoing."

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Tuesday.

Here is an interesting thing that Kendall Brown once said on this subject—I recorded it in my diary along with other sayings of this erratic Greenwich Village poet and philosopher:

“The sex power of women is the most formidable power ever loosed upon earth,” he declared one evening. “Thrones totter before it. Captains of industry forget their millions in its presence. *Cherchez la femme!* This terrible power is possessed by every dark-eyed siren in a Second Avenue boarding house, by every languishing, red-lipped blonde earning eighteen dollars a week in a department store. And she knows it! Others have vast earthly possessions, stores of science, palaces of art, knowledge without end—she has a *tesor* that makes baubles of these—she is the custodian of life, *she has the eternal life power.*”

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How true that is!

Again I wrote:

“It may be argued that women are willing victims of this man conspiracy, I say *no!* Every woman in her heart longs to love *one* man, to give herself to *one* man, to be true to *one* man. Even the unfortunate in the streets, if she receives just a little kindness, if she has only half a chance and is encouraged to right living by some decent fellow, will go through fire and water to show her gratitude and devotion. But men give women no chance. They pluck the roses in the garden and trample them under foot. Here is the great tragedy of modern life—*men wish to change from one woman to another, whereas women do not wish to change. A characteristic sex difference between men and women is that men are naturally promiscuous, but women abhor the thought of promiscuousness.*”

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Sunday.

A wave of repulsion runs over me as I quickly turn the pages of my life with Julian. And then a faint whisper comes to me: “The *truth*, you have promised to tell it—at least to your own soul.”

*The truth!*

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Slowly I turn back to what I wrote in those unhappy days:

“Why do I live with him? I no longer love him. At times I despise him and his slightest touch makes me shiver with disgust, yet I continue to endure this life—why?”

“It is because of the great pity I have for him. He is weak and helpless, almost child-like in his dependence on me. I am the prop which holds up the last shreds of his self-respect. If I left him, he would drift lower and lower, I know it. Sometimes I pass some awful creature staggering along the sidewalks. He is dirty and uncared for. Long matted hair falls across his bleared and sunken eyes. I say to myself: ‘But for you, Penelope Wells, that might be Julian.’ And this gives me courage to take up my burden once more.”

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And again I find:

“I am beginning to fear. I have been looking in my mirror and it seems to me that my face is taking on the lines of animalism that I see daily becoming deeper in Julian's face. Must I continue this degradation? If I were helping him to raise himself—but I am not, not really. It's too heavy a weight for me to bear. I am sinking ... sinking to his level. I cannot stand it. It is killing me....”

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And again:

“I am too heartsick to write....”

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“I began this a week ago in agony of soul when I tried to set down my feelings about a horrible night with Julian, but I could not. He has been drinking—drinking for weeks—neglecting his business, breaking all his promises to me. What can I do? How can I help him, strengthen him, keep him from doing some irrevocable thing that will utterly destroy our home and make me lose him? In spite of his weakness, his neglect, his faithlessness, I cannot bear the thought of losing him. My pride is involved and—and *something else!*”

"He had not come home for dinner that night and it was ten o'clock when I heard the door slam. Julian came into the living room and as soon as I saw him my heart sank. He dropped into a chair without speaking.

"Tired, dear?' I said, trying to smile a welcome.

"Dead beat,' he sighed and stared moodily into the fire.

"I went to him and rested my hand lightly on his head and smoothed back his hair as he liked me to do. He jerked away.

"Wish you'd let me alone,' he muttered fretfully.

"I drew back, knowing what this irritability meant, and we sat in silence gazing into the glowing ashes. His fingers beat a nervous tattoo against the chair and presently, with some mumbled words, he rose and moved towards the door. Now I knew the fight was on, the fight with the Demon, drink, that was drawing him away from me. I followed him into the hall.

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"Don't go,' I pleaded, but he pushed my hand from the door-knob.

"I'll be back soon,' he said, reaching for his hat.

"Wait!' I whispered. Deep within I breathed a prayer: 'Brave heart, have courage; nimble wit, be alert; warm, white body hold him fast.'

"Come back ... before the fire ... I want to talk to you,' I leaned against him caressingly, but I could feel no response as I nestled closer.

"Don't you care for me any more?' I questioned tenderly.

"He was still unyielding, his brain was busy with the thought of the brown liquor that his whole system craved. Purposely I drew back my flowing sleeve and placed my warm flesh against his face. He turned to his old seat before the fire.

"All right, I'll stay for ten minutes ... if what you say is important.'

"When he was once more comfortable, I brought a cushion to his chair and snuggled down at his feet, with my head resting against him. I drew his half reluctant hand around my throat, then I exerted every part of my brain force ... to hold him. Ceaselessly I talked of our old days together—camping trips to the Northern woods of Canada, wonderful weeks of idling down the river in our launch, days of ideal happiness, spent together. I appealed to his love for me, his old love, and the memory of our early married life. He was unresponsive, and I could feel the restlessness of his fingers in my hair.

"Presently he pushed me aside, not ungently this time but, nevertheless, firmly. Once more the struggle began, and now I must rely on the old physical lure to hold him.... Well, I won. I kept him with me but was it worth such a sacrifice? As I think ... I burn with shame."

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There are many entries in my diary like this, for my life with Julian was full of scenes when I tried so hard ... so hard ... all in vain!

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Here is another picture:

"Last night Julian came home in a hilarious mood. His habitual sullen look had gone and he almost seemed the man who had won me—before I knew him as he really is.

"Come along, Penny,' he laughed as he caught me in his arms. 'We're going to celebrate. Dress up in that lacy black thing—you are seduction itself in it.'

"His praise made me happy and, responding to his mood, I changed my clothes quickly, and we set forth joyfully in anticipation of a pleasant evening.

"Everything went well through the dinner, although I hesitated when Julian ordered wine; but I was afraid to oppose him or to speak a single jarring word.

"Drink up, Penny, and have some more. My God, but you are glorious tonight!' he whispered as he leaned across the table.

"I smiled and emptied my glass, and soon I became as reckless and jovial as he. We went from one cabaret to another, laughing at everything. All the world was gay. There was no sorrow anywhere—only one grand celebration. Julian was never so fascinating. I was proud of his good looks, of his wit, of his strength as he lifted me from the taxicab and almost carried me into the house.

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"My darling!' I breathed as my lips brushed his cheek, 'I love you!'

"You see, Penny, how wonderful everything is when you are reasonable. If you will only drink with me once in a while, I'll never, never leave you.'

"He placed me gently in a chair. Soon the room began to whirl around ... and I knew no more...."

"This morning my head ached and a thousand needles were piercing my eyes. I rang for the maid and asked for my husband.

"He brought you home last night, but he went out again later and he hasn't come back,' she said and her eyes did not meet mine.

"Was I—was I?' I stammered, shame possessing me.

"Yes, Mrs. Wells, you were...'

"God! What have I gained? I have degraded myself without doing Julian any good. I have sunk to his level and have not even been able to keep him at my side. I hate him! I hate myself even more!"

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I find a pitiful entry that I made only a few months before Julian was killed. In a fit of anger he had left me, accusing me of being a drag on his life, saying that I was to blame for all his follies. He was going to be rid of me now. So he took all the money in the house and went off—I should never see him again. At last I had what I had longed for, my freedom, he had given it to me, flung it in my face. And then—

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This is what I wrote six weeks later:

"Well, I'm a failure all right. Never again may I think well of myself or feel that I am entitled to the joys of life. For I'm just a plain moral coward. I couldn't even keep what was forced on me—my liberty.

"Last Wednesday he came back, such a miserable wreck of a man, so utterly broken in every way that it would have moved a heart of stone. Inside of me is a sorrow too deep for expression, but somehow a peace also. Now I am sure that my bondage will never cease. But I couldn't refuse to take Julian back when I saw what a state he was in. His spiritual abasement was such an awful thing that I could not shame him by even letting him know that I understood it."

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*Monday.*

I walked for hours beside the ocean, watching the waves, the sky, the soaring gulls,—trying to tire myself out, searching into my heart for the truth about my life—about my illness. I cannot find the truth. I have done what Dr. Owen told me to do as well as I can and—I do not see that any good has come of it. I have stirred up ghosts of the past—leering ghosts, and I hate them. I am sick of ignoble memories. I want to close forever the door on those unhappy years. I want to be well, to live a sane life, to have a little pleasure; but....

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*Thursday.*

I am tired of Atlantic City. I am going back to New York tomorrow. No doubt I have benefited by these days of rest and change. My bad dreams are gone and I have only heard the Voices once. Dr. Owen will say that his prescription has been efficacious, but that is not true. I know *They* are waiting for me in the city, waiting to torture me. Then why do I go back? Because it is my fate. I am driven on by some power beyond my control—driven on!

*Penelope will cross the ocean. Her husband will die very soon. There will be war soon. She will go to the war and honors will be conferred upon her on the battlefields. Then she will go down to horror—to terror!*

How that prophecy of Seraphine haunts me! All of it has come true except the very last. Horror! Terror! These two are ever before me. These two already encompass me. These two will presently overwhelm me unless—unless—I don't know what.

Seraphine is in New York, I have meant to go to see her, but—I am afraid, I am afraid of what she will tell me!

*New York, Saturday.*

I must set down here—to ease my tortured brain—some of the things that have happened to me since I last wrote in this book, my confessional.

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When I got back to town I found an invitation to go to a Bohemian ball, and I decided to accept. *Vive la joie!* So I put on a white dress and went with Roberta Vallis and that

ridiculous poet Kendall Brown. It was the first time I had danced since my husband died and I enjoyed it.

Such a ball! They called it a Pagan Revel and it was! Egyptian costumes and a Russian orchestra. Some of the Egyptian slave maidens were dressed mostly in brown paint. Kendall says he helped dress them at the Liberal Club. Good heavens! Kendall's pose of lily white virtue amuses me. He went as a cave man with a leopard skin over his shoulders, and I danced with him two or three times. His talk reminds me of Julian. How well I know the methods of these sentimental pirates! What infinite patience and adroitness they use in leading the talk towards dangerous ground! How seriously they begin! With what sincerity and ingenuous frankness they proceed, and all the time they know exactly what they are doing, exactly what effects they are producing in a woman.

Kendall spoke of the modern dance in a detached, intellectual way. He dwelt on one particular development in the fox trot—had I noticed it?—there! that naval officer and the languishing blonde were doing it now—which seemed to him unæsthetic. It might be harmful in some cases, say to a Class A woman. Being curious, I asked what he meant by a "Class A" woman and this gave Kendall his opportunity to discourse on fundamental differences that exist among women, so he declares. I wish I knew if what he says is true. He assures me he has it on the authority of a Chicago specialist, but I never put much dependence on anything that Kendall Brown says. If this is true the whole romantic history of the world will have to be rewritten and the verdicts of numberless juries in murder trials *passionels* ought to be set aside.

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The statement is that physical desire is universal among men, but not among women. One-third of all women, Kendall puts them in Class C, have no such desire; therefore, they deserve no particular credit for remaining virtuous. Another third of all women are in Class B, the normal class, where this desire is or is not present, according to circumstances. The last third of all women make up Class A, and these women, being as strongly tempted as men (or more so), are condemned to the same struggles that men experience, and, if they happen to be beautiful, and without deep spirituality, they are fated to have emotional experiences that may make them great heroines or artists, great adventuresses or outcasts.

I am sure I do not belong in Class C, I *hope* I belong in Class B, but I am afraid—

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I knew *They* were waiting for me. Last night I heard Them again—after the ball. It was a horrible night! I shall write to Dr. Owen that I must see him at once.

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## CHAPTER III

### A BOWL OF GOLD FISH

[Top](#)

*(A letter from Penelope)*

*New York, February —.*

DEAR DR. OWEN:

Did you think I had vanished from the earth? I know I ought to have reported to you a week ago, but—I fear Penelope Wells is an unreliable person. Forgive me! I am in great distress.

I will say, first, that Atlantic City did me a lot of good. I came back to town happier than I have been for months, in fact I was so encouraged that I decided to amuse myself a little, as you advised. Last night I went to a rather gay ball with some friends, and I was beginning to think myself almost normal, when suddenly—alas!

I had a strange experience this morning that frightens me. I was sitting at my desk writing a note when I glanced towards the window where there is a bowl of gold fish, three beautiful fish and two snails. It amuses me to watch them sometimes. Well, as I looked up, the sunshine was flashing on the little darting creatures and I felt myself drawn to the bowl, and for two or three minutes I stood there staring into it as if I expected to see something. Then, presently I *did* see something, I saw myself inside the bowl—in a kind of vision. I saw myself just as distinctly as I ever saw anything.

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In order that you may understand this, doctor, I must explain that Captain Herrick took me home from the ball. It was two o'clock in the morning when we left the place and it had blown up cold during the rain, so that the streets were a glare of ice and our taxi was skidding horribly. When we got to Twelfth Street and Fifth Avenue there came a frightful explosion; a gas main had taken fire and flames were shooting twenty feet into the air. I was terrified, for it made me think of Paris—the air raids, the night sirens, the long-distance

cannon. Captain Herrick saw that I was quite hysterical and said that I mustn't think of going up to Eightieth Street. I must spend the night at his studio in Washington Square, only a few doors away, and he would go to a hotel. I agreed to this, for I was nearly frozen.

When we entered the studio I was surprised to find what a beautiful place it was. It seems that Captain Herrick has rented it from a distinguished artist. There is a great high ceiling and a wonderful fireplace where logs were blazing. I was standing before this fireplace trying to warm myself, when there came a crash overhead, it was only a gas fixture that had fallen, but it seemed to me the whole building was coming down. I almost fainted in terror and Chris caught me in his arms, trying to comfort me. Then, before I realized what he was doing, he had drawn me close to him and kissed me.

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This made me very angry. I felt that he had no right to take advantage of my fright in this way and I told him I would not stay in his studio a minute longer. And I did not. I almost ran down the stairs, then out into the street. It was foolish to get so agitated, but I could not help it. I went over to the Brevoort and spent the night there. You will understand in a minute why I am telling you all this, it has to do with the vision that I saw in the bowl of gold fish.

In this vision I saw myself enter Captain Herrick's studio just as I really did—in my white satin dress. Christopher was with me in his uniform. Then I saw myself lying on a divan and—Chris was bending over me, kissing me passionately. He kissed me many times, it seemed as if he would never stop kissing me—in the vision. All this was as clear as a motion picture. The extraordinary part of it is, that I neither resisted him nor responded in any way, I just seemed to be lying there—with my eyes closed—as if I were asleep.

I am very much distressed about this. I *know* that I did not really lie down on Captain Herrick's divan—I would not have done such a thing for the world. I *know* Captain Herrick did not really kiss me in that passionate way, as I saw him kiss me in the bowl of gold fish, but I *feel* that he did. I am afraid that he did. I can't get over the feeling that he did. This sounds like madness, doesn't it? A woman cannot be ardently kissed by a man without knowing it, can she? Perhaps I am mad—perhaps this is the way mad people feel.

Help me, doctor, if you can, and above all *please* see Captain Herrick—he is an old friend of yours—and find out exactly what I did at his studio. I must know the truth. And I can't ask Chris, can I?

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Yours in anguish of soul,

PENELOPE WELLS.

P. S.—Please telephone me as soon as you get this and make an appointment to see me.

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## CHAPTER IV

### FIVE PURPLE MARKS

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During his thirty years of medical experience among neurasthenic and hysterical women, Dr. William Owen had never encountered a more puzzling case than the one before him on this brisk winter morning when he set forth to answer the urgent appeal of Penelope Wells. Here was a case fated to be written about in many languages and discussed before learned societies. A Boston psychologist was even to devote a chapter of his great work "Mysteries of the Subconscious Mind" to the hallucinations of Penelope W——. Poor Penelope!

When Dr. Owen entered her attractive sitting room with its prevailing tone of blue, he found his fair patient reclining on a *chaise longue*, her eyes heavy with anxiety.

"It's good of you to come, doctor. I appreciate it," she gave him her hand gratefully. "I expected to go to your office, but—something else has happened and I am—discouraged." Her arm fell listlessly by her side. "So I telephoned you."

"I am glad to come, you know I take a particular interest in you," he smiled cheerily and drew up a chair. "We must expect these set-backs, but you are improving. You show it in your face. And your letter showed it. I read your letter carefully—studied it and—"

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"You haven't seen Captain Herrick?" she asked eagerly.

"Not yet. I have asked him to dine with me this evening."

Penelope sighed wearily and twined her fingers together in nervous agitation.

"It's all so distressing. I can't understand it. Why did I see myself in that bowl of gold fish, so distinctly? Tell me—why?"

"You mustn't take that seriously, Mrs. Wells. These crystal visions are common enough—the books are full of them. It's a phenomenon of self-hypnotism. You are in a broken-down nervous condition after months of excessive strain—that's all, and these hallucinations



result, just as colored shapes and patterns appear when you shut your eyes tight and press your fingers against the eye-balls."

This did not satisfy her. "What I want to know is whether there is any possibility that I really did what I saw myself do in that vision? Do you think there is?"

"Certainly not. I believe you did exactly what you tell me you did—you spent a few minutes in Christopher's studio and then came away angry because he kissed you. By the way, I don't see why one kiss from a man who loves you and has asked you to marry him should have offended you so terribly, especially when you admit that you care for him?"

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His tone was one of good-humored indulgence for capricious beauty, but Mrs. Wells kept to her seriousness.

"I didn't mean that I was really angry with Captain Herrick. I was angry at myself for the thrill of joy I felt when he kissed me and I was frightened by the wave of emotion that swept over me. I have been frightened all these days—even now!" She covered her eyes with her hand as if shrinking from some painful memory.

"Please don't agitate yourself. You must not get hysterical about this. You must have confidence in me and in your own powers of recuperation. And you must be sure to give me all the facts. Did I understand you to say that something else has happened—since you wrote me?"

"Yes, something quite unbelievable—it happened last night."

"Tell me about it—quietly, just as if you were discussing somebody else."

Penelope smiled wistfully. "How kind and wise you are! I will try to be calm, but—it is hard for me. I had a dream last night, doctor, and this dream is true. I have evidence that it is true. I did something last night without knowing it, and then I dreamed about it."

"You did something without knowing it?"

"Yes, I put on a red dress and a black hat that I have not worn for four years, not since my husband died. For four years I have only worn black or white."

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"Do I understand you to say that you put on these things without knowing that you put them on?"

"Yes."

"How do you know you did?"

"My maid told me so. You see my dream was so extraordinarily vivid—I'll give you the details in a minute—that, as soon as I awakened, I rang for Jeanne and questioned her. 'Jeanne,' I said, 'you know the red dress that I have not worn since my husband died?' She looked at me in a queer way and said: 'Madame is laughing at me. Madame knows quite well that she wore the red dress last night.' Then she recalled everything in detail, how I sent her to a particular shelf where this dress was folded away and got her to freshen up a ribbon and press the skirt where it was wrinkled. Jeanne is also positive that I put on my black hat. Then, she says, I went out; I left the house at five minutes to nine and came back about eleven. There is no doubt about it."

"And you remember nothing of all this?"

"Nothing. So—so you see," she faltered, then she leaned impulsively toward the doctor. "As an expert will you please tell me if it is possible for a woman to act like that unless her mind is affected?"

Dr. Owen tried to take this lightly. "I'm a fairly sane citizen myself, but if you asked me which suit I wore yesterday, I couldn't tell you."

"You couldn't suddenly put on red clothes without knowing it, if you had been wearing black clothes for years, could you?" she demanded.

He laughed. "When it comes to clothes I might do anything. I might wear a straw hat in January. But I couldn't go out of the house without knowing it. Do you mean to tell me you don't remember going out of the house last night?"

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"I certainly do not. I remember nothing about it. I would have sworn that I went to bed early," she insisted.

"Hm! Have you any idea where you went?"

"Yes—I know where I went, but I only know this from my dream. I know I went to Captain Herrick's studio. You—you can ask him."

"Of course. You haven't asked him yourself—you haven't telephoned, have you?"

"No, no! I would be ashamed to ask him."

The doctor noted her increasing agitation and the flood of color mounting to her cheeks.

"Steady now! Take it easy. Have you any idea what you did at the studio, assuming that you really went there?"

Penelope hesitated, biting her lips. "I know what I saw myself do in the dream. I acted in an impossible way. I—I—here is a little thing—you know I never smoke, but in the dream I did smoke."

"Have you ever smoked?"

"Yes, I did when my husband was living. He taught me. He said I was a better sport when I was smoking a cigarette."

"But you haven't smoked since your husband's death?"

"Not at all. I have not smoked once since he died, not once—until last night."

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The man of science eyed her searchingly. "Mrs. Wells, you are not hiding anything from me, are you?"

"No! No! Of course not! Don't frown at me like that—please don't. I am trying my best to tell you the truth. I *know* these things did not happen, but—"

Here her self-control left her and, with a gesture of despair, Penelope sank forward on a little table beside her chair and sobbed hysterically, her face hidden in her arms.

"There! There!" soothed Dr. Owen. "I was a brute. I have taxed you beyond your strength."

"I can't tell you how grateful I am for your patience and sympathy," murmured Penelope through her tears, and, presently, regaining her composure, she continued her confession.

"I want you to know everything—now. In my dream there was a scene of passion between Captain Herrick and myself. He held me in his arms and kissed me and I—I responded. We both seemed to be swept on by a reckless madness and at one moment Chris seized me roughly with his hand and—of course you think this is all an illusion, but—look here!" She threw open her loose garment and on her beautiful shoulder pointed to five perfectly plain purple marks that might have been made by the fingers of a man's hand.

"Extraordinary!" muttered the doctor. "Let me look at this closer. Have you got such a thing as a magnifying glass? Ah, thank you!"

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For some moments he silently studied these strange marks on the fair young bosom, then he said very gravely: "Mrs. Wells, I want to think this over before giving an opinion. And I must have a serious talk with Captain Herrick."

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## CHAPTER V

### WHAT REALLY HAPPENED AT THE STUDIO

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For the purposes of this narrative, which is concerned almost exclusively with the poignant strangeness of a woman's experiences, it is sufficient to say that Captain Christopher Herrick was what is generally known as a fine fellow—handsome, modest, well-to-do, altogether desirable as a lover and a husband. At thirty-five he had made for himself an enviable position as a New York architect, one who was able to strike out boldly in new lines while maintaining a reasonable respect for venerable traditions. He had served gallantly in the war and he was now, for quite understandable reasons, desperately in love with Penelope Wells.

On this particular evening when Christopher had been summoned by his much respected friend, Dr. Owen, to dine and discuss a matter of immediate importance, the young officer had accepted eagerly. For some time he had wanted to talk with the doctor about Penelope's nervous condition. He was drawn to this girl by a force that stirred the depths of his being—he could not live without her; yet his love was clouded by anxiety at her strange behavior.

Christopher's face was troubled. His brain was in a turmoil. The happenings of the last few days bewildered him. Life had seemed so simple, so beautiful, with just their great love for each other to build on; but now.... He was only sure of one thing, that from the moment Penelope Wells had come to him as a ministering angel across the scarred and broken battle field, he had adored her with a love that would endure until the day of his death ... and, he told himself, beyond that!

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"Chris, my boy," began Owen in his bluff, cheery way when they had retired to the study for coffee and cigars, "I am in a difficulty, I must ask you some questions that may embarrass you—it's the only way out."

Herrick's clear, honest gaze met the doctor's eyes unflinchingly.

"That's all right, sir. Go ahead. I suppose it's about Mrs. Wells?"

"Yes. I am very much interested in her case, not only on your account, but because she is a wonderful woman. When I write your father I'll tell him he's going to have a daughter-in-law who will make him sit up and take notice. Ha, ha!"

The young man's heavy brows contracted gloomily.

"I wish that were true, sir, but—you know what I told you?"

"About her refusing you? Don't worry over that. Just wait until we get her health built up a little."

"Do you think she will change her mind? Did she say so?" Herrick asked eagerly.

"Pretty nearly that. If she doesn't marry you, she won't marry anyone. The fact is—Mrs. Wells is suffering from a nervous strain, I'm not sure what it is, but there are abnormal symptoms and—I hate to force your confidence, Chris, but, speaking as Mrs. Wells' medical adviser and a mighty good friend of yours, a sort of representative of your father—you know how close your father and I have always been?"

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"Yes, sir, I know. I'll do anything you say."

"You want to help this lovely lady? You want to make her happy?"

"That's what I want more than anything in this world," the officer's grey eyes flashed with the spirit of a lover and a soldier.

"Good. Now the way to do it is—you must help her by helping me. I think I understand the situation up to a week ago, but since then—well, it's a little complicated. Mrs. Wells has paid you two visits in the last few days, hasn't she?"

"Yes. Did she tell you?"

"She told me a little. Try some of that port, Chris, and light another cigar," the older man said genially. "We may as well be comfortable. There! Now tell me about Mrs. Wells' first visit—after the dance?"

At this invitation the young officer began quite frankly and with a certain sense of humor to describe the circumstances that led up to the climax, but presently he hesitated, and, observing this, Owen said: "No false delicacy, please. It's extremely important to me as a doctor to know everything that happened. You say Mrs. Wells came in chilled and frightened and—then what?"

"Then I threw a couple of logs on the fire and was just going to get her some brandy against the cold when there came an awful racket overhead, it shook the whole place and Penelope was so startled that—just instinctively I put my arm around her. She clung to me and—I tried to soothe her and before I knew it—I couldn't help it—I kissed her."

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The doctor smiled. "If you hadn't kissed her under those circumstances, my boy, I would never have forgiven you. Perhaps she wouldn't either. Well?"

"It's going to be pretty tough, sir, to tell you—some of this," stammered Herrick, frowning at the carpet. "Penelope got awfully angry and said she was going to leave. I apologized and tried to square myself, but she wouldn't have it. She said I had insulted her and she refused to stay in my place another minute. I asked her to wait until I could get a dry coat and umbrella for her and then I would take her wherever she wanted to go. She agreed to wait and I went into the other room."

Christopher paused and drew his chair closer to the doctor.

"Now here is a most extraordinary thing. When I left Penelope she was standing before the fire, furious with me, but when I came back, not two minutes later, she was lying on the divan with her eyes closed, apparently asleep. As I had been out of the room for so short a time, it seemed incredible that she could have really fallen asleep, yet there she was. I looked at her in astonishment. I wondered if she could have fainted, but I saw that her cheeks were flushed, her lips were red and she was breathing regularly. I didn't know what to make of it."

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"Well?" questioned the doctor.

Herrick shifted uneasily on his chair. "I haven't had much experience with women, sir, but I know they are complicated creatures, and I couldn't help thinking that Penelope was playing a little joke on me; so I bent over her and, after I had made up my mind that she wasn't ill and wasn't asleep, I—I kissed her again. That's another queer thing. Her lips were warm, her breathing was as soft and regular as a child's, but she never moved nor spoke nor responded in any way. She just lay there and—"

"You thought she was shamming?" suggested Owen.

"That's it, especially as she had been so angry with me just a few minutes before. I couldn't imagine anything else. So—er—"

"Go on," said the older man.

"You know I have always respected women, and this woman was more to me than anything—she's the woman I want for my wife, so you see I would be the last man in the world to show her disrespect, but—" the young fellow flushed—"as I looked at her there on the divan—so beautiful—I longed to hold her in my arms and I said to myself that, even if she was tricking me, it was quite a pleasing trick—if she could stand it, I could—so I—I kissed her some more. I begged her to speak to me, to respond to me, to tell me she returned my love and would be my wife; but she didn't answer, didn't move, or speak, she didn't even open her eyes, and presently I was filled with a horrible sense of shame. I felt like a thief in the night, stealing caresses that were not meant for me or willingly given. I realized that something terrible must have happened to Penelope, although she looked so calm and beautiful.

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"And now my only thought was to call for help. I hurried into the next room and tried to get you on the telephone, but they said you were at the hospital and could not be reached for an hour. Then I rushed back to the studio and, as soon as I came in, I could scarcely believe my eyes but there was Penelope standing in front of the fireplace, just as I had left her the first time. She was looking at the blazing logs with a thoughtful expression and when I came close to her, she faced me naturally and pleasantly as if nothing had happened.

"You can imagine my astonishment, I could not speak, but—I was so relieved to find her recovered that I put my arm around her affectionately and just touched my lips to her cheek. Heavens! You should have seen her then. She sprang away from me indignant. How dared I take such a liberty? Had she not reproved me already? It was incredible that a man who professed to care for her, a gentleman, should be so lacking in delicacy. And before I could do anything or explain anything, she had dashed out into the night alone, refusing even to let me walk beside her. Now then," Christopher concluded, "what do you make of that?"

"Strange!" nodded the doctor, "very strange. And in spite of this she came to see you again?"

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"Yes, two evenings later, without any warning, she burst into my studio about nine o'clock."

"In a red dress?"

"Yes."

"And a black hat?"

"Yes."

"Good Lord, it's true!" muttered Owen. "Go on, my boy. I want the details. This may be exceedingly important. Go right through the scene from the beginning."

After a moment of perplexed silence, Christopher continued: "When I say she burst in, that about expresses it. She was like a whirlwind, a red, laughing, fascinating whirlwind. I had never seen her half so beautiful—so alluring. I was mad about her and—half afraid of her."

"Hm!" grunted Owen. "What did she do?"

"Do? She did a lot of things. In the first place she apologized for having been so silly the time before—after the ball. She said she was ill then, she didn't want to talk about it. Now she had come to make amends—that was the idea."

"I see. Well?"

"Well, we sat before the fire and she asked me to make her a cocktail. She said she had had the blues and she wanted to be gay. So I mixed some cocktails and she took two, and she certainly was gay. I didn't know Penelope drank cocktails, but of course it was all right—lots of women do. Then she wanted to sit on the divan and she bolstered me up with pillows. She said she liked divans. I hate to tell you all this, sir."

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"Go on, Chris."

"Pretty soon she wanted a cigarette and she began to blow smoke in my face, laughing and fooling and—finally she put her lips up so temptingly for another light that I ... I'll never forget how she bent over me and held my face between her two hands and kissed me slowly with a little sideways movement and told me to call her Fauvette—not Penelope. She said she hated the name Penelope. 'Call me Fauvette,' she said. 'I am your Fauvette, all yours.'"

"Extraordinary! This was the woman who had been furious with you only two nights before for daring to kiss her once?"

"Yes, sir. Now she was a siren, a wonderful, lithe creature, clinging to me. I almost lost control of myself. Once I caught her sharply by the shoulder—I tore her dress...."

Christopher stopped as the power of these memories overcame him. He covered his eyes with one hand, while the other clutched the chair arm.

The doctor waited.

"Well, sir," the young man resumed, "I don't know how I came through that night without dishonor, but I did. There was a moment of madness, then suddenly, distinctly, like a gentle bell I heard a voice inside me, a sort of spiritual voice saying two words that changed everything. 'Your wife!' That is what she was to be, my wife! I loved her. I must defend her against herself, against myself. And I did. I got her out of that place—somehow. I got her home—somehow. I have been through several battles, doctor, but this one was the hardest."

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Captain Herrick drew a long sigh and sat silent.

"What's the answer, doctor?" he asked presently.

"I don't know, Chris. Upon my soul, I don't know."

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## CHAPTER VI

### EARTH-BOUND

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*(From Penelope's Diary)*

*Tuesday Night.*

Heaven help me! I have heard the words that sound my doom. I saw Dr. Owen this morning. It is all true—my dream, and what I saw myself do in the bowl of goldfish. True! I did those incredible things. I wore my red dress and my black hat. I went to Captain Herrick's studio. I lay down on the divan—everything is true. Oh, God, this is too horrible! How can I ever face Christopher again? I wish I could die!

Dr. Owen questioned me about the name Fauvette—why did I ask Christopher to call me Fauvette? I have no idea. I hate and despise that name. It brings up memories that I wish might be forever blotted out of my mind. That was the name Julian used to call me when he had been drinking. He would pretend that I was another person, Fauvette, and sometimes Fauvette would do things that I refused to do. Fauvette would yield to his over-powering physical charm and would say dreadful things, would enter into his mood and become just the sort of animal creature that he wanted. It was like a madness.

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*Wednesday morning.*

I cried my eyes out last night and lay awake for hours thinking about my unhappy life. All my pride and hopes have come to this—an irresponsible mind. It makes no difference whether the cause is shell shock or something else, the fact remains that my mind does not work properly—I do things without knowing or remembering what I do. I am sure I cannot live long—what have I to live for? I have made a will leaving my little fortune to Chris—he will never know how much I care for him—and my jewelry to Seraphine, except my silly thumb ring, which is for Roberta Vallis. She loves it.

This afternoon *They* came again. *They* never were so bad. I was walking down Fifth Avenue and, as I reached the cathedral, I thought I would go in and say my prayers. I love the soft lights and the smell of incense, but just at the door *They* began insulting me.

"Little fool! Little fool! She is going to say her prayers. Ha, ha!" *They* laughed.

I knelt down and breathed an old benediction, shutting my ears against the Voices:

*"The peace of God which passeth all understanding—"*

"Fauvette! Fauvette!" *They* mocked me.

*"Keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God—"*

"She's a pretty little devil. I like her mouth."

*"And of his son, Jesus Christ our Lord—"*

"Red dress! Red dress! Divan! Divan!"

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*"And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost—"*

"She can't remember it. She's thinking of her lover. She wants to kiss her lover." Then *They* said gross things and I could not go on. I got up from my knees, heartbroken, and came away.

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*Thursday night.*

I thought I should never be happy again, but whatever the future holds for me of darkness and sadness, I have had one radiantly happy day. Christopher telephoned this morning and

arrived half an hour later with an armful of roses. He took me to luncheon, then for a drive in the Park, then to tea at the Plaza where we danced to delicious music, and finally to dinner and the theater. He would not leave me. And over and over again he asked me to marry him. He will not hear of anything but that I am to be his wife. He loves me, he worships me, he trusts me absolutely. Nothing that has happened makes the slightest difference to him. Dr. Owen is going to cure me in a few weeks, there is no doubt about it, Christopher says, and anyhow, he loves me.

If I were in Europe now I'd make a pilgrimage to the shrine of some saint and heap up offerings of flowers. I *must* do something to make others happy; my heart is overflowing with gratitude!

I thrilled with pride as I walked beside my lover on the Avenue this afternoon. He looked so tall and splendid in his uniform. I love his eyes—his shoulders—everything about him. My Christopher!

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I am to give him his answer within a week, but—*what answer can I give him?*

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*Friday morning.*

Alas! I have paid for my happiness—it was written, it had to be. I have lived through a night that cannot be described. Seraphine's prophetic words have come true. Horror! Terror! I cannot bear it any longer. It is quite impossible for me to bear it any longer. I have sent for Seraphine, begging her to come to me at once—this afternoon, this evening, any time tonight, before I sleep again. I would sooner die than endure another such night.

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*Saturday morning.*

Seraphine did not get my note until late, but in spite of a snow-storm, she came to me and stayed all night. Dear Seraphine! She spends her life helping and comforting people in distress. She sees nothing but trouble from morning till night, yet she is always cheerful and jolly. She says God wants her to laugh and grow fat, so she does.

We talked for hours and I told her everything—or nearly everything. There is only one abominable memory that I can never tell to anyone, I may write it some day in the red leather volume of my diary that is locked with a key and that must be burned before I die. I told Seraphine how I was suddenly awakened Thursday night by a horrible feeling that there was a *presence* near me in my bedroom. Then I slept again and saw myself all in white lying on the ground surrounded by a circle of black birds with hateful red eyes—fiery eyes. These birds came nearer and nearer and I knew I was suffering horribly as I lay there, yet I looked on calmly without a shred of sympathy for myself; in fact I felt only amused contempt when I saw the dream image of poor Penelope start up from the ground with a scream of fright.

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While I opened my heart Seraphine sat silent, watching me like a loving mother. Several times she touched my arm protectingly, and once her gaze swept quickly down my skirt, then up again, as if she saw something moving.

“What is it? What do you see?” I asked, but she did not tell me.

When I had finished she kissed me tenderly and said she was so glad I had let her come to me in my distress. She told me there was a great and immediate danger hanging over me, but that God's infinite love would protect and heal me, as it protects all His children, if I would learn to draw upon it.

I asked what this danger was and Seraphine said it would strike at me very soon through a dark-haired woman; but she would try to help me, if I would heed her warnings. I don't know why but I immediately thought of Roberta Vallis, and the strange part of it is that within an hour, Roberta called me on the telephone to say she was coming up right away. Roberta and Seraphine had not seen each other for years, not since that night when Seraphine made her prophecy about me.

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Within a half hour Roberta arrived very grand in furs and jewels, quite dashingly pretty and pleased with herself—the real *joie de vivre* spirit. She was perfectly willing to reveal the source of this sudden magnificence, but I did not ask her—I know enough of Bobby's love affairs already—and I could see that she was uneasy under Seraphine's gravely disapproving eyes. She had come to invite me to a house-warming party that she is planning to give at her new apartment in the Hotel des Artistes. I shall meet all sorts of wonderful people, social and theatrical celebrities, and there will be music. Seraphine's eyes kept saying no, and I told Bobby I would telephone her tomorrow before six o'clock. I was not sure whether I could accept because—“Haven't you an engagement for Thursday with Captain Herrick?” suggested Seraphine.

Whereupon Bobby, with an impertinent little toss of her bobbed-off black hair, said: "Oh, Pen, why do you waste your time on a commonplace architect? He will never satisfy you—not in a thousand years. Bye-bye, I'll see you at the party." Then away she went, her eyes challenging Seraphine who stands for all the old homely virtues, including unselfish love, that Bobby Vallis entirely disapproves of. What shall I do? Seraphine says I must not go to this party, but—*I want to go!*



I have accepted Roberta's invitation, in spite of a warning from Seraphine that something dreadful will happen to me if I go. I have a morbid curiosity to see what experiences *can* be in store for me that are worse than those I have gone through already. Besides, I do not believe what Seraphine says—it is contrary to my reason, it is altogether fantastic. And, even if it were true, even if I really am in the horrible peril that she describes, what difference does it make where I go or what I do? I am just a spiritual outcast, marked for suffering—a little more or less *je m'en moque*.

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I have hesitated to write down Seraphine's explanation of my trouble, even in my diary. I reject it with all the strength of my soul. I consider it absurd, I hate it, I try to forget it; but alas! it sticks in my thoughts like some ridiculous jingle. So I may as well face the thing on paper, here in the privacy of my diary, and laugh at it. Ha, ha!—is that false-sounding laughter?

*Seraphine says that the great war has thrown the spirit world into confusion, especially in the lower levels where the new arrivals come and linger. Millions, have died on the battle field in hatred and violence. Great numbers of these have gone over so suddenly that they are not able to adjust themselves to the other plane where they constitute an immense company of earth-bound souls that long to come back. There are myriads of these unreconciled souls hovering all about us, crowding about us, eagerly, greedily, striving to come back. Some do not know that they are dead and rebel fiercely against their changed condition. The drunkards still thirst after drink. The murderers want to go on killing. The gluttons would fain gorge themselves with food, the lustful with bodily excesses. All these evil spirits, cut off from their old gratifications, try to satisfy their desires by re-entering earthly bodies, and often they succeed. That is the great peril of the war, she says. What a horrible thought! I simply refuse to believe that such things are possible.*

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*And yet—those Voices!*

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## CHAPTER VII

### JEWELS

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If this were a conventional novel and not simply a statement of essential facts in the strange case of Penelope Wells, there would be much elaboration of details and minor characters, including the wife of Dr. William Owen and an adventure that befell this lady during a week-end visit to Morristown, N. J., since this adventure has a bearing upon the narrative. As it is, we must be content to know that Mrs. William Owen was an irritable and neurasthenic person, a thorn in the side of her distinguished husband, who was supposed to cure these ailments. He could not cure his wife, however, and had long since given up trying. It was Mrs. Owen who quite unintentionally changed the course of events for sad-eyed Penelope.

It happened in this way. Dr. Owen received a call from Mrs. Seraphine Walters on the day following Seraphine's talk with Penelope and was not overjoyed to learn that his visitor was a trance medium. If there was one form of human activity that this hard-headed physician regarded with particular detestation it was that of mediumship. All mediums, in his opinion, were knaves or fools and their so-called occult manifestations were either conjurers' trickery or self-created illusions of a hypnotic character. He had never attended a spiritualistic séance and had no intention of doing so.

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But in spite of his aversion for Seraphine's *métier*, the doctor was impressed by the lady's gentle dignity and by her winsome confidence that she must be lovingly received since she herself came armed so abundantly with the power of love. Furthermore, it appeared that the medium had called for no other reason than to furnish information about her dear friend Penelope Wells, so the specialist listened politely.

"You are the first spiritualist I ever talked to, Mrs. Walters," he said amiably. "You seem to have a sunny, joyous nature?"

Her face lighted up. "That is because I have so much to be grateful for, doctor. I have always been happy, almost always, even as a little girl, because—" She checked herself, laughing. "I guess you are not interested in that."

"Yes I am. Go on."

"I was only going to say that I have always known that there are wonderful powers all about us, guarding us."

"You knew this as a little girl?"

"Oh, yes, I used to see Them when I was playing alone. I thought They were fairies. It was a long time before I discovered that the other children did not see Them."

"Them! Hm! How long have you been doing active work as a medium?"

"About fifteen years."

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"What started you at it? I suppose there were indications that you had unusual powers?"

"Yes. There were indications that I had been chosen for this work. I don't know why I was chosen unless it is that I have never thought much about myself. That is the great sin—selfishness. My controls tell me that terrible punishment awaits selfish souls on the other side. I was so happy when I learned that the exalted spirits can only manifest through a loving soul. They read our thoughts, see the color of our aura and, if they can, they come to those who have traits in common with their own."

"If they can—how do you mean?"

"My controls tell me that many spirits cannot manifest at all, just as many humans cannot serve as mediums."

At this moment a maid entered the office and spoke to Dr. Owen in a low tone saying that Mrs. Owen had sent her to remind the doctor that this was Saturday morning and that they were leaving for Morristown in an hour to be gone over Sunday. No message could have been more unfortunate than this for Dr. Owen's equanimity, since he abominated week-end invitations, particularly those like the present one (which Mrs. Owen revelled in) from pretentiously rich people.

"Very well. Tell Mrs. Owen I will be ready," he said, then turned with changed manner to poor Seraphine, whose brightening chances were now hopelessly dissipated.

"Suppose we come to the point, Mrs. Walters," he went on. "I am rather pressed for time and—you say you are a friend of Mrs. Wells? Have you any definite information bearing upon her condition?"

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"Oh, yes," she replied and at once made it clear that she was fully informed as to Penelope's distressing symptoms.

"She is suffering from shell shock," said the doctor.

"No, no!" the medium disagreed, sweetly but firmly. "Penelope's trouble is due to something quite different and far more serious than shell shock."

Then earnestly, undaunted by Owen's skeptical glances, Seraphine proceeded to set forth her belief that there is today in the world such a thing as literal possession by evil spirits.

"You mean that as applying to Mrs. Wells?" the doctor asked with a weary lift of the shoulders.

"Yes, I do. I can give you evidence—if you will only listen—"

"My dear lady, I really cannot go into such a—purely speculative field. I must handle Mrs. Wells' case as I understand it with the help of means that I am familiar with."

"Of course, but, doctor," she begged, "don't be vexed with me, I am only trying to save this dear child, I love Penelope and—I *must* say it—you are not making progress. She is going straight on to—to disaster. I *know* what I am saying."

For a moment he hesitated.

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to have a consultation with Dr. Edgar Leroy."

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"Dr. Edgar Leroy? Who is he? I never heard of him."

"He is a New York doctor who has had great success in cases like Penelope's—cases of obsession or—possession."

"Oh! Does he believe in that sort of thing? Is he a spiritualist?"

Seraphine felt the coldness of his tone and shrank from it, but she continued her effort, explaining that Dr. Leroy had been a regular practitioner for years, but he had changed his methods after extended psychic investigations that had led him to new knowledge—such



wonderful knowledge! Her deep eyes burned with the zeal of a great faith.

"I see. Where is his office?"

"In Fortieth Street—it's in the telephone book—Dr. Edgar Leroy. If you only knew the extraordinary cures he has accomplished, you would realize how necessary it is for Penelope to have the help he alone can give her."

She waited eagerly for his reply.

"How do you happen to know so much about this doctor?"

"Because I have been allowed to help him. He uses me in diagnosis."

"You mean that Dr. Leroy relies upon information that you give him as a medium in treating cases?" He spoke with frank disapproval.

"Yes."

Dr. Owen thought a moment. "Of course, Mrs. Wells is free to consult anyone she pleases, but I would not feel justified in advising her to go to Dr. Leroy."

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"But you *must* advise it, you must insist upon it," urged Seraphine. "Penelope relies entirely upon you, she will do nothing without your approval, and this is her only hope."

"My dear lady, you certainly are not lacking in confidence, but you must realize that I cannot advise a treatment for Mrs. Wells that involves the use of spiritualistic agencies when I do not believe in spiritualism. In fact, I regard spiritualism as—"

Seraphine lifted her hand with a wistful little smile that checked the outburst.

"Don't say it—please don't. Will you do one thing, doctor, not for me but for poor Penelope? Come to my house Monday night. I have a little class there, a class of eight. We have been working together for three months and—we have been getting results. You may be allowed to witness manifestations that will convince you. Will you come?" she pleaded.

"You mean that I may see a spirit form? Or hear some tambourines playing? Something of that sort?" His tone was almost contemptuously incredulous.

The anxious suppliant was gathering her forces to reply when the hall clock struck solemnly, bringing back disagreeably to the specialist's mind his impending social duty, and this was sufficient to turn the balance of his decision definitely against Seraphine. He shook his head uncompromisingly.

"I cannot do it, madam. I am sorry to disappoint you, but I have strong convictions on this subject and—" He rose to dismiss her. "Now I must ask you to excuse me."

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In spite of this disappointment Seraphine did not lose faith. "Dear child," she wrote to Penelope that night, "I am like a man in the darkness who *knows* the sun will rise soon and is not discouraged. Before many days Dr. Owen will listen to me and be convinced."

Firm in this confidence, the medium returned to Dr. Owen's office the following Monday morning, but she was coldly received. A rather condescending young woman brought out word that the specialist was exceedingly busy and could not see her.

"But it is *so* important," pleaded Mrs. Walters with eyes that would have moved a heart of stone. "Couldn't you ask him to give me a few minutes? I'll be very grateful."

The office assistant wavered. "I'll tell you why you had better come back another day, madam," she began confidentially; "Dr. Owen is very much upset because his wife has just lost some valuable jewelry. You see, Mrs. Owen went to Morristown for the week-end and took a jewel box with her in her trunk—there was a pearl necklace and some brooches and rings; but when she came to dress for dinner last night—"

"Wait! I—I hear something," Seraphine murmured and sank down weakly on a chair. She closed her eyes and her breathing quickened, while the young woman bent over her in concern; but almost immediately the psychic recovered herself and looked up with a friendly smile.

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"It's all right. You are very kind. I am happy now because I can do something for Dr. Owen. Please tell him his wife is mistaken in thinking that she took the jewels with her. The jewels are here in this house—now."

"What makes you think that?"

"My control says so." The medium spoke with such a quiet power of manner that the office assistant was impressed.

"Suppose I tell Mrs. Owen?" she suggested.

"Very well, tell Mrs. Owen. Ask her if I may go to the room where she last remembers having her jewel box?"

The young woman withdrew with this message and presently returned to say that Mrs.

Owen would be glad if Seraphine would come up to her bedroom. A few minutes later Seraphine faced a querulous invalid propped up against lace pillows.

"I am positive I put my jewel box in the trunk," insisted Mrs. Owen. "It is foolish to say that I did not, it is perfectly useless to look for the jewels in this house. However—what are you doing? Why do you look at me so strangely?"

"The jewels are—in this room—in a chintz sewing bag," the psychic declared slowly, her eyes far away.

"Absurd!"

"I see the sewing bag—distinctly. There are pink roses on it."

"I have a sewing bag like that," admitted the doctor's wife, "it is on a shelf in the closet—there! Will you get it for me, Miss Marshall? We shall soon see about this. Now then!" She searched through the bag, but found nothing. "I told you so. My husband is quite right in his ideas about mediums. I really wish you had not disturbed me," she said impatiently.

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But the medium answered pleasantly: "I have only repeated what my control tells me. I am sorry if I have annoyed you. I advise you to search the house carefully."

"I have done that already," said Mrs. Owen.

Whereupon Seraphine, still unruffled, took her departure, with these last words at the door to the office assistant: "Please tell Dr. Owen that I beg him most earnestly to have the house searched for his wife's jewels. Otherwise one of the servants will find them."

And Dr. Owen, in spite of his scientific prejudices, in spite of his wife's positive declaration that the jewels had been stolen during her visit, and that the house had been thoroughly searched, acted on this suggestion and had the house searched again. *And this time the missing jewel box was found, with the necklace, rings and brooches all intact, in a chintz sewing bag covered with pink roses!*

It seems that Mrs. Owen had two chintz bags, one for ordinary sewing, one for darning, and in the latter bag, hanging on a nail behind the bureau, where the doctor's wife had absent-mindedly hidden it, the missing jewel box was discovered.

"This beats the devil!" exclaimed the doctor when he heard the good news. And an hour later he sent the following telegram to Seraphine: "Jewels found, thanks to you. We are very grateful. I have reconsidered the matter and accept your invitation for tonight. Will call at eight o'clock."

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## CHAPTER VIII

### WHITE SHAPES

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*(From Penelope's Diary)*

*New York January 31, 1919.*

An extraordinary thing happened on Monday night at Seraphine's apartment. I must write down the details before they fade from my memory. Seraphine telephoned Monday morning that there was to be a meeting of her occult class in the evening and she wanted me to come as Dr. Owen had promised to be there. She regarded this as a great opportunity to help me. Darling Seraphine! Of course I could not refuse, although I abhor spiritualism. I love Seraphine for what she is, and in spite of her queer beliefs.

When we were gathered together and after introductions to her class (there were six or seven devout believers), Seraphine explained that it was difficult to obtain psychic manifestations in the presence of active disbelief, and she begged us to maintain an attitude of friendly open-mindedness. I am afraid I did not do this all the time.

We had first some psychic reminiscences and Seraphine described in detail how on a certain night years ago she and her sister were sleeping together in a heavy mahogany fourposter bed, when the whole bed with the two women was lifted several inches from the floor and rocked about, and was then held suspended in the air while the chamber resounded with strange music. In my opinion, this was a dream or an illusion.

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I am also skeptical about the testimony of one of the group, a New York minister, who told us that his dead wife has come to him in the night on several occasions in materialized form and has spoken to him, kissed him, and taken loving counsel with him about the children and about other matters. I am sure this minister was the victim of some kind of hallucination.

And I cannot believe a statement of Seraphine's regarding a Southern woman who is possessed by an evil spirit that forces her to drinking excesses so that she has spoiled her whole life. Seraphine described to us with ghastly vividness the appearance of this evil

entity which she is able to *see*, through her clairvoyant vision, with its hideous leering countenance, inside the lady. For my part *I refuse to believe it*.

I admit that I began to have creepy sensations when Seraphine went into an entranced condition in the cabinet. Then came the happenings that I do not understand and I know Dr. Owen does not understand them either, but that does not prove that they were supernatural. I distinctly saw two white shapes rise from the floor—one of them was so close to me that I could have touched it with my hand, but I did not because I was afraid. Besides, I was sitting in a semi-circle with the others and our hands were joined. Dr. Owen, however, was at the end of the line with one hand free, and I saw him reach out towards the apparition (it was about four feet high) and it seemed to me that his hand and arm passed right through the white shape. As he did this I heard a long sigh and a rustling sound and I was conscious of a chilling breath on my face. I asked Dr. Owen about this afterwards and he said that when his hand touched the shape it felt as if he was grasping thick smoke.

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The appearance of the second white shape was more terrifying because Seraphine came out of the cabinet when she evoked it. She wore a loose white garment and moved about the room in the near darkness like a woman walking in her sleep. She repeated a beautiful prayer in a slow dreamy voice—I wish I could remember it, the idea was that a great disaster might be averted if God would open the eyes of two of His doubting children. I suppose she meant Dr. Owen and me.

Then the second white shape appeared and seemed to rise and grow into the likeness of a woman, but presently it wavered and dissolved. Seraphine reached out her arms towards it imploringly and I saw a woman's hand take shape clearly and rest on Seraphine's hand, but this presently faded away, like a thing of vapor, and was gone. I have no idea what those white shapes were, or why they came, or why they went; but neither have I any idea as to the operation of X-rays. These white shapes may in a few years turn out to be perfectly simple laboratory phenomena, no more mysterious than wireless phenomena were twenty-five years ago. *I refuse to believe that a living person can be possessed by an evil spirit!*

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Looking back at this séance, what troubles me is an utterance about myself that is supposed to have been made by a voice from the other side. This came at the very end when Seraphine went into an entranced condition again, with the lights up.

"I have a message for one who is tenderly loved by an exalted spirit," she said, sighing heavily, her eyes closed, "one who would come to her, but there is a barrier. She can regain health and happiness if she will cleanse her soul of evil. She must confess a sinful purpose that she entertained in her heart on the night of June 14, 1914."

June 14, 1914! I looked up this date in my diary and find that it was the occasion of Roberta Vallis' party when Seraphine made her prophecy about me. Now I remember. We were considering what a woman can do to satisfy her emotional nature if she has no chance to marry and longs for the companionship of a man. I said, according to my diary, that "there is a sacred right given by God to every woman who is born, a right that not even God Himself can take away—" Then I was interrupted by Seraphine and I did not tell them what that sacred right is or what use I personally proposed to make of it.

But I knew and know still, and the question that distresses me is whether an exalted spirit (could it be my mother?) really possesses this knowledge of my wicked purpose—if it was wicked—or whether this is simply a case of mind reading by Seraphine.

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"*She can regain health and happiness if she will cleanse her soul of evil—*" That was the message. Is it true? Is there evil in my heart? Have I entertained a sinful purpose? Have I the courage to answer this question truthfully, even in these secret pages—have I?

Yes, I will put down the truth and justify myself in my own eyes. Then I will burn this book. I would die of shame if Christopher should ever read this confession.

As my chief justification, I dwell upon the frightful wrong that my husband did me when he took away my faith in men, my faith in their ability or willingness to be true to one woman. He did this by his words and by his acts. He assured me that sex desire in the male is so resistless that, when conflict arises between this desire and the teachings of religion, it is the latter which are almost invariably set aside; with the result that great numbers of men, brought up as Christians, either renounce Christianity (if they are honest) or find themselves forced into a life of hypocritical compromise in regard to sex indulgence. Julian told me this over and over again, no doubt to excuse his own delinquencies, until it was burned into my soul that, whatever happened, I would never marry another man, and expose myself to torments and humiliations such as I had endured with him—never!

After my husband died I had to face a problem that confronts thousands of high principled young women, widows, divorcées, in America and in all countries—how could I bear the torture of this immense loneliness? How could I adjust myself to life without the intimate companionship of a man? How could I satisfy my emotional nature? How?

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There were two solutions, a second marriage and a lover. I rejected the first solution for reasons already given and the second solution because of evidence all about me that one lover usually means two, three, half a dozen lovers, since men grow weary and change and women, in loneliness or desperation, change also. Never would I let myself sink to the

degrading level of sex *complaisance* that is sadly or cynically accepted by many women, self-supporting and self-respecting, in many American cities, simply because they cannot combat conditions that have been created and perpetuated by the stronger sex.

Therefore I worked out a third solution that was to satisfy my emotional nature and at the same time give me a reason for existence. I would adopt a little waif as my child, a French or Belgian waif, and I would bring up this child to be a useful and happy man or woman. I would love it, care for it, teach it, and with this responsibility and *soulagement*, I would be able to endure the loneliness of the long years stretching before me. I would find this child while I was in France working for the Red Cross and bring it home after the war, only—

*My purpose was to adopt a child that should be born of my own body!*

That is my sin, a sin never committed, save in intention, yet a sin that would have been committed, if things had happened differently. The arguments (based on the sacred right of motherhood and the longing for a child) that led me to my original purpose still seem valid to me. It is terrible to say this now, but I must tell the truth and the truth is that, if I had not met Captain Herrick, I would have done this thing. My whole plan of life was changed because I loved Captain Herrick. What was previously impossible became possible, and what was previously possible became impossible *because I loved Captain Herrick*.

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That is the truth.

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*Tuesday.*

If I love him so much, why am I possessed by a horrible fear that I will refuse to be his wife? Good God, what a woman I am! I love Captain Herrick so much that I would gladly die for him—I have risked my life for him already—and yet—

I have promised Christopher his answer when we meet at Roberta's party on Friday night, but I am not sure what I will say to him. Three days! I told Roberta I would not go to her party unless she invited Christopher, so she did.

*Wednesday.*

I feel much encouraged about my health. For nearly a week my sleep has been free from dreams and They have not come near me. I begin to think Dr. Owen is right. I have been suffering from nervous disturbances caused by shell shock, and I am on the road to recovery. I need rest and recreation, especially recreation—anything to divert my mind from fears and somber thoughts. I say this to Seraphine when she warns me that I must not go to Roberta's party. She says I will go at my great peril, but I refuse to entertain these fears. I crave the gaiety and *insouciance* of Roberta's care-free Bohemians. Besides, I shall see Christopher. I will tell him that I love him with all my soul and will marry him—the sooner the better—any time. Within a month I may be Mrs. Christopher Herrick. How wonderful!

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*Thursday.*

While I was looking back through my diary I came upon a reflection of Julian's—he said that men take no real interest in other men, *as men*, although they are interested in all women. The fact that men are sex animals makes no impression upon other men, whereas the fact that women are sex animals makes an enormous impression. A man would hear of the tragic death of a thousand unknown men with comparative indifference, he declared, but would be distressed to hear of the death of a hundred unknown women. I wonder if that is true. I know that women are intensely conscious that all other women are sex animals. Is that due to jealousy?

I came upon another thought of Julian's—about temptation. He pictured a drunkard who has sworn off drinking. This man announces his virtuous intentions from the housetops—he will never drink again, he will avoid temptation, he will not attend a certain convivial gathering, say tonight at nine o'clock. He repeats this to himself and to others—he will *not* be present at this gathering. But all the time, deep down in his heart, he knows that he will be present. He knows that nine o'clock will find him in his accustomed seat smiling upon flowing glasses....

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I am afraid of tomorrow night. I am afraid of what I will say to Captain Herrick!

*Friday morning.*

I dreamed last night that I was in a great purple forest and again I saw the black birds with fiery eyes. They were in a circle around me, judging me. They wanted me to say something or do something, but I did not know what it was, and I was in despair. Suddenly the trees opened and I saw a smooth black river pouring over a precipice and the birds bore me to the river and dropped me into it. Then, as I struggled in the water, Chris leaped from the bank to save me, but I fought against him and we were both swept along towards the precipice. He caught me in his arms, but I struck at him and screamed—and then I

awakened.



Seraphine gave me a beautiful prayer or affirmation to say when I am afraid. I say this over and over again and it comforts me: *"I am God's child. God is my life, God is my strength. My soul is in unison with the perfect love of God. There is absolutely nothing to fear. All thoughts of fear are banished from my mind. I will no longer be bound by thoughts of fear."*

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I shut my eyes tight and say this when I am going to sleep.

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## CHAPTER IX

### THE CONFESSIONAL CLUB

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In setting forth the happenings at Roberta Vallis' party (with their startling psychic consequences to Penelope Wells) it is necessary to say a word about the Greenwich Village poet Kendall Brown, since he originated the Confessional Club. This remarkable organization grew out of a tirade against American hypocrisy made by Kendall one night in a little Italian restaurant on Bleeker Street.

What was most needed in this country and in all countries, the one thing that alone could redeem mankind, declared Brown, soaring away on red wine enthusiasm, was truth. "Let us be honest and outspoken about things as they are, about men and women as they are," he ran on in his charmingly plausible way. "We are none of us very important, there isn't much difference between saints and sinners—I'll argue that point with any man—but there is one immensely valuable contribution that we can all make to the general store of life-knowledge, we can speak the exact truth about ourselves and our experiences, instead of hiding it. That would be a real service to humanity, for this composite truth, assembled and studied, must lead to wisdom; but men and women are such pitiful cowards, such cringing toadies to convention. It makes me sick!"

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He refilled his glass slowly and continued: "Why is our talk stupid—all talk, so stupid that we have to get drunk in order to endure life? Why are we bores—all of us? Because we are afraid to say the essential things—what we know. We talk about what we don't know, like monkeys, and call it civilized. By God, I'd like to start a society for the dissemination of the truth that everybody knows and nobody tells!"

This phrase caught the fancy of Roberta Vallis whose fluttering, frivolous soul was appealed to by any line of reasoning that tended to put saints and sinners on the same level. She made Kendall repeat his idea and then and there proposed that they adopt it. *A society for the dissemination of the truth that everybody knows and nobody tells!* Splendid! They must found this society—immediately. When should they have the first meeting?

In this casual way the Confessional Club came into being, with no fixed membership, no dues or constitution, no regular place or time of meeting, and added one more to those amusing (sometimes inspiring) little groups that have flourished in Greenwich Village. It certainly had a real idea behind it. "We are loaded with human dynamite. We tell the truth that is never told," became the watchword of the society.

All of which bears upon the present narrative because Roberta Vallis had arranged to have one of these self-revealing séances as a feature of her party; and she insisted that Penelope contribute an emotional experience.

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"You *must* confess something, Pen, my sweet one, in order to be in the spirit of the evening," she explained with bubbling exuberance, "any little thing. We all do it. Only be careful you don't make that architect of yours jealous," she teased. "Think up a classy confession, something weird—understand? Don't look so darned serious. It's only for fun. You can fake up something, dearie, if you're afraid to tell the truth. Why, what's the matter?"

Penelope's face had changed startlingly, and was now overcast by sombre memories—by fears. Why had those lightly spoken words moved her so strangely? Afraid to tell the truth! Was she afraid? With sinking heart she recalled that message of Seraphine's exalted spirit—*Penelope must cleanse her soul of evil!*

But—had she not cleansed her soul already? Had she not confessed the truth about her longing for a child? And written it down in her diary and prayed God to forgive her? Was not that enough? Why should this pressure to confess more be put upon her? Could it be that frivolous, selfish Roberta Vallis was the unconscious agent of some fateful power urging Penelope Wells to look into her soul again?

Suddenly, in a flash of new understanding, Mrs. Wells decided. This was no longer a trifling incident, but a happening of deep spiritual import. She was struggling desperately

for health—for happiness. Perhaps this was her way of salvation, if she could only bring herself to say the one thing that—that ought to be said. After all, the opinion of these careless Bohemians mattered little—it was God's opinion that mattered.

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“Do you mind if I bring Seraphine to the party?” Penelope asked with a far-away look in her eyes.

“Of course not—we'll be glad to have her.”

“All right, Bobby. I will make a confession. There is something I want to confess. I don't know just the details, but—yes I do, too, it's about—” she hesitated, but went on with strengthening resolve, “it's about a trip I made once on a Fall River steamboat.”

Roberta's eyes danced at this prospect.

“Splendid, Pen! We'll have yours last—just before the supper.”

And so it came about that it was Penelope herself who set into action forces of the mind or the soul, memories and fears that were to change her whole future.

We need take no account of the other confessions (except one), tinsel or tawdry fragments from the drift-wood of life, that were offered blithely by three or four members of the gay company. We are concerned with Penelope's confession, and with this only as it leads up to subsequent developments of the evening. There was an ominous significance in the fact that Mrs. Wells made this confession before the man she loved. Why did she do that? Why?

Penelope sat beside a Japanese screen of black and gold on which a red-tongued dragon coiled its embroidered length and, by the light of a yellow lantern just above (there was also a tiny blue lantern that flung down a caressing ray upon her smooth dark hair and adorable shoulders) she glanced at some loose leaves taken from an old diary. Then, nerving herself for the effort, she began in a low, appealing tone, but rather unsteadily:

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“I am going to tell you something that—it's very hard for me to speak of this, but—I want to tell it. I have a feeling that if I tell it I may save myself and someone who is dear to me,” she looked down in embarrassment, “from—from a terrible danger. I feel more deeply about this because—some of you remember a strange thing that happened four years ago when I was present at a meeting of this club.”

There were murmurs and nods of understanding from several of the guests who settled themselves into positions of expectant attention.

“Are we to have a second prophecy, Mrs. Walters?” inquired Kendall Brown briskly of Seraphine, whose haunting eyes kept Penelope in loving watchfulness; but the medium made no reply.

“The second prophecy has already been made, Kendall,” Mrs. Wells answered gravely. “I have come here tonight knowing that a disaster may result from my presence. Seraphine says that a disaster will result, but—I don't believe it. I can't believe it. What harm is there in my coming to this party?”

She spoke vehemently with increasing agitation and the guests watched her with fascinated interest.

“A disaster? Tonight? Extraordinary! What kind of a disaster?”

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Such were the questions and exclamations called forth by this startling announcement, and incredulous glances were addressed to the psychic; but Seraphine offered no enlightenment. She merely rocked placidly in her chair.

“Go on, dear,” she said.

And Penelope continued:

“You know I have been ill since I came back from France. There are symptoms in my illness that are—peculiar—distressing. I have horrible fears that I have to fight all the time. Horrible dreams, one dream in particular lately of a thing that happened on a Fall River steamboat.”

“A thing that really happened?” questioned a little gray-haired woman.

“Yes, it really happened to me during a trip that I made on this boat; and now, years later, it continues to happen in my dreams. It terrifies me, tortures me, for the thing was—it was something wrong that I did. I—I suppose it was a sin.”

A sin!

There was a tremor in her voice, a pathetic catch in her breath, almost a sob, as she forced herself to speak these words; then bravely, pleadingly, she lifted her eyes to her beloved.

Over the gay company there came a surprised and sympathetic hush. Herrick straightened awkwardly, but never flinched in his loyalty or fondness—what an ordeal for a lover!—while Penelope paused as if gathering strength to go on.

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"May I ask if this was before you were married?" queried the poet.

"No."

"After you were married?"

"Yes. My husband was with me."

Penelope's voice sank almost to a whisper, and the unconscious twining together of her fingers bore witness to her increasing distress. Everyone in the room felt the poignancy of the moment. If the operation of soul cleansing involved such stress as this, then even these heedless members of the Confessional Club drew back disapprovingly.

"Hold on, Pen!" interposed Roberta Vallis good-naturedly, wishing to relieve this embarrassment. "You're getting all fussed up. I guess you'd better cut out this story. I don't believe it's much good anyway. If you think there are any sentimental variations on a Fall River steamboat theme that we are not fully conversant with, why you've got another guess coming."

Penelope wavered and again her dark eyes yearned towards Christopher. It was cruelly hard to go on with her story, yet it was almost impossible now not to tell it.

"I *want* to make this confession," she insisted, strong in her purpose, yet breaking under womanly weakness. "I must cleanse my soul of—of evil—mustn't I?" her anguished eyes begged comfort of Seraphine.

"You are right, dear child," the medium answered gently, "but wait a little. Sit over here by me. We have plenty of time." She took her friend's icy hand in hers and drew her protectingly to a place beside her on the sofa.

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"To cheer you up, Pen," laughed Bobby, "and create a general diversion, I'll tell a story myself—you'll see the kind of confession stuff we generally put over in our little group of unconventional thinkers. Attention, folks! Harken to the Tale of Dora the Dressmaker! Which proves that the way of the transgressor, as observed on Manhattan Island, is not always so darned hard."

Then she told her story in the most approved Greenwich Village style, with slangy and cynical comments, all of which were received with chortles of satisfaction by the men and with no very severe disapproval by the ladies—except Seraphine.

"Dora was a pretty, frail looking girl—but really as strong as a horse," began Bobby gleefully, "one of those tall blondes who can pass off for aristocrats without being the real thing. She came from a small Southern town and had married a man who was no good. He drank and chased after women; and, in one of his drunken fits, he was run over on a dark night at the railroad crossing—fortunately."

Penelope stirred uneasily at the memories in her own life conjured up by this picture.

"Dora had the usual small town collection of wedding cut glass and doilies, which she put away in the attic, after husband's decease; and, with them, she also put away all respect and desire for the married state. She was through with domesticity and all that it represented, and made up her mind to devote the rest of her life to earning as big a salary as she could and having the best time possible."

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The rest of the story was a sordid account of this girl's effort to combine business with pleasure, as men do, and of her startled discovery one day, just at the moment of her greatest success—she had been offered the position of head designer in a wholesale dress house with coveted trips to Europe—that she was about to become a mother.

Penelope sighed wearily as she listened. Could she *never* escape from this eternal sex theme?

"You see," Bobby rattled on, "Dora knew she couldn't go to roof gardens and supper parties alone, and she couldn't keep a chap on a string without paying—so she paid. Of course she camouflaged this part of her life very daintily, as she did everything else, but going out evenings was as important to her as her business ambition was."

Mrs. Wells smiled faintly at the word camouflaged, for she knew better than anyone else that this supposed story of a dressmaker was really the story of Roberta Vallis herself, thinly disguised.

"The point is that after years of living exactly like a man," Miss Vallis became a shade more serious here and a note of defiance crept into her discourse, "with work and pleasure travelling along side by side, Dora was called upon to face a situation that would have brought her gay and prosperous career to a sad and shameful end in any well-constructed Sunday School book; but please notice that it did nothing of the sort in real life. Did she lose her job? She did not. Or her health or reputation? Nothing like that. After she got over the first shock of surprise Dora decided to go through with the thing, and, being tall and thin, got away with it successfully. No one suspected that the illness which kept her away from her work was anything but influenza, and—well, the child didn't live," she concluded abruptly as she caught Seraphine's disapproving glance. "The point is that Dora is today one

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of the most successful business women in Boston.”

A challenge to outraged virtue was in her tone, and all eyes turned instinctively to the psychic who was still rocking placidly.

“Poor woman!” Seraphine said simply, which seemed to annoy Miss Vallis.

“Why do you say that? Why is she a poor woman? She has everything she wants.”

“No! No indeed,” was the grave reply. “She has nothing that she really wants. She has cut herself off from the operation of God's love. She is surrounded by forces that—Oh!” the medium's eyes closed for a moment and she drew a long breath, “my control tells me these forces of evil—they will destroy this girl.”

Roberta essayed to answer mockingly, but the words died on her lips, and there fell a moment of shivery silence until Kendall Brown broke the spell.

“That story of Dora is a precious human document,” was the poet's ponderous pronouncement. “It is unpleasant, painful, but—what is the lesson? The lesson is that infinite trouble grows out of our rotten squeamishness about sex facts. This girl craved a reasonable amount of pleasure after her work, and she got it. She refused to spend her evenings alone in her room reading a book. She wanted to dance, to enjoy the society of men—their intimate society. That brings us to the oldest and most resistless force in the world, a blessed force, a God-given force upon which all life depends—you know what I mean. And how do we deal with this most formidable of forces? Are we grateful for it? Do we acknowledge its irresistible supremacy? No! We deal with it by pretending that it doesn't exist. We say to Friend Dora that, being unmarried, she has nothing whatever to do with sex attraction, except to forget it. Does she forget it? She does not. Do the men allow her to forget it? They do not. And one fine day Friend Dora has a baby and everybody says horrible, disgraceful! Rubbish! I maintain that the state should provide homes and proper care for the children we call illegitimate! What a word! I say *all* children are legitimate, all mothers should be honored, yes, and financially protected. A woman who gives a child to the nation, regardless of who the father is, renders a distinguished service. She is a public benefactor.”

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“Hear, hear!” approved several, but the little grey-haired woman objected that this meant free love, whereupon Kendall was off again on his hobby.

“Love *is* free, it always has been and always will be free. If you chain love down under smug rules you only kill it or distort it. I am not arguing against marriage, but against hypocrisy. We may as well recognize that sex desire is so strong a force in the world—that—”

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To all of this Penelope had listened with ill-concealed aversion, now she could no longer restrain her impatience. “Ridiculous!” she interrupted. “You exasperate me with your talk about the compelling claims of oversexed individuals. Let them learn to behave themselves and control themselves.”

“Mrs. Wells is absolutely right,” agreed Captain Herrick quietly, his eyes challenging Brown. “If certain men insist on behaving like orang-outangs in the jungle, then society should treat them as orang-outangs.”

This incisive statement somewhat jarred the poet's self-sufficiency and he subsided for the moment, but jealousy is a cunning adversary and the rival awaited his opportunity for counter-attack.

As the discussion proceeded Kendall noticed that one of the loose pages from Penelope's diary had fluttered to the floor and, recovering this, he glanced at it carelessly, then smiled as he plucked at his yellow beard.

“Excuse me, Mrs. Wells,” he said. “I could not help reading a few words. Won't you go on with your confession—please do. It sounds so wonderfully interesting. See—there—at the bottom!” He pointed to the lines.

“Oh!” she murmured as she saw the writing, and two spots of color burned in her cheeks. “Let me have it—I insist!”

“Certainly. But do read it to us. This is a real human interest story. *'Let me bow my head in shame and humble my spirit in the dust'*—wasn't that it?” laughed Kendall maliciously.

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At this, seeing the frightened look in Penelope's eyes, Captain Herrick stormed in: “You had no right to read those words or repeat them.”

“I am sorry, Mrs. Wells. I meant no offense,” apologized the poet, realizing that he had gone too far, but the harm was done. Something unaccountably serious had happened to Penelope Wells. Her face had gone deathly white, and Roberta, suddenly sympathetic, hastened to her.

“It's a shame to tease you, dearie. No more confession stuff. Now, folks, we'll have supper—down in the restaurant. Then we'll dance. Come on! Feeling better, Pen? What you need is a cocktail and some champagne.”

But Penelope lay like a stricken creature, her beautiful head limp against the pillow of her



chair, her eyes filled with pain.

"I—I'll be all right in a minute, Bobby," she whispered. "Please go down now—all of you except Captain Herrick. We'll join you—a little later. You don't mind?" she turned to Herrick who was bending over her anxiously. Then she said softly: "Don't leave me, Chris. I don't feel quite like myself. I'm a little frightened."

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## CHAPTER X

### FAUVETTE

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Thus it happened that Penelope and Captain Herrick did not descend to the flower-spread supper room where dancing and good cheer awaited the gay company, but remained in Roberta's black and gold apartment, two lovers swept along by powers of fate far beyond their control, and now facing the greatest emotional moment of their lives.

The catastrophe came gradually, yet at the end with startling suddenness.

At first, when they were alone, Penelope seemed to recover from her distress and began to talk naturally and serenely, as if her preceding agitations were forgotten. She told Christopher that Dr. Owen's wise counsels had reassured her, and she now felt confident that her bad dreams and other disturbing symptoms would soon leave her.

"You see something has conquered all my sadness, all my fears," she looked at him shyly.

For a moment he sat motionless, drinking in her splendid beauty, then he leaned towards her impulsively and spoke one word that carried all the devotion of his soul: "Penelope!"

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"Dear boy!" she murmured, her voice thrilling, and a moment later he had clasped her in his arms.

"You're mine! You love me! Thank God!"

But she disengaged herself gently, there was something she wished to say. She would not deny her love, her great love for him. She realized that she had loved him from the first. Her resistance had been part of her illness—it was not coquetry, he must not think that. Now her eyes were opened and her heart was singing with joy. She was the happiest woman in the world at the thought that she was to be his wife.

"My darling! How I love you!" exclaimed Christopher, drawing her towards him, his lips seeking hers.

"No—no," Penelope's voice was so serious, so full of alarm that her lover instantly obeyed. He drew away from her with a hurt, puzzled expression in his eyes. Very gravely Penelope went on. "I love you, too, my darling, but I must ask you to make me a solemn promise. I shall be most unhappy if you refuse. I want you to promise not to kiss me,—as—as lovers kiss, passionately, ardently, until after we are married."

"But, Pen, you—can't mean that seriously?"

With a wistful little smile she assured him that she did mean it most seriously.

In vain he protested. "But why? It's so absurd! Why shouldn't I kiss you when I love you better than anything in the world."

"Chris, please, *please* don't talk like that. You must trust me and do what I ask. You must, dear!"

A pathetic earnestness in her tone and a strange look in her eyes made Christopher forget his privileges, and he made the promise.

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"Thank you, dear. Now I must tell you something else," she went on. "I must explain why I was so disturbed when Kendall Brown read those words from my diary. I *must* tell you what they meant."

But a masterful gesture from Herrick stopped her. He did not wish to know anything about this. He trusted her entirely, he approved of her entirely, they must never speak of these old sad things again.

Tears of gratitude suddenly filled her eyes.

"Take this, dear, it belonged to my mother," she said fondly and gave him a circlet of twisted dolphins and he put it on his finger. Then he gave her a brown seal ring, engraved with old Armenian characters.

"I got it in Constantinople, Pen. It's a talisman. It will bring us luck."

They talked on, forgetful of the supper party downstairs, until a waiter came with cocktails and champagne that Roberta had sent up, but Penelope would have none of these,

saying that her love was too great to need stimulation.

"I must drink to your health, dear," said Herrick, and pouring out the bubbling liquid, he offered her a glass, but she shook her head.

"No? Not even a sip? All right, sweetheart. I'll pledge you the finest toast in the world," he lifted his goblet. "My love! My wife!"

As Christopher set down his glass and turned to clasp his beloved in his arms, he realized that there was a curious change in her face, a subtle, an almost indistinguishable change—the sweet radiance had gone. It was the word *wife* that had stabbed Penelope with unforgettable memories and brought back her impulse to confess. Once more she tried to tell the story of that tragic steamboat, but Christopher firmly and good-naturedly refused to listen. Whatever she had done, her life had been a hundred times finer and nobler than his. Not that he had any great burden on his conscience, but—well—With a chivalrous idea of balancing scores, he mentioned that there had been one or two things that—er—and his embarrassment grew.

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Penelope's eyes caressed him. "I'm so glad, Chris, if there is something for me to forgive. Is it—is it a woman story?"

"Well, yes."

"Tell me. I won't misjudge you, dear," she spoke confidently, although a shadow of pain flitted across her face. Then he began to tell of a hotel flirtation—a young woman he had met one night in Philadelphia. She wasn't so very pretty, but—her husband had treated her like the devil and—she was very unhappy and—they had rather a mad time together.

Christopher spoke in brief, business-like sentence's as if desiring to get through with a painful duty, but Penelope pressed him for details.

"What was her name—her first name?"

"Katherine."

"Did you have supper with her—did she drink?"

"Yes."

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"Was she—how shall I say it?—an alluring woman? Did she have a pretty figure?"

The soldier looked at his sweetheart in surprise and, without answering, he struck a match and meditatively followed the yellow flame as it consumed the wood. Penelope watched his well-shaped, well-kept hands.

"Did she?"

"I—I suppose so. What difference does that make? Do you mind if I smoke?"

"Of course not." She took a cigarette from his silver case. "I'll have one with you—from the same match! *Voilà!*" She inhaled deeply and blew out a grey cloud. "Tell me more about Katherine."

His frown deepened.

"Poor woman! She was reckless. I am sure she had never done a thing like this before. I hadn't either. I don't mean that I've been an angel, Pen, but—" he paused, then, with a flash of self-justification: "I give you my word of honor, in the main I have not done that sort of thing."

She caught his hand impulsively. "I know you haven't. I'm so glad. Now I *will* drink to—to you." She rose and stood before him, a lithe young creature vibrant with life. "Touch your glass to mine. My dear boy! My Christopher!"

They drank together.

Then Herrick resumed his explanation. "I must tell you a little more, darling. You see I was sorry for this woman, her story was so pathetic. I wanted to help her, if I could, not to harm her. So I suggested that we each make a pledge to the other—"

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He was intensely in earnest, but Penelope's eyes were now dancing in mockery.

"Oh you reformer! You ridiculous boy!" she laughed.

"It's true, I assure you."

"I don't believe it. What was the pledge? No, don't tell me! Tell me if you kept it."

He moved uneasily under her searching gaze, but did not answer.

"Did you keep your pledge?" she insisted.

"Yes."

"For how long?"

He shifted again uncomfortably.

"For several months," he began, "but I must admit—"

"No, no!" she interrupted with a swift emotional change. "Don't admit anything. It was wicked of me to mock you. Come, we will drink to the lady in Philadelphia! Fill the glasses! To Katherine! And poor, weak human nature! Katherine! And all our good resolutions!"

Pen's eyes teased her lover with a *gay diablerie* as she slowly emptied her glass, and Herrick's heart quickened at the realization that this beautiful woman belonged to him—she belonged to him. At the same time he was conscious of a vague uneasiness under the increasing allurements of her glances. Were there ever such eyes in the world? Was there ever such a woman? Adorable as a saint, dangerous as a siren!

"There is one pledge I will never break, Pen," he said tenderly. "I'll never fail to do every possible thing to make you happy."

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"Will you take me back to Paris, Chris? I want to spend a whole year in Paris with you. We'll go to fine hotels along the Champs Élysées, we'll prowl through those queer places in Montmartre, remember? and once you'll take me to a students' ball, won't you, dear? I'd love to dance at a students' ball—*with you!*" Her eyes burned on him under fluttering black lashes—such long curling lashes! "Let's drink to Paris—*toi et moi, tous les deux ensemble, pas?* Come!" She snatched up her glass again and emptied it quickly.

A spirit of wild gaiety and abandon had caught Penelope—there was no restraining her. They must sit on the divan under that dull blue light, and talk of their love—their wonderful love that had swept aside all barriers—while she smoked another cigarette. Christopher forgot to be afraid—he, too, was young! *Vive la joie!*

She nestled close to him against the pillows and, as they talked in low tones, he drew her closer, breathing the perfume of her hair. She caught his hand and clung to it, then slowly, restlessly, her fingers moved along his arm.

"My love! My love!" she whispered.

"Sweetheart!" he looked deep into her soul, his heart pounding furiously.

"It was horrid of me, Chris, to make you promise—that," she bent close offering him her lips.

"Promise what?" he asked unsteadily.

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"Oh, Chris," she whispered and her soft form seemed to envelope him. "I am yours, yours!"

Then silence fell in the room while she pressed her eager mouth to his.

"Penelope!" he thrilled deliriously.

"Don't call me Penelope. It's so prim and old fashioned. I told you what to call me—Fauvette. That's the name I like. Fauvette! I am your Fauvette. Say it."

Her eyes consumed him.

Christopher realized his danger, but he was powerless against the spell of her beauty.

"My Fauvette!" he caught her in his arms.

"Ah! Ah! *Mon cheri!* Wait!" Swiftly she turned off the lights, then darted back to him in the darkness.

At this moment of supreme crisis the door of the apartment opened slowly and, as the light streamed in, a figure entered that came like a gentle radiance. It was Seraphine.

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## CHAPTER XI

### THE EVIL SPIRIT

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Penelope sprang up from the divan panting with anger. Her hair was dishevelled. Her bare shoulders gleamed in the shadows. She glared at Seraphine.

"How dare you come in here?" she demanded insolently. "What do you want here?"

With a smile of infinite compassion Mrs. Walters approached like a loving mother. "My child! My dear child!" she said tenderly.

But the mad young creature repulsed her. "No, no! I hate you! Go away!"

The newcomer turned reassuringly to Captain Herrick. "I am Penelope's friend—Seraphine."

"Ha! Seraphine! I am Fauvette! What do I care for you?" The frantic one snapped her fingers at the other woman.

"Penelope!" pleaded Christopher, shocked at her violence.

She turned on him in fury. "You fool! You wouldn't take the chance I offered you."

"I will quiet her," said Mrs. Walters to Herrick. "Don't be alarmed."

"You can't quiet me. I'll say anything I damn please. Go on, quiet me! Quiet Fauvette! I'd like to see you do it. Ha, ha, ha!" Her wild laughter rang through the apartment. [Pg 112]

Christopher's face was tense with alarm and distress. "What can I do? What is the matter with her?" he appealed to Seraphine.

"She is ill. She is not herself," was the grave reply. "I'll call Dr. Owen; I'll tell him to come at once."

He hurried out of the room and the two women faced each other.

Fauvette sank back on the divan and lay there in sullen defiance. "Now we're alone—you and I. What are you going to do about it?" was her harsh challenge.

The psychic did not answer, but her lips moved as if in prayer; then she spoke sternly, her deep eyes widening: "I see your scarlet lights, your sinister face."

From the shadowy corner Fauvette sneered: "I see your soft, sentimental Christmas card face. I'm not afraid of you. I laugh at you." And peals of shrill, almost satanic, laughter rang through the room.

Seraphine advanced slowly, holding out her hands.

"I know your ways, creature of darkness. I command you to leave this pure body that you would defile."

And fierce the answer came: "No! Damn you! You are not strong enough to drive me out."

"Think of the tortures you are preparing for yourself."

"Don't you worry about my tortures." [Pg 113]

"Have pity on Penelope. It will be counted in your favor."

There were snarling throat-sounds, then these menacing words: "No! I'm going to put Penelope out of business."

"Where is Penelope now?"

"She is sleeping. Poor nut!"

"She knows nothing about Fauvette?"

"Nothing."

"She remembers nothing that Fauvette says?"

"Nothing."

There was a long silence in the darkened room while Seraphine prayed.

"You know very well that Dr. Leroy can drive you out," she said presently.

"He can't do it. Let him try. Nobody can drive me out. Besides, you won't get Dr. Leroy."

"Why not?"

"This other doctor won't have him."

"Dr. Owen?"

"Yes. I know damned well how to fix him. I'll tell him some things that will make him sit up and take notice."

"How do you mean you will fix him?"

"Never mind. You'll see. If I can't have Herrick, Penelope is *never* going to have him."

The medium closed her eyes and seemed to listen. "You mean Penelope will never have him because of something you are going to tell Dr. Owen—something about—about chemistry?" she groped for the word.

"Ye-es," unwillingly. [Pg 114]

"Dr. Owen will not believe you."

"He *will* believe me."

"No!" declared Seraphine dreamily. "There are greater powers than you fighting for

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## CHAPTER XII

### X K C

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We come now to what has been regarded by some authorities as the most remarkable feature in the case of Penelope Wells, a development almost without parallel in the records of abnormal psychology. All books on this subject record instances of jealousy or hostility between two recurring personalities in the same individual. A woman in one personality writes a letter that humiliates her in another personality. A little girl eats a certain article of food while in one personality simply because she knows that her other personality hates that particular food. And so on. It almost never occurs, however, that an evil personality will commit an act or a crime that is abhorrent to the individual's fundamental nature. Neither through hypnotism nor through any manifestation of a dual nature will a person become a thief or a murderer unless there is really in that person a latent tendency towards stealing or killing. There is always some germ of Mr. Hyde's bloodthirstiness in the benevolence of Dr. Jekyll.

But Penelope Wells, under the domination of her Fauvette personality, now entered upon a course that was certain to bring disgrace and sorrow upon a man she loved with all her heart, a man for whom she had risked her life on the battle field. Here is one of those mysteries that will not be cleared up until we better understand these strange and distressing phenomena of the sick brain or the sick soul.

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In presenting this development it must be mentioned that Dr. William Owen was not only a specialist on nervous diseases but a chemist of wide reputation in the field of laboratory investigation. For a year and a half preceding the end of the war he had held a major's commission in the army and had spent much time in a government research laboratory, studying poison gases.

In August, 1918, he had discovered a toxic product of extraordinary virulence, not a gas, but a tasteless and odorless liquid containing harmful bacteria. These bacteria showed great resistance against heat and cold and were able to propagate and disseminate themselves with incredible rapidity through living creatures, rats, earth worms, birds, cattle, dogs, fleas, that might feed upon them or come in contact with them. The deadliness of this product was so great, as appeared from laboratory tests, that it was believed all human life might be exterminated in a region intensively inoculated (from airplanes or guns) with the liquid. This was only a possibility, but it was an enormously important possibility.

A report on this formidable discovery had been prepared by Dr. Owen for the Washington authorities with such extreme secrecy that the chemical formula for the liquid had been indicated simply by the letters X K C, the product being referred to as X K C liquid. Moreover, the only person, except Dr. Owen, in possession of the full facts touching this discovery was Captain Herrick who had assisted the doctor in his investigations. Herrick had been cautioned to guard this secret as he would his life, since there was involved in it nothing less than the possibility of preventing future wars through the power of its potential terribleness.

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The bearing of all this upon our narrative was presently made clear as the conflict developed between tortured Penelope and the psychic in Roberta Vallis' studio.

For some moments the two women eyed each other in hostile silence, which was broken presently by the sound of footsteps in the hall.

“Ah! Here comes your doctor!” mocked the fair creature on the divan. “Now watch Fauvette!”

The door opened and Dr. Owen, followed by Herrick, both grave-faced, entered the apartment.

Christopher turned anxiously to Seraphine: “What has happened? Is she better?”

Mrs. Walters shook her head, but when the young officer looked at Penelope his fears were lessened, for she (was it from dissimulation or weariness?) gave no indication of her recent frenzy, but seemed to be resting peacefully against the cushions.

“Let's have a little more light here,” said Dr. Owen, and he turned on the electrics. “I'm afraid you have overtaxed your strength, Mrs. Wells.”

Penelope answered gently with perfect self-possession: “I'm afraid I have, doctor, I'm sorry to give you so much trouble.” And she smiled sweetly at Herrick.

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The specialist drew up a chair and studied his patient thoughtfully. There was an added austerity in his usual professional manner.

"Captain Herrick tells me that you made some rather strange remarks just now?" he said tentatively.

Mrs. Wells met him with a look of half amused understanding.

"Did I?" she answered carelessly, and as she spoke she took up a pencil and made formless scrawls on a sheet of paper. "I suppose he refers to my calling him a fool. It is a little unusual, isn't it?"

She laughed in a mirthless way.

"Why did you do it?"

"I haven't any idea."

"And you spoke unkindly to Seraphine? That isn't like you."

"No? How do you know what I am like?" she answered quickly, her hand still fidgeting with the pencil.

Dr. Owen observed her attentively and did not speak for some moments. Seraphine and Christopher drew their chairs nearer, as if they knew that the tension of restraint was about to break.

"You must realize that you have been under a great strain, Mrs. Wells," resumed the doctor, "and you are tired—you are very tired."

Her answer came dreamily, absent-mindedly: "Yes, I am tired," and, as she spoke, Penelope's tragic eyes closed wearily. But her fingers still clutched the pencil and continued to move it over the white sheet.

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"Look!" whispered Seraphine, "she is making letters upside down."

"That's queer!" nodded Owen. "She is writing backwards—from right to left. Hello!" He started in surprise as he saw, on bending closer, that Penelope had covered the sheet with large printed letters—X—K—C, written over and over again.

Greatly disturbed, Dr. Owen roused his patient and questioned her about this; but she insisted that she had no idea what she had written or what the letters meant. A little later, however, she acknowledged that this was not true.

"What! You did know what you wrote?" the scientist demanded. His whole manner had changed. His eyes were cold and accusing. He was no longer a sympathetic physician tactful towards the whims of a pretty woman, but a major in the United States Army defending the interests of his country.

"This is a very serious matter, Mrs. Wells, please understand that. You told me just now that you did not know what you wrote on the sheet of paper?"

Penelope faced him scornfully. Her cheeks were flushed. Her bosom heaved.

"I said that, but it wasn't true. I lied to you. I did know what I wrote."

"You know what those letters mean?"

"Yes, I do!"

"What do they mean?"

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"They mean some kind of poison stuff that you have made for the army."

"How do you know that?"

"He told me," she turned to Captain Herrick who had listened in dumb bewilderment.

"How can you say such a thing?" Chris protested.

"Because it's true," she flung the words at him defiantly.

The young officer went close to her and looked searchingly into her eyes.

"Think what you are saying," he begged. "Remember what this means. Remember that—"

She cut in viciously: "You shut up! I have no more use for you. I tell you it's true."

"Don't believe her, doctor," interposed Seraphine: "She is not responsible for what she says."

"I am responsible. I know exactly what I am saying."

"It is not true, sir," put in Captain Herrick. "May I add that—"

"Wait! Why are you confessing this, Mrs. Wells?"

Like a fury Fauvette glared at Christopher.

"Because he turned me down. I'm sore on him. He's not on the level."

"Not on the level? Are you speaking of him as a lover or an officer?"

"Both ways. He's not on the level at all."

"Oh, Penelope!" grieved the heartbroken lover.

She eyed him scornfully. "You needn't Penelope me! I said I have no use for you. A Sunday school sweetheart! Ha! I'll tell you something else, doctor, I'm not the only one who knows about your X K C stuff."

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"Mrs. Wells," Dr. Owen spoke slowly, "are you deliberately accusing Captain Herrick of disloyalty?"

"Yes, I am."

Herrick stiffened under this insult, white-faced, but he did not speak.

"He meant to sell this information—for money," she added.

"My God!" breathed Christopher.

"Captain Herrick told you this?"

"Yes, he did. He said we would go abroad and live together—like millionaires. You did! You know damned well you did," she almost screamed the words at Herrick, then she sank back on the divan exhausted, and lay still, her eyes closed.

The doctor's face was ominously set as he turned to his young friend.

"Chris, my boy, I need not tell you that I cannot believe this monstrous accusation. At the same time, I saw Mrs. Wells write down those letters that are only known to you and to me. I saw that with my own eyes—you saw it, too."

"Yes, sir."

"And you heard what she said?"

"Yes, sir."

"Under the circumstances, as your superior officer, I don't see how I have any choice except to—"

Here Mrs. Walters interrupted: "May I speak? It is still possible to avert a great disaster."

The doctor shook his head. "You have heard Mrs. Wells' confession. No power on earth can prevent an investigation of this," he declared with military finality.

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Seraphine's lips moved in silent prayer. Her face was transfigured as her eyes fell tenderly upon the white-faced, tortured sleeper.

"No power on earth, but—God can prevent it," she murmured and moved nearer to Penelope whose face was convulsed as if by a terrifying dream. Then, with hands extended over the beautiful figure, the psychic prayed aloud, while Herrick and the doctor, caught by the power of her faith, looked on in wondering silence.

*"God of love, let Thine infinite power descend upon this Thy tortured child and drive out all evil and wickedness from her. Open the eyes of these men so that they may understand and be merciful. Oh, God, grant us a sign! Let Thy light descend upon us."*

Captain Herrick has always maintained that at this moment, as he watched his beloved, his heart clutched with horrible forebodings, he distinctly *saw* (Dr. Owen did not see this) a faint stream of bluish radiance playing over her from the direction of Seraphine, and enveloping her. It is certain that Penelope's face immediately became peaceful and the convulsive twitchings that had shaken her body ceased.

"Look!" marvelled Christopher. "She is smiling in her sleep."

Seraphine turned to Dr. Owen, with radiant countenance.

"It is God's sign. Come! Penelope will awaken soon and must find herself alone with her lover. It will be the real Penelope. You will see. Let us draw back into the shadows. You stay near her," she motioned to Herrick, then turned down the lights except a yellow-shaded lamp near the sleeper.

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And, presently, watching with breathless interest, these three saw Penelope stir naturally and open her eyes.

"Why, how strange!" she exclaimed. "I must have gone to sleep. Why did you let me go to sleep, Chris?" she questioned her lover, with bright, happy eyes in which there was no trace of her recent perturbations of spirit.

"It's all right, Pen," he said reassuringly. "You were a little—a little faint, I guess."

She held out her hand lovingly and beckoned him to her side.

"Sit by me here. I had such a horrible dream. I'm so glad to see you, dear. I'm so glad to

be awake. Oh!" She started up in embarrassment as she saw that her dress was disarranged. "What's the matter with my dress? What did I do? What has happened? Tell me. You must tell me," she begged in confusion.

"Don't worry, sweetheart," he soothed her. "It was the excitement of all that talk—that ass of a poet."

Penelope passed her hand over her eyes in a troubled effort to remember. It was pathetic to see her groping backwards through a daze of confused impressions. The last clear thing in her mind was exchanging rings with her lover. How long had they been here? What time was it? What must Roberta think of them, staying up in her apartment all alone?

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Christopher assured her that what Roberta thought (she and her gay friends were still dancing downstairs) was the very least of his preoccupations, and he was planning to turn his sweetheart's thoughts into a different channel when Seraphine came forward out of the shadows followed by Dr. Owen.

"Why, Seraphine!" exclaimed Penelope in astonishment. "Where did you come from? And Dr. Owen?"

Seraphine greeted her friend lovingly and kissed her, but there was unconcealed anxiety in her voice and manner.

"Dear child, something very serious has happened. You were ill and—Dr. Owen came to help you. He wants to ask you some questions."

"Yes?" replied Penelope, her face paling.

Then the doctor, with scarcely any prelude and with almost brutal directness, said: "Mrs. Wells, I want you to tell me why you accused Captain Herrick of disloyalty."

Poor Penelope! She could only gasp for breath and turn whiter still. Accuse her dear Christopher whom she loved and honored above all men of any wrong or baseness! God in heaven! If she had done this she wanted to die.

"I—I didn't," she stammered. "I couldn't do such a thing."

But the doctor was relentless. "If what you said to me a few minutes ago is true," he went on coldly, "it will be my duty, as a major in the United States Army, to order the arrest of Captain Herrick for treason against the government."

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At this startling assertion Penelope fell back as if struck down by a mortal wound, and lay still on the couch, a pitiful crumpled figure. The others gathered around her apprehensively.

"You were very harsh, sir," reproached Herrick.

"It was the best thing for you and for Mrs. Wells," answered Dr. Owen, bending over his patient, who lay there with dark-circled eyes closed, oblivious to her surroundings. "At least I have no doubt as to her sincerity, I mean as to the genuineness of this shock."

The doctor was sorely perplexed as he faced this situation. What was his duty? Here was a definite charge of extreme gravity made against a young man of unimpeachable character by the very last person in the world who would naturally make such an accusation, that is the woman who loved him. Must he assume that the patient's mind was affected? The idea that Christopher Herrick could be capable of a treasonable act was altogether preposterous, a thing that Owen rejected indignantly, yet there was the evidence of his own senses. Penelope had written those letters that were not known to anyone except Herrick and himself? And she knew what they meant. *How did she know?* Was it possible Chris had told her?

But, even so, why had Penelope betrayed and denounced her lover?

At this moment Seraphine turned to the doctor in gentle appeal.

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"Don't you see what the explanation is?" she whispered with eloquent eyes.

"It seems to be a case of dual personality," he answered.

"It's more than that, doctor."

The scientist moved impatiently, then, remembering what he had seen at Seraphine's apartment, and the recovery of his wife's jewels, he softened the skepticism of his tone.

"You think it is one of those cases you told me about of—possession? That's absurd!"

"Why is it absurd? Doesn't the Bible speak of possession by evil spirits? Is the Bible absurd? Did not Christ cast out evil spirits?"

"I suppose so, but—times have changed."

"Not in the spirit world. Oh no!"

"Anyway, the thing is not capable of proof."

"Yes, it is, if you will not shut your mind against the evidence. Oh," she pleaded, "if you



only had faith enough to let Dr. Leroy treat Penelope! What harm could it do? You say yourself this is a case of dual personality. Do you know how to cure that trouble? Do you?" she insisted.

"Perhaps not," he admitted, "but—that is not the only thing. It must be made clear to me how Mrs. Wells came into possession of an extremely precious secret of the war department."

The medium's face shone with an inspired light as she answered: "That is the work of an evil entity, doctor, I know what I am saying. You *must* let me prove it. Look at that young woman—honored by all the world." She pointed to Penelope resting peacefully. "Think what she has done! Think of her bravery, her kindness, her sincerity. Look at Captain Herrick—the soul of honor! You know him, doctor, I tell you it is impossible that these two are guilty of treason."

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Dr. Owen could not resist the power of this appeal. He was deeply moved in spite of himself. "You say you can prove that Mrs. Wells is possessed by an evil spirit? How can you prove it?"

"Give me permission to take Penelope to Dr. Leroy's hospital for a few days—will you?" she begged. "You will see for yourself that I am right."

"See for myself? Great heavens! You don't mean to tell me that—?" the doctor stopped short before the vivid memory of those white shapes that this woman once before had so strangely evoked.

Seraphine stood silent in deep concentration, then she said slowly: "Yes, that is what I mean. I believe that God, for His great purposes, will let you *see* this evil spirit."

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## CHAPTER XIII

### TERROR

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#### *(Statement by Seraphine)*

At the request of Dr. William Owen I am writing this account of what happened last night after Roberta Vallis' party. What happened during the party was terrible enough, but what came later, after the doctor and the guests had gone and we three women were alone together, Roberta and Penelope and I, was infinitely worse.

I am told to put down details of the night, as far as I can remember them, so that these may be kept in the records of the American Occult Society. There never was a clearer case of an evil spirit working destructively against a living person, although other noble souls have faced a similar ordeal, especially returned soldiers and Red Cross workers, and some have not survived it. Remember those pitiful, unaccountable suicides of our bravest and our fairest. In every case *there was a reason!*

Penelope did not go home after the party, she was in no condition to do so, but stayed at Roberta's, and I stayed with her, at least I promised to stay, for I knew she needed me. I knew that the greatest danger was still threatening her.

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When the guests had gone we took off our things (Roberta let me have her little spare room on the mezzanine floor and she gave Penelope her own big bedroom with the old French furniture), then a Russian singer, a tall blond, Margaret G—, came in from the next apartment and we talked for a long time. Pen and Bobby smoke cigarettes and drank cordials; they drank in a nervous, hysterical way, as if they felt they *must* drink, and, strangely enough, the more they drank the more intensely sober they became. *I understood this!*

Such talk! Miss Gordon had just returned to America by way of Tokio. She had been in London, Paris, Petrograd, Cairo; and, everywhere, as a result of the war, she said, she found a mad carnival of recklessness and extravagance. Everywhere the old standards of decency and honor had been set aside, greed and lust were rampant, the whole human race seemed to be swept as with a mighty tide, by three fierce desires—for money, for pleasure, for sensuality. And God had been forgotten!

I, who know how hideously true this is, tried to show these women *why* it is true, especially Penelope, whose eyes were burning dangerously, but they were *not* interested in my moralizing. "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die," mocked Margaret G—, emptying her glass, and Roberta joined her, while Penelope hesitated.

"Wait! For God's sake, wait!" I caught the poor child's arm and the wine spilled over the carpet. Never shall I forget the look in her eyes as she drew back her head and faced me. I realized that the powers of evil were striving again for the soul of Penelope Wells. Poor, tortured child!

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"Why shouldn't we eat, drink and be merry?" she demanded boldly, and I was silent.

How could I explain to this dear, misguided one that, even as those rollicking words were spoken, I felt the clutch of a cold foreboding that I know only too well.

*For tomorrow we die!*

The Russian singer presently withdrew as if she were annoyed at something, saying to Roberta that she would see her later. It seems they had arranged that Roberta should pass the night in Margaret G——'s apartment so that Penelope might have the large bedroom.

It was now after two o'clock and I suggested that we all needed sleep, my thought being for Penelope; but she was aggressively awake, and Roberta, as if bent on further excitement, started a new subject that came like a challenge to me. She began innocently enough by putting her arm around Penelope, as she sat on the bedside between the draped curtains—I never saw her so beautiful—and saying sweetly: "You don't know how terribly I'm going to miss you, Pen, when you get married."

Married! That word, so full of exquisite sentiment, seemed to stir only what was evil in Penelope. Her face hardened, her eyes narrowed cynically.

"Good old Bobby! I'm not so sure that I shall marry at all. I'm a little fed up with this holy matrimony stuff. Perhaps I want my freedom just as much as you do."

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For a moment I caught her steady defiant gaze, then her eyes dropped and shifted. I knew that Penelope was gone.

After this outburst the *other one* was restrained enough for a time and did not betray herself by violent utterances. Apparently she was listening attentively to Roberta Vallis' views about life and love and the destiny of woman, these views being as extreme and selfish as the most wayward nature could demand.

I realized that the moment was critical and concentrated all my spiritual power in an appeal to Penelope, praying that God would bring her back and make her heed my words. I spoke gently of God's love for His children and said that we need fear no evil within us or about us, no dangers of any sort, if we will learn to draw to us and through us that healing and protecting love. We can do this, we must do this by establishing a love-current from God to us and from us to God, by keeping it flowing just as an electrician keeps an electrical current flowing—every day, every hour. It is not enough to pray for God's love, we must keep our spiritual connections right, exactly as an electrician keeps his electrical connections right, if we expect the current to flow. We cannot make our electric lamps burn by merely wishing them to burn, although there is a boundless ocean of electricity waiting to be drawn upon. We must know how to tap that ocean. Similarly, the power of God's infinite love will not descend upon us simply because we need it or ask for it. We must ask for it in the right way. We must establish the right love-connections. We must set the love-current flowing, and keep it flowing, *from God to us and from us back to God*; and this can be done only by confessing our sins, by cleansing our hearts of evil thoughts and desires. *Not even God Himself can make the sun shine upon those who wilfully hide in the shadows!*

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I saw that they were listening impatiently and more than once Roberta tried to interrupt me, but I persisted and said what I had to say as well as I could, with all the love in my heart, for I knew that my precious Penelope's fate was hanging in the balance.

When I had finished Roberta got up from the bed where she had been sitting and lighted a cigarette.

"Now, then, it's my turn," she began. I could see her eyes shining with an evil purpose. "You've heard her pretty little speech, Pen. You've heard her talk about the wonderful power of God's love, and a great rigamarole about how it guards us from all evil, if we say our prayers and confess our sins and so on. I say that is all bunk, and I can prove it. Take women—they've always said their prayers more than men, always confessed their sins more than men, always been more loving than men, haven't they? And what's the result? Has God protected them from the evils of life more than men? He has not. God has let women get the worst of it right straight along through the centuries. Women have always been the slaves of men, haven't they?—in spite of all their love and devotion, in spite of all their prayers and tears? How do you account for that?"

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She flashed this at me with a wicked little toss of her head and Penelope chimed in: "Yes, I'd like to know that myself." But, when I tried to answer, Roberta cut me off with a new flood of violence.

"I'll let you know how I account for it," she went on angrily. "It's because all the churches in the world, all the smug preachers in the world, like you, have gone on shooting out this very same kind of hot air that you've been giving us; and the women, silly fools, have fallen for it. *But not the men!* The women have tried to live by love and prayer and unselfishness; they have said: 'God's will be done,' 'God will protect us'; and what is the result? How has God protected the women, who *did* believe? And how has He punished the men who refused to believe? He has made the men masters of the world, lords of everything; and He has kept the women in bondage, hasn't He?—in factory bondage, in nursery bondage, in prostitution bondage? Is what I say true, or isn't it true? I ask you, I ask any person who has got such a

thing as a clear brain and is not simply a mushy sentimentalist, is what I say true?"

Again I tried to answer, but again she cut me short and rushed on in a blaze of excitement.

"So it has been through all the pitiful history of women, until a few years ago, the poor, foolish creatures began to wake up. At last women are getting rid of their delusions and emerging from their slavery—why? Because they have begun to imitate men, and go straight after the thing they want, the thing that is worth while, *by using their power as women*, and not depending upon the power of love or the power of God or any other power. Believe me, the greatest power in the world is the power of women *as women*, and we may as well use it to the limit, just as men would. We can get anything we want out of men by learning to use this power, and, I tell you, Pen, there isn't anything better in this good old United States than money. So far men have had the money, they've ground it out of the poor and the ignorant, especially women, but now women are going after money and getting it, just like the men. Why not? If I want a sable coat and a limousine and a nice duplex apartment, why shouldn't I have them, if I can get them without breaking the law? And I *can* get them; so can you, Pen, if you'll play the cards you hold in your hand. Haven't I done it? You don't see me eating in Childs restaurants to any great extent these days, do you? And I'm not worrying about clothes, or about paying my rent."

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The poison of her words was stealing into Penelope's soul and defiling it, yet I was powerless to restrain her.

"Listen to this, child, and remember it, women are the equals of men today in every line, and they're going to have their full share of the good things of life. They're going to have freedom, and that means the right to do as they please without asking the permission of any man. Women are going to have their own latch keys and their own bank accounts. They're going to cut off their hair and put pockets in their skirts, and have babies, if they feel like it, or not have them, if they don't feel like it. The greatest revolution the world has ever known is going on now, it's the revolution of women. Let the men open their eyes! How did women get the suffrage? Was it by praying for it? Was it by the power of love? Was it by the mercy of God? No! They got the suffrage by fighting for it, by going out and hustling for it, just the way men hustle for what they want. If women had depended on the power of God's love to give them the suffrage, they wouldn't have got it in a million years."

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Of course, those were not Roberta's exact words, but I am sure I have given the substance of them, and I cannot exaggerate the defiant bitterness of her tone. She was a powerful devil's advocate and I saw that wavering Penelope (if it still was Penelope) was deeply impressed by this false and wicked reasoning. She looked at me out of her wonderful eyes—unflinching, cruel, then the balance swung against me.

"I believe you are right, Roberta Vallis," she spoke with raised forefinger and a show of judicial consideration. "It's a bold speech for a woman, I never heard the thing put that way before, but—I'm damned if I see what the answer is except—"

"Oh, Penelope!" I interrupted, trying in vain to reach her with my eyes.

"You shut up," she answered spitefully. "I said I'm *damned* if I see what the answer is except your answer, Bobby, that women have always been fools and dupes—dupes of religious superstition invented by men for the benefit of men and never accepted by men."

Roberta applauded this. "Bravo! little one! I'll tell that to Kendall Brown. *Women have always been dupes of religious superstition invented by men for the benefit of men and never accepted by men!* Go on! Tell us some more."

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And Penelope went on, flinging aside all restraint, while my heart sank.

"Take my own life. Look at it! I had an ignoble husband. Why didn't I leave him? Because I was loving, trusting. I thought I could save him. I said prayers for him. I asked God to strengthen him. And what was the result? The result was that Julian not only destroyed himself, but he destroyed what was best in me. Did God interfere? Did God give any manifestation of His infinite love? Not so that you could notice it."

She paused with heaving bosom and then swept on in her mad discourse.

"And then, when I was left alone in the world, what happened? I went abroad as a Red Cross nurse. I tried my best to help in the war. I took care of the wounded—under fire. I bore every hardship. I said my prayers. And God put a curse upon me—yes He did. He took all chance of happiness and health and love away from me. He made me do things that I never meant to do, that I don't remember doing."

Her cheeks were burning scarlet, her eyes shone like black stars. I tried to stop her. "My darling, you are ill!"

"Ill? Who made me ill? God made me ill, didn't He? That's my reward, isn't it? That's what has come of all my love and faith. If that's what God does, you can have Him. I don't want Him. I'll go with Roberta. I'll do as Roberta does—yes, I will." She almost screamed the words.

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How I prayed then for wisdom!

"No—no!" I said slowly but firmly. "You will *not* go with Roberta. You will go with me."

"I must say I like your impertinence," Roberta put in, her face white, her voice trembling with fury. "This happens to be my apartment, Mrs. Seraphine Walters, and now you can get damned well out of it."

I saw that I could do nothing more, for Penelope's eyes were hard set against me. They both wanted me to go.

"Good night. God bless you, dear," I said.

"Don't you worry about God's blessing us. You can tell Him the next time you make your report that there is a young woman named Roberta Vallis living at the Hotel des Artistes who is getting along quite well, thank you, without—"

"Don't say it, please don't say it," I begged. "You have no idea what dangers are threatening, what evil powers are about us—even now—here."

She laughed in my face. "I snap my fingers at your evil powers and your God of Love. I don't believe in either of them. I'm not afraid of either of them. Evil powers! Ha! Let them come if they want to. Here! We'll drink defiance to the powers of evil. Come on, Pen!"

"Defiance to the powers of evil," laughed my poor soul-sick Penelope, lifting her glass.

With a shudder I watched these two tragically led young women as they stood there, draped in white, and drank this sacrilegious toast; then, heavy-hearted, I came away.

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It was nearly four o'clock when I reached my home and I was so exhausted by the emotions of the night that I lay down without undressing and almost immediately fell into a troubled sleep. Then, suddenly, I awoke with a start of alarm and a sense that a voice had called me. And, though my bedroom was dark, I distinctly saw a white vaporish form passing over me as if someone had blown a cloud of tobacco smoke in my face. Once before I had had this experience of a white form passing over me—it was when my mother died.

I got up quickly, knowing that this was a summons, and, as I put on my hat and cloak, I heard my control telling me that I must go to Penelope. I knelt down and prayed that I might not be too late. Then I hurried back to the hotel and got there at half-past five. It was still night.

A sleepy elevator girl took me up to Roberta's apartment and I found that the door opened at my touch. In another moment I was standing in the silent hall looking down a long passage that led to Penelope's bedroom. The bedroom door was ajar and a dim light from the chamber illumined the way before me.

Thus far I had acted swiftly, almost mechanically, knowing that I had only one thing to do, and I had been aware of no particular emotion except a natural anxiety; but now, the moment I entered this apartment and closed the door behind me, I was conscious of a freezing, paralyzing fear, a sensation as real as the touch of a hand or the sound of a bell. It was something that could not be resisted. I was bathed in an atmosphere of terror. I was afraid to a degree that made my breath stop, my heart stop....

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The passage leading to Penelope's bedroom was not more than six yards long, but it seemed as if it took me an hour to traverse it. I could scarcely force my lagging steps, one by one, to carry me. And every hideous moment brought me the vision of Penelope lying on that curtained bed, her beautiful face distorted, her eager young life—crushed out of her. Oh God, how I prayed!

When at last I came into the bedroom I faced another struggle. There was absolute silence. No sound of breathing from the bed, although I saw a woman's form under the sheets. But not her face, which was hidden by the curtain. For a long time I stood beside that bed, rigid with fear, before I found courage to draw the curtain back. At last I drew it back and—there lay Penelope, sleeping peacefully, quite unharmed. I was stunned with relief, with amazement and—suddenly her eyes opened and she gave a wild but joyful cry and flung her arms around my neck, sobbing hysterically.

"Oh! Oh! My dear, dear Seraphine! You came to me. You forgave me. You did not abandon your poor Penelope." She clung to me like a child in frantic, pitiful terror.

Then she told me that she too had gone through a frightful experience. When Roberta had left her, about an hour before, to sleep in the adjoining apartment, as they had arranged with Margaret G—, Penelope had tried to compose herself on her pillow, but she had scarcely fallen into a doze when she was awakened by the same sense of horrible fear that had overcome me. She was about to die—by violence. An assassin was coming—he was near her. She could hardly breathe. It was almost beyond her power to rise from the bed and search the apartment, but she did this. There was nothing, and yet the terror persisted. She huddled herself under the bed-covers and waited, saying her prayers. And when I entered the apartment and came down the passage—so slowly, so stealthily!—she *knew* it was the murderer coming to kill her. And when I paused at her bedside—how long it was before I drew the curtain!—she almost died again, waiting for the blow.

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Of course I did not leave Penelope after this, but comforted her and prayed with her and rejoiced that her madness was past. Then we tried to sleep, locked in each other's arms, but, shortly after six, there came a timid knock at the door and, all of a tremble, Jeanne entered, Penelope's French maid who had come with her mistress to Roberta's party and had occupied a small room overhead, and she told us with hysterical sobs that she had not closed her eyes all night for ghastly visions of Penelope murdered in her bed.

Now it is easy to scoff at premonitions and haunting fears, but there can be no doubt that on this night an evil spirit was present in Roberta's apartment, a hideous, destructive entity that came and—wavered in its deadly purpose against Penelope, then—*manifested to Roberta Vallis in the adjoining apartment*, for when I went in there a little later I found Roberta—she who had mocked God and defied the powers of evil—I found her in her bed, her face convulsed with a look of indescribable terror—*dead!*

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The hotel doctor reported it as a case of heart failure, but Doctor William Owen, who has an honest mind, acknowledged that all this was beyond his understanding. This tragedy made him realize at last that there may be sinister agencies in us and about us that cannot be dealt with by mere medical skill. And, at my pleading, he directed that Mrs. Wells be placed immediately in the care of Dr. Edgar Leroy.

Thank God, my precious Penelope will receive psychic treatment before it is too late. There is no other hope for her but this.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### POSSESSED

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*(From Penelope's Diary)*

*At Dr. Leroy's Sanitarium.*

I understand why people kill themselves. There was an hour last night, that horrible hour between four and five (I have seen so many hospital patients die then), when I was resolved to kill myself. Seraphine was sleeping in the next room—she has not left me since I came to this place yesterday—and I longed to waken her for a last talk, but decided not to. What was the use? I must settle this for myself—whether it was possible for me to go on living or not, I must fight out this battle alone—with my own soul.

I decided to kill myself because I felt sure, after what had happened, that I was condemned to madness. This is evidently a place where mad people are treated. They call it a Sanitarium, but I know what that means. Seraphine speaks of Dr. Leroy (I have only seen him once) as a wonderful spiritual healer and she says I will love him because he is so kind and wise; but none of this deceives me. I know they have brought me to a place for mad people.

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Here is a thought that makes me waver—what if death is not annihilation? What if I find myself in some new state where there are other horrors and terrors—worse than those that I have suffered? The Voices tell me this—taunting me. And then Christopher! He loves me so much! He will be so sorry, if I do this!

While I was hesitating—it was just before dawn—Seraphine came to me. She talked to me, soothed me, and, at last, she told me the truth about myself. She said that all my troubles come from this, that I am possessed by an evil spirit! *Literally possessed!* This is what she was leading up to when she told me about the great company of earth-bound souls that are hovering about us since the war, striving to come back!

The extraordinary part of it is that I no longer regard this as a fantastic impossibility. I no longer reject it. I am not terrified or horrified by the thought, but almost welcome it, since it offers an explanation of what has happened that does not involve madness. I am either possessed by an evil spirit or I am mad, and of these two I prefer the evil spirit. That, at least, is a definite cause carrying with it the hope of a cure, for we read that evil spirits were cast out in olden times, and they may be again.

One thing convinces me that what Seraphine says is true—I did something at Roberta's party that my own soul or spirit, even in madness, could never have done. I accused Christopher of committing a crime. I accused him of treason! Christopher! My love! Seraphine bears witness to this. I *must* be possessed by an evil spirit! This would account for something else that happened last night. I was just falling into a troubled sleep when—*no, I cannot tell it!*

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Christopher sent me a gorgeous basket of roses this morning with his love. He loves me in spite of the devil and all his angels—he said that to Seraphine. How wonderful! I wish they would let me see him, and yet—I am ashamed. How can I ever face Christopher again?

There is something strange about Roberta Vallis—I feel it. She did not come in to speak to me or say good-bye before I left her apartment—that morning. Why not? I asked Seraphine if there was anything the matter with Roberta—had I done anything to offend her?—but the only answer I could get was that Roberta is not well. Seraphine is keeping something back—I am sure of it.

Seraphine knows of two cases where evil spirits have been cast out. One was a New York silversmith who had never shown any talent for art, but who suddenly began to paint remarkable pictures, which sold for good prices. He was desperately unhappy, however, because he felt sure that he was becoming insane. He had visions of scenes that he was impelled to paint and he suffered from clairaudient hallucinations. Two well known neurologists declared that he was a victim of paranoia and must soon be confined in an asylum. This man was brought back to a normal condition by Dr. Leroy's treatment, and the first step in his improvement was when he grasped the idea that his abnormal symptoms were due to possession. This satisfied his reason and drove away his fears (I understand that), especially when he was assured that an evil spirit can be driven out by the power of God's love as easily as an evil germ or humour of the body can be driven out by the same agency. What a blessed thought!

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Seraphine says we must obey the safeguarding rules with which God has surrounded the operation of His love, if we would enjoy the blessed guardianship of that love. We must not expect God to change His rules for us. *We must cleanse our hearts of evil!*

The other case of possession was not a patient of Dr. Leroy, but came under Seraphine's notice while she was attending a sufferer. This was Alice E—, a charming, refined girl about twenty, the daughter of well-bred people who lived in Boston. They were somewhat stricter in family discipline than most American parents, consequently Alice, from babyhood up, was guarded and protected in every possible way. She and her mother were almost inseparable companions. There was absolutely no way in which Alice could have become acquainted with people of the underworld, or heard the vile expressions that she afterward used in an evil personality. Her face showed unusual innocence and purity, her disposition was affectionate and serene.

But when she was about seventeen Alice began to have strange spells of irritability; she would grow sullen and stubborn, and soon these ugly moods became more violent; she would burst into horrible tirades against her father and mother and declare that she couldn't stand their goody-goody ways, that they were so damned pious they made her sick. Then rage and lust seemed to possess her and she would talk about men in a shocking way, using unspeakable words, while the expression of her face and the posture of her body became those of a wanton.

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At first Alice could not tell when these attacks were coming on, but later, when she was about twenty, she knew and would beg her family to keep "that dreadful, horrible girl" from taking hold of her. "She's going to change me! Oh, keep her away! Don't let her get me!" she would cry out in terror.

Through the last days of the poor girl's life the struggle between the real Alice and the gutter woman went on almost constantly. Alice would implore Seraphine to make the wicked girl go away so that when the end came (she knew she was going to die) she might be herself. But the evil spirit had firm possession and a few hours before her death Alice's mouth was coarse and sensual, her eyes were wicked, her whole expression revolting.

Seraphine sent word to the family that they must not come into the room; then, kneeling by the bedside of the dying girl, she nerved herself for a last struggle between the powers of good and evil. With all the strength of her pure soul she invoked God's love to restore and heal this afflicted child ere she departed for the Great Beyond; and, an hour before the end, the family were admitted to the chamber and looked upon Alice's pillowed face, sweetly smiling, beautiful and unsullied, as they had always known her and cherished her. *God's love had prevailed!*

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When Seraphine left me my mind had become calm and hopeful and I had given up my wicked purpose. I fell asleep praying that God would save me from the powers of darkness, that His love would watch over me and protect me from all evil, especially from that dream on the Fall River steamboat, the one that has tortured me so many nights.

I awakened suddenly to the knowledge that a terrible thing had happened, an incredible thing. I was alone in my bedroom, *and yet I was not alone!* I had escaped one degradation only to face another. I was awake, fully awake; yet I was more abominably tempted than ever I was in my dreams. With all the strength of my soul I fought against the aggressions of

a real presence that—*that touched me!* I cried out, I struggled, I begged God to save me or else to let me die. And then Seraphine came to me again in my agony.

But before she came the Voices sounded worse than ever, nearer about me than ever. Why was I such a fool? Why was I so obstinate in resisting my fate? Was I not Their appointed sacrifice? Why not be resigned to the inevitable? Why not ...? They laughed and fluttered close to me with vile murmurings while I prayed against them with all my strength.

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*“God of love, guard Thy child; God of power, save Thy child,”* I prayed.

A harsh, cruel voice broke in to tell me that Roberta Vallis was dead, she died of terror because she had defied Them, as I had defied Them; and, in three days, the Voice said that I, too, would die of terror. Three days remained to me, three nights with my dream and a hideous awakening, unless—

Then Seraphine opened my bedroom door and I sobbed in her arms a long time before I could speak.

“Is—is Roberta dead?” I gasped.

She looked at me strangely and I knew it was true.

“Yes, dear,” she answered gently, and tried to comfort me again, but it was in vain.

“I have only three days to live, Seraphine,” I said solemnly. “Three days and three nights!”

Then I told her what the evil spirit had said, and she listened with grave attention.

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## CHAPTER XV

### DR. LEROY

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There may now be presented, as bearing upon Mrs. Wells' strange illness, a conversation which took place between Dr. William Owen and Dr. Edgar Leroy, the psychic healer, on the evening following Penelope's entrance into the Leroy sanitarium on Fortieth Street, just south of Bryant Park.

Owen began in his bluff, outspoken way: “Doctor, I have put into your hands a lady I am very fond of, in spite of the fact that your theories contradict everything I stand for. Not very complimentary, is it?—but I may as well tell you the truth. Mrs. Wells has not improved under my treatment, I admit that, and I have turned her over to you as a sort of last hope.”

Leroy's rather stern face brightened with a flash of humor.

“The same thing has happened to other physicians, doctor. I believe you diagnose this case as shell shock?”

“Unquestionably—with unfavorable developments, dual personality complications—I wrote you.”

“Yes. I spent several hours with Mrs. Wells last evening when she arrived. She was agitated, but I soothed her and explained certain things that had troubled her, and, gradually, she grew calm. I think I can help her.”

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In spite of himself Dr. Owen was favorably impressed both by the man and his surroundings. There was nothing garish or freakish or Oriental about the place, which was furnished with the business-like simplicity of an ordinary doctor's office. And Leroy certainly had a fine head—a clean-shaven face with heavy black brows under which shone grave, kindly eyes that twinkled now and then in good-natured understanding. He was about ten years younger than his colleague.

“May I ask, doctor, if there is any scientific evidence to prove the existence of this healing spiritual power that you use or think you use?” In spite of himself, Owen put this question a little patronizingly.

“There are the results—the cures. And there is the evidence of Christianity. Spiritual power is the basis of Christianity, isn't it?”

A deeper note sounded here, and the hard-headed materialist began to realize that he was in the presence of an unusual personality, developed by suffering and struggle, a man who had finally reached a haven of sure and comforting belief. There was great kindness in this face as well as strength.

“Nothing else? Is there no evidence similar to that which convinces us that the X-rays really exist?”

Leroy thought a moment, then he spoke with a quiet impressiveness that was not lost upon Dr. Owen.

"There is evidence that would probably convince any fair-minded person who was willing to give to the investigation time enough to get results. The X-rays were not discovered in a day, were they? Suppose I tell you how I got into this occult field—would that interest you?"

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"Very much."

"Take that other chair—make yourself comfortable—that's better. It began accidentally with certain persistent hallucinations, as I used to call them, in a patient of mine, a Southern lady whom I attended when I was a regular practitioner like yourself. These hallucinations worried me, and, being an open-minded man, I found it impossible to dismiss them as of trivial importance; so I began an investigation that led me—well, it led me very far, it is still leading me, for I am scarcely over the threshold of that mysterious region where spirit phenomena occur. I resolved to know *for myself* whether these things are true."

"And you think they are true?"

"I know they are true," was the grave reply.

Dr. Owen listened attentively while Leroy described his first groping efforts to determine whether or not he personally possessed psychic powers. He began with regular periods of mental concentration, an opening of the soul, as it were, to spirit impressions; he would sit alone, in a state of meditative receptiveness for ten or fifteen minutes every day, and later several times a day, waiting for something to happen—he did not know what.

Day after day the psychologist persisted in this singular experiment and, soon, he began to see small blue figures, irregularly shaped, that moved rapidly about the room and cast no shadows. Some of these blue figures were luminous, and among them were occasional luminous white figures. As weeks passed and his efforts continued, there came a noticeable increase in the number of these moving shapes until, when the doctor desired it, he could make them swarm everywhere, over the walls, the pictures, the bookcases.

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"Wait!" interrupted Owen. "Do you see these blue shapes or luminous figures at all times? Do you see them now?"

"No. I only see them when I desire to see them—when I prepare myself to use them—for a case."

Leroy told how the phenomena continued to increase in frequency and in intensity, how gradually he felt an unmistakable sense of power growing in himself, as if he had somehow tapped a vast source of energy, a kind of spiritual trolley-line, and he was now impelled to use this power. He made his first trial on a poor man who had suffered for years from headaches that seemed incurable.

"Stretch out on that reclining chair, close your eyes, don't think of anything," ordered the experimenter. Then he laid his hands on the man's forehead and concentrated his mind in the psychic way he had adopted. Almost immediately the blue shapes appeared in great numbers, and began to pour themselves in fine, pulsing streams, like a purplish mist, over the patient's brow and head and shoulders, over his whole body until he was completely enveloped in them, laved by them, penetrated by them.

"That was a crude beginning," Leroy went on, "but it drove away those obstinate headaches for three months; then a second laying on of hands completed the cure. After that, as months passed, other persons were cured in the same way—especially nervous cases. Whatever these blue streams are, they benefit the patient in most cases. One woman told me, during a treatment, that *she saw blue shapes about her!*"

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"You hypnotized her," declared Owen.

"Possibly. I did not intend to."

"What I want to know is, have you ever treated a case like this one of Mrs. Wells?"

"Yes, I treated a young woman in Mrs. Wells' profession, a trained nurse. She came of good family and was very intelligent, but she was driven toward certain forms of depravity. It was pretty bad. All efforts to change her had failed and, at last, her mother in desperation decided to try psychic treatment."

"And you cured her?"

"Yes. She is now doing useful work in Washington for the Red Cross."

"How did you cure her—it wasn't simply by the laying on of hands, was it?"

"No. I recognize the necessity of getting at the forgotten or concealed causes of these abnormalities, just as Freud does in his psycho-analysis, but, instead of following the uncertain trail of dreams, I conceived the idea of discovering the truth by clairvoyant revelation. I engaged Mrs. Seraphine Walters to assist me in my work. She has astonishing psychic gifts and—" he hesitated.

"Yes?"

"In her entranced condition, Mrs. Walters discovered things about this young woman,

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painful things that had been hidden for years and—well, I was able to relieve her of her fears and check her waywardness,” he concluded abruptly.

“But the details? Tell me more about this case. What were the painful things that Mrs. Walters discovered?”

Leroy shook his head.

“What's the use? I can state the result of my treatment, but if I go into details, if I try to make you understand the cause of this young woman's evil desires and how I overcame them —” he paused, his eyes shining with an inspired light. “Don't you see, doctor, you and I do not speak the same language. You are always in opposition. You have no faith. It's your narrow training.”

“Narrow?” snorted the other.

“Yes, you scientists are childishly narrow. You believe in atoms and ions and electrons that you have never seen and never will see, but if anyone mentions secrets of the soul that control human happiness, you laugh or sneer.”

“Not necessarily. I suppose you refer to your theory of possession by evil spirits. If you could only furnish any evidence—”

“It isn't my theory. It's as old as Christianity, it's a part of Christianity. As to evidence, my dear sir, you are blind to evidence. The young lady I speak of was despaired of by everybody, she was on her way to an insane asylum, two alienists had declared her case hopeless, yet, thanks to psychic treatment, she was restored to health and happiness. Does that impress you? Not at all if you call it a coincidence. And if I am fortunate enough to cure Mrs. Wells, whom you have failed to cure, you will call that a coincidence, too.”

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Dr. Owen tried to control his irritation, but his prejudices got the better of him.

“Of course I want to see Mrs. Wells cured, but—do you mean to tell me seriously that you believe she is possessed by an evil spirit?”

“I believe that some malignant influence is near her and able to control her—intermittently. How else do you account for the facts in her case? Even Mrs. Wells believes this.”

“That is because Seraphine put the notion in her head. It's unfortunate.”

“No, she believes this because of the way her friend died. You know how she died?”

“Miss Vallis? She died suddenly, but the cause of her death is doubtful. People die suddenly from all sorts of causes.”

“Yes,” answered Leroy with a significant tightening of the lips, “and one of the causes is fear. People die suddenly of fear, doctor.”

“Referring to Mrs. Wells and her bad dreams?”

“Precisely. If you had seen her last night—after midnight—watching the clock with dark, furtive glances, watching, waiting, as the hands approached half past twelve, you would understand what fear can do to a woman. That is Mrs. Wells' worst symptom, she is afraid—not all the time but intermittently.”

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Owen leaned forward in concentrated attention.

“Why was she in such a state at half past twelve rather than at any other time?”

“Because the change in her takes place then, the change into her other personality.”

“Fauvette? You saw her—in that personality?”

“Yes. I saw her. Besides, she told me about it in advance. She knows what is going to take place, but is powerless against it. Every night at exactly half past twelve there comes a violent period that lasts until one o'clock. Then she falls into a deep sleep, and a dream begins, always the same dream, a horrible dream that terrifies her and drains her life forces. She had this dream last night, she will have it again tonight, and again tomorrow night. *She believes that she will die tomorrow night, just as her friend died!*”

“Good God! What a pity!” exclaimed Owen. “Why does she think she is going to die tomorrow night?”

“Her Voices tell her so, and she believes them.”

“She told you this?”

“Yes.”

The older man tapped impatiently on his chair-arm.

“And you? What did you say to her? You surely do not believe that Mrs. Wells will die tomorrow night? You know these are only the morbid fancies of an hysterical woman, don't you?”

Leroy rose quietly and took down a volume from the bookcase.

"How we love to argue over the *names* of things!" he answered gravely. "I don't care what you call the influence or obsession that threatens this lady. I ask, What do you propose to do about it? Do *you* believe that Mrs. Wells will die tomorrow night? Do you?"

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Owen moved uncomfortably on his chair, frowned, snapped his fingers softly and finally admitted that he did not know.

"Ah! Then is it your idea to wait without doing anything until tomorrow night comes, and see if Mrs. Wells really does die at half-past twelve, and then, if she does, as the Vallis woman died, to simply say: 'It's very strange, it's too bad!' and let it go at that? Is that your idea? Will you take that responsibility?"

"No, certainly not. I don't mean to interfere with your plans. I told you I have left this matter entirely in your hands," answered the skeptic, his aggressiveness suddenly calmed.

"Very well. Take my word, doctor, fear is terribly destructive, it may cause death. Listen to this case, cited by a French psychologist." He turned over the pages. "Daughter of an English nobleman, engaged to a man she loves, perfectly happy; but one night she is visited, or thinks she is, by her dead mother who says she will come for her daughter the next day at noon. The girl tells her father she is going to die. She reads her Bible, sings hymns to the accompaniment of a guitar, and just before noon, although apparently in excellent health, she asks to be helped to a large arm chair in her bedroom. At noon exactly she draws two or three gasping breaths and sinks back into her chair, dead. That shows what fear will do."

But his adversary was still unconvinced.

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"What does that prove? Do you think you could have saved this young woman if you had been in charge of the case?"

"Perhaps. I hope to save Mrs. Wells."

"How?"

Leroy hesitated, frowned with a nervous squinting, as if he were trying to solve a baffling problem.

"How? I wish I could tell you, doctor, but you would not understand. That is the sad part of my work, I am all alone."

His eyes burned somberly, then he spoke with intense feeling.

"Not one of you orthodox physicians will join me in my effort to save millions of unfortunates from the tragedy of our state hospitals. You won't lift a hand to help me. You all say there is nothing to be done. What a wicked evasion of responsibility! Nothing to be done? I tell you there is everything to be done. Suppose you had a daughter or a sister or a wife who was suffering from such an affliction—how would you feel? God grant you may never know how you would feel. Why do you doctors scoff at miracles when the Bible is full of them and we all live among them? What is life but an unceasing miracle? Tell me how you move your finger except by a miracle? What is vision? What is death? How do you *know* that spirits of the departed, good and bad, do not come back to help us—or to harm us? Many great men believe this and always have. Many fine women know that this is true. Mrs. Walters has actually *seen* an evil spirit hovering about a girl who was called insane. How do you know that insanity is not caused by evil possession?"

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"Hold on! I can't answer all those questions," laughed Owen and now his manner changed quite charmingly as he made an *amende honorable*. "I'm a stubborn old fool, doctor. I ought to have had more sense than to get into this argument. What I care about is to have this dear lady restored to health and happiness. There!" He held out his hand. "Forgive me! The more miracles you can work for her cure, the better I shall like it."

At this Leroy relented in his turn.

"Dr. Owen, I will not conceal from you that Mrs. Wells is in great peril. I have no more doubt that she will die tomorrow night, unless she consents to do something that I have already indicated to her as necessary, than I have of your presence in this room."

"Extraordinary! Do you really mean that? What is this thing? Is it a definite thing, or is it some—some spiritual thing?"

Dr. Leroy sighed and shook his head.

"It's hard for you to believe, isn't it? I suppose you want me to give Mrs. Wells a dose of medicine or put a hot water bag at her feet. No, doctor, it's much more difficult than that."

The veteran pondered this in puzzled exasperation.

"If Mrs. Wells does this definite thing that you have told her to do, will she be saved?"

"Yes, I think so," Leroy spoke confidently.

There came a knock at the office door, but both men were so absorbed in their conversation that they paid no attention to it.

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"Is there any doubt about her doing this definite thing that will save her?"

"That's the trouble, she fights against doing it with all her strength. She says she cannot do it. *But I tell her she must do it!*"

The knock sounded sharper. An attendant had come with a message from Seraphine asking Dr. Leroy to come to her at once. She was upstairs in Mrs. Wells' sitting-room. Something serious had happened.

"Tell Mrs. Walters that I will be right up," he said. "You had better wait here, doctor." Leroy glanced at his watch. "It's half-past nine. We have three hours."

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## CHAPTER XVI

### IRRESPONSIBLE HANDS

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Dr. Leroy found Mrs. Walters in the attractive sitting-room, brightened by flowers (most of them sent by Christopher) that had been set apart for Penelope. The medium, usually so serene, was pale and agitated and had evidently been repairing some recent disorder of her hair and dress.

"She is asleep, doctor," panted Seraphine, and she pointed to the closed door of the bedroom. "We have had quite a bad time."

Then Seraphine told the doctor what had happened. She and Penelope had spent the evening pleasantly, sewing and chatting, and Mrs. Wells had seemed her old joyous self, free from fears and agitations. She listened with touching confidence when the medium assured her that her mother's exalted spirit was trying to help her. And she promised to bear in mind Dr. Leroy's injunction that, just before composing herself to sleep, she must hold the thought strongly that she was God's child, guarded from all evil by the power of God's love. Also she would search into her heart to find the obstacle that prevented her mother from coming closer to her.

About nine o'clock Penelope said she was sleepy and would lie down to rest, at which Seraphine rejoiced, hoping this might indicate a break in the spell of fear that had kept Mrs. Wells in exhausting suspense. Perhaps this was an answer to their prayers. She assisted the patient, lovingly and encouragingly, to prepare herself for the night and at half-past nine left her in bed with the light extinguished and the door leading into the sitting-room open, so that she could hear the slightest call.

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About twenty minutes later, as Seraphine sat meditating, her attention was attracted by a sound from the bedroom and, looking through the door, she was surprised to see Mrs. Wells sitting up in bed and writing rapidly on a large pad from which she tore sheets now and then, letting these fall to the floor. So dim was the bedroom light that it was impossible for Penelope to see her penciled writing, nor did she even glance at the words, but held her eyes fixed in a far-away stare, as if she were guided by some distant voice or vision. After a time, Penelope ceased writing and sank back in slumber upon her pillow, allowing the pad to fall by her side.

"Automatic writing," nodded the psychologist.

"Yes. I entered the bedroom softly and picked up the sheets. There are two communications, one in a large scrawl written by a woman—I believe, it is Penelope's mother. The other is in a small regular hand with quick powerful strokes, evidently a man's writing. There! You see the handwriting is quite different from Penelope's."

Leroy studied the sheets in silence.

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"Have you read these messages?"

"I read one of them, doctor, the one from Penelope's mother—it is full of love and wisdom—and I was just beginning the other when a terrible thing happened. That is why I sent for you. I was sitting in this rocking chair with my back turned to the bedroom door, absorbed in reading this message, when suddenly—"

"Wait! Let me read it first. Hello! It's for Captain Herrick."

"Not all of it. Won't you read it aloud, doctor?"

The medium closed her eyes while Leroy, speaking in a low tone but distinctly, repeated this mysterious communication:

*Tell Captain Herrick it was I he saw on the battlefield guiding the stumbling footsteps of my little girl, helping her to find the place where he lay. I realized that, through her love for him, which she would experience later, she would build better and higher ideals than the*

ones she was then holding deep within her soul. Tell him also that he is in danger from something he is carrying....

Here the writing became impossible to decipher.

"See how the powers of Love work against the powers of Evil!" mused the psychic. "I must show this to Captain Herrick. Well, what happened?"

Seraphine went on to say that she had just begun to read the second piece of automatic writing and had only finished a few lines—enough to see that it was very different from the first—when she felt a clutch of hands around her throat and realized that Fauvette had crept up cunningly from behind. There had been a struggle in which the medium tried vainly to cry out for help or to reach the bell, but her enemy was too strong for her, and she had grown weaker; then, using strategy, she let herself fall limp under the murderous hands, whereupon Fauvette, laughing triumphantly, had loosened her grip for a moment and allowed Seraphine to free herself.

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"Then I caught her and held her so that I could look into her eyes and, finally, I subdued her. She cried out that she would come back again, but I forced her to lie down and almost instantly she fell into a deep sleep."

"It was your love and your fearlessness that gave you the victory," Leroy said quietly. Then he took up the other message and read it with darkening eyes.

"Horrible! The change must have come while she was writing this."

He opened the bedroom door softly and, with infinite compassion in his rugged face, bent over Penelope who was sleeping peacefully, her loveliness marred by no sign of evil.

An hour passed now, during which the spiritual physician gave Seraphine her instructions for the night and made preparations for the struggle that he knew was before him.

Meantime Captain Herrick had reached the sanitarium and, finding Dr. Owen in the study, had laid before him a plan to save Penelope, if it was true, as Christopher believed, that her trouble was simply in the imagination. He proposed to divert his sweetheart's attention so that she would not know when the deadly Fauvette hour was at hand. And to this end he had arranged to have the clocks set back half an hour.

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"It can't do any harm, can it, sir?" he urged with a lover's ardor, "and it may succeed. Dr. Leroy says it's fear that's killing her. Well, we'll drive away her fear. I've fixed it at the church down the street, the one that chimes the quarter-hours, to have that clock put back. And the clocks in the house are easy. What do you think of it, sir?" he asked eagerly.

The old doctor frowned in perplexity.

"I don't know, Chris. You'll have to put this up to Dr. Leroy. He's a wonderful fellow. I've had my eyes opened tonight or my soul—something."

The two men smoked solemnly.

"I believe we're going to save Penelope, my boy—somehow. It's a mighty queer world. I don't know but we are all more or less possessed by evil spirits, Chris. What are these brainstorms that overwhelm the best of us? Why do good men and women, on some sudden, devilish impulse, do abominable things, criminal things, that they never meant to do? We doctors pretend to be skeptical, but we all come up against creepy stuff, inside confession stuff that we don't talk about."

He was silent again.

"There was a patient of mine in Chicago, a tough old rounder," Owen resumed, "who changed overnight into the straightest chap you ever heard of—because he went down to the edge of the Great Shadow—he was one of the passengers saved from the Titanic. He told me that when he was struggling there in the icy ocean, after the ship sank, *he saw white shapes hovering over the waters, holding up the drowning!* I never mentioned that until tonight."

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They smoked without speaking.

"I—I had an experience like that myself, sir," ventured Christopher. "I've never spoken of it either—people would call me crazy, but—that night when I lay out there in front of Montidier, among the dead and dying, I saw a white shape moving over the battlefields."

"You did?"

"Yes, sir. It was the figure of a woman—coming towards me—she seemed to be leading Penelope. I saw her distinctly—she had a beautiful face."

Silence again.

Dr. Leroy joined them presently and, on learning of Captain Herrick's plan, he made no objections to it, but said it would fail.

"We are dealing with an evil power, gentlemen, that is far too clever to be deceived by such a trick," he assured them; but Christopher was resolved to try.

Leroy then described Seraphine's narrow escape and showed them the automatic writing, the message from Penelope's mother, not the evil message; whereupon Christopher, in amazement, gave the corroborative testimony of his battlefield experience. The psychologist nodded gravely.

At five minutes of twelve (correct time) Seraphine sent down word that Mrs. Wells had awakened and was asking eagerly for Captain Herrick.

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"Go to her at once, my young friend," directed Leroy. "Do all you can to encourage her and make her happy. Tell her there is nothing to fear because her mother's pure soul is guarding her. Show her this message from her mother. And whatever happens do not let your own faith waver. I assure you our precautions are taken against everything. God bless you."

When Christopher had gone, Leroy told Dr. Owen about the second communication in automatic writing which he had withheld from Captain Herrick.

"This is undoubtedly from the evil spirit," he said, and he read it aloud:

*"I was one of many loosed upon earth when the war began. I rode screaming upon clouds of poison gas. I danced over red battlefields. I entered one of the Gray ones, an officer, and revelled with him in ravished villages. Then I saw Penelope going about on errands of mercy, I saw her beautiful body and the little spots on her soul that she did not know about, and when her nerves were shattered, I entered into her. Now she is mine. I defy YOU to drive me out. Already her star burns scarlet through a mist of evil memories. I see it now as she sleeps! I shall come back tonight and make her dream."*

"You see what we have against us," Leroy said, and his face was sad, yet fixed with a stern purpose.

And now the old materialist asked anxiously, not scoffingly: "Doctor, do you really believe that this spirit can drag Mrs. Wells down?"

"That depends upon herself. Mrs. Wells knows what she must do. I have told her. If she does this, she will be safe. If not—"

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His eyes were inexpressibly tragic, and at this moment the neighboring chimes resounded musically through the quiet sanitarium—a *quarter to twelve!*

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## CHAPTER XVII

### THE HOUR OF THE DREAM

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When Seraphine led Captain Herrick into the bedroom where Penelope lay propped up against pillows, her dark hair in braids and a Chinese embroidered scarf brightening her white garment, it seemed to Christopher that his beloved had never been so adorably beautiful.

Gallantly and tenderly he kissed the slim white hand that his lady extended with a brave but pathetic smile.

Seraphine withdrew discreetly.

The lovers were alone.

It was an oppressive night, almost like summer, and Penelope, concerned for her sweetheart's comfort, insisted that he take off his heavy coat, and draw up an easy chair by her bedside.

They tried to talk of pleasant things—the lovely flowers he had sent her—how well she was looking—but it was no use. The weight of the approaching crisis was upon both of them.

"Oh, Chris, how we go on pretending—up to the very last!" she lifted her eyes appealingly. "We know what has happened—what may happen, but—" she drew in her breath sharply and a little shiver ran through her. "I—I'm afraid."

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He took her hand strongly in his and with all a lover's ardor and tenderness tried to comfort her. Then, rather clumsily, he showed her the automatic writing, not quite sure whether to present this as a thing that he believed in or not.

Penelope studied the large, scrawled words.

"How wonderful!" she murmured. "I remember vaguely writing something, but I had no idea what it was. My mother! It must be true! It's her handwriting. She was watching over us, dear—she is watching over us still. That ought to give us courage, oughtn't it?"

She glanced nervously at the little gilt clock that was ticking quietly over the fireplace. Ten minutes to twelve!

"What is this danger, that she speaks of, Chris? What is it—that you are carrying?"

The captain's answer was partly an evasion. He really did not know what danger was referred to, unless it could be a small flask from the laboratory with a gas specimen for Dr. Owen that he had left in the other room in his coat, but this was in a little steel container and could do no harm.

"It may mean some spiritual danger, Pen, from selfishness or want of faith or—or something like that," he suggested. "I guess I am selfish and impatient—don't you think so?"

"Impatient, Chris?"

"I mean impatient for you to get well, impatient to take you far away from all these doctors and dreams, and just have you to myself. That isn't very wicked, is it, sweetheart?"

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He stroked her hand fondly and looked deep into her wonderful eyes. Penelope sighed.

"I—I suppose it will all be over soon—I mean we shall know what's going to happen, won't we?"

It was her first open reference to the peril hanging over them, and again, involuntarily, she glanced at the clock. Five minutes to twelve! It was really twenty-five minutes past twelve!—but she did not know that.

"Darling, I don't believe anything is going to happen. Our troubles are over. You are guarded by this beautiful love—all these prayers. I've been saying prayers, myself, Pen—for both of us."

"Dear boy!"

"I want you to promise me one thing—you love me, don't you? No matter what happens, you love me?"

Her eyes glowed on him.

"Oh yes, with all my heart."

"You're going to be my wife."

"Ye—es, if—if—"

"All right, we'll put down the *ifs*. I want you to promise that if this foolish spell, or whatever it is, is broken tonight—if nothing happens at half-past twelve, and you don't have this bad dream, then you'll forget the whole miserable business and marry me tomorrow. There! Will you?"

"Oh, Chris! Tomorrow?"

"Yes, tomorrow! I'm not a psychologist or a doctor, but I believe I can cure you myself. Will you promise, Pen?"

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Her eyes brimmed with tears of gratitude and fondness.

"You want me—anyway?"

"Anyway."

"Then I say—yes! I will! I will! Oh my love!" She drew him slowly down to her and kissed his eyes gently, her face radiant with sweetness and purity. A moment later the chimes rang out twelve.

As the minutes passed Christopher watched her in breathless but confident expectation. The crisis had come and she was passing it—she had passed it safely. They talked on fondly—five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes, and still there were no untoward developments, no sign of anything evil or irrational. Penelope was her own adorable self. The spell was broken. Nothing had happened.

"You see, it's all right?" he laughed. "You needn't be afraid any more."

"Wait!" she looked at the clock. "Ten minutes yet!"

He longed to tell her that they had already passed the fatal moment, passed it by twenty minutes, but he restrained his ardor.

"Chris, my love, if we are really to be married tomorrow—how wonderful that seems!—I must have no secrets from you. What my mother said is true—a woman must cleanse her soul. I want to tell you something—for my sake, not for yours—then we will never refer to it again."

"But, Penelope—"

"For my sake, Chris."

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"It isn't about that steamboat?"

"It is, darling. I must tell it. Fix the pillows behind me. There! Sit close to me—that's right. Now listen! This dream is a repetition of what happened on the boat. It would have been much better if I had told you all about it long ago."

"Why?"

She hesitated.

"Because—it is not so much the memory of what I did that worries me, as the fear that—you will be ashamed of me or—or hate me—when you know."

Herrick saw that her cheeks were flushed, but at least her mind was occupied, he reflected, and the minutes were passing.

"I could never be ashamed of you, Penelope."

"If I were only sure of that," she sighed, then with a great effort, and speaking low, sometimes scarcely lifting her eyes, she told her lover the story of the Fall River steamboat.

The main point was that her husband, a coarse sensualist, whom she despised, had, during the year preceding his death, accepted a *chambre apart* arrangement, that being the only condition on which Penelope would continue to live with him, but, on the occasion of this journey down from Newport, he had broken his promise and entered her stateroom.

"It was an oppressive night, like this," she said, "and I had left the deck door ajar, held on a hook. I was trying to sleep, when suddenly I saw a man's arm pushed in through the opening. I shall never forget my fright, as I saw that black sleeve. Do you understand what I mean? Look!"

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Gathering her draperies about her, Penelope sprang lightly out of bed and moved swiftly to the bedroom door, while Christopher, startled, followed the beauty of her sinuous form.

"His arm came through—like this," she stepped outside the bedroom, and, reaching around the edge of the door showed her exquisite bare arm within. "See? Then my husband entered slowly and—as soon as I saw his eyes," her agitation was increasing, "I knew what to expect. His face was flushed. He had been drinking. He looked at me and—then he locked the door—like this. I crouched away from him, I was frozen with terror, but—but—" she twined her hands in distress. "Oh, you'll hate me! I know you'll hate me!"

"No!"

"I tried so hard to resist him. I pleaded, I wept. I begged on my knees—like this."

"Please—please don't," murmured Christopher, as he felt the softness of her supplicating body.

"But Julian was pitiless. He caught me in his arms. I fought against him. I struck him as I felt his loathsome kisses. I said I would scream for help and—he laughed at me. Then—"

She stopped abruptly, leaving her confession unfinished, and, standing close to her lover, held him fascinated by the wild appeal of her eyes and the heaving of her bosom.

Suddenly Christopher's heart froze with terror. The dreaded change had come. This glorious young creature whose glances thrilled him, whose flaunted beauty maddened him, was not Penelope any more, but *the other*, Fauvette, the temptress, the wanton.

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"Chris!" she stepped before him splendid in the intensity of her emotion. Her garment was disarranged, her beautiful hair spread over her white shoulders. She came close to him—closer—and clung to him.

"Why—why did you lock that door?" he asked unsteadily.

"I did not notice," she answered in pretended innocence, and he knew that she was lying. "Do you mind, dear? Do you mind being alone with me?" Then, before he could answer, she offered her lips. "My love! My husband! Kiss me!"

It was too much. He clasped her in his arms and held her. He knew his danger, but forgot everything in the deliciousness of her embraces.

"Penelope!"

She drew back in displeasure.

"No! I'm not Penelope. Look at me! Look!"

What was it the soldier read in those siren eyes—what depths of allurements—what sublime degradation?

"Fauvette!" he faltered.

"Yes, your Fauvette. Say it!"

He said it, knowing that his power of resistance was breaking. He was going to yield to

her, he could not help yielding. What did the consequences matter? She was too beautiful.

Then slowly, musically, the neighboring chimes resounded.

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A quarter to one!

And Christopher remembered.

God! What should he do? He straightened from her with hands clenched and eyes hardening.

In a flash she saw the change. She knew what he was thinking and pressed close to him, offering again her red lips.

"No!"

"Don't be a fool! You can save *her*, your goody-goody Penelope. It's the only way. I will leave her alone, except occasionally—I swear I will."

"No! You're lying!" It seemed as if he repeated words spoken within him.

"Lying?" Her eyes half closed over slumberous fires. "Do you think Penelope can ever love you as I can—as your Fauvette can? Share her with me or—" she panted, "or you will lose her entirely. Penelope dies tomorrow night, you know that, unless—"

Frantically she tried to encircle him with her arms, but Herrick repulsed her. Some power beyond himself was strengthening him.

"Oh!" she cried in fury, "you don't deserve to have a beautiful woman. Very well! This is the end!" She darted to the bedroom door and unlocked it. "Come! I'll show you."

Deathly pale, she led the way into the sitting-room and, going to Christopher's coat, she drew out a small flask.

"There! This is the danger she wrote about. *I know*. Spiritual danger! Ha! I'm going to open this. Yes, I am. You can't stop me."

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"Don't! It's death!"

But already she had unscrewed a metal stopper and drawn forth a small glass vial filled with a colorless liquid.

"One step nearer, and I'll smash this on the floor!" she threatened. "If I can't have you, *she* never shall!"

The captain faced her quietly, knowing well what was at stake.

"Penelope!"

She stamped her foot. "I'm not Penelope. I'm Fauvette. I hate Penelope. For the last time—will you do what I want?"

"No!"

She lifted the vial.

"Stop!" came a masterful voice, and, turning, they saw Dr. Leroy standing in the outer doorway. Back of him were Seraphine and Dr. Owen.

"Give that to me."

The psychologist advanced toward her slowly, holding out his hands. Fauvette stared at him, trembling.

"No! I'll throw it down."

His eyes blazed upon her. His outspread arms seemed to envelope her.

"You cannot throw it down! Come nearer! Give it to me!"

Like a frightened child she obeyed.

"Now go into the bedroom! Lie down! Sleep!"

Again she obeyed, turning and walking slowly to the bed; but there she paused and said with scornful deliberateness: "You can drive me out now, but I'll come back when she sleeps. I'll make her dream. Damn you! And tomorrow night—Ha! You'll see!"

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Dr. Leroy's stern gaze did not falter, but compelled Penelope to go back to the couch, where almost immediately her tragic eyes closed in slumber.

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## CHAPTER XVIII



What happened on the last day, or rather the last night, of Mrs. Wells' psychological crisis may be regarded either as a purely subjective phenomena, a dream or a startling experience of the soul, or as something that came from without, a telepathic or spiritualistic manifestation. In any case note must be made of the testimony of Dr. William Owen, an extremely rational person, that after midnight on this occasion he distinctly *saw* scarlet lights moving about the darkened room near Penelope's couch.

The patient passed the day quietly (after sleeping late) and was advised not to see her lover, although Dr. Leroy did not insist upon this. Mrs. Wells agreed, however, that any conversation with Christopher might be harmfully agitating, and was content to send him a loving message, together with a sealed communication that was not to be opened unless—unless things went badly.

“Do you think I am going to pull through tonight, doctor?” she asked tremulously about three in the afternoon.

“I am sure you will, Mrs. Wells, if you will only trust me and do what I have told you to do. Your fate is in your own hands—entirely.”

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Dr. Leroy spoke confidently, but she shook her head in distress of mind.

“I wish I could believe what you say. I would give anything to feel sure that my mother is watching over me, trying to come to me; but I can't believe it. If she wants to come, why doesn't she do it? Why didn't she come to me last night when I needed her so terribly?”

“Seraphine has told you why, she says the conditions are not right. Is that so surprising? Take a telephone—you can't talk over it unless the connections are right, can you? Take a telescope or a microscope—you can see nothing through them unless the instruments are in focus, can you? Take an automobile—it will not move an inch unless all the parts are properly adjusted, will it? You may have the finest photographic camera in the world, yet you will get no picture unless you expose the sensitive plate in just the right way—isn't that true? Suppose a savage refused to believe in photography, or in the telephone, or the telescope, or in any of our great inventions, unless they would operate according to the fancy of his ignorant mind, regardless of scientific laws? What results would he get? The very same kind that we get in the psychic world if we refuse to obey psychic laws.”

The fair patient moved wearily on her pillow with signs of increasing discouragement.

“I have not refused to obey psychic laws, I don't know what the laws are. How can I believe in something that is entirely unknown to me? I can't do it, I can't do it.”

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“But, Mrs. Wells, when so much is at stake, when everything is at stake, can't you take an open-minded attitude toward these mysteries? Why not submit to the indicated conditions and see what happens? If there is only one chance in a hundred that your mother can really come to you and help you, why not take that chance? You believe that your mother is an exalted spirit, don't you?”

“Oh, yes. I am sure she is.”

“You don't doubt that she would be glad to help you in your present trouble, if she could, do you?”

“No, of course not, but what can I do? I say my prayers, I try to have good thoughts—what else can I do?”

The spiritual healer answered with sudden impressiveness.

“Penelope, you must cleanse your soul of evil. There is something you are keeping back—perhaps you do not know what it is yourself. I can only tell you to think, to look into the past, to search into your soul—just as if you were coming before a great, wise, loving Judge who cannot be deceived. He wants you to confess something—I don't know what it is, you must find that out for yourself—but when you have confessed, I *know* that help will come to you through your mother. Now close your eyes. Don't speak. Think! Think of your mother.”

He laid his hands gently on her forehead and for some minutes there was silence.

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“Now I shall leave you alone. In an hour I will send Seraphine to you.”

Then he left her.

At four o'clock Mrs. Walters came in with an armful of flowers from Christopher and the two women talked of indifferent things over their tea. Then they went for a drive in the park and Penelope returned blooming like a lovely rose; but not one word did she breathe of her deeper thoughts. Seraphine waited.

Seven o'clock!

At last the barrier of pride and reserve began to crumble. Penelope turned to her old friend, trying at first to speak lightly, but her troubled eyes told the story of tension within. Then came the confession—in broken words. There were two things on her conscience—one

that she had done, but it wasn't exactly her fault, one that she did not do, but she meant to do it. She supposed that was a sin just the same.

Mrs. Walters smiled encouragingly.

"It can't be so serious a sin, can it? Tell me everything, Pen."

With flaming cheeks the young widow told how she had meant to adopt a child—in France—that would really have been—her own child. She did not do this because she met Captain Herrick, but—she would have done it. The other thing was what happened on the Fall River steamboat—with Julian. On that tragic summer night, she had finally yielded to him and—*she had wanted to yield!*

To which Seraphine made the obvious reply: "Still, my dear, he was your husband."

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"But I had sworn that never—never—it was so—ignoble! I despised him. Then I despised myself."

The medium listened thoughtfully.

"You trust me, don't you, Pen? You know I want to do what is best for you?" She passed her arm affectionately around her distressed friend.

"Oh, yes. You have proved it, dearest. I'll never be able to repay your love."

Mrs. Wells began to cry softly.

"Please don't. We need all our courage, our intelligence. It doesn't matter how wrong you have been in the past, if you are right in the present. The trouble with you, dear child, is that you cannot see the truth, although it is right under your eyes."

"But I am telling the truth," Penelope protested tearfully. "I am not keeping anything back."

"You don't mean to keep anything back—but—"

The psychic's deep-set, searching eyes seemed to read into the soul of the fair sufferer.

"You showed me parts of your diary once—what you wrote in New York after your husband died—before you went to France. There were four years—you remember?"

"Yes."

"How would you interpret those four years, Pen? You were not worried about money—Julian left you enough to live on. You had no children, no responsibilities. You were in splendid health and very beautiful. What was in your mind most of the time? How did you get that idea of adopting a child in France? It must have come gradually. How did it come? *Why* did it come?"

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"Because I was—lonely."

"Is that all? Think!"

There was silence.

"Why did you dance so much during those four years?"

"I like dancing. It's good exercise."

"And all those allurements of dress—clinging skirts, low-cut waists, no corsets—why was that?"

"I hate corsets. I don't need them. I can't breathe in corsets."

"And those insidious perfumes?"

"I don't see what that has to do with it."

"Those are little indications. But take the main point, your desire to have a child—of your own. Do you really love children, Pen? Have you ever shown that you do? Did you try to have children when you were married?"

"Not *his* children! God forbid!"

Seraphine hesitated as if dreading to wound her friend.

"I must go on, dear. We must get to the bottom of this. Suppose you had done what you intended to do? And had come back to America with an adopted child? And suppose no one had ever known the truth, about it—do you think you would have been happy?"

Penelope sighed wearily.

"Is a woman ever happy?"

"Wait! Let us take one point. You have always loved men's society, haven't you? That's natural, they're all crazy about you. Well, do you think that would have changed just because

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you had a child? Do you?"

"No—no, I suppose not."

"You would have been just as beautiful. You would have gone on wearing expensive clothes, wouldn't you? You would have kept up the old round of teas and dinners, theatres, dances, late suppers—with a train of men dangling after you—flirting men, married men—men who try to kiss women in taxicabs—you know what I mean?"

Penelope bit her red lips at this sordid picture.

"No," she said, "I don't think I would have done that. I would have changed, I intended to change. That was why I wanted a child—to give me something worthy of my love, something to serve as an outlet for my emotions."

The medium's eyes were unfathomably sad and yearning.

"Is that true, Pen? A child calls for ceaseless care—unselfishness. You know that? Did you really long for a child in a spirit of unselfish love? Did you?"

But Penelope was deaf to this touching appeal.

"Certainly," she answered sharply. "I wanted a child to satisfy my emotional nature. What else do you think I wanted it for?"

Mrs. Walters' face shone with ineffable tenderness.

"That is what I want you to find out, my darling. When you have answered that question I believe the barrier that keeps your dear mother away will be removed. Now I am going to leave you to your own thoughts. God bless you!"

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At ten o'clock Dr. Leroy directed Mrs. Wells to prepare herself for the night and told her she was to sleep in a different room, a large chamber that had been made ready on the floor below. As Penelope entered this room a dim light revealed some shadowy pieces of furniture and at the back a recess hung with black curtains. In this was a couch and two chairs and on the wall a familiar old print, "Rock of Ages," showing a woman clinging to a cross in a tempest.

"Please lie down, Mrs. Wells," said Leroy with cheerful friendliness. "You don't mind these electrics?"

He turned on a strong white light that shone down upon the patient and threw the rest of the room into darkness. Then Penelope, exquisitely lovely in her white robe, stretched herself on the couch, while the doctor and Seraphine seated themselves beside her.

"This light will make you sleep better when I turn it off," explained the physician. Then he added: "I will ask Dr. Owen to come in a little later."

Eleven o'clock!

Not yet had the patient spoken and time was passing, the minutes that remained were numbered. Mrs. Walters essayed by appealing glances to open the obstinately closed doors of Penelope's spiritual consciousness, but it was in vain.

Half past eleven!

The spiritual healer rose, his face set with an unalterable purpose.

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"I will turn down the light, Mrs. Wells," he said quietly. "I want you to compose yourself. Remember that God is watching over you. You are God's child. He will guard you from all evil. Hold that thought strongly as you go to sleep."

Penelope closed her eyes. Her face was deathly pale in the shadows. The minutes passed.

"I—I am afraid to go to sleep," the sufferer murmured, and her hands opened and closed nervously as if they were clutching at something.

"Think of your mother, dear," soothed Seraphine. "Her pure spirit is near you, trying to come nearer. *Oh God, keep Penelope, Thy loving child, under the close guardianship of her mother's exalted spirit in this her hour of peril.*"

Twelve o'clock by the musical, slow-chiming bells!

Then at last Penelope spoke, her face transfigured with spiritual light and beauty.

"Doctor,—I—I know I have only a few minutes," she began haltingly, but almost immediately became calm, as if some new strength or vision had been accorded her. "I realize that my troubles have come from selfishness and—sensuality. I have deceived myself. I blamed my husband for encouraging these desires in me, but—I knew what kind of a man my husband was before I married him. There was another man, a much finer man, who asked me to be his wife, but I refused him because—in a way I—wanted the kind of husband that—my husband was."

"In the years after my husband's death I was—playing with fire. I craved admiration. I wanted to go as near the danger point—with men—as I dared. I deceived myself when I said I wanted a child—of my own—to satisfy my emotional nature. What I really wanted was an excuse—to—give myself—to a man."

Some power beyond herself upheld the penitent in this hard ordeal. Her eyes remained fixed on the Cross to which she seemed to cling in spirit even as the woman pictured there clung to the Cross with outstretched arms.

There was an impressive silence, then the spiritual teacher, his voice vibrant with tenderness and faith, spoke these words of comfort:

"Penelope, you have cleansed your soul. You can sleep without fear. When your dream begins you will know that the powers of love are guarding you. You are God's child. No harm can befall you, for you will reach out to the Cross, *you will reach out to the Cross!*"

"Yes," she murmured faintly. Her eyelids fluttered and closed. She drew a long sigh of relief, then her breathing became regular and her face took on an expression of lovely serenity. She was sleeping.

And then the dream!

Penelope was in that tragic stateroom once more. She heard the throb of engines and sounds on the deck overhead—the echoing beat of footsteps, while the steady swish of the waters came in through the open window. She turned restlessly on her wide brass bed trying to sleep.

How oppressive was the night! She looked longingly at the stateroom door which she had fixed ajar on its hook. If she could only go out where the fresh breezes were blowing and spread her blanket on the deck—what a heavenly relief!

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Penelope sat up against her pillows and looked out over the sighing waters illumined by an August moon. In the distance she watched the flashes of a lighthouse and counted the seconds between them....

Suddenly she froze with terror at the sight of a black sleeve, a man's arm, pushed in cautiously through the door, and a moment later Julian entered. She saw him plainly in the moonlight. He wore a dinner coat. He looked handsome but dissipated. His face was flushed, his dress disordered. He came to her bed and caught her in his arms. He kissed her. He drew her to him, close to him. She remembered the perfume of his hair. He said she belonged to him. He was not going to let her go. Promises did not matter—nothing mattered. This was a delicious summer night and—

"*Oh God, let Thy love descend upon Penelope and strengthen her,*" prayed Seraphine, kneeling by the couch.

The dream moved on relentlessly toward its inevitable catastrophe. Penelope tried to resist the intruder, but she knew it was in vain. She wept, protested, pleaded, but she knew that presently she would be swept in a current of fierce desire, she would wish to surrender, she would be incapable of *not* surrendering.

"*Oh God, let the spirit of the mother come close to her imperilled child,*" prayed Seraphine.

In her dream Penelope was yielding. She had ceased to struggle. She was clasped in her husband's arms and already was turning willing and responsive lips to his, when her eyes fell upon the porthole, through which the distant lighthouse was sending her a message—it seemed like a message of love and encouragement. She saw the mighty shaft towering serenely above dark rocks and crashing waters, and watched it change with beautiful gradations of light into a rugged cross to which a woman was clinging desperately. The waves beat against her, the winds buffeted her, but she cried to God for help and—then, as she slept Penelope recalled Dr. Leroy's words and, still dreaming, stretched out her hands to the Cross, praying with all her strength that her sins might be forgiven, that her soul might be cleansed, that she might be saved from evil by the power of God's love.

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Instantly the torture of her dream was relieved. The brutal arms that had clasped her fell away. The ravisher, cheated of his victim, drew back scowling and slowly faded from her view, while from a distance a white figure with countenance radiant and majestic approached swiftly and Penelope knew it was the pure spirit of her mother coming to save her, and presently on her brow she felt a kiss of rapturous healing.

"My child!" came the dream words, perfectly distinct, although they were unspoken. "God will bless you and save you."

Penelope smiled in her sleep and her soul was filled with inexpressible peace.

"*I saw the mother's exalted spirit hovering over her child,*" Seraphine wrote of this clairvoyant vision. "*I saw the evil entity, leering hideously, go out of Penelope in a glow of scarlet light. I knew that the wicked dream was broken. My darling was saved.*"

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An hour passed, during which the two doctors and the medium watched anxiously by the sleeping patient.

Finally the young woman stirred naturally and opened her eyes.

"Oh, Dr. Leroy!" she cried joyfully. "It is true—what you said. It stopped—the dream stopped. And my mother came to me in my sleep. She kissed me. She blessed me. Oh!" Penelope glanced eagerly about the room.

Leroy greeted her with grave kindness.

"Your troubles are all over, Mrs. Wells. You need never have any more of these fears."

"Is that really true?"

"Yes, I am quite sure of what I say."

"How wonderful!"

He bowed gravely.

"God's love is very wonderful."

Again the radiant eyes seemed to search for some one. Penelope glanced appealingly at Seraphine.

"I understand, dear," beamed Mrs. Walters. "He is waiting outside. He will be so happy," and a moment later Christopher entered.

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## CHAPTER XIX

### PRIDE

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#### *(Fragments from Penelope's Diary)*

*Paris, Three Months Later.*

It is three months since I wrote this diary, three lonely months since I said good-bye to Christopher, or rather wrote good-bye, for I should never have had the courage to leave him, if I had tried to give him my reasons—face to face. I have never seen him or heard from him since that terrible night at Dr. Leroy's when the evil cloud was lifted from my soul and I knew and remembered—*everything!*

I have never heard from Seraphine. They do not even know where I am, they must not know—that is part of my plan, but it is frightfully hard. I pray for strength to be reconciled to my life of loneliness and to find comfort in good works; but the strength has not come to me. Every day I think of Christopher and the separation from him grows harder and harder. Life is not worth living.

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I am perfectly sane and normal, just as I was before my hallucinations. No more voices, or fears, or wicked dreams. Sometimes I wish I could dream of Christopher; but I never do, I never dream of anything. I suppose I should be grateful for that and glad that my cure is so complete. Oh, dear!

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I wear myself out at the dispensary for poor French children and try my best to smile and be cheerful and to interest myself in their pitiful needs and sorrows; but my heart is not in this work and my smiles are forced. Many nights I cry myself to sleep.

And yet I did right. I go over it all in my mind and I see that I did right. There was nothing else for me to do. I had to decide for both of us, and I decided. I thought of those dreadful things that I did, and—meant to do—those things that neither Christopher nor I can possibly forget ... how could Christopher ever have confidence in me as his wife? How could we ever be happy together with those memories between us?

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I try to remember the exact words that I wrote to my lover that morning when I went away. I hope I did not make him suffer too much. But of course he suffered—he must have. I

told him we could not see each other any more, or write to each other, or—anything. I knew I would have been too weak to resist the call of my love and he would have been too fine, too chivalrous, to let me go. He would have said: "You are cured now, dear" (which I really am) "and there is no reason why we should not be married—" which is true, except that he would always have had the fear, deep down in his heart, that I might relapse into what I had been. How could a high-minded man like Chris bear the thought that the woman he loved, the woman who was to be the mother of his children, had acted like a wanton? He could not bear it. It is evident that I did right.

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*And yet—*

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I often wonder what another woman would have done in my place. She loves a man as I loved Christopher—as I love him still. She is proud, she has always been admired, she cannot bear the thought of being pitied. And suddenly she learns that she has disgraced herself, she has violated the sacred traditions of modesty that restrain all women. She has acted like an abandoned woman towards the man she worships. God! It is true she has done this without knowing it, without being responsible for it, but she has done it, and that inefaceable memory will always shame her, if she becomes his wife. Day after day she will read it in his eyes, in his reticencies, in his efforts to be cheerful—she will know that he remembers—*what she was!*

NO! She could not bear it, no woman with any pride could bear it.

Pride!

What is pride? Is it a good thing or a bad thing? Would I be a finer woman if I could endure this humiliation and gracefully accept forgiveness? I suppose some women would take it all simply, like a grateful patient cured of an illness. Alas! that is not my nature.

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How little we know ourselves! We all wear masks of one kind or another that hide our true personalities even from ourselves. How will a woman act in sudden peril? In a moral crisis? In the face of shattering disgrace? Let the most beautiful wife and mother realize that some painful chapter in her life is to be opened to the world—what price will she not pay to avert this scandal?

Julian had a friend who on a certain night stood before a locked door with an officer of the law. His wife was on the other side of that door—with a companion in dishonor. The husband was armed. He was absolutely within his rights. They broke down the door. *And then—*

Not one of those tragic three could have told in advance what would happen when that door crashed in. As a matter of fact the woman alone was calm—coldly calm.

"Yes," she said, "I am guilty. Now shoot! Why don't you shoot? You are afraid to shoot!"

Which was true.

The husband was afraid; and the lover was more afraid; it was the erring wife who cut the best figure. But who could have foreseen this dénouement?

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After all I only did those abominable things because I was ill—when I was not myself; whereas now I am well, and the evil has passed from me. Besides, I only showed that wicked side of my nature to Christopher, through my love; it is inconceivable that I could ever have acted that way with another man. Christopher knows that. He knows there is no possible doubt about that. How much difference does this knowledge make to him—I wonder.

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I am going to leave Paris. I am too unhappy here. It seems there is a great need for nurses at Lourdes—that strange miracle place where pilgrims go to be healed—and I have volunteered for service. If the sick are really cured by miracles I don't see why they need nurses; but never mind that. It will give me a change and I may see some unfortunate men and women who are worse off than I am. Oh, if God would only work a miracle so that I can have Christopher and make him happy! But that can never be. Why not? Why do I say that after what has happened to me? Was it not a miracle that saved me from those hideous evils? Then why not other miracles?

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*At Lourdes. Two Weeks Later.*

Speaking of miracles, I am living among them. I am working in the *Bureau de Constataions* where the *miraculés*—those who are supposed to have been miraculously healed—are questioned and examined by doctors, Catholics, Protestants, Agnostics, Atheists, who come from all over the world to investigate these cures from the standpoint of a religion or pure science. What sights I have seen! Men and women of all ages and walks of life testifying that the waters of the sacred grotto have freed them from this or that malady, from tumors, lameness, deafness, blindness, tuberculosis, nervous trouble and numerous other afflictions. By thousands and tens of thousands these unfortunates crowd here from the four corners of the earth, an endless procession of believers, and every year sees scores of the incurable cured, instantly cured—even the sceptical admit this, although they interpret the facts differently. Some say it is auto-suggestion, others speak of mass hypnotism, others regard it as a scientific phenomenon not yet understood like the operation of the X-rays. And many wise men are satisfied with the simple explanation that it is the work of God, manifested today for those who have faith exactly as in Bible times.

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I was stabbed with poignant memories this afternoon when a tall black-bearded peasant told the doctors that his father, who accompanied him, and who had been insane, a violent neurasthenic, shut up in an asylum for four years, had been restored by the blessed waters to perfect health and had shown no abnormality of body or mind for eight years. These statements were verified by scientists and doctors.

Eight years! If I really believe in the permanent recovery of this poor man, as the doctors do, why am I doubtful about my own permanent recovery? The answer is that I am not doubtful for myself, but for Christopher. He might reason like this, he might say to himself—he is so loyal that he would die rather than say it to me: “I know Penelope has been restored to her normal condition of mind, but that normal condition includes a strong inherited and developed tendency towards—certain things,”—my cheeks burn with shame as I write this. “How do I know that this tendency in her, even if she remains herself, will not make trouble again—for both of us?”

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How could Christopher be sure about this?

*He could not be sure!*

So I did right to leave him.

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## CHAPTER XX

### THE MIRACLE

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*(From Penelope's Diary)*

*Lourdes. A Week Later.*

Today, with a multitude of the afflicted, I bathed in the *piscine*, a long trough filled with holy water from the grotto. The water was cold and not very clean (for hours it had received bodies carrying every disease known to man), but as I lay there, wrapped in a soaking apron and immersed to the head, I felt an indescribable peace possessing my soul. Was it the two priests who held my hands and encouraged me with kindly eyes? Was it the shouts and rejoicings, the continual prayers of pilgrims all about me? Or was it a sudden overwhelming sense of my own unworthiness, of my ingratitude and lack of faith and a rush of new desire to begin my life all over again, to forget my selfish repining? Whatever it was I know that as I arose from the bath and bowed before the statue of the Blessed Virgin, I was caught by a spiritual fervor that seemed to lift me in breathless ecstasy.

A young woman who was blind stood beside me, splashing water from a hand basin upon her reddened, sightless eyelids, and praying desperately. Together with her I prayed as I never had prayed, crying the words aloud, over and over again, as she did, while tears poured down my cheeks:

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*“Oh, Marie, conçue sans péché, priez pour nous qui avons recours à vous!”*

As I came away and started back to the *Bureau*, walking slowly under the blazing Pyrenees sun, I knew that an extraordinary change had taken place in me. I was not the same woman any more. I would never again be the same woman. I was like the child I knew

about that had been miraculously cured of infantile paralysis; or like the widow I had spoken to who had been miraculously cured of a fistula in the arm that had been five times vainly operated upon; or like the old woman I had seen who had been miraculously cured of an "incurable" tumor that had caused her untold suffering for twenty-two years. I was a *miraculée*, like these others, hundreds of others, one more case that would be carefully noted down by skeptical investigators on their neatly ruled sheets, *if only the mysteries of a sick soul could be revealed!*

Suddenly a great burst of singing drew my attention to the open space beyond the gleaming white church with its sharp-pointed towers, and I drew nearer, pushing my way through a dense multitude gathered to witness the procession of pilgrims and the Blessing of the Sick. In all the world there is no such sight as this, nothing that can stir the human soul so deeply. Inside the concourse, fringing the great crowds, lay the afflicted—on litters, on reclining chairs, on blankets spread over the ground; standing and kneeling, men, women and children from all lands and of all stations, pallid-faced, emaciated, suffering, dying, brought here to supplicate for help when all other help has failed them.

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"*Seigneur, nous vous adorons!*" chanted a priest with golden voice and ten thousand tongues responded:

"*Seigneur, nous vous adorons!*"

"*Jesus, Fils de Marie, ayez pitie de nous!*" came the inspired cry.

"*Jesus, Fils de Marie, ayez pitie de nous!*" crashed the answer.

"*Hosanna! Hosanna au Fils de David!*"

"*Hosanna! Hosanna au Fils de David!*" thundered the multitude, and the calm hills resounded.

It was an immense, an indescribable moment, not to be resisted. I felt myself literally in the presence of God, and choking, almost dying with emotion, I waited for what was to come.

Suddenly at the far end of the crowd a great shouting started and spread like a powder-train, with a violent clapping of hands.

"A miracle! A miracle!" the cries proclaimed.

They told me afterwards that five miraculous cures were accomplished at this moment, but I knew nothing about it. My eyes were closed. I had fallen to my knees in the dust and was sobbing my heart out, not in grief but in joy, for *I knew* that all was well with me now and would be in the days to come. I knew that Christopher would be restored to me, and that I would be allowed to make him happy. There would be no more doubt or fear in either of us—only love. *I knew this!*

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As I knelt there filled with a spirit of infinite faith and serenity, it seemed as if, above the tumult of the crowd, I heard my name spoken gently—"Penelope!"

I knew, of course, that it could not be a real voice, for I was a stranger here, yet there was nothing disturbing to me in this illusion. It came rather like a comforting benediction, as if some higher part of me had inwardly expressed approval of my prayerful aspirations, and had confirmed my belief that Christopher would be restored to me.

"Penelope!" the voice spoke again, this time with unmistakable distinctness, and now I opened my eyes and saw Seraphine standing before me.

"Seraphine! Where did you come from? I thought you were in America—in New York."

Smiling tenderly she helped me to my feet and led me away from the multitude.

"Let us go where we can talk quietly," she said.

"We will go to the hospice, where I am staying," I replied, not marvelling very much, but more than ever filled with the knowledge that God was guiding and protecting me.

"This has been a wonderful day for me, Seraphine," I told her when we came to my room, "the most wonderful day in my whole life."

"I know, dear," she answered calmly, as if nothing could surprise her either.

Then I explained everything that had happened—why I had left America so suddenly, why I had felt that I must never see Christopher again.

"But you don't feel that way any more?" she asked me with a look of strange understanding in her deep eyes.

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"No," said I, "everything is changed now. My fears are gone. I see that I must count upon Christopher to have the same faith and courage that I have in my own heart. Why should I expect to bear the whole burden of our future? He must bear his part of it. The responsibility goes with the love, doesn't it? I saw that this afternoon—it came to me like a flash when the procession passed. Isn't it wonderful?"



"Dear child, the working of God's love for His children is always wonderful. This is a place of miracles"—she paused as if searching into my soul—"and the greatest miracle is yet to come."

I felt the color flooding to my cheeks.

"What do you mean?"

"I must go back a little, Penelope, and tell you something important. You haven't asked about Captain Herrick."

"Is he—is he well?" I stammered.

She shook her head ominously.

"No. He is far from well. You did not realize, dear, what an effect that letter of yours would have upon him. It was a mortal blow."

I tried to speak, but I could not; my bosom rose and fell with quick little gasping breaths, as if I was suffocating.

"There was no particular illness," my friend continued, "just a general fading away, a slow discouragement. He had no interest in anything, and about a month ago Doctor Owen told me the poor fellow would not live long unless we could find you."

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"Oh, if I had only known! If I had dreamed that he would care so—so much," I sobbed. "How—how did you find me?"

Seraphine answered with that far-away, mystic look in her eyes: "It was your mother, dear—she told me we must go to Lourdes, she said it quite distinctly, she said we must sail that very week, or it would be too late—and we did sail."

I stared at her with widening, frightened eyes.

"Seraphine! You don't mean that—that Christopher is—here?" I cried.

The clairvoyant bowed her head slowly.

"He is here, at the hotel, but he is very ill. He took cold on the ship and—it got worse. He has pneumonia."

"Oh!" I breathed. I could feel my lips go white.

"The doctor is with him now, and a trained nurse. I left them to search for you. I knew I should find you—somewhere."

I rose quickly and caught my companion's arm.

"Come! We must go to him."

"No! You cannot see him until tomorrow. This is the night of the crisis."

"Please!" I begged.

"No! You must wait here. I will send you word." Then she left me.

Hour after hour I waited at the hospice, knowing that Seraphine would keep her promise and send me some message. At about nine o'clock a little boy came with a note saying that I must come at once. Christopher was worse.

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As we hurried through the square, the whole place was ablaze with lights, the church itself outlined fantastically in electric fires, while great crowds of chanting pilgrims moved in slow procession, each man or woman carrying a torch or lantern or shaded candle and all lifting their voices in that everlasting cry of faith and worship:

*Ave, Ave, Ave, Maria!*  
*Ave, Ave, Ave, Maria!*

Until the day of my death I shall hear that thunderous chorus sounding in my ears whenever memory turns back my thoughts to this fateful night.

Seraphine met me at the door of the chamber where Christopher lay, feverish and delirious. A French doctor, with pointed beard, watched by the patient gravely, while a sad-eyed nurse held his poor feet huddled in her arms in an effort to give them warmth. Already the life forces were departing from my beloved.

The doctor motioned me silently to a chair, but I came forward and sat on the bed, and bending over my dear one, I called to him fondly:

"Chris! It's Penelope! Oh, my dear, my dear! Don't you know me?" I pleaded.

But there was no answer, no recognition.

An hour passed, two hours and still there was no indication that my dear Christopher realized that I was near him, bending over him, praying for him. He turned uneasily in his

fever and now and then cried out with a great effort in his delirium; but he never spoke my name or made any reference to his love for me. It was heartbreaking to be there beside him and yet to feel myself so far away from him.

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At about eleven the doctor saw that a change was coming and warned me that there would be a lucid interval which would precede the final crisis.

"Within an hour we shall know what to expect," he said. "Either your friend will begin to improve—his heart action will be stronger, his breathing easier, or—he will sink into a state of coma and—" the doctor finished his sentence with an ominous gesture. "You must have courage, dear lady. The balance of his life may be turned by you—either way. It will be a shock for him to see you here, a great shock. I cannot tell how that shock may affect him. It may save him, it may destroy him. No man of science in my place would take the responsibility of saying to you that you must or must not show yourself to this man at this moment. You must take the responsibility for yourself—and for him."

"I understand, doctor," I said. "I will take the responsibility."

Again we waited in anguished silence, and soon the change came just as the doctor said it would. Christopher's eyes opened naturally and I saw that the glassy stare had gone out of them. He knew where he was, he knew what he was saying, he would recognize me, if he saw me; but I drew back into the shadows of the room where I could watch him without being seen. I wanted to think what I must do.

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Christopher beckoned Seraphine and the doctor to come close to him.

"I want you to write something for me," he said in weak tones but quite distinctly to Seraphine. "I may not come out of this. I—I don't care very much whether I do or not, but—get some paper—please—and a pencil. The most important thing is about my money—all that I have—everything in the world, understand? I—I leave it all to the only woman I have ever loved—or ever could love—Penelope Wells."

When he had said this he settled back on the pillow and breathed heavily but with a certain sense of relief, as if his mind was now at rest. I bit my lip until my teeth cut into it to keep myself from crying out.

"You are both witnesses to this—to what I have said—you've written it down?" he looked at Seraphine and the doctor who nodded gravely.

"You must find Penelope and tell her that—that she made a mistake to go away. I understand why she did it, but it was a mistake. Tell her I said that we all of us have a whole lot to be sorry for and we must not only ask to be forgiven, but we must be glad to accept the forgiveness of others for—for whatever we have done that is wrong, and we must believe that they are sincere in forgiving us. Tell her that I would have been glad to—to forgive her for—for everything."

His strength was evidently failing and the doctor told him that he had better not try to talk any more. But Christopher smiled in that quaint brave way that I knew so well and lifted his thin white hands in protest.

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"Just one thing more—please. It won't make any particular difference, doc, and I want to say it. I want you to be sure to tell her this—write it down. Tell her two things. One is that there isn't any argument about my loving her because I am dying for her—now—that's a fact. There isn't anything else I want to live for if I can't have Penelope. The other thing is that—" He paused as a violent spasm of coughing shook his wasted body, and again the doctor told him to be quiet, but he gave no heed.

"The other thing is—be sure to tell her this—that I would sooner have lived with Penelope—I don't care how many devils she was possessed with—than with all the saints in the calendar. I loved her—" He struggled to raise himself and then lifting his voice in a supreme effort, "I loved her good or bad. I—I couldn't help loving her. There—that's all. Let me sign it."

This was too much for me. As I saw my dear love tracing his name with painful strokes, I could control myself no longer and rushed out of the darkness to him, feeling that I must cry out wildly against his leaving me. I must fight the grim shadows that were enveloping him. I must keep him for myself by the fierce power of my love.

Just then a great glare from the torches filled the chamber and Christopher's eyes met mine. I stood speechless, choked with emotion, and as I tried to force my will against these obstacles of weakness, the cry of the pilgrims resounded from the streets below, a vast soul-stirring cry:

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*"Hosanna! hosanna au fils de David!"*

At this I fell on my knees by the bedside and buried my face in my hands. I realized suddenly that it was not for me to dispute God's will even for this life that was so dear to me, even for our great love. Once more I must fight my selfish pride and yield everything into God's keeping for better or for worse. But with all my soul I prayed, not daring to look up: "Dear God, save him! Give him back to me."

Then I felt Christopher's hand on my head, resting there lovingly.

"Penelope!" he said.

"Chris!"

Down in the street the lines of fire swept past in a molten sea while the roar of worshipping voices came up to me:

*"Hosanna! hosanna au fils de David!"*

And still I prayed, with my head buried in my arms: "Save him! Dear God, save him and give him back to me!"

*And God did.*

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## CHAPTER XXI

### THE TRUTH ABOUT WOMEN THAT NOBODY TELLS

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*(Extracts from Penelope's Diary)*

*Two Years Later.*

A woman who has been saved, as I have been, from a fate worse than death must be grateful, and ready to show her gratitude by helping others, especially other women. I have a message of hope for those who have heard the Voices, for those who have gone down into the Black Valley, where I was—*they can come back into the sunshine of happiness. The powers of Light are stronger than the powers of Darkness, and Love conquers Fear always in those who cleanse their souls of evil.*

And I have a warning for thousands and tens of thousands of women who have not yet glimpsed the Gates of Despair, but are drifting towards them and will surely pass through them, as I did, unless they understand the perils that surround and beset their lives.

With my husband's assistance and approval, I have selected from my diary parts that bear on the emotional problems of women today. Christopher says I have told the truth about women that nobody tells, and he wants me to make it known, so that others, being enlightened, may avoid the mistakes I made and be spared the consequences of these mistakes. Dear Chris! His judgment encourages me, and yet—

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How fully shall I speak, so that my words may do good, not harm?

I can only have faith in my honesty of purpose, and hold to my belief that, in spite of my limitations, I have a message to deliver that will be helpful. Yes, I must deliver this message. God will not allow so sincere a motive to fail. Perhaps the reason for all my sufferings and mistakes, the reason for my existence was that I should deliver this message.

### ARE CERTAIN WOMEN PREDESTINED TO UNHAPPINESS THROUGH THE INFLUENCE OF THE STARS?

Soon after my deliverance from evil, Seraphine cast my horoscope (I wonder why she never did this before?), and now much that was previously inexplicable in my life is made clear to me. She says that astrology is not a cheap form of trickery, but a recognized field of knowledge and investigation.

From the earliest times wise men have emphasized the influence of the stars upon human lives—for good or ill. I like to believe this. It gives one a broader and more charitable view of one's fellow creatures, of their sins and weaknesses, to realize the presence about us of these vast and mysterious forces.

My horoscope, with its queer phraseology, reads:

"Your Neptune is in evil aspect to your Venus, which makes you attract men almost irresistibly."

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This was the case, Seraphine says, with Georges Sand, George Eliot and various women in history who were the favorites of kings, although some of them had little beauty. They were dowered, however, with this terrific magnetism for the opposite sex.

I remember, even as a school girl, how the boys used to fight over me, while they scarcely noticed prettier and brighter girls. I never understood this, any more than they did, for I was rather indifferent to them. There was one girl in our set who attracted the boys as much as I did, but she was also drawn to them. When this girl was about eighteen her father began to receive anonymous notes telling of his daughter's escapades and warning him to guard her more carefully. Finally there came an open scandal when the girl ran away with a married man. At the time I thought myself a better and stronger character than she, since I resisted

temptation, but my horoscope shows that I had "in beneficent aspect" certain planets that were "evilily aspected" for my friend, and this made her temptations greater than mine.

Seraphine says that the horoscope, wisely used, is like an automobile light in the darkness—it reveals dangers in the road that may be avoided. "*The stars incline, but do not compel,*" she always tells her clients and assures them that, by power of the will, we can overcome any influence of the stars, strengthening the good and weakening the evil aspects. That is a blessed thought.

When I was a trained nurse I received many confidences from women and some confessions of an intimate nature. At one time I took care of a married woman in Washington, a neurasthenic case, and this woman told me that she had several times tried to kill herself because of a curse that seemed to be hanging over her. Twice, following an irresistible impulse, she had left her husband with another man for whom she had no particular affection. It was a kind of recurrent madness which she did not understand except that *she was positive that it had something to do with the phases of the moon*. During about ten days of the month when the moon was "dark," she was perfectly normal, but when a new moon appeared she was conscious of a vague uneasiness that increased and finally became acute when the moon was full, this being her time of peril.

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Venus in conjunction with Mars, Seraphine says, brings love at first sight, but in evil aspect to Mars it makes one liable to sex-excesses.

She says that a good Neptune in the 5th house, the house of Romance, or in the 7th house, the house of Marriage, brings an ideal and spiritual attachment; but in evil aspect in either of these houses it brings an immoral relationship or a marriage to one who is morally or physically deformed. This was the condition in my own horoscope and certainly poor Julian was deformed morally.

What a strange and fascinating light all this throws upon human behavior! How it clears up mysterious infatuations and explains incredible follies! Seraphine knows a woman of fifty—she is a grandmother and a most estimable person—who has always had and still has this power of attracting men violently to her. On one occasion this woman was in a railway station in New York, waiting for her son, when a fine looking man approached her and, lifting his hat, asked if she could direct him to the train that would soon leave for Chicago. She told him in her well-bred way, and he left her; but a few minutes later he returned and said with intense feeling that he had never believed in love at first sight, but now he did. He was compelled to believe in it now.

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When she drew back he told her that he was a widower, a man of means, living in the West, that he could give her the best references and—the point was that his infatuation for her was so great that he begged her to consider whether she would be willing to marry him. He would do everything in his power to make her happy, but declared that he could not and would not try to live without her another day.

Knowing her horoscope the woman did not get angry at this presumption, but gently declined the offer, and begged the man to leave her. He bowed and withdrew, but came back once again after she had joined her son and explained to the astonished young man his hopes and aspirations toward the mother. Whereupon, as the woman still refused, he finally left, to all appearances broken-hearted.

I have had one experience of this sort myself that shows how even the noblest man may suddenly suffer an infatuation capable of sweeping him on to disaster. It was at the time of my husband's death—during days when he lay half conscious in the hospital following his automobile accident. A distinguished clergyman, Dr. B—, who had known Julian slightly, visited him here and in this way made my acquaintance. And he fell violently in love with me.

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For months during my early widowhood he saw me almost every day and wrote me impassioned letters, declaring that I was the only woman in the world for him, I was his true mate, he could not live without me, he was ready to give up everything for me, to go away with me to some distant city—any city—and begin life all over again.

This clergyman was a man of fifty, a brilliant preacher, widely honored and loved, who had never in his life, he assured me, committed any deliberately sinful act such as this would be, for he was married to a fine woman who had been his faithful companion for many years and had borne him two children—two boys. All this he was ready to renounce for me—reputation, honor, duty. He said it was fate. His desire for me was too strong to be resisted. The sin, the disgrace, the pain that he would cause—none of these could keep back this man of God from his evil purpose.

## **ARE WOMEN DISLOYAL TO OTHER WOMEN?**

In many pages of my diary (written sincerely at the time) I present the conventional view of sex offences, the comforting view to women.

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*But—*

When I search deep into my soul with an honest desire to find the truth, I am not sure that

women are as blameless in the sex struggle with men as I would like to believe. Very often they are less pursued than pursuing. Every man of the world can recall the cases where women have played the rôle of temptress, using their charms against unwilling victims, notably husbands of other women. *I am afraid the rule is that women are disloyal to other women where there is any serious emotional conflict.*

The editor of a popular magazine told me once about a prize contest that they had for the best essay on a woman's sex solidarity union—they called it the W.S.S.U. The idea was that if women would stand together against men they could get anything in the world they wanted—equal rights and privileges, equal wages, fair treatment in every department of life; and do away with evils of ignorance and poverty, child labor evils, prostitution evils. We could have an ideal world if women, using their sex power, would only stand together against men.

Hundreds of letters were received from women, who thought this a wonderful idea; but they all agreed that it was impossible to carry it out, because women would never be loyal to one another.

That is true; I know it, and every woman knows it—women are disloyal to other women whenever it becomes a question of men. They might agree on a W.S.S.U. program, but they would never stick to it, poor things, because every blessed one of them who was at all good looking would be ready to go over to the opposition at the first favorable opportunity. Only the homely women would be loyal!

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## ARE WOMEN GREATER HYPOCRITES THAN MEN?

In all my troubles I kept at least to the form of religious belief, although I missed the substance, namely, that any life can be made happy, even glorious, if it is founded on purity of soul and unselfish love and service. I was selfish—even in my love; therefore I brought upon myself the fruits of selfishness which are ill health, inefficiency and unhappiness. *The beauty of a selfish woman fades quickly.*

Once I wrote this in my diary:

“Alas, how soon love passes! Ten or fifteen years and the best of it is gone. After that the dregs! A woman of thirty! Ugh! I shall be thirty next year. A woman of forty! No wrinkles at forty, says the beauty advertisement, but that is a lie. A woman of forty is a pitiful, tragic figure, especially if she is a little beautiful. No man wants her any more.”

I was mistaken. The beauty of unselfish love never passes. There are sisters of charity whose faces are exquisitely beautiful at fifty. Seraphine is forty-five and her face shines with heavenly radiance. Her skin is as smooth as a girl's and free from lines because she thinks good thoughts and does kind acts. The greatest beauty tonic in the world is the habit of kindness.

In one place I find this:

“Women are naturally religious, especially women with a strong sex nature; they believe in God, in spiritual mysteries; they are deeply stirred by religious music and by the ritual of worship; they love the architectural impressiveness of a church, the stained glass windows far up among majestic arches, the candles, the incense, the far-away chanting.

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“I was brought up an Episcopalian, but when I am tired or discouraged I often go into St. Patrick's Cathedral—it is so beautiful—and say my prayers there. At any hour I find others praying, men and women—they come in off Fifth Avenue quite naturally and cross themselves and bow to the Altar and kneel straight up—they don't just lean forward the way we do. I love to imitate them—cross myself and go down on one knee and dip my fingers in the font of Holy Water as I come away. *Sometimes I wish I was a Catholic and could confess my sins. It might help me.*

“I do not think religion keeps women back very much from doing what they want to do or have resolved to do in love affairs. It is a comfort, an emotional satisfaction rather than a restraint. They come tripping in on their high heels with all their smiles and finery, and they trip out again, unchanged in their sentimental natures. A woman will go to church in the afternoon and flirt with another woman's husband in the evening. She will respond devoutly after the Commandments 'Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law,' even though she knows that her heart is inclined to break one of these laws.”

This is true in the main, although I believe now that women, because they are highly emotional, are sincere for the moment when they kneel down to say their prayers and confess their sins, even if they half know that they may continue in wrong-doing. I suppose women are less logical here than men who will often stay away from church entirely when they are breaking the moral law and when they know that they intend to go on breaking it. I am sure it is better, however, for men and women to go to church, even at the risk of a little hypocrisy, than not to go at all.

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## ARE WOMEN DISINGENUOUS IN SENTIMENTAL AFFAIRS?

I suppose we must admit that there are many women, in all classes of society—not mercenary women—who extend to men a certain measure of sex complaisance and feel no deep regret for this behavior, so long as things go well.

Once I wrote in my diary:

“Of course women will not admit sex indiscretions—wild horses could not drag the truth out of them. The attractive ones, those who have had emotional experiences with men, will hide them, following the feminine free masonry of centuries. And unattractive women will call high heaven to witness that nothing of that sort has ever happened to them. They have always found men respectful and considerate.”

I asked Julian about this one day when he was in a penitential mood and he said:

“Of course you are right, the indiscretions of women are numerous, inevitable; but it is the fault of men. The evidence is all about us. Any woman may ascertain this from her husband, her father, her grandfather, or her great-grandfather, if she can persuade one of these gentlemen to be honest with her.”

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The ghastly truth is—this is the truth that has filled the world with tears—that the average full-blooded male citizen is polygamous in his instinct and to some extent in his practice.

Every reasonably attractive woman who has been called upon to face the facts of life knows that men are impelled towards women by a force of desire that they call over-powering. It is not over-powering, as thousands of clean-minded men have proved, it is no more over-powering than the desire to gamble or the desire to take drugs; it can be conquered as these other desires have been conquered; but centuries of wayward living under relaxed standards (the double standard) have made men believe that it is over-powering and they act accordingly. And women yield on one pretense or another, smilingly or tearfully—*how can they resist the dominant will of half the human race?*

I find this in my diary heavily underscored:

*“How can the same act be a sin for half the race and not a sin for the other half? For centuries men have proclaimed that women must not give themselves to men, but men may give themselves to women. Is there any greater absurdity? Wine may mix with water, but water must not mix with wine.”*

If these sex-complaisant women were really filled with remorse, burdened with a sense of shame, we should all know it. Their eyes, their voices, their daily lives would reveal it. Could a million women be in physical pain, say from starvation, without all the world knowing it? Is pain of the soul less torturing than pain of the body? The fact is that these women are not in spiritual pain. They regard what they have done (often regretfully) as a result of impossible conditions in the world today, a world controlled by men.

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I can speak about these things with a certain authority, since, for years, I sympathized with the self-indulgent point of view, in fact I lived in an artistic and Bohemian *milieu* where many of my friends followed the line of least resistance. I may even confess that I might have gone with the current, had I not seen the harm and unhappiness that resulted. *It does not pay to be self-indulgent.*

### **“LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION”**

The suspicion that many women are disingenuous in regard to these irregularities of conduct was forced upon me some years ago in a conversation with Kendall Brown, who, for all his eccentricities, is a keen observer of life.

I give the conversation at some length just as I wrote it down in my diary:

“Kendall insists that women like me—he calls me a Class A woman which makes me furious for I'm afraid I am one—are never really on the level in sentimental affairs. If we were on the level, he says, we would not make such a fuss about the grand conspiracy of men against our virtue. There would be no point to it, for our virtue would never be in any danger unless we half-wished it to be. He says that the three great sins mentioned in the Bible and in all religions are killing, stealing and sex offences. Now, the attitude of the human race toward these sins, as established by centuries of habit, makes it almost impossible for the average citizen, man or woman, to either kill or steal. 'Isn't that true?' he asked.

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“I agreed that the thought of stealing is so abhorrent to me that I could not imagine any temptation strong enough to make me a thief. I might have some reserves about killing, however, in fact I have once or twice felt a sympathy for ... well, no!

“‘All right,’ he went on. ‘Now, if women were on the level in guarding their virtue and always had been, just as they are on the level in regard to stealing, don't you see that it would be utterly impossible for any man under any circumstances (barring violence which does not happen once in ten thousand times) to have his way with a woman? This habit of virtue would be so deeply ground into you women, into the very depth of your being, that nothing could overcome it. But as we look about us and observe women in all classes of society, we see that there is no such condition, no such habit, which proves that women are

not and never have been on the level. What do you say to that, speaking as a pretty woman?'

"I did not say anything, I was so indignant—speechless—at his impertinence, and while I was searching for some answer to this outrageous statement, my poet friend proceeded:

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"You know how strong habits are, Penelope, all habits. Take smoking, or drinking cocktails, or even coffee. I swore off coffee six weeks ago. During the first week I was nearly crazy for it—had headaches, felt rotten, but I stuck it out. In the second week it was much easier for me not to take coffee. At the end of a month the habit was established and now I have no more craving for coffee. If I leave it alone for six months the chances are that nothing will ever make me drink coffee again, especially if I hypnotize myself with the idea that coffee is bad for my heart action, that I'm a nice little hero to have cut it out and that now I am going to live to be over ninety. You see?

"Now then, the drift of all this is that the habit of virtue in women if it really was an on-the-level habit that they believed in with all their souls and would fight for with all their strength, would be utterly and absolutely unbreakable—no man could overcome it. The only reason why men in all times and in all lands have overcome women's virtue is because women themselves have never attached the importance to it that they pretend to attach. That isn't a very gallant speech, but it is true."

As I said, I became angry at Kendall's accusations and refused to continue the discussion, but if I were to answer the poet now, after my wider experience of life, especially after my sufferings, I should feel obliged to acknowledge that he struck a hard blow at feminine complacency. The trouble with women is that there is an increasing tendency among them, especially among those who live in cities full of pleasures and excitements, to compromise with evil, to go as near the danger line as possible, so long as they do not cross it. And this cowardly, dallying virtue is almost no virtue at all. There was a time when women prayed sincerely: "Lead us not into temptation"; now it seems as if they pray to be led into temptation, with just this reservation: *that they may come out of it unscathed. Demi-vierges!*

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I have watched many attractive women treading the primrose path and I have seen that it always leads them to unhappiness. Not that they are disgraced or openly degraded—life goes on with many of them very much as before, but gradually their faces change, their souls change. They could have done so much better; they could have been useful, respected and self-respecting figures in the world *through loving service*. After all, life is very short and the only things that really matter are the things that happen in our own souls. *No one can fail in life who does not fail inside, and no one can succeed in life who only succeeds outside*. I learned that from Dr. Leroy.

## IS PLATONIC FRIENDSHIP POSSIBLE TO AN ATTRACTIVE WOMAN?

In telling the truth about my life and my innermost feelings I must quote passages from my diary that were written in a light and often flippant spirit, that being my mood at the time; but the lesson is there just the same and in many instances tears follow close behind the laughter. Furthermore, I thank God that my regeneration has not taken away my sense of humor. One of the great troubles with neurasthenic women is that they do not laugh enough.

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I wrote the following about a year after my husband's death:

"We women are irrational creatures. Our emotions control us, and these emotions change from day to day, from hour to hour. We never know how we will act under any given circumstances—that may depend upon some man."

The truth is that the attraction which draws a man and a woman together in what they call platonic friendship always has something of the physical in it—on one side or the other. Or on both sides. Women will not admit this, but it is true. They talk about the intellectual bond that joins them to a man—what a precious interchange of thoughts! Or the spiritual bond—such a soulful and inspiring companionship—nothing else, my dear! I used to talk that way myself about Jimsy Brooks before my husband died. He was my unchangeable rock of defense whenever the subject of platonic friendship came up. Other men might fail and falter, make fools of themselves, seek opportunities for—nonsense, but Jimsy was Old Reliability. I could tell him everything, even my troubles with Julian, I could trust him entirely. Alas!

One day I received this warning from Seraphine: "My beloved Penelope, you are riding for a fall! I have had you in mind constantly since you told me of your new friendship with Mr. R ——. I know you intend to be truly platonic and I can see you smiling as you recall your many years' friendship with Jim Brooks to prove that such a thing is possible. But, my dear, take warning in time. While it has apparently worked out in that case, I am certain it is only the thought of losing 'even that that he has' which has prevented Jimsy from telling you of his love long ago. Your new playmate may cause you many heartaches before the game is played out. Think it over."

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Dear old Seraphine! How well she knows the human soul! A month later I wrote this in my diary:

"Seraphine was right. My bubble has vanished into thin air. Jimsy Brooks has declared his love for me and a wonderful thing has gone out of my life forever. I had always felt so perfectly safe with Jimsy. When I think of the all-day picnics that we two used to go on together and the outrageous things I have done, I blush all over.

"I remember our trip to Bear Mountain and the sparkling stream that beckoned me into its depths. I wanted to wade in it, to sit on one of the smooth round stones in the middle and in general to behave like a child. All of which I did, for there was only Jimsy to see and he didn't matter in the least. He never so much as glanced at my bare feet and legs when I splashed through the ripples with my dress pinned up!

"I remember how I kissed his hand where a fish barb had torn it.... 'Kiss it, make it well,' and all the while I must have been hurting him cruelly. God knows I did not mean to, I would not have hurt him for the world.

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"This sort of thing is all very well from a woman's angle, but is it well for a man? Jimsy says no, and when I remember the expression in his eyes, I am afraid I must agree with him. I had thought of him more as I would think of a girl chum, only infinitely more desirable, for he had the power of really *doing* things for me—he was a cross between a nice old friendly dog that would fetch and carry at my bidding and a powerful protector who could (and did) stand between me and unpleasant happenings.

"Jimsy has gone out of my life and left a terrible loneliness. He says that some day, when he has learned resignation, he will come back and we can take up the threads of our friendship just where we have laid them down ... but that can never be, you cannot build up a new friendship on the ashes of an old one. Poor Jim Brooks! I shall never forget what a wonderful thing he was in my life. And now that I have learned my lesson, my new platonic friend Mr. R— can take his professed platonic friendship elsewhere. I am through, henceforth all men are acquaintances ... or lovers!"

As I look back on my life and try to draw wisdom from my mistakes, I see some things clearly and one is that it is impossible for a woman like me to enjoy the close friendship of an attractive man without danger. No matter how honorable he is or how sincere the woman is, there will be danger. The only case where there is no danger is where there is no physical attraction. I might have been safe enough with some anemic saint, but not with one who had pulsing red blood in his veins—certainly not!

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Here is a characteristic episode written before I married Julian, during those months of hard struggle in New York:

"Last night Kendall Brown talked to me like an angel.

"'I'll give you a case in point, Pen,' he was saying. 'A beautiful woman like you, an exquisite, lithe creature is sitting on a sofa under a soft light, leaning against pillows—just as you are now; and a man like me, a poor adoring devil, a regular worm, is sitting at the other end of the sofa looking at this woman, drinking in her loveliness, thrilling to the mysterious lights in her eyes, the caressing tenderness of her voice and all the rest of it. This man wants to reach out and take this woman in his arms—draw her to him—press his lips to hers. But he doesn't do it, because—well, she wouldn't stand for it. Besides, it isn't right. Perhaps she is a married woman. Perhaps he is married.

"'Now what I want to know is why this chap can't behave himself and regard his fair friend as he would an exquisite rose in a garden—somebody else's garden. Why can't he say to himself: "This woman is one of God's loveliest creatures, but she does not belong to me. I can look at her, I can rejoice in her beauty, but I mustn't touch her or try to harm her." Why can't he say that to himself? Isn't it a wicked thing for a man to crush and bruise and destroy a lovely flower, to scatter its color and perfume just for a wayward impulse?"

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"I shall never forget the earnestness, the tenderness in the eyes and voice of this harum scarum poet whose record in women conquests makes a rich chapter in the annals of Greenwich Village. At this moment he was quite sincere, or thought he was. There were tears in his eyes.

"And what did I do? I rose from my pillows and said, with a little laugh and toss of my head: 'Very pretty, Kendall, you ought to make a poem of it.' Then I went over to the victrola and set it going in a fox-trot, one of my favorites. I was restless and began to move about slowly to the music while Kendall watched me with a different light growing in his eyes. I wore a clinging white house garment—I suppose I was at my best.

"'Let's dance it, Pen, just gently so as not to disturb the folks downstairs,' he said. So we danced the fox-trot and my hair brushed against his cheek—he really dances very well for a poet.

"After he had gone I sat thinking of this for a long time, puzzled about myself and about Kendall. This afternoon I saw him again as I was passing through the Brevoort Café. He came up to me, smiling, and drew me aside.



"Don't you see what a little faker you are, Pen?" he laughed. 'It's just as I said, you are none of you on the level, you pretty women. Why did you set that victrola going last night and tempt me to—to—yes you did, you know darn well you did. Why did you let your cheek brush against mine? Come, be honest, if you can. You're laughing, you adorable little devil—you expected me to kiss you.'

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"Impertinent!" I said. 'You do yourself too much honor, sir.'

"I say you expected me to kiss you.'

"No.'

"Liar!" He wrinkled up his nose amusingly.

"I suppose I was a liar. I did expect Kendall Brown to—well—not to kiss me necessarily, but to make it perfectly clear that he wanted to. It was a ridiculous and unnecessary bit of posing on his part to act as if he did not want to. The French have a saying that a pretty woman always expects a suitor to know just *when* to be lacking in respect."

## HOW SHALL A WOMAN SATISFY HER HEART'S LONELINESS?

I quote from my diary without comment another significant conversation that took place during the early months of my widowhood. How I resented, at this time, any suggestion that I was inclined to venture too near the sentimental danger line!

And yet....

"Tonight I had a long talk with Kendall Brown on the same old subject—*what is a woman to do who longs for the companionship of a man, but does not find it?*

"Kendall always says disconcerting things, he is brutally frank; but I like to argue with him because I find him stimulating, and he does know a lot about life.

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"The trouble with women like you, Pen,' he said, 'is that you are not honest with yourselves. You pretend one thing and end by doing something quite different; then you say that you never intended to do this thing. Why can't you be consistent?'

"Like men?'

"Well, at least men know what they are going after, and when they have done a certain thing, they don't waste time regretting it or insisting that they meant to do something else.'

"You think women are hypocrites?'

"Yes.'

"If women are hypocrites, if women are afraid to tell the truth about sentimental things, it is because you men have made them so,' I replied with feeling.

"Kendall answered good-naturedly that he held no brief for his own sex, he acknowledged that men treat women abominably—lie to them, abandon them, and so on; but he kept to his point that women create many of their troubles by drifting back and forth aimlessly on the changing tide of their emotions instead of establishing some definite goal for their lives.

"Women yield to every sentimental impulse—that is why they weep so easily. Watch them at a murder trial—they weep for the victim, then they weep for the murderer. Half their tears are useless. If women would put into constructive thinking some of the vital power they waste in weeping and talking they could revolutionize the world.'

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"Could they reform the men?' I retorted, but when he tried to answer I stopped him. What was the use? I knew what he would say about this, and I really wanted to get his ideas on the other point.

"Come back to the question,' I said. 'Take the case of a well-bred woman surrounded by stifling, conventional influences of family and friends, who sees lonely years slipping by while nothing comes that satisfies her womanhood. She may have money enough, comforts, even luxuries, but she longs for the companionship of a man. What is she to do?'

"He answered with his usual positiveness:

"She must take the initiative. She must go after what she supremely wants, just as a man would, using her power—I assume that she is reasonably attractive. She must break through restraints, and drive ahead towards the particular kind of emotional happiness that suits her. That is what God created her for, to achieve by her own efforts this emotional happiness. If she wants it enough she can get it. We can all of us do anything, have anything on condition that we want it enough to pay the price for it. The price is usually the elimination of other things that interfere.'

"Suppose a woman wants a husband? Suppose she is forty—and not rich? Do you mean to say she can get a husband?'

"Here my poet, blazing with conviction, leaned towards me, pointing an emphatic

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forefinger.

"I tell you, Penelope Wells, it is possible for any reasonably attractive woman *up to forty-five* to get a reasonably satisfactory husband if she will work to get him as a man works to make money. She can't sit on a chair and twirl her thumbs and wait for a husband to drop into her lap out of the skies like a ripe plum. She must bend destiny to her purposes. She must make sacrifices, create opportunities, move about, use the intelligence that God has given her. The world is full of men who are half ready to marry—*she must turn the balance!*

"Listen! If I were a lonely woman yearning for matrimony I would pick out one of these eligible males and make him my own. I would make him feel that the thing he wanted above all other things was to have me for his wife. How would I do this? I would study his desires, his needs, his weaknesses; I would make myself so necessary to him—as necessary as a mother is to a child—that he couldn't get along without me. I tell you it can be done, Pen, by the resistless power of the human will. The trouble with most of us is that we don't want things hard enough. *If a woman wants a husband hard enough she will get him—nothing can prevent it!*

"I smiled at these fantastic views, although I admit, that we women ought to be more masters of our fates than we are. In my own case I suppose it would have been better if I had left Julian of my own volition, because it was right to leave him, instead of waiting for an automobile accident to separate us.

"Please be sensible, Kendall,' I protested. 'Give me thoughts that apply to the world as it is, not extravagant fancies. You know perfectly well that there are thousands, tens of thousands, of fairly attractive women in all classes of society, especially in the wage earning class, who have no chance to marry the kind of man they wish to marry. Besides, there are a million more women than men in American. They can't all get husbands, can they? There aren't enough men to go around. And there are other thousands of wretched women tied to husbands who will not consent to a divorce. What are all these unhappy women to do?'

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"Can't they get along without men?' he laughed.

"Can men get along without women?' I answered, rather annoyed. Kendall saw that I was serious and changed his tone.

"Let me get this straight, Pen. If a woman longs for the companionship of a man—you mean the intimate companionship? You are not talking about platonic friendship?'

"No, I mean the intimate companionship.'

"And she cannot marry? Then what is she to do? Is that what you mean?'

"Yes.'

"Ah! Now we come to the heart of the discussion. You want to know if there are cases where self-respecting women enter into irregular love affairs and never regret it? Is it possible for a woman to break the moral law without suffering disastrous consequences? Are there cases where a girl or a woman yields to the desperate cry of her soul for a mate without degradation and without loss of her self-respect? Can such things be? Do you want my honest opinion?' The poet's eyes challenged me.

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"Yes, that is exactly what I want, I want the truth.'

"Whereupon Kendall Brown assured me that he has known a number of rather fine women, self-supporting and self-respecting, the kind of women who say their prayers at night and try to be kind, who, nevertheless, have had *liaisons* that have not resulted in shame and sorrow or in any moral or material disaster.

"Are you sure of this? How can you be sure?'

"Because I have talked frankly with these women. Sometimes I was in a position where I could, and, anyhow, women tell me things. They know it is my business to study life, to glimpse the heights and depths of human nature. I would be a poor poet if I couldn't do that.'

"And these women told you that they have never felt regrets?'

"Practically that—yes; several of them said that they would do the same thing over again if they had to relive their lives. They have been happier, more efficient in their work, they have had better health, calmer nerves, a more serene attitude towards life because of these love affairs.'

"I don't believe it,' I declared. 'These women lied to you. They kept something back. The thing is wrong, abominable, and nothing can make it right or decent. I would rather die of loneliness.'

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"I shall never forget Kendall's superior smile as he answered me:

"Oh, the inconsistency of a woman! She will not marry, she will not have an *affaire*, yet she longs for the intimate companionship of a man. She wants to go swimming, but insists upon keeping away from the water.'

"I bit my lip in vexation of spirit.

"'Dear friend, don't be annoyed with me,' my poet continued with a quick change to gentleness. 'I didn't make the world or put these troublesome desires and inconsistencies into the hearts of women. Listen! I'll give you my best wisdom now: If a woman cannot marry and will not have a lover, then she must stop all stimulation of her emotions, she must put men out of her thoughts, out of her life and concentrate on something worth while that will not harm her. Let her take up the purely intellectual life, some cultural effort—history, art, municipal reform, anything, and absorb herself in it. Or let her follow the old path that has led thousands of women to peace of mind—let her seek the comforts of religion.' Then smiling, he added: 'You might become a missionary, Pen, in China or Armenia. I'll bet you'd be flirting with some mandarin or pasha before you got through.'

"Again I bit my lip, for I knew very well that the religious life would never satisfy me. If I entered a convent I should probably run away from it in despair. What a horrible situation to want to do right and long to do wrong at the same time!

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"Kendall Brown must have read my thoughts.

"'There is one thing you self-pitying ladies must learn,' he went on, 'that is to play the game of life according to the rules. You can't have your cake and eat it. You can't amuse yourselves with fire without getting burned.'

"I was silent.

"'You must stop flirting with temptation—that's what you all do, you pretty women, fascinating women. You can't deny it.'

"'I do deny it,' I said weakly.

"'Oh come now! How about dancing—when a woman has a sinuous, clinging body and wears no corsets and—you know what I mean. Isn't that temptation?'

"'It's horrid of you, Kendall Brown, to suggest such things. Only a person with evil thoughts—'

"His eyes twinkled at me good-humoredly but I refused to be conciliated.

"'And how about the ancient and honorable practice of kissing?' he persisted. 'Of course it is not done any more, I realize that. No pretty woman in these austere days ever thinks of allowing a man to kiss her—except her husband, but—seriously, isn't kissing a temptation? Isn't it, Pen?'

"By this time my nerves were decidedly ruffled.

"'You are too foolish!' I stormed. 'I wish you would go home. I am tired of your ex-cathedra statements and your self-sufficiency.'

"'No,' he flung back, studying me with his keen gray eyes, 'you are tired of the truth.'"

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## CONCERNING THE DOUBLE STANDARD

With great diffidence I venture to say a word about the most perplexing and embarrassing question in the world:

*Shall men be allowed to do certain things without any particular punishment or social condemnation, while women are punished mercilessly for doing these same things—things that men compel them to do?*

The double standard!

Shall women try to change this standard, and, if so, in which direction—up or down?

Is it desirable that the weaker sex be given more liberty in emotional matters, or that the stronger sex be given less liberty?

I know that some distinguished women, great artists, stage favorites and others have succeeded brilliantly in spite of sex irregularities; but this proves nothing. These women succeeded because they had genius or talent, not because they were immoral, just as certain men of genius have succeeded in spite of an addiction to various evil practices. They would probably have achieved more splendid careers had they been able to conquer these weaknesses. Besides, we are considering what is best for the majority of men and women, not for an exceptional few.

I have a friend, a public school teacher in Chicago,—Miss Jessie G—, who holds advanced views on these matters and admits that she herself has been a sex transgressor. She has never been sordid or mercenary, she has always believed that she was actuated by sincere affection, but the fact remains that she has had several affairs with men. She has broken the moral law. And while she professes not to regret this and insists that she would repeat these affairs if she had to live her life over again, yet, I have felt in talking with her that this cannot possibly be true.

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Miss G— has fine instincts, is fond of music, is proud of her profession and shrinks from the thought that she might be considered *déclassée*; at the same time she *knows* that on more than one occasion she has been treated coldly by men and women familiar with the facts of her life. For example, at summer hotels, in spite of her good looks and apparent respectability, she has been denied introductions to charming women who would disapprove of her behavior.

*That hurts!*

Even the bravest of our advanced women thinkers know in their hearts that they writhe under the pity or scorn of their sister women.

It is certain that a decent woman who enters into irregular relations with a man whom she loves must endure great distress of mind; her relations with this man are at best unsatisfactory. She accepts the disadvantages of wifehood and foregoes the advantages. She can see her adored one only with difficulty at uncertain times and places. She lives in constant fear of discovery. She is doomed to torturing loneliness for, in the nature of things, she cannot have her lover with her whenever she longs to have him, there must be days and weeks of the inevitable separation. Nor dare she write to him freely, lest the letters fall into wrong hands. In no way may she reveal her love, the proudest treasure in her life, but must hide it like a thing of shame.

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“My poor child,” I would say to such a woman, if I might, “remember that the hard test comes when things go wrong, when money fails, when beauty fades. Suppose your beloved falls ill. You cannot go to him, speak to him, minister to him on his bed of pain, though your heart is breaking. Even if he is dying, you can only wait ... wait in anguish of soul for some cold or covert message. You have no rights at his side that the family respect—*his* family. Who are you? Are you his wife? No! Then you are nothing, less than nothing; you are the temptress, *the mistress!* You love him? Bah! Can such a woman love?”

Miss G— once acknowledged to me that while she has enjoyed the companionship of superior men whom she would never have known but for her moral laxity, yet she has paid a heavy price here, since she no longer values the acquaintance of men in her own sphere of life. From two such men (excellent, average men) she has received offers of marriage that she refused because their society no longer satisfied her after that of others more brilliant and highly placed; but she might easily have been happy with one of these two, had not her ideals been raised to a level beyond her legitimate attainment.

I might present other difficulties that must be faced by a woman who says she is tired of the old standards of virtue and will live her life as a man lives his, but I need not detail these difficulties. In her deepest soul every woman knows that the thought of a wayward existence is abhorrent to her better nature. She hates the double standard, she knows it has worked only evil in the world—it is a debasement of all that is noblest, a betrayal of all that is most beautiful. *The double standard has done more harm to the human race than all the wars of history.*

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Women know this, but they are afraid to speak out, they are afraid to fight for their ideals, and passing years find men clinging to hideous sex privileges—one law of morality for men and another law for women.

I believe that American women could change all this, they could abolish the wicked double standard, as they have abolished saloons and houses of degradation, if they would face the facts of life instead of ignoring them. It is merely a matter of courage and organization. Suppose a hundred women in a single city should pledge themselves to bar from their homes and acquaintance notorious sex offenders—men offenders? And to question clean-minded men of their acquaintance, influential men, about these things and to get honest answers? And to have these answers openly discussed—perhaps in the churches? Why not? What are churches for except to fight evil?

What would the average man say to a woman whom he respected and trusted if she asked him to tell her, on his honor as a good citizen, whether he believes that the double standard is helpful or harmful to the women of America? Helpful or harmful to the children of America? To the manhood of America? Whether he is glad or sorry to think of the effects that his double-standard pleasures have had upon American women? Whether he would wish his sons to follow in his double-standard footsteps? Whether he would be willing to give up his double-standard privileges, if by so doing, he could save ten American women like his mother or his daughter from destruction? Would he be willing to do that? *Will he give his pledge to do that?*

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Think how such a leaven of decency and clean manhood might spread throughout the land! It might start a single-standard revival that would sweep the world. *By the power of courage and faith and the love of God!*

### **SHALL A WIFE FORGIVE HER HUSBAND FOR UNFAITHFULNESS?**

I have thought deeply about this, remembering what I suffered with Julian. It is terribly hard to tell the truth; a woman is filled with shame for herself and for her whole sex when she tries to tell the truth about the unfaithfulness of husbands.

Many women say: "I would never forgive my husband if he deceived me." Others say: "I would never forgive my husband if I *knew* that he had deceived me." And still others say: "If my husband must deceive me, I hope he will never let me know it."

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The tragic truth is (as all women vaguely suspect) that thousands of devoted husbands, hundreds of thousands of average husbands have at one time or another fallen from grace. Julian used to say that if all the men in America who have broken the seventh commandment were sent away to do penance on lonely mountain tops, we should run short of mountains.

He told me also that a man can love his wife so sincerely that he would gladly die for her, yet, in a moment of temptation, he may be untrue to her. Julian was an impossible person, but other clean-minded men, including my dear Christopher, have told me the same thing.

The truth is that most men have never learned to resist sex temptation; they grow up with the knowledge that they need not resist temptation, which is the fault of society, as now organized, the fault of wrong teaching, of insincere preaching, of nation-wide hypocrisy.

I have come to see that women, so long as they have not set themselves as a body against this evil system (which they might evidently change if they would act together) have no right to complain of its inevitable consequences. Men will abandon sex excesses, as they have abandoned drinking excesses, gradually, through education, through reasonable appeal, through the resistless force of public opinion intelligently aroused and directed by devoted women. And in no other way!

Meantime, it is the duty of individual wives to be merciful, as far as they can, towards erring husbands. The cure lies often in more love from the wife rather than in less love.

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To any tortured wife who knows or half knows certain things about her husband, I say this—"Dear friend, as long as you love him, forgive him. As long as he loves you, forgive him. Be patient—enduring. Make the hard fight against sensuality with your husband, but don't let him know you are making it. Make this fight exactly as you would a similar fight against alcohol or drugs."

A woman must be on her guard, however, lest she hide under a cloak of forgiveness, some base motive in her own heart. Alas! I know, better than anyone, how easily we women can deceive ourselves.

There is an ignoble forgiveness that is based on love of material advantages—love of money. There are women who tolerate faithless husbands because they are too cowardly or indolent to fight the battle of life alone. What would they do if they left their sheltered homes? Who would provide comforts and luxuries? How would they dress themselves? How would they live? Shall it be by working? But they hate to work. They have never learned to work. It was partly as a defense against this woman helplessness that I took up trained nursing while Julian was still alive.

A still more degrading forgiveness is based on sensuality. There are women married to brutes of husbands who will endure every humiliation, surrendering all their fine ideals and high purposes rather than leave these coarse mates.

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I first realized this just before I went abroad to nurse the soldiers. I had gone to the Adirondacks that summer for a rest, and one day on a motor trip I stopped for luncheon at a farm house, and there I recognized an old friend from my home town, Laura K—, who was to have had a brilliant musical career. It was she who had encouraged me to develop my voice; but I never could have been the great artist that Laura might have been. A famous impresario had judged her voice to be so fine—it was a glorious contralto—that he had offered to advance money for her musical studies abroad. He assured Laura that in three years she would be a blazing star on the grand opera stage.

That was the last I had heard of my old friend, and here suddenly I found her, married to a hulking mountaineer, half trapper, half guide. Here was my wonderful, burning-eyed Laura, who might have had the world at her feet, a farm drudge taking in summer boarders! How was this possible?

I spent the afternoon seeking an answer to this riddle. We walked out into the forest and talked for hours, but whenever I pressed for an explanation, she halted in confusion. Her mother was old and ill and—she did not wish to leave her. But, I pointed out, she had never spoken of this before, she had always cared supremely about her voice, about her great musical triumph that was to be. Was not that true? Yes, of course, but—the mountain air was so good for her mother. And she made other trivial excuses.

Finally, I got the truth as we were strolling home in the twilight and met her husband slouching along with a gun over his shoulder. As I caught his sullen, tawny glance and sensed his superb, muscular figure, I suddenly understood. He nodded curtly and passed on—this cave man!

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"*That* was the reason, Laura, wasn't it?" I whispered.

She looked at me in silence, biting her lips, and blushed furiously.

"Yes," she confessed, "that was the reason."

## IS IT A WOMAN'S DUTY TO TELL HER HUSBAND OF PAST TRANSGRESSIONS?

I am not sure what I really believe about this in my deepest soul. Thousands of women who long to do right will agree with me that it is a terribly difficult question to answer.

If this were an ideal world where men and women had been purified and spiritualized to a Christ-like loftiness of soul, one would say yes; but it is not. A loving wife does not wish her husband to confess to her his past transgressions, she takes him as he is and is happy to start a new life with him, turning over a clean page. She only asks that he be loyal and faithful in the future. And if she is ready to give him similar loyalty and faithfulness, if she has sincerely repented of any sinful act, is not that sufficient? Why must she risk the destruction of their happiness by a revelation that will do no good to anyone? Why must she give her husband needless pain?

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*And yet—*

While the vast majority of women will agree that such feminine reticence about past wrong-doing is justifiable, the truth, as I have come to see it, is that, in so agreeing, women must subscribe to a creed of deliberate deception. A man marries a woman whom he believes to be virtuous, a woman whom he might refuse to marry if he knew that she were not virtuous. And this woman does nothing to disabuse him of his error. Is that right? She allows her husband to keep a certain good opinion of her that is not justified. No matter how excellent her motive may be, the fact remains that this marriage rests upon an insecure foundation, upon an implied falsehood. Thousands of plays and stories have been constructed on this theme, and they usually end unhappily.

Suppose a man who had been in prison should marry a woman who was ignorant of this cloud on his life, trusting to chance that his criminal record would never be discovered? The two cases are somewhat parallel. What would the woman say if she learned later that she had unwittingly married an ex-convict? Would she not prefer that he had told her the truth before he married her?

On the other hand it may be argued that a woman's sin, being presumably the fault of some man, may be properly expiated, in part at least, by some other man. But that does not dispose of the difficulty that *a woman who conceals past indiscretions from her husband is condemned to live a lie.*

One deception almost invariably leads to another deception until a whole chain or net of equivocations, ruses, trickeries, is established with the hideous possibility of some shocking divorce scandal, possibly years later when innocent children may be the sufferers.

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Even if such disaster is averted and the truth is never revealed, even if all goes well apparently through happy married years, yet the poison of deceit may work a spiritual disaster in this woman—such a disaster as overwhelmed me—or it may bring about a lowering of moral standards in a woman, a stifling of religious life, that will have sinister and far-reaching consequences.

*The greatest need in the world today is the need of spirituality among women, for they are the teachers of the young.*

As illustrating the frightful harm that may result from such a lack of spirituality in a woman, I quote from my diary the case of a great English lady whom I met while I was nursing in the battle region back of Verdun. She had come from London to be near her son, a magnificent soldier, the handsomest Englishman I have ever seen, who had been wounded in the Mesopotamian campaign and was now here for his convalescence.

"Lady Maude H— G— is a fascinating woman," I wrote. "She must have been a great beauty in her day, and she seems to be a figure in the rich, smart London set. She speaks quite casually of being invited to this or that palace for a chat and a cup of tea with one of the princesses or even with the Queen. During hours that she spent at the hospital she talked to me frankly and charmingly about many things connected with her boy and his future. She is worried lest some designing woman get him in her power, and one day she told me that she has arranged matters for Leonard so that he will be spared certain perils of this kind that might surround him in London. This excellent and brilliant mother has solved her son's problem—the sex problem—in the following extraordinary way, which proves, so she seems to think, her love and wisdom. She has arranged matters—goodness knows how—so that Leonard will be on excellent terms with two beautiful young matrons in her set and in this way he will not be vamped off by any unscrupulous chorus girl. These two beauties are to serve for the delectation of this young warrior until he can make a suitable marriage. What a commentary upon the morals and standards of high society!"

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How can one explain such incredible baseness?

This woman is not an ignoble person. On the contrary she is kind and generous, full of the best intentions. She has simply reached a point in her selfish round of vanity and pleasure-seeking where she can no longer distinguish between right and wrong. Her soul is withered,

starved, because it has been deprived of God's love and God's truth; yet the deterioration came gradually, no doubt, beginning with petty lies and compromises and evasions of responsibility. If *she* had any past transgression on her conscience it is certain she never told her husband about it.

It is a rule among women (with few exceptions) that idleness and uselessness make for selfishness and sensuality. Also for irreligion. These ultra *mondaines* think of God in an amiable, well-bred way—they approve of God, and they say their prayers in an amiable, well-bred way; but none of this avails to regenerate their lives or to combat the sensuality of their self-indulgent men. Nor does it save these women themselves from submitting to a social regime that is largely based on indulgence of the senses and the appetites. *Il y en a, de ces femmes du monde, qui se conduisent d'une façon pire que les filles de joie.*

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As for myself I told my husband everything. I kept back nothing of my waywardness and sinfulness, my evil thoughts and desires. I admit that most men would not forgive a wife or a young bride who confessed to some sex transgression committed before her marriage. I also admit that the chances are against a husband's discovering such a transgression, if the wife keeps silent. It is apparently to the wife's advantage to keep silent; it apparently pays, in this case, to live a lie; but if deeper values are considered, if the sacredness of a woman's soul is taken into account, then a woman will see that she must confess, regardless of consequences. Alas, this is a very hard thing for the ordinary woman to do—the ordinary woman who is neither a saint on a stained glass window nor the heroine of a novel. But if she has the moral courage to confess her sin (knowing that life is given us for something else than temporary advantage), then, having cleansed her soul, she will be singularly blessed with peace of mind, and will be given strength to bear whatever comes, even loneliness. Besides, there are men who know how to forgive. God knows most of them have need enough to be forgiven themselves.

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## EPILOGUE

### A WOMAN'S LITANY

[Top](#)

*(Written by Penelope Wells)*

I dedicate to other women who may have done wrong, as I did, or who may be sorely tempted as I was, these thoughts that have comforted me—they have been like a consecration of my life. I have had them printed on vellum in a little red book no larger than a visiting card and so thin that I can slip it inside my glove. This is my talisman. I read these thoughts whenever I am wavering or discouraged, wherever I may be, in crowds or solitude, walking in the street, sitting in a car, and they always give me new heart and courage.

#### I

When I am weak or embittered, indolent, envious, I know that I can find strength through the performance of some loving act, however small. I can brighten the dullest sky with the sunshine of a little love. I know that sin and evil come chiefly from selfishness and sensuality. I can conquer selfishness by love. I can conquer sensuality by love. I can overcome all evil, all fear, all vanity, by love. There is no death, but the death of love. From which,

*Dear Lord, deliver me.*

#### II

I know that pride is the worship of self: but humility is the worship of God. Pride leads to discontent, but humility in loving service (no matter how obscure) gives peace of mind. From all forms of pride,

*Dear Lord, deliver me.*

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#### III

I know that only harm can come to me from dwelling upon past mistakes, follies, sins. I cannot change these so I put them out of my thoughts and concentrate on the present, which is mine to do with as I please. From all vain regrets,

*Dear Lord, deliver me.*

## IV

I know that right living comes only from right thinking. To do right under stress of law or custom while desiring to do wrong is to make a mockery of virtue. I must sincerely desire to do right. The forces of life-control must act from within me, not from without. From all hypocrisy and false pretense,

*Dear Lord, deliver me.*

## V

I know that a woman cannot be virtuous if she longs for sensuality, or dallies with it, or dwells upon it in her thoughts, even though she refrain from any sinful act. Nor can a married woman be a truly virtuous wife if she yields to perverse revellings of the imagination which defile body and soul—even with her husband! From all defilements of love,

*Dear Lord, deliver me.*

## THE END

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