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I'VE MARRIED MARJORIE

by

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"Why Not," "The Wishing Ring Man," "You're Only Young Once," "The Boardwalk," etc.

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I'VE MARRIED MARJORIE

CHAPTER I

The sun shone, that morning, and even from a city office window the Spring wind could be felt, sweet and keen and heady, making you feel that you wanted to be out in it, laughing, facing toward the exciting, happy things Spring was sure to be bringing you, if you only went a little way to meet them—just a little way!

Marjorie Ellison, bending over a filing cabinet in a small and solitary room, felt the wind, and gave her fluffy dark head an answering, wistful lift. It was a very exciting, Springy wind, and winds and weathers affected her too much for her own good. Therefore she gave the drawer she was working on an impatient little push which nearly shook the Casses down into the Cats—she had been hunting for a very important letter named Cattell, which had concealed itself viciously—and went to the window as if she was being pulled there.

She set both supple little hands on the broad stone sill, and looked downward into the city street as you would look into a well. The wind was blowing sticks and dust around in fairy rings, and a motor car or so ran up and down, and there were the usual number of the usual kind of people on the sidewalks; middle-aged people principally, for most of the younger inhabitants of New York are caged in offices at ten in the morning, unless they are whisking by in the motors. Mostly elderly ladies in handsome blue dresses, Marjorie noticed. She liked it, and drew a deep, happy breath of Spring air. Then suddenly over all the pleasure came a depressing black shadow. And yet what she had seen was something which made most people smile and feel a little happier; a couple of plump, gay young returned soldiers going down the street arm in arm, and laughing uproariously at nothing at all for the sheer pleasure of being at home. She turned away from the window feeling as if some one had taken a piece of happiness away from her, and snatched the nearest paper to read it, and take the taste of what she had seen out of her mouth. It was a last night's paper with the back page full of "symposium." She read a couple of the letters, and dropped the paper and went back desperately to her filing cabinet.

"Cattell—Cattell——" she whispered to herself very fast, riffling over the leaves desperately. Then she reverted to the symposium and the soldiers. "Oh, dear, everybody on that page was writing letters to know why they didn't get married," she said. "I wish somebody would write letters telling why they *did*, or explain to those poor girls that say nobody wants to marry a refined girl that they'd better leave it alone!"

After that she hunted for the Cattell letter till she found it. Then she took it to her superior, in the next room. Then she returned to her work and rolled the paper up into a very small ball and dropped it into the big wastebasket, and pushed it down with a small, neat oxford-tied foot. Then she went to the window again restlessly, looked out with caution, as if there might be more soldiers crossing the street, and they might spring at her. But there were none; only a fat, elderly gentleman gesticulating for a taxi and looking so exactly like a *Saturday Evening Post* cover that he almost cheered her. Marjorie had a habit of picking up very small, amusing things and being amused by them. And then into the office bounced the one girl she hadn't seen that day.

"Oh, Mrs. Ellison, congratulations! I just got down, or I'd have been here before!" she gasped, kissing Marjorie hard three times. Then she stood back and surveyed Marjorie tenderly until she wanted to pick the wad of paper out of the basket and throw it at her. "Coming back to you!" she said softly. "Oh, you must be thrilled!" She put her head on one side—she wore her hair in a shock of bobbed curls which Marjorie loathed anyway, and they flopped when she wished to be emphatic—and surveyed Marjorie with prolonged, tender interest. "Any time now!" she breathed.

"Yes," said Marjorie desperately. "The ship will be in some time next week. Yes, I'm thrilled. It's—it's wonderful. Thank you, Miss Kaplan, I knew you would be sympathetic."

One hand was clenching and unclenching itself where Miss Kaplan, fortunately a young person whose own side of emotions occupied her exclusively, could not see it.

Miss Kaplan kissed her, quite uninvited, again, said "*Dear* little war-bride!" and—just in time, Marjorie always swore, to save herself from death, fled out.

It is all very well to be a war-bride when there's a war, but the war was over.

"And I'm married," Marjorie said when the door had swung to behind Miss
Kaplan, "for life!"

She was twenty-one. She was little and slender, with a wistful, very sweet face like a miniature; big dark-blue eyes, a small mouth that tipped down a little at the indented corners, and a transparently rose and white skin. She looked a great deal younger even than she was, and her being Mrs. Ellison had amused every one, including herself, for the last year she had used the name. As she sat down at her desk again, and looked helplessly at the keen, dark young face surmounted by an officer's cap, that for very shame's sake she had not taken away from her desk, she looked like a frightened little girl. And she *was* frightened.

It had been very thrilling, if scary, to be married to Francis Ellison, when he wasn't around. The letters—the *dear* letters!—and the watching for mails, and being frightened when there were battles,

and wearing the new wedding-ring, had made her perfectly certain that when Francis came back she would be very glad, and live happily ever after. And now that he was coming she was just plain frightened, suffocatingly, abjectly scared to death.

"I mustn't be!" she told herself, trying to give herself orders to feel differently. "I *must* be very glad!" But it was impossible to do anything with herself. She continued to feel as if her execution was next week, instead of her reunion with a husband who wrote that he was looking forward to——

"If he didn't describe kissing me," shivered poor little Marjorie to herself, "so accurately!"

She had met Francis just about a month before they were married. He had come to see her with her cousin, who was in the same company at Plattsburg. Her cousin was engaged to a dear friend of hers, and it had made it very nice for all four of them, because Billy and Lucille weren't war-fiancés by any means. They had been engaged for a couple of years, in a more or less silent fashion, and the war had given them a chance to marry. One doesn't think so much about ways and means when the man is going to war and can send you an allotment.

Francis, dark, quick, decided, with a careless gaiety that was like that of a boy let out from school, had been a delightful person to pair off with. And then the other two had been so wrapped up in the wonderful chance to get married which opened out before them, that marriage—a beautiful, golden, romantic thing—had been in the air. One felt out of it if one didn't marry. Everybody else was marrying in shoals. And Francis had been crazy over little Marjorie from the moment he saw her—over her old-fashioned, whimsical ways, her small defiances that covered up a good deal of shyness, over the littleness and grace that made him want to pick her up and pet her and protect her, he said . . . Marjorie could remember, even yet, with pleasure, the lovely things he had said to her in that tense way he had on the rare occasions when he wasn't laughing. She had fought off marrying him till the very last minute. And then the very day before the regiment sailed she had given in, and the other two —married two weeks by then—had whisked her excitedly through it. And then they'd recalled him—just two hours after they were married, while Marjorie was sitting in the suite at the hotel, with Francis kneeling down by her in his khaki, his arms around her waist, looking up at her adoringly. She could see his face yet, uplifted and intense, and the way it had turned to a mask when the knock came that announced the telegram.

And it seemed now almost indecent that she should have let him kneel there with his head against her laces, calling her his wife. She had smiled down at him, then, shyly, and—half-proud, half-timid—had thought it was very wonderful.

"When I see him it will be all right! When we meet it will all come back!" she said half-aloud, walking restlessly up and down the office. "It must. It will have to."

But in her heart she knew that she was wishing desperately that the war had lasted ages longer, that he had been kept a year after the end of the war instead of eight months; almost, down deep in her heart where she couldn't get at it enough to deny it, that he had been killed. . . . Well, she had a week longer, anyway. You can do a great deal with yourself in a week if you bully hard. And the ships were almost always a much longer time getting in than anybody said they would be, and then they sent you to camps first.

Marjorie had the too many nerves of the native American, but she had the pluck that generally goes with them. She forced herself to sit quietly down and work at her task, and wished that she could stop being angry at herself for telling Lucille that Francis had written he was coming home. Because Lucille worked where she did, and had promptly spread the glad tidings from the top of the office to the bottom, and her morning had been a levee. Even poor little Mrs. Jardine, whose boy had been killed before he had been over two weeks, had spoken to Marjorie brightly, and said how glad she was, and silent, stiff Miss Gardner, who was said never to have had any lovers in her life, had looked at her with an envy she tried to hide, and said that she supposed Marjorie was glad.

"Well, it's two weeks, maybe. Two weeks is ages."

Marjorie dived headfirst into the filing cabinet again, and was saying to herself very fast, "Timmins, Tolman, Turnbull—oh, dear, *Turnbull*——" when, very softly, the swinging-door that shut her off from the rest of the office was pushed open again, and some one crossed sharply to her side. She flung up her head in terror. Suppose it should be Francis—

Well, it was.

She had no more than time for one gasp before he very naturally had her in his arms, as one who has a right, and was holding her so tight she could scarcely breathe. She tried to kiss him back, but it was half-hearted. She hoped, her mind working with a cold, quick precision, that he could not tell that she

did not love him. And apparently he could not. He let her go after a minute, and flung himself down by her in just the attitude that the knock on the door, fifteen months ago, had interrupted. And Marjorie tried not to stiffen herself, and not to wonder if anybody was coming in, and not to feel that a perfect stranger was doing something he had no right to.

It was to be supposed that she succeeded more or less, because when he finally let her go, he looked at her as fondly as he had when he entered, and began to talk, without much preface, very much as if he had only been gone a half hour.

"They'll let you off, won't they, for the rest of the day? But of course they will! I almost ran over an old gentleman outside here, and it comes to me now that he said something like 'take your wife home for to-day, my boy!' I was in such a hurry to get at you, Marge, that I didn't listen. My wife! Good Lord, to think I have her again!"

She got her breath a little, and stopped shivering, and looked at him. He had not changed much; one does not in fifteen months. It was the same eager, dark young face, almost too sharply cut for a young man's, with very bright dark eyes. The principal difference was in his expression. Before he went he had had a great deal of expression, a face that showed almost too much of what he thought. That was gone. His face was younger-looking, because the flashing of changes over it was gone. He looked wondering, very tired, and dulled somehow. And he spoke without the turns of speech that she and her friends amused each other with, the little quaintnesses of conscious fancy. "As if he'd been talking to children," she thought.

Then she remembered that it was not that. He had been giving orders, and taking them, and being on firing-lines; all the things that he had written her about, and that had seemed so like story-books when she got the letters. His being so changed made it real for the first time. . . . And then an unworthy feeling—as if she simply could not face the romantic and tender eyes of all the office—everybody having the same feelings about her that Miss Kaplan had, even if they were well-bred enough to phrase them politely.

"Shall we go?" she asked abruptly, while this feeling was strong in her.

"Not for a minute. I want to see the place where my wife has spent her last year . . ."

He stood with his arm still around her—would he never stop touching her?—and surveyed the office with the same sort of affectionate amusement he might have given to a workbasket of hers, or a piece of embroidery. Marjorie slipped from under his arm and put her hat on.

"I'm ready now," she said.

They walked out of the little office, and through the long aisle down the center of the floor of the office-building, Marjorie, still miserably conscious of the eyes, and the emotions behind the eyes, and quite as conscious that they were emotions that she ought to be ashamed of minding.

"Now where shall we go for luncheon?" demanded Francis joyously, as they got outside. He caught her hand in his surreptitiously and said "You darling!" under his breath. For a minute the old magic of his swift courtship came back to her, and she forgot the miserable oppression of facing fifty years of wedded life with a stranger; and she smiled up at him. Then, as he caught her hand in his, quite undisguisedly this time, and held it under his arm, the repulsion came back.

"Anywhere you like," she answered his question.

"We'll go to the biggest, wildest, wooliest place in the city, where the band plays the most music," he announced. "Going to celebrate. Come on, honey. And then I have a fine surprise for you, as soon as we go back to the flat. Lucille won't be back till five, will she? And thank goodness for that!"

Lucille and Marjorie, pending the return of their husbands, shared a tiny flat far uptown on the west side. Marjorie had described it at length in her letters, until Francis had said that he could find his way around it if he walked in at midnight. But his intimacy with it made her feel that there was no place on earth she could call her own.

"Tell me now," she demanded.

Francis laughed again, and shook his head.

"It will do you good to guess. Come now, which—Sherry's or the Plaza or the Ritz?"

"Sherry's—they're going to close it soon, poor old place!"

"Then we'll celebrate its obsequies," said Francis, grinning cheerfully.

Before he went he had smiled, somehow, as if he had been to a very excellent college and a super-fine prep school of many traditions—as, indeed, he had—but now it was exactly the grin, Marjorie realized, still with a feeling of unworthiness, of the soldier, sailor, and marine grinning so artlessly from the War Camp Community posters. In his year of foreign service, Francis had shaken off the affectations of his years, making him, at twenty-five, a much older and more valuable man than Marjorie had parted with. But she didn't like it, or what she glimpsed of it. Whether he was gay in this simple, new way, or grave in the frighteningly old one, he was not the Francis she had built up for herself from a month's meetings and a few memories.

He smiled at her flashingly again as they settled themselves at the little table in just the right spot and place they had chosen.

"Wondering whether I'll eat with my knife?" he demanded, quite at random as it happened, but altogether too close to Marjorie's feelings to be comfortable.

She colored up to her hair.

"No—no! I *know* you wouldn't do that!" she asseverated so earnestly that he went off into another gale of affectionate laughter.

And then he addressed himself to the joyous task of planning a luncheon that they would never of them either forget, he said. He took the waiter into their confidence to a certain degree, and from then on a circle of silent and admiring service inclosed them.

"But you needn't think we're going to linger over it, Marjorie," he informed her. "I want to get up to where you live, and be alone with you."

"Of course," said Marjorie mechanically, saying a little prayer to the effect that she needed a great deal of help to get through this situation, and she hoped it would come in sight soon. She could not eat very much. It was all very good, and the band played ravishingly to the ears of Francis, who sent buoyantly across and demanded such tunes as he was fondest of. There was one which they played to which he sang, under his breath, a profane song which ran in part:

"And we'll all come home
And get drunk on ginger pop—
For the slackers voted the country dry
While we went over the top."

And then, when the meal was two-thirds over, Marjorie wished she hadn't offered up any prayers for help to get through the situation. Because softly up to their table strolled a tall, thin young man with a cane, gray silk gloves, and a dreamy if slightly nervous look, and said discontentedly, "Marjorie Ellison! How wonderful to find you here! You will let me sit down at your table, won't you, and meet your soldier-friend?"

If Marjorie had never written to Francis about Bradley Logan it would have been all right, quite a rescue, in fact. But in those too fatally discursive letters; the letters which had come finally to feel like a sympathetic diary with no destination, she had rather enlarged on him. He had been admiring her at disconnected intervals ever since she first met him. He had not been able to get in the army because of some mysterious neurasthenic ailment about which he preserved a hurt silence, as to details, but mentioned a good deal in a general way. It kept him from making engagements, it made him unable to go long distances; Marjorie had described all the scattered hints about it in her letters to Francis, who had promptly written back that undoubtedly the little friend had fits; and referred to him thereafter, quite without malice, as, "your fit-friend." She had an insane terror, as she introduced him, lest she should explain him to Francis in an audible aside by that name. However, it was unnecessary. Francis placed him immediately, it was to be seen, and was cold almost to rudeness. Logan did not notice it much. He sat down with them, declined the food Marjorie offered, ordered himself three slivers of dry toast and a cup of lemonless and creamless tea, and sipped them and nibbled them as if even they were a concession to manners.

What really was the matter with Logan Marjorie was doomed never to know. Francis told her afterwards, with a certain marital brevity, that it was a combination of dry toast and thinking too much about French poets. His literary affiliations, which he earned his living by, had stopped short at the naughty nineties, when everybody was very unhealthy and soulful and hinted darkly at tragedies; the period of the Yellow Book and Aubrey Beardsley and Arthur Symons and Dowson, and the last end of Wilde. He undoubtedly had the charming and fluent manners of his time, anachronism though he was.

And he talked a great deal, and very brilliantly, if a bit excitedly. He plunged now, in his charming, high, slightly too mannered voice, into a discussion with Marjorie on the absolute rottenness of the modern magazine, considered from the viewpoint of style. He overwhelmed them with instances of how all magazines were owned by persons who neither had cultivation nor desired any. Francis answered him very little, so Marjorie, wifely before her time, found herself trying nervously to keep up with Logan, and hurling more thoughts at him about Baudelaire than she had known she possessed. As a matter of fact she'd never read any of him, but Logan thought she had to his dying day, which says a good deal for her brains. Presently Francis summoned the waiter in rather a martial voice, demanded a taxi of him efficiently, and Marjorie found herself swept away from Logan and taxi-ing extravagantly uptown before she knew what she was at.

Francis wasn't cross, it appeared. The first thing he did when he got her in the cab was to sweep her close to him—the second to burst into a peal of delighted laughter, and quote

"I had a cow, a gentle cow, who browsed beside my door,
Did not think much of Maeterlinck, and would not, furthermore!"

"Heavens!" he ended, "that fool and his magazine editors! Nobody but you could have been so patient with the poor devil, Marge."

He leaned her and himself back in the cab, and stared contemplatively out at New York going by. "And to think—and—to—think—that while half of decent humanity has been doing what it's been doing to keep the world from going to hell, that fool—that *fool*—has been sitting at home nibbling toast and worrying about what is style! . . . I'll tell him! Style is what I'll have when I get these clothes off, and some regular ones. You'll have to help me pick 'em out, Marge. You'll find I've no end of uses for a wife, darling."

"I hope you'll make me useful," she answered in a small voice. Fortunately she saw the ridiculousness of what she had said herself before the constrained note of her voice reached her husband, and began, a little nervously, to laugh at herself. So that passed off all right.

"Will life be just one succession of hoping things pass off all right?" she wondered. And she did wish Francis wasn't so scornful about all the things Logan said. For Logan, in spite of his mysterious disability, was very brilliant; he wrote essays for real magazines that you had to pay thirty-five cents for, and when Marjorie said she knew him people were always very respectful and impressed. Marjorie had been brought up to respect such things very much, herself, in a pretty Westchester suburb, where celebrities were things which passed through in clouds of glory, lecturing for quite as much as the club felt it could afford. A celebrity who let you talk to him, nay, seemed delighted when you let him talk to you, couldn't be as negligible as Francis seemed to think him. . . . Francis didn't seem as if he had ever read *anything*. . . . It was a harmless question to ask, at least.

"What did you read, over there?" she asked him.

"We read anything we could get hold of that would take our minds," was the answer, rather grimly. Then, more lightly, "When I wasn't reading detective stories I was studying books on forestry. Did you know you had married a forester bold, Marge?"

"Of course I remembered you said that was what you did," she answered, relieved that the talk was veering away, for one moment, from themselves.

"Poor little girl, you haven't had a chance to know very much about me," he said tenderly. "Well, I know a lot more about it than I did when I went away. Oh, the trees in France, dear! It's worse to think of the trees than of the people, I think sometimes. I suppose that's because they always meant a lot to me—very much as a jeweler would feel badly about all the spoons the Crown Prince took home with him. . . . Anyway, they wanted me to stay over there and do reforestation. Big chances. But I didn't feel as if I could stay away from little old New York—naturally Marge had nothing to do with it—another hour. Would you have liked to go to Italy and watch me re-forest, Marjorie?"

Marjorie's "Oh, *no*!" was very fervent. She also found herself thinking stealthily that even any one as efficient as Francis could not reforest the city of New York, and that therefore any position he had would very likely let her off. Maybe he might go very soon.

With this thought in her mind she led the way up the three flights of stairs to the tiny apartment she and Lucille Strong shared. If Francis had not spoken as they reached the door she might have carried it through. But just as she fitted her key in the door he did speak, behind her, an arm about her.

"In another minute you and I will be alone together; in our own home—my wife——"

He took the key gently from her hand; he unlocked the door, and drew her in, with his arms around her. He pushed the door to behind them, and bent down to kiss her again, very tenderly and reverently. And in that instant Marjorie's self-control broke.

CHAPTER II

"Oh, please don't touch me, just for a minute!" she exclaimed.
"Please—please—just stop a *minute*!"

She did not realize that her tone was very much that of a patient addressing a dentist. Francis's arms dropped, and he looked at her, all the light going out of his face, and showing its weary lines. He closed the door entirely, carefully. He went mechanically over to a chair and sat down on it, always with that queer carefulness; he laid his cap beside him, and looked at Marjorie, crouched against the door.

"Please come over here and sit down," he said very courteously, but with the boyishness gone from his voice even more completely than Marjorie had wished.

She came very meekly and sat opposite him, with a little queer cold feeling around her heart.

"Please look at me," he asked gently. She lifted her blue eyes miserably to his, and tried to smile. But unconsciously she shrank a little as she did so, and he saw it.

"I won't touch you—not until you want me to," he began. "What's the matter, Marjorie? Is it nerves, or are you afraid of me, or——"

"It—it was just your coming so suddenly," she lied miserably. "It upset me. That was all."

In her mind there was fixed firmly the one thing, that she mustn't be a coward, she must go through with it, she must pretend well enough to make Francis think she felt the way she ought to. The Francis of pre-war times would have been fooled; but this man had been judging men and events that took as keen a mind as seeing through a frightened girl. He looked at her musingly, his face never changing. She rose and came over to him and put her hand on his shoulder. She even managed to laugh.

"Do you mind my being upset?" she asked.

"No," he said, "if that's all it is. But you have a particular kind of terror about you that I don't like. Or I think you have."

She took her hand away, hurt by the harshness of his voice—then, seeing his face, understood that he was not knowingly harsh. She had hurt him terribly by that one unguarded moment, and she would have to work very hard to put it out of sight.

"I—I haven't any terror——" she began to say.

He made himself smile a little at that.

"You mustn't have," he said. "We'll sit down on the davenport over there that Lucille's grandmother gave her for a wedding-present—you see how well I remember the news about all the furniture? And we'll talk about it all quietly."

"There's nothing to talk about," said Marjorie desperately. She went obediently over to the davenport and sat down by him.

"You were upset at seeing me?" he began.

"It was—well, it was so sudden!" dimpled Marjorie, quoting the tag with the sudden whimsicality which even death would probably find her using.

"And I still seem—do I seem like a strange person to you, dear?" he asked wistfully. "You don't seem strange to me, you know. You seem like the wife I love."

The worst of it was that when Francis was gay and like a playmate, as he had been at their luncheon before Logan came, she could feel that things were nearly all right. But when he spoke as he was speaking now the terror of him came back worse than ever.

"No. No, you don't seem strange at all," she said. "Why should you?" But while she spoke the words she knew they were not true. She looked at him, and his face was like a stranger's face. She had known other men as well as she had known her husband, except for the brief while when she had promised to marry him. She took stock of his features; the straight, clearly marked black brows under the mark the cap made on his forehead; the rather high cheekbones, the clear-cut nose and chin, the little line of black mustache that did not hide his hard-set and yet sensitive lips; the square, rather long jaw—"He'll have deep lines at the sides of his mouth in a few more years," she thought, and—"He's much darker than I remembered him. But he has no color under the brown. I thought he had a good deal of color . . ." She appraised his face, not liking it altogether, as if she had never seen it before. His hand, long, narrow, muscular, burned even more deeply than his face, and with a fine black down lying close over it, seemed a hand she had never seen or been touched by before. But that was his wedding-ring—her wedding-ring—on the thin third finger. She even knew that inside it was an inscription—"Marjorie—Francis——" and the date of their wedding. Hers was like it. He had bought them and had them inscribed with everything but the actual date before she had given in; that had been put in, of course, the week before their marriage. Oh, what *right* had he to be wearing her wedding-ring?

"Would you like a little time to think it over?" he asked heavily.

She was irrationally angry at him. What right had he to think she needed time to think it over? Why hadn't he the decency to be deceived by her behavior? Then she stole another look at him, with all the gaiety and youth gone out of his face, and made up her mind that the anger ought to be on his side. But it apparently was not.

"Oh, *please* don't mind!" she begged him, abandoning some of her defenses. "It's true, I do feel a little strange, but I'm sure it will all come straight if—if I wait a little. You see, you were gone so long."

"Yes. I worried a lot about it on shipboard," he answered her directly. His face did not lighten, but there was a sort of relief in his tone, as if actually knowing the truth was better than being fenced with. "I thought to myself—'I hurried her into it so. I wonder if she really will care when I come back.' It was such a long time. But then your letters were so sweet and loving, and I cared such a lot——"

His voice broke. He had been talking on a carefully emotionless dead level, but now he suddenly stopped as if he had come to the end of his control. But he was only silent a moment, and went on:

"I cared so much that I thought you must. That's a queer thing, isn't it? You've known all your life that other people think if they care enough the other person will care, and you know they're idiots. And then your time comes, and you go and are the same old idiot yourself. . . . Queer. Well, I'm sorry, Marjorie. Shall I go now? We can think about what we'd better do next time we talk it over."

"Oh, please, please!" begged Marjorie. "Oh, Francis, I feel like a dog—a miserable, little coward-dog. And—and I don't know why you're making all this up. I—I haven't said anything like what——"

He put his arm around her, not in the least as if he were her lover.
It only felt protecting, not like a man's touch.

"I would be glad to think you cared for me. But I am almost sure you don't. Everything you have said, and every one of your actions since we came in, have seemed to me as if you didn't. It isn't your fault, poor little thing. It's mine for hurrying you into it. . . . Marjorie, Marjorie—*do* you?"

There was an intense entreaty in his tone. But she knew that only the truth would do.

"No," she said, dropping her head.

"I thought not," he said, rising stiffly and crossing to the door. "Well, I'll go now. I'll come back some time to-morrow, whenever it's most convenient for you, and we'll discuss details."

She ran after him. She did feel very guilty.

"Oh, Francis—Francis! Please don't go! I'm sure I'll feel the way I should when I've tried a little longer!"

He stopped for a moment, but only to write something down on a piece of paper.

"There's my telephone number," he said. "No, Marjorie, I can't stay any longer. This has been pretty bad. I've got to go off and curl up a minute, I think, if you don't mind. . . . Oh, dearest, don't you see that I *can't* stay? I'll have myself straightened out by to-morrow, but——"

He had been acting very reasonably up to now. But now he flung himself out the door like a tornado. It echoed behind him. Marjorie did not try to keep him. She sat still for a minute longer, shivering.

Then she began to cry. She certainly did not want him for her husband, but equally she did not want him to go off and leave her. So she went over to the davenport again, where she could cry better, and did wonders in that line, in a steady, low-spirited way, till Lucille came breezily in.

Lucille Strong was a plump, exuberant person with corn-colored hair and bright blue eyes and the most affectionate disposition in the world. She also had a quick, fly-away temper, and more emotions than principles. But her sense of humor was so complete, and her sunniness so steady that nobody demanded great self-sacrifice from her. Who wouldn't give anybody the biggest piece of cake and the best chair and the most presents, for the sake of having a Little Sunshine in the home? At least, that was the way Billy Strong had looked at it. He had been perfectly willing to put off his marriage until Lucille decreed that there was money enough for her to have her little luxuries after marriage, in order to eventually possess Lucille. People always and automatically gave her the lion's share of all material things, and she accepted them quite as automatically. She was a very pleasant housemate, and if she coaxed a little, invisibly, in order to acquire the silk stockings and many birthday presents and theater tickets which drifted to her, why, as she said amiably, people value you more when they do things for you than when you do things for them.

"Why, you poor *lamb*!" she said with sincere sympathy, pouncing on the desolate and very limp Marjorie. "What's the matter? Did Francis have to go away from you? Look here, honey, you can have my——"

What Lucille was about to offer was known only to herself, because she never got any farther. Marjorie sat up, her blue eyes dark-circled with tears, and perhaps with the strain she had been undergoing.

"Yes," she said in a subdued voice. "He—he had to go. He'll be back to-morrow."

Lucille pounced again, and kissed Marjorie rapturously, flushed with romance.

"Oh, isn't it wonderful to have him back! And Billy may be back any minute, too! Marge, what on earth shall we do about the apartment? It isn't big enough for three; and I can't keep it on alone. And the wretched thing's leased for six months longer. You know we thought they'd be coming back together. But you and Francis can take it over——"

"I—I don't think we need to worry about that," said Marjorie, "for a while longer. I've made up my mind to go on working. I'd be restless without my work. Filing's really *very* exciting when you're accustomed to it——"

Lucille released her housemate and leaned back on the davenport, the better to laugh. As she did so she flung off her coat and dropped it on the floor, in the blessed hope that Marjorie would pick it up, which usually happened. But Marjorie did not.

"Filing," Lucille said through her laughter, "is undoubtedly the most stimulating amusement known to the mind of man. I wonder they pay you for doing it—they ought to offer it as a reward! Oh, Marge, you'll kill me! Now, you might as well be honest, my child. You know you always tell me things eventually—why not now? What are your plans, and did Francis bring any souvenirs? I told him to be sure to bring back some of that French perfume that you wouldn't let him get you because it was too expensive for his income. I wonder he ever respected you again after that, incidentally. Did he?"

"Did he respect me? I don't know, I'm sure," said Marjorie dispiritedly. She knew that she would tell Lucille all about it in two more minutes, and she did not want to.

"No, darling! Did he bring the perfume?"

"I don't know," said Marjorie. "Lucille, you haven't had your bath yet."

"Did you light the hot water for me?"

"No, I forgot," said Marjorie.

"All right, I'll light it," said Lucille amiably. She was deflected by this, and trotted out into the tiny kitchen to light the gas under the hot water heater. She came back in an exquisite blue crêpe negligee, and curled herself back of Marjorie on the davenport while she waited for the water to heat, and for Marjorie to tell her about it all.

"I wish my hair curled naturally," she said idly, slipping her fingers up the back of Marjorie's neck, where little fly-away rings always curled.

"I wish it did," said Marjorie with absent impoliteness.

Lucille laughed again.

"Come back, dear! Remember, I haven't any happy reunion to weep over yet, and be sympathetic. And I have an engagement for dinner, and how will I ever keep it if you don't tell me everything Francis said? When did he see Billy last?"

"He didn't say."

"What *did* he say?"

"He said," said Marjorie, turning around with blazing eyes and pouring forth her words like a fountain, "that he'd wondered if I really loved him, and now he was sure I didn't. And that he'd come back some time to-morrow and discuss details. And he gave me his telephone number, and said he couldn't stay any longer, and it was pretty bad, and he had to curl up——"

"Marjorie! Marjorie! Stop! This is a bad dream you've had, or something out of *Alice in Wonderland*! Francis never said he had to curl up. Curl up *what*?"

"Curl up himself, I suppose," said Marjorie with something very like a sob. "I was perfectly rational and it made me feel dreadful to hear him say it, and I knew just what he meant. Curl up like a dog when it's hurt. Curl *up*!"

"*Don't*! I *am*!" said Lucille. "If you issue any more orders in that tone I'll look like a caterpillar. Now, what really did happen, Marjorie?" she ended in a gentler tone and more seriously.

She pulled Marjorie's head over on to her own plump shoulder, and put an arm round her.

"It was all my fault. I don't love him any more. I don't want to be married to him. I didn't mean to show it, I meant to be very good about it, but he knows so much more than he did when he went away. He knew it directly. And now he's dreadfully hurt."

"You poor little darling! What a horrid time you've been having all this time everybody's been thinking you were looking forward to his coming home. Why, you must have nearly gone crazy!"

"It's worse for him," said Marjorie in a subdued voice, nestling down on Lucille's shoulder.

"Oh, I don't know," said Lucille comfortably. "Men can generally take care of themselves. . . . But are you sure you don't love him the least little bit?"

"I'm afraid of him. He's like somebody strange. . . . It's so long ago."

"So long ago an' so far away, le's hope it ain' true!" quoted Lucille amiably. "Well, darling, if you don't want to marry him you needn't—I mean, if you don't want to stay married to him you needn't. I'm sure something can be done. Francis is perfectly sure to do anything you like, he adores you so."

But this didn't seem to give comfort, either. And as the boiler was moaning with excess of heat, Lucille dashed for the bathtub. She talked to Marjorie through the flimsy door as she splashed, to the effect that Marjorie had much better let her call up another man and go out on a nice little foursome, instead of staying at home. But there Marjorie was firm. She would have preferred anything to her own society, but she felt as if any sort of a party would have been like breaking through first mourning.

So she saw Lucille, an immaculate vision of satins and picture hats, go off gaily with her cavalier, and remained herself all alone in the little room, lying on the sofa, going over everything that had happened and ending it differently. She was very tired, and felt guiltier and guiltier as time went on. Finally she rose and went to the telephone and called the number Francis had left.

The voice that answered her was very curt and very quiet.

"Yes. . . . This is Captain Ellison. Yes, Marjorie? What is it?"

It seemed harder than ever to say what she had to say in the face of that distant, unemotional voice. But Marjorie had come to a resolve, and went steadily on.

"I called up to say, Francis, that I am ready to go with you anywhere you want to, at any time. I will try to be a good wife to you."

She clung to the telephone, her heart beating like a triphammer there in the dark, waiting for his answer. It seemed a long time in coming. When it did, it was furious.

"I don't want you to go with me anywhere, at any time. I don't want a wife who has to try to be a good

wife to me."

He hung up with an effect of flinging the receiver in her face.

Marjorie almost ran back to the davenport—she was beginning to feel as if the davenport was the nearest she had to a mother—and flung herself on it in a storm of angry tears. He was unjust. He was violent. She didn't want a man like that—what on earth had she humiliated herself that way for, anyway? What was the use of trying to be honorable and good and fair and doing things for men, when they treated you like that? Francis had proposed and proposed and proposed—she hadn't been so awfully keen on marrying him. . . . It had just seemed like the sort of thing it would be thrilling to do. Well, thank goodness he did feel that way. She was better off without people like that, anyhow. She would go back home to Westchester, and live a patient, meek, virtuous life under Cousin Anna Stevenson's thumb, as she had before she got the position at the office or got married. She certainly couldn't go back to the office and explain it all to them. At least, she wouldn't. It would be better, even if Cousin Anna did treat everybody as if they were ten and very foolish. . . . And she had refused the offer of a nice foursome and one of Lucille's cheerful friends, to stay home and be treated this way!

She rose and went to the telephone again, with blazing cheeks.

She called up, on the chance, Logan's number; and amazingly got him. And she invited him on the spot to come over the next evening and have something in a chafing-dish with Lucille and herself. Lucille, she knew, had no engagement for that evening, and could produce men, always, out of thin air. Marjorie chose Logan because Francis had said he didn't like him. She had been a little too much afraid, before that, of Logan's literariness to dare call him up. But that night she would have dared the Grand Cham of Tartary, if that dignitary had had a phone number and been an annoyance to Francis Ellison.

Logan, to her surprise, accepted eagerly, and even forgot to be mannered. He did, it must be said, keep her at the telephone, which was a stand-up one, for an hour, while he talked brilliantly about the Italian renaissance in its ultimate influence on the arts and crafts movement of the present day. To listen to Logan was a liberal education at any moment, if a trifle too much like attending a lecture. But at least he didn't expect much answering.

She went to the office, next day, in more or less of a dream. She was very quiet, and worked very hard. Nobody said much to her; she took care not to let them. When stray congratulations came her way, as they were bound to, and when old Mr. Morrissey, the vice-head, said, "I suppose we can't hope to keep you long now," and beamed, she answered without any heartbeatings or difficulty. She was quite sure she would never feel gay again; she had had so much happen to her. But it was rather pleasant not to be able to have any feelings, if a little monotonous. The only thing at all on her mind was the question as to how much cheese a party of four needed for a rarebit, and whether Logan would or could eat rarebits at night. And even that was to a certain degree a matter of indifference.

She finally decided that scallops à la King might be more what he would eat. She bought them on her way home, together with all the rest of the things she needed. Lucille had produced a fourth person with her usual lack of effort, and it promised to be—if anything in life could have been anything but flavorless—rather a good party.

In fact, it was. It was a dear little apartment that the girls shared, with a living-room chosen especially for having nice times in. It was lighted by tall candles, and had a gas grate that was almost human. There was a grand piano which took up more than its share of room, there was the davenport aforesaid, there were companionable chairs and taborets acquired by Lucille and kept by Marjorie in the exact places where they looked best; there were soft draperies, also hemmed and put up by Marjorie. The first thing visitors always said about it was that it made them feel comfortable and at home. They generally attributed the homelikeness to Lucille, who was dangerously near looking matronly, rather than to Marjorie, who would be more like a firefly than a matron even when she became a grandmother.

Marjorie, with cooking to do, tied up in a long orange colored apron, almost forgot things. She loved to make things to eat. Lucille, meanwhile, sat on the piano-stool and played snatches of "The Long, Long Trail," and the men, Lucille's negligible one and Marjorie's Mr. Logan, made themselves very useful in the way of getting plates and arranging piles of crackers. The small black kitten which had been a present to Lucille from the janitor, who therefore was a mother to it while the girls were out, sat expectantly on the edge of all the places where he shouldn't be, purring loudly and having to be put down at five-minute intervals.

"I suppose this is a sort of celebration of your having your husband back," said the Lucille man presently to Marjorie. He had been told so, indeed, by Lucille, who was under that impression herself,

Logan looked faintly surprised. He, to be frank, had forgotten all about Marjorie's having a husband who had to be celebrated.

Marjorie nearly spilled the scallops she was serving at that moment, and the kitten, losing its self-control entirely, climbed on the table with a cry of entreaty for the excellent fish-smelling dishful of things to eat. It was lucky for Marjorie that he did, because while she was struggling with him Lucille answered innocently for her.

"Yes, more or less. But he's late. Where's your perfectly good husband, Marge?"

"Late, I'm afraid," Marjorie answered, smiling, and wondering at herself for being able to smile. "We aren't to wait for him."

"Sensible child," Lucille answered. "I'm certainly very hungry."

She drew her chair up to the low table the men had pushed into the center of the room, sent one of them to open the window, rather than turn out the cheerful light of the gas grate, and the real business of the party began.

It was going on very prosperously, that meal; even Mr. Logan was heroically eating the same things the rest did, and not taking up more than his fair share of the conversation, when there was a quick step on the stairs. Nobody heard it but Marjorie, who stood, frozen, just as she had risen to get a fork for somebody. She knew Francis's step, and when he clicked the little knocker she forced herself to go over and let him in.

He came in exactly as if he belonged there; but after one quick glance at the visitors he drew Marjorie aside into the little inner room.

"Marjorie, I've come to say I was unkind and unfair over the telephone. I've made up my mind that you are fonder of me than you know. I think it will be all right—it was foolish of me to be too proud to take you unless you were absolutely willing. Let me take back what I said, and forgive me. I know it will be all right—Marjorie!"

She gave him a furious push away from her. Her eyes blazed.

"It never will be all right! It isn't going to have a chance to be!" she told him, as angry as he had been when she called him up. "You had your chance and you wouldn't take it. I don't want to be your wife, and I never will be. That's all there is to say."

She took a step in the direction of the outer room. He put out a hand to detain her.

"Marjorie! Marjorie! Don't!"

"I'm going out there, and going to keep on having the nice time I had before you came. If you try to do anything I'll probably make a scene."

"You're going to give me one more chance," he said. "That's settled."

She looked at him defiantly.

"Try to make me," was all she said, wrenching her wrist out of his hand.

"I will," said Francis grimly.

She smiled at him brilliantly as he followed her into the room where the others were.

"I'm afraid there isn't any way," she said sweetly.

Lucille, who had not seen Francis before, flew at him now with a welcome which was affectionate enough to end effectually any further ardors or defiances.

"And you're in time for your own party after all," she ended, smiling sunnily at him and pushing him into a chair. She gave him a plate of scallops and a fork, and the party went on as it had before. Only Marjorie eyed him with nervous surprise. "What will he do next?" she wondered.

CHAPTER III

What he did was to eat his scallops à la King with appetite, fraternize cheerfully with Lucille's friend, whose name was Tommy Burke, and who was an old acquaintance of his, speak to Marjorie occasionally in the most natural way in the world, and altogether behave entirely as if it really was his party, and he was very glad that there was a party. It is to be said that he ignored Logan rather more than politeness demanded. But Logan was so used to being petted that he never knew it. Marjorie did, and lavished more attention on him defiantly to try to make up for it. She thought that the evening never would end.

After the food was finished it was to be expected that Lucille would go to the piano, and play some more, and that the men would sit about smoking on the davenport and the taborets, and that every one would be pleasantly quiet. But Lucille did not. Instead, she and Francis retired to the back room, leaving Marjorie and the others to amuse each other, and talk for what seemed to Marjorie's strained nerves an eternity of time. It was Francis who had called Lucille, moreover, and not Lucille who had summoned Francis, as could have been expected.

Finally the other men rose to go. Francis came out of the inner room and went with them. Before he went he stopped to say to Marjorie:

"I told you I wanted to talk things over with you. I'll be back in a half-hour. You seem to be so popular that the only way to see you alone is to get you in a motor-car, so if you aren't too tired to drive around with me to-night, to a place where I have to go, I'll bring you home safely. . . . I didn't mean to speak so sharply to you, Marjorie, over the telephone. Please forgive me."

"Certainly," said Marjorie coldly and tremulously. It could be seen that she did not forgive him in the least.

He went downstairs with the others, laughing with Burke, who had a dozen army reminiscences to exchange with him, and bidding as small a good-by as decency permitted to Logan. Marjorie heard him dash up again, and then run down, as if he had left something outside the door and forgotten it. Lucille came over to her and began to fuss at her about changing her frock for a heavier one, and taking enough wraps.

"Why, it's only a short drive," Marjorie expostulated. "And I'm not sure that I want to go, anyway. I don't think there's anything more to be said than we have said."

Francis, with that disconcerting swiftness which he possessed, had come back as she spoke.

He came close to her, and spoke softly.

"You used to like the boy you married, Marjorie. For his sake won't you do this one thing? Give me a hearing—one more hearing."

Lucille had come back again with a big loose coat, and she was wrapping it round her friend with a finality that meant more struggle than poor tired Marjorie was capable of making. After all, another half-hour of discussion would not matter. The end would be the same. She went down with them to the big car that stood outside, and even managed to say something flippant about its looking like a traveling house, it was so big. Francis established her in the front seat, by him, tucked a rug around her, for the night was sharp for May, and drove to Fifth Avenue, then uptown.

She waited, wearily and immovable, for him to argue with her further, but he seemed in no hurry to commence. They merely drove on and on, and Marjorie was content not to talk. It was a clear, beautiful night, too late for much traffic, so they went swiftly. The ride was pleasant. All that she had been through had tired her so that she found the silence and motion very pleasant and soothing.

Finally he turned to her, and she braced herself for whatever he might want to say.

"Would you mind if we drove across the river for a little while?" he asked.

"Why—no," she said idly. "Out in the country, you mean?"

He assented, and they drove on, but not to the ferry. They turned, and went up Broadway, far, far again.

"Where are we?" asked Marjorie finally. "Isn't it time you turned around and took me back? And didn't you have something you wanted to say to me?"

"Yes——" he said absently. "No, we have all the time in the world. There's no scandal possible in being out motoring with your husband, even if you shouldn't get home till daylight."

"But where *are* we?" demanded Marjorie again.

"The Albany Post Road," said Francis. This meant very little to Marjorie, but she waited another ten minutes before she asked again.

"Just the same post road as before," said Francis preoccupiedly, letting the machine out till they were going at some unbelievable speed an hour. "The Albany. Not the Boston."

"Well, it doesn't matter to me *what* post road," remonstrated Marjorie, beginning rather against her will to laugh a little, as she had been used to do with Francis. "I want to go home."

"You are," said he.

"Oh, is this one of those roads that turns around and swallows its own tail?" she demanded, "and brings you back where you started?"

"Just where you started," he assented, still in the same preoccupied voice.

She accepted this quietly for the moment.

"Francis," she said presently, "I mean it. I want to go home."

"You are going home," said Francis. "But not just yet."

It seemed undignified to row further. She was so tired—so very tired!

Francis did not speak again, and after a little while she must have dropped off to sleep; for when she came to herself again the road was a different one. They were traveling along between rows of pines, and the road stretched ahead of them, empty and country-looking. She turned and asked sleepily, "What time is it, Francis, please?"

He bent a little as he shot his wrist-watch forward enough to look at the phosphorescent dial.

"Twenty minutes past three," he said as if it was the most commonplace hour in the world to be driving through a country road.

For a moment she did not take it in. Then she threw dignity to the winds. She was rested enough to have some fight in her again.

"I'm going home! I'm going home if I have to walk!" she said wildly. She started to spring up in the car, with some half-formed intention of forcing him to stop by jumping out.

"Now, Marjorie, don't act like a movie-heroine," he said commonplacely—and infuriatingly. He also took one hand off the steering-wheel and put it around her wrist. "You can't go back to New York unless I take you. We're fifty miles up New York State, and there isn't a town near at all."

Marjorie sat still and looked at him. The car went on.

"I don't understand," she said. "You can't be going to abduct me, Francis?"

Francis, set as his face was, smiled a little at this.

"That isn't the word, because you don't abduct your lawful wife. But I do want you to try me out before you discard me entirely. And apparently this is the only way to get you to do it."

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Want the cards on the table?"

She nodded.

"All the cards—now? Or would you rather take things as they come?"

All this time the car was going ahead full speed in the moonlight.

"Everything—now!" she said tensely.

He never looked at her as he talked. His eyes were on the road ahead.

"Just now—as soon as we get to a spot where it seems likely to be comfortable, we're going to unship a couple of pup-tents from the back of the car, and sleep out here. I have all your things in the back of the car. If you'd rather, you can sleep in the car; you're little and I think you could be comfortable on the back seat."

She interrupted him with a cry of injury.

"My things? Where did you get them?"

"Lucille packed them. She worked like a demon to get everything ready.
She was thrilled."

"Thrilled!" said Marjorie resentfully. "I'm so sick of people being thrilled I don't know what to do. *I'm* not thrilled. . . . I might have known it. It's just the sort of thing Lucille would be crazy over doing. I suppose she feels as if she were in the middle of a melodrama."

"I'm sorry, Marjorie, but there's something about you that always makes people feel romantic. . . ." His voice softened. "I remember the first time I saw you, coming into that restaurant a little behind Lucille, it made me feel as if the fairy-stories I'd stopped believing in had come true all over again. You were so little and so graceful, and you looked as if you believed in so many wonderful things——"

"Stop!" said Marjorie desperately. "It isn't fair to talk that way to me. I won't have it. If you feel that way you ought to take me back home."

"On the contrary, just the reverse," quoted Francis, who seemed to be getting cooler as Marjorie grew more excited. "You said you'd listen. Be a sport, and do listen."

"Very well," said Marjorie sulkily. She *was* a sport by nature, and she was curious.

"I've taken a job in Canada—reforesting of burned-over areas. I had to go to-night at the latest. It seemed to me that we hadn't either of us given this thing a fair try-out. I hadn't a chance with you unless I took this one. My idea is for you to give me a trial, under any conditions you like that include our staying in the same house a couple of months. I'm crazy over you. I want to stay married to you the worst way. You're all frightened of me, and marriage, and everything, now. But it's just possible that you may be making a mistake, not seeing it through. It's just possible that I may be making a mistake, thinking that you and I would be happy."

Marjorie gave a little tense jerk of outraged pride at this rather tactless speech. It sounded too much as if Francis might possibly tire of *her*—which it wasn't his place to do.

"And so," Francis went on doggedly, "my proposition is that you go up to Canada with me. There's a fairly decent house that goes with the job. There won't be too much of my society. You need a rest anyhow. I won't hurry you, or do anything unfair. Only let us try it out, and see if we wouldn't like being married, exactly as if we'd had a chance to be engaged before."

"And if we don't?" inquired Marjorie.

"And if we don't, I'll give you the best divorce procurable this side of the water."

"You sound as if it was a Christmas present," said Marjorie.

She thought she was temporizing, but Francis accepted it as willingness to do as he suggested.

"Then you will?" he asked.

"But—it's such an awful step to take!"

Francis leaned back—she could feel him do it, in the dark—and began to argue as coolly as if it were not three o'clock in the morning, on an unfrequented road.

"The most of the step is taken. You haven't anything to do but just go on as you are—no packing or walking or letter-writing or anything of the sort. Simply stay here in the car with me and end at the place in Canada, live there and let me be around more or less. If there's anything you want at home that Lucille has forgotten——"

"Knowing Lucille, there probably is," said Marjorie.

"——we'll write her and get it. . . . Well?"

Marjorie took a long breath, tried to be very wide-awake and firm, and fell silent, thinking.

She was committed, for one thing. People would think it was all right and natural if she went on with Francis, and be shocked and upset and everything else if she didn't. Cousin Anna Stevenson would write her long letters about her Christian duty, and the office would be uncomfortable. And Lucille—well, Lucille was a blessed comfort. She didn't mind what you did so long as it didn't put her out

personally. She at least—but Lucille had packed the bag! And you couldn't go and fling yourself on the neck of as perfidious a person as *that*.

And—it would be an adventure. Francis was nice, or at least she remembered it so; a delightful companion. He wasn't rushing her. All he wanted was a chance to be around and court her, as far as she could discover. True, he was appallingly strange, but—it seemed a compromise. And she had always liked the idea of Canada. As for eventually staying with Francis, that seemed very far off. It did not seem like a thing she could ever do. Being friends with him she might compass. Of course, you couldn't say that it was a fair deal to Francis, but he was bringing it on himself, and really, he deserved the punishment. For of course, Marjorie's vain little mind said irrepressibly to itself, he would be fonder of her at the end of the try-out than at the beginning. . . . And then a swift wave of anger at him came over her, and she decided on the crest of it. She would never give in to Francis's courtship. He wasn't the sort of man she liked. He wasn't congenial. She had grown beyond him. But he deserved what he was going to get. . . . And she spoke.

"It isn't fair to you, Francis, because it isn't going to end the way you hope. But I'll go to Canada with you . . ."

For a moment she was very sorry she had said it, because Francis forgot himself and caught her in his arms tight, and kissed her hard.

"If you do that sort of thing I *won't*!" she said. "That wasn't in the bargain."

"I know it wasn't," said Francis contritely. "Only you were such a good little sport to promise. I won't do it again unless you say I may. Honestly, Marjorie. Not even before people."

This sounded rather topsy-turvy, but after awhile it came to Marjorie what he meant—just about the time she climbed out of the car, sat on its step, and watched Francis competently unfurling and setting up two small and seemingly inadequate tents and flooring them with balsam boughs. He meant that there would have to be at least a semblance of friendliness on account of the people they lived among. She felt more frightened than ever.

Francis came up to her as if he had felt the wave of terror that went over her.

"Now you aren't to worry. I'm going to keep my word. You're safe with me, Marge. I'm going to take care of you as if I were your brother and your father and your cousin Anna——"

She broke in with an irrepressible giggle.

"Oh, please don't go that far! Two male relatives will be plenty. . . . I—I really got all the care from Cousin Anna that I wanted."

He looked relieved at her being able to laugh, and bent over the tents again in the moonlight.

"There you are. And here are the blankets. We're near enough to the road so you won't be frightened, and enough in the bushes so we'll be secluded. Good-night. I'll call you to-morrow, when it's time to go on. I know this part of the country like my hand, and here's some water in case you're thirsty in the night. Oh, and here are towels."

This last matter-of-fact touch almost set Marjorie off again in hysterical laughter. Being eloped with by a gentleman who thoughtfully set towels and water outside her door was really *too* much. She pinned the tent together with a hatpin, slipped off some of her clothes—it did not seem enough like going to bed to undress altogether, and she mistrusted the balsam boughs with blankets over them that pretended to be a bed in the corner—and flung herself down and laughed and laughed and laughed till she nearly cried.

She did not quite cry. The boughs proved to have been arranged by a master hand, and she was very tired and exceedingly sleepy. She pulled hairpins out of her hair in a half-dream, so that they had to be sought for painstakingly next morning when she woke. She burrowed into the blankets, and knew nothing of the world till nine next morning.

"I can't knock on a tent-flap," said Francis's buoyant voice outside then. "But it's time we were on our way, Marjorie. There ought to be a bathrobe in that bundle of Lucille's. Slip it on and I'll show you the brook."

She reached for a mirror, which showed that, though tousled, she was pretty, took one of the long breaths that seemed so frequently necessary in dealing with Francis, said "in for a penny, in for a pound," and did as she was directed. The bath-robe wasn't a bath-robe, but something rather more civilized, which had been, as a matter of fact, part of her trousseau, in that far-off day when trousseaux

were so frequently done, and seemed such fun to buy. She came out of the tent rather timidly. "Good gracious, child, that wasn't what I meant!" exclaimed Francis, seeming appallingly dressed and neat and ready for life. "It's too cold for that sort of thing. Here!"

He picked up one of the blankets, wrapped it around her, gave her a steer in a direction away from the road, and vanished.

She went down the path he had pushed her toward, holding the towels tight in one hand and her blanket around her in the other. It was fresh that morning, though it was warm for May. And Francis seemed to think that she was going to take a bath in the brook, which even he could not have had heated. She shivered at the idea as she came upon it.

It was an alluring brook, in spite of its unheated state. It was very clear and brown, with a pebbled bottom that you could see into, and a sort of natural round pool, where the current was partly dammed, making it waist-deep. She resolved at first to wash just her face and hands; then she tried an experimental foot, and finished by making a bold plunge straight into the ice-cold middle of it. She shrieked when she was in, and came very straight out, but by the time she was dry she was warmer than ever. She ran back to the tent, laughing in sheer exuberance of spirits, and dressed swiftly. The plunge had stimulated her so that when Francis appeared again she ran toward him, feeling as friendly as if he weren't married to her at all.

"It was—awfully cold—but I'm just as hungry as I can be!" she called.
"Was there anything to eat in the car, along with the towels?"

Francis seemed unaccountably relieved by her pleasantness. This had been something of a strain on him, after all, though it was the first time such a thought had occurred to Marjorie. His thin, dark face lighted up.

"Everything, including thermos bottles," he called back. "We won't stop to build a fire, because we have to hurry; but Lucille——"

"Lucille!" said Marjorie. "Well, I certainly never knew what a wretch that girl was."

"Oh, not a wretch. Only romantic," said Francis, grinning. "I tell you again, Marjorie, you have a fatal effect on people. Look at me—a matter-of-fact captain of doughboys—and the minute I see that you won't marry me—stay married to me, I mean—I elope with you in a coach and four!"

"I don't think you ought to laugh about it," said Marjorie, sobering down and stopping short in her tracks.

"Well, I shouldn't," said Francis penitently. "Only I'm relieved, and a little excited, I suppose. You see, I like your society a lot, and the idea of having it for maybe three months, on any terms you like, is making me so pleased I'm making flippant remarks. I won't any more, if I remember."

And he apparently meant it, for he busied himself in exploring the car, which seemed as inexhaustible as the Mother's Bag in the Swiss Family Robinson, for the food he had spoken of. There was a large basket, which he produced and set on a stump, and from which he took sandwiches, thermos flasks, and—last perfidy of Lucille!—a tin box of shrimps à la King, carefully wrapped, and ready for reheating. He did it in a little ready-heat affair which also emerged from the basket, and which Marjorie knew well. It was her own, in fact. Reheated shrimps should have killed them both, more especially for breakfast. But they never thought of that till some days later. Marjorie was so overcome by finding her own shrimps facing her, so to speak, that nothing else occurred to her—except to eat them. They made a very good breakfast, during which Francis was never flippant once. They talked decorously about the natural scenery—fortunately for the conversation there was a great deal of natural scenery in their vicinity—and somewhat about pup-tents, and a little about how nice the weather was. After that they cleared up the pieces, repacked everything like magic, and went on their way very amicably.

CHAPTER IV

"And now that things are more or less settled, wouldn't you like to know what we are going to do?" inquired Francis.

"Haven't I anything to do with it?" inquired Marjorie, not crossly, but as one seeking information.

"Almost everything. But you don't know the road to Canada. I thought we'd take it straight through in the car, but to-night we will be in more civilized parts—in an hour or so, in fact—and you can get straightened up a little—not that you look as if you needed to, but after a night in the open one does feel more or less tossed about, I imagine."

Marjorie considered. Ordinarily at this hour she would be walking into the office. She would be speaking with what politeness one can muster up in the morning to Miss Kaplan, who was quite as exuberant at five as at seven in the evening; she would be hoping desperately that she wasn't late, and that if she was she would escape Mr. Wildhack, who glared terrifyingly at such young women who didn't get down on schedule time. Marjorie was not much on schedule time, but she always felt that the occasions when she got there too late really ought to be balanced by those when she came too early. Instead of all this, she was racing north with the fresh wind blowing against her face, with no duties and no responsibilities, and something that, but for the person who shared it with her, promised to be rather fun. Just then something came to her. She had an engagement for tea with Bradley Logan.

Suddenly that engagement seemed exceedingly important, and something that she should on no account have missed. But at least she could write to him and explain.

"Have you a fountain-pen?" she inquired of Francis, "and can I write sitting here?"

"If you don't mind writing on a leaf from my notebook. It's all I have."

She was privately a little doubtful as to the impression that such a note would make on Mr. Logan, for she remembered one wild tale she had heard from him about a man who spent his whole life in a secluded room somewhere in France, experimenting on himself as to what sort of perfumes and colors and gestures made him happiest. None of them had made him happy at all, to the best of her remembrance; but the idea Mr. Logan left her with was that he was that sort of person himself, and that the wrong kind of letter-paper could make him suffer acutely. She was amused at it, really, but a bit impressed, too. One doesn't want to be thought the kind of person who does the wrong thing because of knowing no better. Still, it was that or nothing.

"Dear Mr. Logan," she began, more illegibly than she knew because of the car's motion, "I am so sorry that I have not been able to tell you in advance that I couldn't take tea with you. But Mr. Ellison has taken me away rather suddenly. He had to go to Canada to take a position. We hope we will see you when we get back."

She did not know till much later that owing to the thank-you-ma'am which they reached simultaneously with the word "suddenly" that when Mr. Logan got that note he thought it was "severely," and that the bad penmanship and generally disgraceful appearance of the loose-leaf sheet, the jerky hand, and the rather elderly envelope which was all Francis could find—it had been living in a pocket with many other things for some time—gave him a wrong idea. Mr. Logan, to anticipate a little, by this erroneous means, acquired an idea very near the truth. He thought that Marjorie Ellison was being kidnapped against her will, and made it the subject of much meditation. His nervous ailment prevented him from dashing after her.

Marjorie fortunately knew nothing of all this, for she was proud to the core, and she would rather have died than let any one but Lucille, of necessity in on it, know anything but that she was spending the most delightful and willing of honeymoons.

So when they found a little up-state town with a tavern of exceeding age and stiffness, and alighted in search of luncheon, the landlord and landlady thought just what Marjorie wanted them to think; that all was well and very recent.

She sank into one of the enormous walnut chairs, covered with immaculate and flaring tidies which reminded her of Cousin Anna and stuck into the back of her neck, and viewed the prospect with pleasure. For the moment she almost forgot Francis, and the problem of managing just the proper distance from him. There was a stuffed fish, glassy-eyed and with cotton showing from parts of him, over the counter. There were bills of forgotten railroads framed and hung in different places. There was a crayon portrait of a graduated row of children from the seventies hung over the fireplace, four of them, on the order of another picture, framed and hanging in another part of the room, and called "A Yard of Kittens." Marjorie wondered with pleasure why they hadn't added enough children to bring it up to a yard, and balanced things properly. The fireplace itself was bricked up, all except a small place where a Franklin stove sat, with immortelles sticking out of its top as if they aimed at being fuel. Marjorie had seen immortelles in fireplaces before, but in a Franklin they were new to her. She made up her mind to find out about it before she was through.

"Why—why, I'm not worrying about being carried off by Francis!" she remembered suddenly. She had

been quite forgetful of him, and of anything but the funny, old-fashioned place she was in. She lay back further in the walnut chair, quite sleepily.

"Would you like to go upstairs now, ma'am?" the landlord said. She looked around for Francis, but he was nowhere to be seen. She picked up the handkerchief which had slipped from her lap, cast a regretful look at the yard of kittens, and followed him.

"Here it is, ma'am," said the landlord, and set the suitcase he had been carrying down inside the door. She shut the door after her, and made for the mirror. Then she said "Oh!" in a surprised voice, because Francis was standing before it, brushing his hair much harder than such straight black hair needed to be brushed.

He seemed as much surprised as she.

"Good heavens, I beg your pardon, Marjorie!" he said. "This isn't your room. Yours is the next one."

"I beg *your* pardon, then," said Marjorie, with a certain iciness.

"You can have this one if you like it better. They're next door to each other. You know"—Francis colored—"we have to seem more or less friendly. Really I didn't know——"

He was moving away into the other room as he spoke, having laid down his brush on her bureau as if he had no business with it at all.

"This isn't my brush," she said, standing at the connecting door and holding it out at arm's length.

"No," said Francis. "I didn't know I'd left it. Thank you."

He took it from her, and went into his own room. She pushed the door to between them, and went slowly back and sat down on the bed. A quite new idea had just come to her.

Francis wasn't a relentless Juggernaut, or a tyrant, or a cave-man, or anything like that really. That is, he probably did have moments of being all of them. But besides that—it was a totally new idea—he was a human being like herself. Sometimes things embarrassed him; sometimes they were hard for him; he didn't always know what to do next.

She had never had any brothers, and not very much to do with men until she got old enough for them to make love to her. The result was that it had never occurred to her particularly that men were people. They were just—men. That is, they were people you had nothing in common with except the fact that you did what they said if they were fathers, or married them when the time came, if they weren't. But she had actually felt sorry for Francis; not sorry, in a vague, rather pitying way because she didn't love him—but sorry for him as if he had been Lucille, when he was so embarrassed that he walked off forgetting his own brush. She smiled a little at the remembrance. She really began to feel that he was a friend.

So when he tapped at her outside door presently and told her that luncheon was ready, and that they had better go down and eat it, instead of the severity for which Francis had braced himself, she smiled at him in a very friendly fashion, and they went down together, admiring the wallpaper intensely on their way, for it consisted of fat scarlet birds sitting on concentric circles, and except for its age was almost exactly like some that Lucille and Marjorie hadn't bought because it was two dollars a yard.

Luncheon proved to be dinner, but they were none the less glad of it for that. And instead of freezing every time the landlord was tactlessly emotional, Marjorie found that she could be amused at it, and that her being amused helped Francis to be amused.

She always looked back tenderly to that yard of kittens, and to those other many yards of impossible and scarlet birds. They gave her the first chance at carrying through her wild flight with Francis decently and without too much discomfort.

The rest of the trip to Canada was easier and easier. Once admitting that Francis and she were friends—and you can't spend three days traveling with anybody without being a friend or an enemy—she had a nice enough time. She kept sternly out of her mind the recollection that he was in love with her. When she thought of that she couldn't like him very much. But then she didn't have to think of it.

"Here we are," said Francis superfluously as they stopped at the door of a big house that was neither a log cabin nor a regular house.

Marjorie gave a sigh of contentment.

"I admit I'm glad to get here," she said.

She slipped out of the car in the sunset, and stood drooping a minute, waiting for her bag to be lifted down. She was beginning to feel tired. She was lonely, too. She missed everything acutely and all at once—New York, the little apartment, Lucille, being free from Francis—even the black kitten seemed to her something that she could not live one moment longer without. She turned and looked at Francis, trim and alert as ever, just steering the car around the side of the house, and found herself hating him for the moment. He was so at home here. And she hadn't even carfare to run away if she wanted to!

"Well, now, you poor lamb!" said somebody's rich, motherly voice with a broad Irish brogue. "You're tired enough to die, and no wonder. Come along with me, darlin'."

She looked up with a feeling of comfort into the face of a black-haired, middle-aged Irishwoman, ample and beaming.

"I'm Mrs. O'Mara, an' I know yer husband well. I kep' house for him an' the other young gintlemen when they were workin' up here before the fightin' began. So he got me to come an' stay wid the two of ye, me an' Peggy. An' I don't deny I'm glad to see ye, for there does be a ghost in this house!"

The ending was so unexpected and matter-of-fact that Marjorie forgot to feel lost and estranged, and even managed to laugh. Even a ghost sounded rather pleasant and friendly, and it was good to see a woman's face. Who or what Peggy might be she did not know or care. Mrs. O'Mara picked up the suitcase with one strong arm, and, putting the other round Marjorie in a motherly way, half led her into the house.

"Ye'll excuse me familiarity, but it's plain to see ye're dead,
Miss—ma'am, I mean. Come yer ways in to the fire."

Marjorie had been feeling that life would be too hard to bear if she had to climb any stairs now; so it was very gladly that she let Mrs. O'Mara establish her in a rude chaise-longue sort of thing, facing a huge fire in a roughly built fireplace. The housekeeper bent over her, loosening knots and taking off wraps in a very comforting way. Then she surrounded her with pillows—not too many, or too much in her way—and slipped from the room to return in a moment with tea.

Marjorie drank it eagerly, and was revived by it enough to look around and see the place where she was to dwell. It looked very attractive, though it was not in the least like anything she had ever seen.

Where she lay she stared straight into a fire of great logs that crackled and burned comfortingly. The mantel over it was roughly made of wood, and its only adornment was a pipe at one side, standing up on its end in some mysterious manner, and a pile of Government reports at the other. The walls were plastered and left so. Here and there were tacked photographs and snapshots, and along one wall—she had to screw her neck to see it—some one had fastened up countless sheets from a Sunday supplement—war photographs entirely. She wondered who had done it, because what she had seen of returned soldiers had shown her that the last thing they wanted to see or hear about was the war.

There were couches around the walls, the other chairs were lounging chairs also. There was fishing-tackle in profusion, and a battered phonograph on a table. It looked as if men had made themselves comfortable there, without thinking much about looks. The only thing against this was one small frilled chair. It was a most absurd chair, rustic to begin with, with a pink cushion covered with white net and ruffled, and pink ribbons anchoring another pink and net cushion at its back. Mrs. O'Mara, hovering hospitably, saw Marjorie eying it, and beamed proudly.

"That's Peggy's chair," she said. "Peggy's me little daughter."

"Oh, that's nice," said Marjorie. "How old is she?"

"Just a young thing," said Mrs. O'Mara. "She'll be in in a minute."

Marjorie leaned back again, her tea consumed, and rested. She was not particularly interested in Peggy, because she was not very used to children. She liked special ones sometimes, but as a rule she did not quite know what to do with them. After a few sentences exchanged, and an embarrassed embrace in which the children stiffened themselves, children and Marjorie were apt to melt apart. She hoped Peggy wouldn't be the kind that climbed on you and kicked you.

A wild clattering of feet aroused her from these half-drowsy meditations.

"Here's Francis, mother! Here's Francis!" called a joyous young voice, and Marjorie turned to see Francis, his eyes sparkling and his whole face lighted up, dashing into the room with an arm around one of the most beautiful girls she had ever seen, a tall, vivid creature who might have been any age from seventeen to twenty, and who brought into the room an atmosphere of excitement and gaiety like

a wind.

"And here's Peggy!" said Francis gaily, pausing in his dash only when he reached Marjorie's side. "She's all grown up since I went away, and isn't she the dear of the world?"

"Oh, but so's your wife, Francis!" said Peggy naïvely, slipping her arm from around his shoulder and dropping on her knees beside Marjorie. "You don't mind if I kiss you, do you, please? And must I call her Mrs. Ellison, Francis?"

"Peggy, child, where's your manners?" said her mother from the background reprovingly, but with an obvious note of pride in her voice.

"Where they always were," said Peggy boldly, laughing, and staying where she was.

She was tall and full-formed, with thick black hair like her mother's, not fluffy and waving like Marjorie's, but curling tight in rings wherever it had the chance. Her eyes were black and her cheeks and lips a deep permanent red. She looked the picture of health and strength, and Marjorie felt like a toy beside her—fragile to the breaking-point. She seemed much better educated than her mother, and evidently on a footing of perfect equality and affection with Francis.

Marjorie was drawn to her, for the girl had vitality and charm; but she found herself wondering why Francis had never told her about this Peggy, and why he had never thought of marrying her.

"You wouldn't think this young wretch was only sixteen, would you?" said Francis, answering her silent question. "Look at her—long dresses and hair done up, and beaux, I hear, in all directions!"

Of course. If Peggy had been scarcely past fourteen when Francis saw her last, he couldn't have considered marrying her. Marjorie tried to think that she wished he had, but found that she did not like to cease owning anything that she had ever possessed, even such a belonging as Francis Ellison.

"That's very nice," she said inadequately, smiling at Peggy in as friendly a manner as so tired a person could manage. "I'm glad I shall have Peggy to be friends with while I'm up here."

"Oh, me dear, ye'll be up here forever an' the day after, be the looks of the job Mr. Francis has on his hands," said Mrs. O'Mara.

"No, I won't," she began to say hurriedly, and then stopped herself. She had no right to tell any one about her bargain with Francis. She didn't want to, anyway.

"The poor child's tired," said Mrs. O'Mara, whom, in spite of her relation to Peggy, Marjorie was beginning to regard as a guardian angel. "Come upstairs to yer room, me dear."

Marjorie rose, with Francis and Peggy hovering about her, carrying wraps and hats and suitcases; and Mrs. O'Mara led the way to a room on the floor above, reached by a stair suspiciously like a ladder.

"Here ye'll be comfortable," said Mrs. O'Mara, "and rest a little till we have supper. Peggy will get you anything you want."

But Marjorie declined Peggy. All she wanted was to rest a little longer.

She flung herself on the softly mattressed cot in one corner of the room; and nearly went to sleep.

She was awakened—it must have been quite sleep—by Francis, on the threshold. His eyes were blazing, and he was evidently angry at her to the last degree—angrier even than he had been that time in the city when he nearly threw the telephone at her.

"Is this the sort of person you are?" he demanded furiously. "Look at this telegram!"

Marjorie, frightened, rose from the couch with her heart beating like a triphammer.

"Let me see," she asked.

He handed the telegram to her with an effect of wanting to shake her.

"Am coming up to arrange with you about Mrs. Ellison," it said. "Know all."

It was signed by Logan.

"Good heavens!" said Marjorie helplessly.

"Knows all!" said Francis bitterly. "And that's the sort of girl you are!"

CHAPTER V

Marjorie froze in consternation. She had forgotten to allow for Francis's gusts of anger; indeed, there had been no need, for since his one flare-up over the telephone he had been perfectly gentle and courteous to her.

She stared at him, amazed.

"But I didn't do anything to make that happen!" she protested. "I never dreamed—why, I'd have too much pride——"

"Pride!" thundered Francis. "It's plain cause and effect. You write to that pup in New York, and I give you the envelope and paper—help you straight through it, good heavens!—and you use my decency to appeal to him for help, after you've agreed to try it out and see it through!"

Marjorie stiffened with anger.

"I *was* going to try it out and see it through," she countered with dignity. "But if you treat me this way I see no reason why I should. Even this housekeeper of yours would give me money to escape with."

"Escape! You act as if you were in a melodrama!" said Francis angrily. "We made a bargain, that's all there is to it; and the first chance you get, you smash it. I suppose that's the way women act. . . . I don't know much about women, I admit."

"You don't know much about me," said Marjorie icily, "if you jump to conclusions like that about me. Whatever that Logan man knows he doesn't know from me. Have you forgotten Lucille?"

"Lucille wouldn't——" began Francis, and stopped.

"And why wouldn't she? Didn't she tell me that I was a poor little pet, and that men could always take care of themselves and, then turn around and help you carry me away? And it was carrying me away—it was stealing me, as if I were one of those poor Sabine women in the history book."

They were fronting each other across the threshold all this time, Francis with his face rigid and pale with anger, his wife flushed and quivering.

"I admit I hadn't thought of that," said Francis, referring presumably to Lucille's possibilities as an informer, and not to Marjorie's being a Sabine woman.

Marjorie moved back wearily and sat on the bed.

"And you were just getting to be such a nice friend," she mourned. "I was getting so I *liked* you. There never was anybody pleasanter than you while we were coming up from New York. Why, you weren't like a person one was married to, at all!"

"More like a friend nor a 'usband," quoted Francis unexpectedly.

Marjorie looked at him in surprise. Any one who could stop in the middle of a very fine quarrel to see the funny side of things that way wasn't so bad, her mind remarked to itself before she could stop it.

"What do you mean?" she asked, mitigating her wrath a little.

"Why, you know the story; the cockney woman who had a black eye, and when the settlement worker asked her if her husband had given it to her said, 'Bless you, no, miss—'e's more like a friend nor a 'usband!'"

"Oh," said Marjorie, smiling a little. Then she remembered, her eyes falling on the yellow paper Francis still held. There was still much to be settled between them.

"But, as you were saying about Mr. Logan——"

"I was saying a lot I hadn't any business to about Mr. Logan," said
Francis frankly.

"Then it's all right?" said Marjorie. "At least as far as you're concerned?"

He nodded.

"Well," said she most unfairly, "it isn't, as far as I am. Francis, I don't think we'd better think any more of ever trying to be married to each other. It's too hard on the nervous system."

Francis colored deeply.

"What do you want to do?" he demanded.

Marjorie paused a minute before she answered. The truth was, she didn't know. She had definitely given up her New York position. She liked it up here, very much indeed. She liked the O'Maras and the house, and she was wild to get outdoors and explore the woods. Leaving Francis out of the question, she was freer than she had been for years. Altogether it was a bit hard to be entirely moved by lofty considerations. She wanted to stay; she knew that.

"Canada's a nice place," she began, dimpling a little and looking up at Francis from under her eyelashes.

"Oh, then——" he began eagerly.

"And I want to stay, for perfectly selfish reasons," she went on serenely. "But if my staying makes you think that there is any hope of—of eventualities—I think I'd better go. In other words, I like the idea of a vacation here. That's all. If you are willing to have me as selfish as all that, why, it's up to you. I think myself I'm a pig."

"You will stay, but not with any idea of learning to like me better—is that it?"

"That's it," she said. "And, as I said, I feel colossally selfish—a regular Hun or something."

"That's because you used the word 'colossal,'" he said absently. "They did, a lot. All right, my dear. That's fair enough. Yes, I'm willing."

"But no tempers, mind, and no expectations!" said Marjorie firmly, making hay while the sun shone.

"No," said Francis. He looked at her appraisingly. "You know," he remarked, "the gamble isn't all one way. It's just possible that I may be as glad as you not to see the thing through when we've seen something of each other. I don't feel that way now, but there's no telling."

She sprang to her feet, angry as he had been. But he had turned, after he said that, and gone quietly downstairs.

The idea was new to her, and correspondingly annoying. Francis—Francis, who had been spending all his time since he got back trying to win her—Francis suggesting that he might tire of her! Why, people didn't *do* such things! And if he expected to tire of her what did he want her for at all?

She sprang up and surveyed herself in the glass that hung against the rough wall, over a draped dressing-table which had apparently once been boxes. Yes, she did look tired and draggled. Her wild-rose color was nearly gone, and there were big circles under her eyes. And there was a smudge on her face that nobody had told her a thing about. And her hair was mussed too much to be becoming, even to her, who looked best with it tossed a little. And there was not a sign of water to wash in anywhere, and the room had no furniture except the cot and the dressing-table——

Another knock stopped her here, and she turned to see young Peggy, immaculate and blooming, at the door.

"I just came to bring you towels, and to see that everything was all right, and show you the way to the bathroom," she said most opportunely. "We have a bathtub, you know, even up here in the wilds!"

Marjorie forgot everything; home, husband, problems, life in general—what were they all to the chance at a real bathtub? She followed Peggy down the hall as a kitten follows a friend with a bowl of milk.

"O-o! a bathtub!" she said rapturously.

Peggy threw open a door where, among wooden floor and side-wall and ceiling and everything else of the most primitive, a real and most enticingly porcelain bathtub sat proudly awaiting guests.

"It'll not be so good as you've been used to," she said with more suggestion of Irishry than Marjorie

had yet heard, "but I guess you'll be glad of it."

"Glad!" said Marjorie. And she almost shut the door in Peggy's face.

She lingered over it and over the manicuring and hairdressing and everything else that she could linger over, and dressed herself in the best of her gowns, a sophisticated taupe satin with slippers and stockings to match. She'd show Francis what he was perhaps going to be willing to part with! So when Mrs. O'Mara's stentorian voice called "Supper!" up the stair, she had not quite finished herself off. The sophisticated Lucille had tucked in—it was a real tribute of affection—her own best rouge box; and Marjorie was on the point of adding the final touch to beauty, as the advertisement on the box said, when she heard the supper call. She was too genuinely hungry to stop. She raced down the stairs in a most unsophisticated manner, nearly falling over Francis and Peggy, who were also racing for the dining-room.

They caught her to them in a most unceremonious way, each with an arm around her, and sped her steps on. She found herself breathless and laughing, dropped into a big wooden chair with Francis facing her and Peggy and her mother at the other two sides. It was a small table, wooden as to leg under its coarse white cloth; but, oh, the beauty of the sight to Marjorie! There were such things as pork and beans, and chops, and baked potatoes, and apple sauce, and various vegetables, and on another table—evidently a concession to manners—was to be seen a noble pudding with whipped cream thick above it.

"The food looks good, now, doesn't it?" beamed Mrs. O'Mara. "I'll bet ye're hungry enough to eat the side o' the house. Pass me yer plate to fill up, me dear."

Marjorie ate—she remembered it vaguely afterwards, in her sleep—a great deal of everything on the table. It did not seem possible, when she remembered, also vaguely, all the things there had been; but the facts were against her. She finished with a large cup of coffee, which should have kept her awake till midnight; and lay back smiling drowsily in her chair.

The last thing she remembered was somebody picking her up like a small baby and carrying her out of the dining-room and up the stairs to her own bed, and laying her down on it; and a heavy tread behind her carrier, which must have been Mrs. O'Mara's, for a rich voice that belonged to it had said, "Shure it's a lovely sight, yer carryin' her around like a child. It's the lovely pair yez make, Mr. Francis!" And then she remembered a tightening of arms around her for an instant, before she was laid carefully on her own cot and left alone.

Mrs. O'Mara undressed her and put her to bed, she told her next morning; but Marjorie remembered nothing at all of that. All she knew was that the lady's voice, raised to say that it was time to get up, wakened her about eight next day.

It is always harder to face any situation in the morning. And theoretically Marjorie's situation was a great deal to face. Here she was alone, penniless, at the mercy of a determined young man and his devoted myrmidons—whatever myrmidons were. Marjorie had always heard of them in connections like these, and rather liked the name. Mr. Logan was imminent at any moment, and a great deal of disagreeableness might be looked for when he turned up and had it out with Francis. Altogether the Sabine lady felt that she ought to be in a state of panic terror. But she had slept well,—it was an excellent cot—the air was heavenly bracing, Mrs. O'Mara was a joy to think of, with her brogue and her affectionate nature, and altogether Marjorie Ellison found herself wondering hungrily what there would be for breakfast, and dressing in a hurry so that she could go down and eat it.

Peggy, rosy and exuberant, rushed at her and kissed her when she got to the foot of the stairs.

"Oh, isn't it lovely to think you're here, and I've got somebody to have fun with, and Francis has to be out a lot of the time? Do you like to dance? There's a French-Canadian family down the road, two girls and three boys, and seven or eight other men out working with Francis, and under him, and if you only say you like to dance I'll telephone them to-night. Mother said I was too young to dance—and me three years learning at the convent!—but with you here sure she can't say a word. Oh, do say you'll have a little dance to-night! Francis dances, too, if you haven't stopped it in him."

She stopped for a minute to take breath, and Marjorie clapped her hands.

"I love to dance! Do have them up! Never mind whether Francis likes it or not!"

"Sure you have to mind what your own wedded husband likes," said the Irish girl, shocked a little. "But unless he's been more sobered than's likely by the big war, he'll be as crazy over it all as we are. There's a dozen grand dance records on the phonograph, and sure a bit of rosin on the floor and it'll be as fine as silk. Let's try them now."

She made for the phonograph and had a dance-record on it before Marjorie could answer, and in another minute had picked the smaller girl up and was dancing over the rough floor with her. And so Francis, coming in a little apprehensively, found them flushed and laughing, and whirling wildly around to the music of a record played much too fast. Peggy, in an effort to show off heavily before Francis, came a cropper over a stool at his feet, pulling Marjorie down in her fall; both of them laughing like children as they fell, so that they could scarcely disentangle themselves, and had to be unknotted by Francis.

"Come on to breakfast now, you young wild animals," said he, his thin, dark face sparkling all over with laughter as Marjorie had never seen it.

"I'm killed entirely," said Peggy. "I have to be taken."

She made herself as limp and heavy as possible, and it ended in a free-for-all scuffle which was finally shepherded into the dining-room by Mrs. O'Mara, who was laughing so herself that she had to stop and catch her breath.

So there was little time to think of one's sad lot at breakfast, either. And Peggy was so keen on the dance proposition that it took all breakfast time to discuss it.

"I'm taking the motor-cycle over to the clearing, and I don't think I'll be back till night," said Francis unexpectedly when breakfast was over.

Peggy made a loud outcry.

"Is this your idea of a honeymoon? Well, when my time comes may I have a kinder man than you! And poor Marjorie sitting home darning your socks, I suppose!"

"No. Not at all. I have to go over first to take some things. When I come back I'll take her, too, if she'd like to go. Think you'd enjoy it, Marjorie?"

"What is it?" she asked cautiously, not particularly willing to implicate herself.

"Well, it's a little cabin—or two little cabins, rather, and a lean-to—several miles away. A motor-cycle can go there by taking its life in its hands. It's in the middle of a clearing, so to speak; but it's also in the middle of a pretty thick patch of woods around the clearing. There's a spring, and a kettle, and we make open fires. There are provisions in the lean-to, locked up so the deer can't get them—yes, deer like things to eat. We go there to stay when there's such work to do that it isn't convenient to come back and forth at night. There are lots of rabbits and birds, and once in a while a harmless little green snake—do you mind harmless snakes, my dear?—comes and looks affectionately at you, finds you're a human being, and goes away again rather disappointed. Once in a long while an old bear comes and sniffs through the cracks of the lean-to in hopes of lunch, and goes away again disconsolately like the snake. But only once since I can remember. I tell you, Marjorie, I don't ever remember having a better time than when I'd built a fire out there in an open spot near the trees, and just lay on the ground with my hands behind my head, all alone, and everything in the whole world so far away that there wasn't a chance of its bothering me! Just trees and sky and wood-smoke and the ground underneath—there's nothing like it in the world!"

He had flushed up with enthusiasm. Marjorie looked at him admiringly. This was a new Francis, one she had never met. She had not realized that any one could love that sort of thing—indeed, no one had ever told her that such things existed. Her life had been spent between Cousin Anna's little prim house with a pavement in front of it and a pocket-handkerchief of lawn behind, and the tiny New York flat she had occupied with Lucille. She had never really been out-of-doors in her life.

"Oh, please do take me!" she cried.

He seemed extremely pleased at her asking.

"I can't this first trip; the side-car will be full of junk that I have to get over there. But I *would* like to take you on my second trip, about noon to-day. Or it may be later when I get back—it's quite a distance."

"That will be all right," said Marjorie sedately. "I'd like to rest a little this morning, anyway."

So Francis, with a light in his eyes, and whistling happily, fussed about for a while assembling a mysterious collection of tools and curious bundles, and rode blithely off in the general direction of what looked like virgin forest.

"And now we'll plan all about the dance," said Peggy gaily.

"You will not, Miss! You'll plan how to help me clean the back cellar this beautiful sunny morning that was just made for it," said her mother sternly, appearing on the scene, and carrying off a protesting Peggy.

Marjorie, left alone, addressed herself to resting up in preparation for the afternoon's trip. There was a big hammock on the porch, and thither, wrapped in her heavy coat, she went to lie. She tried to think out some plans for her future life without Francis; but the plans were hard to make. There were so many wild things to watch; even the clouds and sky seemed different up here. And presently when Peggy, no more than healthfully excited by her hard morning's work on the cellar, came prancingly out to enjoy more of her guest's society, she found her curled up, asleep, one hand under her cheek, looking about ten years old and very peaceful.

"Isn't she the darling!" she breathed to her mother.

"She is that!" said Mrs. O'Mara heartily. "But they've both got fine young tempers of their own, for all they're so gay and friendly. Somebody's going to learn who's rulin' the roost, when the first edge of the honeymoon's off. And it's in me mind that the under-dog won't be Mr. Francis."

"Oh, mother! How can you talk so horridly?" remonstrated Peggy. "As if they ever had any chance of quarreling!"

"There's none," said Mrs. O'Mara wisely, "but has the chancet of quarrelin' when they're man an' wife. An' why not? Sure it brightens life a bit! 'Tis fine when it's over, as the dentist said to me whin he pulled out the big tooth in me back jaw."

"Well, I know *I'm* never going to quarrel," said Peggy vehemently.

"Then ye'd be a reformed character itself, an' why not start to curb yer temper now?" said her mother. "I can mind a certain day——"

But Peggy engulfed her mother in a violent embrace, holding her mouth shut as she did so, and as Peggy was even taller than Mrs. O'Mara and quite as strong, the ensuing struggle and laughter woke Marjorie.

"Now, see that! An' take shame to yerself!" said Mrs. O'Mara apologetically. "'Twas me angel girl here, Mrs. Ellison, explainin' by fine arguments how peaceful-minded she is. Now let me away, Peggy, for there's the meal to make."

Peggy, laughing as usual, sat down unceremoniously by Marjorie.

"I was just saying that I didn't see why married people should quarrel," she explained, "and mother says that they all have to do some of it, just to keep life amusing. *I* think you and Francis get along like kittens in a basket."

"And does she think we quarrel?" inquired Marjorie sleepily, yet with suspicion.

Peggy shook her head with indubitable honesty.

"No, she only says you will sooner or later. But that's because she's Irish, I think; you know Irish people do like a bit of a shindy once in awhile. I admit I don't mind it myself. But you Americans born are quieter. When you quarrel you seem to take no pleasure whatever in it, for all I can see!"

Marjorie laughed irrepressibly.

"Oh, Peggy, I do love you!" she said. "It's true, I don't like quarreling a bit. It always makes me unhappy. It's my Puritan ancestry, I suppose."

"Well, you can't help your forebears," said Peggy sagely.

"And now shall I call up the folks for the dance to-night?"

"Oh, yes, do!" begged Marjorie, who had slept as much as she wanted to and felt ready for anything in the world.

She lay on in the khaki hammock in a happy drowsiness. The wind and sunshine alone were enough to make her happy. And there was going to be a dance to-night, and she could wear a little pink dress she remembered . . . and pretty soon there would be luncheon, and after that she was going off on a gorgeous expedition with Francis, where there was a fire, and rabbits and maybe a nice but perfectly harmless little green snake that would look at her affectionately . . . but everybody looked at you affectionately, once you were married . . . it was very warming and comforting. . . .

She was asleep again before she knew it. It was only Francis's quick step on the porch that woke her—Francis, very alert and flushed, and exceedingly hungry.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Francis, the food's been waitin' you this long time," said Mrs. O'Mara, evidently in answer to a soul-cry of Francis's, for he had not had time to say anything aloud. "Bring yer wife an' come along an' eat."

So they went in without further word spoken, and after all Marjorie found herself the possessor of as good an appetite as she'd had for breakfast.

"Be sure to get back in time to dress for the dance," Peggy warned them as they started off in the motor-cycle. "It's to be a really fine dance, with the girls in muslin dresses, not brogans and shirtwaists!"

"The girls?" asked Marjorie of Francis wonderingly.

"I think she means that the men aren't to wear brogans, or the girls shirtwaists," he explained, as they whizzed down what seemed invisible tracks in a trackless forest. "Smell the pines—aren't they good?"

Marjorie looked up, beaming.

"Stunning!" she said. "I don't see how you ever wanted to come to New York, after you'd had this."

"After a long time of this New York is pleasant again," he said. "But I hope you won't tire of this, my dear."

"Oh, no!" she said fervently. "I'm crazy to go on, and see the cabins you told me about. I can amuse myself there the whole afternoon, if you have other things you want to do."

"You dear!" said Francis.

After that they were quiet, and rode on together, enjoying the glorious afternoon.

"Here we are," said Francis after about two hours on the motor-cycle. He slipped off and held the machine for her to get out.

"Oh," said Marjorie, "it's like something out of a fairy-book!"

CHAPTER VI

They had gone through what seemed to Marjorie's city-bred eyes a dense forest, but which Francis had assured her was only a belt of woodland—quite negligible. And they had come out, now, on what Francis called a clearing. It was thick with underbrush, little trees, and saplings; while bloodroot flowered everywhere, and the gleam of thickly scattered red berries showed even as they rode quickly over the grass. In the center of things were the two cabins Francis had spoken of; one quite large—Francis seemed given to understatement—and the other of the conventional cabin size.

"The larger one is where my men stay," he explained. "Two of them are there now. That's why you see a red shirt through the window. Pierre is probably leaving it there to dry. I'll take you through if you like, but it's just a rough sort of place. The lean-to is the cook-place. All that cabin has inside is bunks, and a table or two to play cards on, as far as I remember. The other cabin——"

He stopped short, and turned away, pretending to fuss over his motor-cycle, which he had already laid down tenderly in just the right spot and the right position. Marjorie, eager and swift, sprang close to him like a squirrel. She did not look unlike one for the moment, wrapped in the thick brown coat with its furry collar.

"The other one! Oh, show me that, and tell me all about it!" she demanded ardently.

"The other one——" he said. "Well—it's nothing. That's where I wanted to bring you to stay—before I knew there wasn't anything to it but—this. I—fixed it up for—us."

In spite of all the things she had against Francis, Marjorie felt for the moment as if there was something hurting her throat. She was sorry for him, not in a general, pitying way, but the close way that hurts; as if he was her little boy, and something had hurt him, and she couldn't do anything about it.

"I'm—I'm sorry," she faltered, not looking at him.

He had evidently expected her to be angry—could she have been angry so much as all that?—for he looked up with a relieved air.

"I thought you might like to go in there and rest while I went over to where the work is being done," he said matter-of-factly. "I can't get back to you or to the Lodge till just in time for Peggy's dance. But you'll find things in the little cabin to amuse you, perhaps."

"Oh, I don't need things in the cabin to amuse me!" said Marjorie radiantly. "There's enough outside of it to keep me amused for a whole afternoon! But I do want to see in."

He took a key out of his pocket, and together they crossed the clearing to where the little cabin stood, its rustic porch thick with vines. Francis stood very still for a moment before he bent and put the key into the padlock, and Marjorie saw with another tug at her heart that his face was white, and held tense. She felt awed. Had it meant so much to him, then?

She followed him in, subdued and yet somehow excited. He moved from her side with a sort of push, and flung open the little casement windows. The scented gloom, heavy with the aromatic odors of life-everlasting and sweet fern, gave place to the fresh keen wind with new pine-scents in it, and to the dappled sunshine.

"Oh, how *lovely*!" said Marjorie. "Oh, Francis! Do you know what this place is? It's the place I've always planned I'd make for myself, way off in the woods somewhere, when I had enough money. Only I thought I'd never really see it, you know. . . . And here it is!"

He only said "Is it?" in a sort of suppressed way; but she said no more. She only stood and looked about her.

There was a broad window-seat under the casement windows he had just thrown open. It was cushioned in leaf-brown. A book lay on it, which Marjorie came close to and looked at curiously.

"Oh—my own pet 'Wind in the Willows!'" she said delightedly. "How queer!"

"No, not queer," said Francis quietly, from where he was unlocking an inner door.

So Marjorie said no more. She laid the book down a little shyly and investigated further. The walls were of stained wood, but apparently there were two thicknesses, with something between to keep the heat and cold out, for she could see a depth of some inches at the door. There was a perfectly useless and adorable and absurd balcony over the entrance, and a sort of mezzanine and a stair by which you could get to it; something like what a child would plan in its ideas of the kind of house it wanted. There was a door at the farther end leading into another room, and crossing the wooden floor, with its brown fiber rug, Marjorie opened it and entered a little back part where were packed away most surprisingly a kitchen, a bathroom, and a bedroom.

"Why, it isn't a cabin—it's a bungalow!" she said, surprised. "And what darling furniture!"

The furniture was all in keeping, perfectly simple and straight-built, of brown-stained wood. There was a long chair at one side of the window-seat, with a stool beside it, and a magazine thrown down on the stool. Everything looked as if it had just been lived in, and by some one very much like Marjorie.

"When did you do all this?" she asked curiously.

"I didn't know you'd had any time for ages and ages. Was it——"

"Was it for some other girl," was hovering on her lips. But she did not ask the question. As a matter of fact, she didn't want to hear the answer if it was affirmative. "You don't remember," he said quietly. "I put in some time training recruits not far from here. No, of course you don't remember, because I never told you. It was in between my first seeing you, and the other time when I was going around with you and Billy and Lucille. After I saw you that first time, when I had to come back here, near as it was to my old haunts,—well, I didn't know, of course, whether I was ever going to marry you or not. But—there was the cabin, my property, and I had time off occasionally and nothing to do with it. So—well, it was for the you I thought might possibly be. It made you realer, don't you see?"

Marjorie sank down as he finished, on the broad, soft window-seat; and began to cry uncontrollably.

"Oh—oh—it seems so pitiful!" he made out that she was saying finally. "I—I'm so sorry!"

Francis laughed gallantly.

"Oh, you needn't be sorry!" he said, smiling at her, though with an obvious effort. "I had a mighty good time doing it, my dear. Why, the things you said, and the way you acted while I was doing it for you—you've no idea how nice they were. You sat just——"

"Oh, that was why the book was on the window-seat, and the other things——"

"That was why," nodded Francis.

"And the stool close up to the lounge-chair——"

He nodded.

"You lay there and I sat by you on the stool," he said. "And you whispered the most wonderful things to me——"

"I didn't!" said Marjorie, flushing suddenly. "You know perfectly well all the time that was going on I—the real Me—was being a filing-clerk in New York, and running around with Lucille, and being bored with fussy people in the office, and hunting up letters for employers and hoping they wouldn't discover how much longer it took me to find them than it did really intelligent people——"

"No," said Francis, suddenly dejected, "you didn't. But—it was a nice dream. And I think, considering all that's come and gone, you needn't begrudge it to me."

"I don't," said Marjorie embarrassedly. "I—I only wish you wouldn't talk about it, because it partly makes me feel as if my feelings were hurt, and partly makes me feel terribly self-conscious."

"Then perhaps it *was* you, a little," said Francis quietly.

Marjorie moved away from him, and went into the kitchen again, with her head held high to hide the fact that her cheeks were burning. He hadn't any right to do that to her. Why, any amount of men might be making desperate love to dream-Marjories—Mr. Logan, for instance,—only his love-making would probably be exceedingly full of quotations, and rather slow and involved.

She turned, dimpling over her shoulder at Francis, who had been standing in rather a dream, where she had left him.

"Francis! Do you suppose any other men are doing that?" she asked mischievously. "Supposing our good friend Mr. Logan, for instance, has installed me in a carved renaissance chair in his apartment, and is saying nice things to me——"

"Marjorie!"

"Well, you see!" said Marjorie. "It isn't a good precedent."

"Well, I'm your husband," muttered Francis quite illogically.

"Oh, this has gone far enough," said Marjorie with determination. And she went back to the kitchen.

"I'll leave you here, if that's the case," said Francis in a friendly enough way. "I have to go over to the other cabin and see how things are and then out to where some work is going on. Can you find amusement here for awhile?"

"Oh, yes," said Marjorie. She felt a little tired, after all; and a little desirous of getting away from Francis.

"Well, if you're hungry, I think there are some things in the kitchen; and the stove is filled, and there are matches," he said in a matter-of-fact way. She wondered if he intended her to get herself a large and portentous meal. She did not feel at all hungry.

"If you'll tell me when you think you'll be back for me I'll have a little lunch ready for you before we go," she was inspired to say.

"That's fine," said Francis with the gratitude which any mention of food always inspires in a man. "Don't overwork yourself, though. You must be tired yet from your trip."

She smiled and shook her head. She went over to the door with him, and watched him as he went away, as bonny and loving a wife to all appearances as any man need ask for. Pierre, who had been dwelling in the cabin along with his red shirt, for the purpose of doing a much-needed housecleaning for himself and his mates, looked out at them with an emotional French eye.

"By gar, it's tarn nice be married!" he sighed, for his last wife had been dead long enough to have blotted out in his amiable mind the recollection of her tongue, and he was thinking over the acquirement of another one.

Meanwhile Marjorie went back to the cabin that had been built around the dream of her, picked up "The Wind in the Willows," and tried to read. But it was difficult. Life, indeed, was difficult—but interesting, in spite of everything. Francis was nice in places, after all, if only he wouldn't have those terrifying times of being too much in earnest, and over her. It was embarrassing, as she had said. She rose up and walked through the place again. It was so dainty and so friendly and so clean, so everything that she had always wanted—how *had* Francis known so much about what she liked?

She curled down on the window-seat, tired of thinking, and finally slept again. It was the change to the crisp Canada air that made her sleep so much of the time.

She sprang up in a little while conscious that there was something on her mind to do. Then she remembered. She had promised to get luncheon—or afternoon tea—or a snack—for Francis before he went. She felt as if she could eat something herself.

"At this rate," she told herself, "I'll be as fat as a *pig*!"

She thought, as she moved about, to look down at the little wrist-watch that had been one of Francis's ante-bellum gifts to her. And it was half-past five o'clock. Then it came to her that by the time she had something cooked and they had made the distance back to the lodge it would be time for the dance, and therefore that this meal would have to be supper at least. It was more fun than cooking in the kitchenette of the apartment, because there was elbow-room. Marjorie's housewifely soul had always secretly chafed under having to prepare food in a kitchen that only half of you could be in at a time.

There was a trusty kerosene stove here, and a generous white-painted cupboard full of stores and of dishes. She had another threatening of emotion for a minute when she saw that the dishes were some yellow Dutch ones that she remembered admiring. But she decided that it was no time to feel pity—or indeed any emotion that would interfere with meal-getting—and continued prospecting for stores. Condensed milk, flour, baking-powder, and a hermetically-sealed pail of lard suggested biscuits, if she hurried; cocoa and tins of bacon and preserved fruit and potatoes offered at least enough food to keep life alive, if Francis would only stay away the half-hour extra that he might.

Heaven was kind, and he did. The biscuits and potatoes were baked, the fruit was opened and on the little brown table with the yellow dishes, and the bacon was just frizzling curlily in the pan when Francis walked into the kitchen.

If it seemed pleasantly domestic to him he was wise enough not to say so. He only stated in an unemotional manner that there were eggs put down in water-glass in the entry back; and as this conveyed nothing to Marjorie he went and got some and fried them, and they had supper together.

"You're a bully good cook," he told her, and she smiled happily. Anybody could tell you that much, and it meant nothing. Sometimes dealing with Francis reminded her of a Frank Stockton fairy-tale in her childhood, where some monarch or other went out walking with a Sphinx, and found himself obliged to reply "Give it up!" to every remark of the lady's, in order not to be eaten.

"We won't have time to clear up much," was his next remark, looking pensively at a table from which they had swept everything but one biscuit and a lonely little baked potato which had what Marjorie termed "flaws," and they had had to avoid. "But then, I suppose you might say there wasn't much to clear. We'll stack these dishes and let Pierre or somebody wash 'em. Us for the dance."

They piled the yellow dishes in a gleeful hurry, and Francis went out and disposed of the scraps and did mysterious things to the kerosene stove. They were whizzing back the way they had come before Marjorie had more than caught her breath.

"We'll be a little late, if you have to do anything in the dressing line. I have to shave," said Francis.

Marjorie, who really wasn't used to men, colored a little at this marital remark, and then said that she supposed that it must have been hard not to do it in the trenches.

"Oh, that was only the poilus," said Francis, and went on into a flood of details about keeping the men

neat for the sake of their morale. It was interesting; but Marjorie thought afterward that perhaps it was because anything would have been while she was whirring along through the darkening woods in the keen, sharp-scented air. She loved it more and more, the woods and the atmosphere, and the memory of the little cabin. She promised herself that she would try some day to find the place by herself. Maybe she could borrow a horse or a bicycle or some means of locomotion and go seeking it in the forest.

"Now hurry!" admonished Francis as he landed her neatly by the veranda. "Don't let them stop you for anything to eat, as Mother O'Mara will want to."

So she scurried up to her room, not even waiting to hear the voice of temptation, and began hunting her belongings through for something. It was foolish, but she was more excited over the thought of this rough, impromptu backwoods dance than she ever had been in the city by real dances, or out with Cousin Anna at the carefully planned subscription dances where you knew just who was coming and just what they were going to wear.

Finally she gave up her efforts at decision, and went out to find
Peggy. Her room, she knew, was on the third floor.

"Come in!" said Peggy's joyous voice. Marjorie entered, and found
Peggy in the throes of indecision herself.

"You're just what I wanted to see!" said she. "Would you wear this green silk that's grand and low, but a bit short for the last styles, or this muslin that I graduated in, and it's as long as the moral law, and I slashed out the neck—but a bit plain?"

"Why, that's just what I came to ask you," said Marjorie. "What kind of clothes do you wear for dances like these?"

"Well, the grander the better, to-night, as I was telling everybody over the telephone. Mrs. Schneider, now, the priest's housekeeper, she has a red satin that she'll be sure to wear,—and the saints keep her from wearing her pink satin slippers with it, but I don't think they can. It would be a strong saint at the least," said Peggy thoughtfully. "I'd better be in my green."

"Then I can wear——" said Marjorie, and stopped to consider. She had one frock that was very gorgeous, and she decided to wear it. It would certainly seem meek contrasted with Mrs. Schneider's red satin.

"Come on, and I'll bring this, and we can hook each other up," Peggy proposed ardently, and followed her down in a kimono.

So they hooked each other up, except where there were snappers, and admired each other exceedingly. Marjorie's frock was a yellow one that Lucille had hounded her into buying, and she looked as vivid in it as a firefly.

Francis had been given orders to wear his uniform, which he was doing. He looked very natural that way to Marjorie; there were others of the men in uniform as well. There were perhaps twenty people already arrived when the girls came downstairs, seven or eight girls and twelve or fourteen men. And Marjorie discovered that young persons in the backwoods believed in dressing up to their opportunities. Some of the frocks were obviously home-made, but all were gorgeous, even in the case of one black-eyed *habitant* damsel who had constructed a confection, copied accurately and cleverly from some advanced fashion-paper, out of cheesecloth and paper muslin!

One of the men was sacrificed to the phonograph, and for hours it never stopped going. Records had been brought by others of the men and girls, and Marjorie had never seen such gay and unwearied dancing. She was tossed and caught from one big backwoodsman to another, the dances being "cut-in" shamelessly, because the women were fewer than the men. They nearly all danced well, French or Yankee or Englishmen. There were a couple of young Englishmen whom she particularly liked, who had ridden twenty miles, she heard, to come and dance. And finally she found herself touched on the shoulder by her own husband, and dancing smoothly away with him.

"This isn't much like the last time and place where we danced," he said, smiling down at her and then glancing at the big, bare room with its kerosene lamps and bough-trimmed walls. "Do you remember?"

She laughed and nodded. "Maxim's, wasn't it? But I like this best. There's something in the air here that keeps you feeling so alive all the time, and so much like having fun. In spite of all our tragedies, and your very bad temper"—she laughed up at him impertinently—"I'm enjoying myself as much as Peggy is, though I probably don't look it."

"There isn't so much of you to look it," explained Francis. Their eyes both followed young Peggy, where, magnificent in her green gown and gold slippers, she was frankly flirting with a French-Canadian who was no match for her, but quite as frankly overcome by her charms. "But what there is," he added politely, "is very nice indeed."

They laughed at this like a couple of children, and moved on toward a less frequented part of the floor, for there was a big man in khaki, one of Francis's men, who was coming dangerously near, and had in his eye a determination to cut in. Francis and Marjorie moved downwards till they were almost opposite the door. And as they were dancing across the space before the door there was a polite knock on it. They stood still, still interlaced, as an unpartnered man lounging near it threw it open. And on the threshold, like a ghost from the past, stood Mr. Logan. In spite of his mysterious nervous ailment he had nerved himself to make the journey after Marjorie, and walked in, softly and slowly, indeed, and somewhat travel-soiled, but very much himself, and apparently determined on a rescue. Marjorie stared at him in horror. Rescue was all right theoretically; but not in the middle of as good a party as this. And what could Francis do to her now?

What he did was to release her with decision, and come forward with the courtesy he was quite capable of at any crisis, and welcome Logan to their home.

"You've caught us in the middle of a party," he concluded cordially, "but I don't suppose you feel much like dancing. Perhaps after a little something to eat and drink you'd like to rest a bit. Come speak to Mr. Logan, my dear," he finished, with what Marjorie stigmatized as extreme impudence; and Marjorie, in her firefly draperies, came forward with as creditable a calm as her husband, and greeted Mr. Logan, after which Francis called Mrs. O'Mara to show him to a room where he could rest.

"I came to talk to you——" began Mr. Logan as he was led hospitably away.

"I'll be at your service as soon as you've had a little rest and food," said Francis in his most charming manner.

He actually put his arm about Marjorie again and was going on with the dance, when the telephone rang. The woman nearest it answered it, and called Francis over excitedly. Marjorie, too proud to ask any questions, was nevertheless eaten up with curiosity, and finally edged near enough to hear above the phonograph.

"You'll be all right till to-morrow? Very well—I'll be out then and see what to do."

"What's the matter?" demanded Peggy, who had no pride to preserve.

Francis smiled, but looked a little worried, too.

"Nothing very serious, but inconvenient. Pierre, the cook for the outfit, suddenly decided to leave to-day, and did. He said he thought it was time he got married again, and has gone in quest of a bride, I suppose. The deuce of it is, we're so short-handed. Well, never mind——"

"If mother wasn't so silly about the ghosts," began Peggy.

"Well, she is, if ye call it silly," said Mrs. O'Mara from where she stood with her partner in all the glory of a maroon satin that fitted her as if she were an upholstered sofa. "I'd no more go live in that clearin' with the Wendigees, or whatever 'tis the Canucks talk about, than in Purgatory itself. Wendigees is Injun goblins," she explained to her partner, "and there's worse nor them, too."

She crossed herself expertly, and in almost the same movement swept her partner, not of the tallest, away in a fox-trot. She fox-trotted very well.

Marjorie went on dancing, and hoping that Mr. Logan would go to bed and to sleep, or have a fit of nerves that would incapacitate him from further interfering with her. But the hope was in vain, for Francis appeared from nowhere in about fifteen minutes, and beckoned her to follow him to where she knew Logan was waiting.

The two men sat down gravely in the little wooden room where Logan had been shown. It was Francis who spoke first.

"Mr. Logan insists, Marjorie, that you appealed to him for rescue. He puts it to me, I must say, very reasonably, that no sensible man would travel all this way to bring back a girl unless she had asked him to. He says that you wrote him that you were being treated severely."

"I didn't! I never did!" exclaimed outraged Marjorie, springing up and standing before them. "Show me my letter!"

"Unfortunately," said Mr. Logan wistfully, "I destroyed it, because I have always found that the wisest thing to do with letters. But I am prepared to take my oath that you wrote me, asking me to help you. I am extremely sorry to find that you are in such a position as to—forgive me, Mr. Ellison, but it seems rather like it—to be so dominated by this gentleman as not to even admit——"

"You see what it looks like," broke in Francis, turning to his wife furiously. "Never ask me to believe you again. I don't trust you—I never will trust you. Nobody will, if you keep on as you've begun. Go back with him, then—you're not my slave, much as you may pretend it."

"I won't!" said Marjorie spiritedly. "I've had enough of this. I'll stay here, if it takes ten years, till you admit that you've treated me horribly, and misjudged me. I've played fair. I've no way of proving it, against you two men, but I have! I'll prove it by any test you like."

"There's only one way you can convince me that one word you've said since you came up here was the truth," he told her, suddenly quiet and cold. "If you stay, of your own free will, out there in the clearing; if you take over the work that Pierre fell down on this evening, and stay there looking after me and my men—I'll believe you. There's no fun to doing that, just work; it stands to reason that you wouldn't do that for any reason unless to clear yourself. If you don't want to do that, you may go home with this gentleman; indeed, I won't let you do anything else. Take your choice."

Marjorie looked at him for a moment as if she wanted to do something violent to him. Then she spoke.

CHAPTER VII

"I see what you mean," she said. "I wasn't sporting in the first place—I wouldn't live up to my bargain. That's made you more apt to believe that I've been acting the same way ever since. You don't think I can see _any_thing through. Well—not particularly for your sake—more for my own, I guess—I'm going to see this through, if I die doing it. I'll stay—and take Pierre's place, Francis."

Francis's severe young face did not change at all.

"Very well," he said.

"But you understand," she went on, "that I'm not doing this to win anything but my own self-respect. And at the end of the three months, of course, I shall go back to New York. And you'll let me go, and see that I get free."

"I wouldn't do anything else for the world," said Francis in the same unmoved voice.

"Very well, then—we understand each other." She turned to Logan, who had sprung to his feet and tried to interfere a couple of times while she talked. "And please remember that this arrangement does not go beyond us three," she said. "I would prefer that no one else knew how matters stood."

Logan looked a little baffled. He was ten years older than either of them, but so many actual clashing things happening had never come his way before. His ten years' advantage had been spent writing stylistic essays, and such do not fit one for stepping down into the middle of a lot of primitive young emotions. He felt suddenly helpless before these passionate, unjust, emotional young people. He felt a little forlorn, too, as if the main currents of things had been sweeping them by while he stood carefully on the bank, trying not to get his feet wet. A very genuine emotion of pity for Marjorie had brought him up here, pity more mixed with something else than he had been willing to admit. It was the first thing he had done for a long, long time that was romantic and unconsidered and actual. And it appeared that, after all, he wasn't needed. Concentration on the nuances of minor fifteenth-century poets had unfitted him for being swept on, as these had been, by the world-currents. They had married each other, pushed by the mating instinct in the air—the world's insistence on marriage to balance the death that had swept it. Now they were struggling to find their balance against each other, to be decent, to be fair, to make themselves and each other what they thought they ought to be. He could see what they were doing and why much more clearly than they could themselves. But he couldn't be a part of it—he had stood aside from life too long, with his nerves and his passion for artistic details and pleasures of the intellect.

But he bowed quietly, and smiled a little. He felt suddenly very tired.

"Certainly it shall go no farther," he assured her. "And I owe you an apology for the trouble which I

fear I have ignorantly brought upon you. If there is anything I can say——"

She shook her head proudly, and Francis, fronting them both, made a motion of negation, too.

"You must be tired," he added to his gesture. "Or would you care to watch the dancers awhile?"

"No, I thank you," said Mr. Logan courteously in his turn. "If you will tell me of some near-by hotel ——"

"There's only this," explained Francis. "But I think your room is ready by now. Miss O'Mara—I'll call her—will show you to it."

Peggy, summoned by a signal whistle from the ballroom, convoyed Logan upstairs with abundant good-will and much curiosity. She had never seen any one like him before, and took in his looks and belongings with the intense and frank absorption of an Indian. Indeed, as she explained to Marjorie, whom she met at the foot of the stairs, it was only by the help of the saints and her own good decency that she didn't follow him into his room and stay there to watch him unpack.

"With the charming, purry voice he has, and all the little curlicues when he finishes his words, and the little cane—does he never sleep without it, would you say?—and the little Latin books he reads——"

But here Marjorie pulled her up.

"How on earth do you know he reads little Latin books?"

Peggy flushed generously.

"Well, if you must know, I gave one teeny weeny peek through the crack in the door after I left him, and he was thrown down across his cot like a long, graceful tomcat or leopard or something, and he pulled a little green leather book out of his pocket and went to reading it on the spot. 'Pervigilium Veneris,' its name was. All down the side."

Marjorie had heard of it; in fact, in pursuance of her education Mr. Logan had made her read several translations of it. It had bored her a little, but she had read it dutifully, because she had felt at that time that it would be nice to be intellectually widened, and because Logan had praised it so highly.

"Oh, yes, I know," she said.

"And is it a holy book?" Peggy inquired.

"Just a long Latin poem about people running around in the woods at night and having a sort of celebration of Venus's birthday," said Marjorie absently. It occurred to her Logan would have been worse shocked if he could have heard her offhand summing-up of his pet poem than he had been by her attitude about going back to New York with him. But she had more important things on her mind than Latin poetry. When Peggy met her she was on her way to go off and think them out.

"Good-night, Peggy," she said. "I'm going to bed. I have to get up early and go to work."

Peggy laughed.

"Don't talk nonsense. The dance isn't half over, and everybody's crazy to dance with you. You can sleep till the crack of doom to-morrow, and with not a soul to stop you."

Marjorie shook her head, smiling a little.

"No. I'm going over to the clearing to do the cooking for the men. I told Francis I would, tonight."

Peggy made the expected outcry.

"To begin with, I'll wager you can't cook—a little bit of a thing like you, that I could blow away with a breath! And you'd be all alone there. Mother won't do it because she's afraid of wraiths"—Peggy pronounced it "wraths," and it was evidently a quotation from Mrs. O'Mara—"and it would be twice as scary for you. Though, to be sure, I suppose you'd have Francis. I suppose that's your reason, the both of you—it sounds like the bossy sort of plan Francis makes."

This had not occurred to Marjorie. But she saw now that the only plausible reason not the truth that they could give for her taking Pierre's job was her desire to see more of her husband.

"Well, it's natural we should want to see more of each other," she began lamely.

"Oh, I suppose so," said Peggy offhandedly, and with one ear pricked toward the music. "But when my

time comes I hope I won't be that bad that I drag a poor girl off to do cooking, so I can see the more of her."

"You're getting your sexes mixed," said Francis coolly, strolling up behind the girls. "Peggy, your partner is looking for you. I'll take you over after luncheon to-morrow, Marjorie."

"Very well," she said. "Good-night."

If his heart smote him, as Marjorie's little, indomitable figure mounted the stairs, shoulders back and head high, he made no sign of it. Instead, in spite of the preponderance of men, he went back to the dance, and danced straight through till the end had come.

Marjorie went to bed, as she had said she would do. She did not go to sleep. Marjorie, as has been said, was not brave—that is, she could and did do brave things, but she always did them with her heart in her slippers. She did not know what the cooking would be, but she was sure it would be worse than she could imagine, and too much for her strength. The only comfort was the recollection that the dear brown cabin was hers to live in, every moment that she was not at work. She would have that rest and comfort. There was the shelf of books chosen for her by the far-off Francis who was not doubtful of her, and loved her and dreamed about her, and built a house all around the vision of her. And there might be times when she could hurry up a great deal, and lie on the window-seat and look out at the woodlands and dream.

She finally went to sleep. She wakened with a start, early, vaguely remembering that there was a great deal to do. Full remembrance came as she sprang out of bed and ran down the hall to her bath. She had to pack, and after luncheon Francis would carry her off to imprisonment with hard labor. And —why on earth was she doing it, when she could still go back with Logan? For a long half hour she struggled with herself, one minute deciding; to go back, the next deciding to stay. Finally she faced the thing. She would see it through, if it killed her. She would make Francis respect her, if it took six months instead of three at hard labor. She would take the wages for the work she had done, and go back home a free, self-respecting woman.

She dressed herself quickly, and went down to breakfast, braced to play her part before the O'Maras. Short as her time with them, she was fond of them already.

"I think your devotion is a bit hard on yer wife," remarked Mrs.
O'Mara, whom Peggy had put in possession of the facts. "If I were her,
I'd value an affection more that had less o' dishwashin' in it!"

"She's helping me over a pretty hard place." Francis said this calmly. But he flushed in a way that, as Marjorie knew, meant he was disturbed. "You know every man counts just now, and labor is cruelly scarce. I'm doing mine and a day-laborer's work besides, now. And the contract has to be finished."

"Well, of course, there's a gown or so for her in it," said Mrs. O'Mara comfortably. "And 'tis no more than a woman should do, to help out her man if he needs it. Have ye any aprons or work-dresses, me dear, for if not Peggy and me will make ye some. We've a bolt of stuff."

"No, and I'd be very glad if you would," said Marjorie, feeling the thing more irrevocable every moment.

"And rest this morning, and I'll pack for you," said Peggy affectionately. She led Marjorie out to the swing herself, and went upstairs to pack before she went to help her mother with the breakfast dishes.

Marjorie was too restless to lie still. She went out and walked about the place, and came back and lay down, and so put in the interminable hours till luncheon. After luncheon Francis appeared like the messenger of doom he was, put her and a small bag in the side-car and carried her off to her place of servitude.

The ride, in spite of all, was pleasant. For a while neither of them spoke. Then Francis did.

"I feel as if this was unfair to you—for apparently the O'Maras think, and I suppose everybody will, that you really are doing this to show your fondness for me. I shall have to ask you to let them think so."

"I have," she answered curtly.

"You don't understand. I—I am going to have to stay in the cabin with you. . . . There is the little upstairs balcony, I can bunk in that. You know—the one over the door, with the little winding stair leading up to it. I—I'm sorry."

This was one more thing Marjorie hadn't counted on. But after all what did it matter? She expected to

be so deadly tired from the work she had promised to do that she would never know whether Francis was in the house at all. And if there really were bears once in awhile it would really be better not to be all alone with them.

"Very well," she said. She looked hungrily at the thick trees they were speeding through. She supposed she would never have time to lie out under a tree, or go hunting for flowers and new little wood-paths again. She had read stories of lone, draggled women in logging-camps, toiling so hard they hadn't even time to comb their hair, but always wore it pulled back tight from their forehead. This wasn't a logging-camp, but she supposed there was very little difference.

She was very quiet for awhile. Francis, turning finally, a little uneasy, found that she was quietly crying. It happened that he had never seen her cry before.

"Please, Marjorie!" he begged in a terrified voice. "Please stop! Is there anything I can do?"

"You have done everything," she said in a little quiet voice that tried not to break, but did, most movingly, on the last word.

She said nothing more after that. After awhile she got hold of herself, dried her eyes, and began to watch the woods desperately again, as if she would never see them any more. If she had but known it, she was making Francis suffer as much as she was suffering herself.

"I'll bring the rest of your things over now," he said, when he had carried her little bag in and put it on her bed. He went out and left her alone, in the little wood-walled bedroom with its high, latticed windows, and Indian blankets and birch-bark trimmings. She lay on the bed apathetically awhile, then she began to notice things a little. There was a kodak on her bureau. There were snowshoes, too small for a man surely—if you could tell of a thing the size of snowshoes—hanging on the wall. There was a fishing-rod case, with something hanging near it that she imagined was a flybook. There was a little trowel, and a graceful birch-bark basket, as if some one might want to go out and bring home plants. She got up finally, her curiosity stronger than her unhappiness, and investigated.

There was dust on everything. That is, except in one particular. On top of each article she had noticed was a square, clean place about the size of an envelope. There had been a note lying or pinned to each one of the things.

It occurred to Marjorie that a man who had not noticed the dust might have overlooked one of the notes; and she commenced a detailed and careful search. The kodak told no tales, nor the snowshoes. The fishing-rod was only explanatory to the extent of being too light and small for a man, and the basket's only contents were two pieces of oilcloth, apparently designed to keep wet plants from dripping too much.

She rose and tiptoed out into the living-room. There might be more notes there. Her spirits had gone up, and she was laughing to herself a little—it felt like exploring Bluebeard's castle. She investigated the book case, shaking out every book. She ran up to the toy balcony and even pushed out the couch there, noticing for the first time that the balcony had curtains which could be drawn. But there was nothing behind couch or curtains. She put her hands on the little railing and looked down at the room below her, to see if she had missed anything. And her eyes fell on a cupboard which was level with the wall at one side, and had so escaped her eye heretofore. Also there was a scrapbasket which might tell tales.

She dashed down the little stair, and made for the scrapbasket, but Francis was more thorough than she had thought, and it was empty. She opened the cupboard and looked in—there was a little flashlight lying near it, and she illuminated the dark with it. There in the cupboard lay a banjo.

"Gracious!" breathed Marjorie. "What a memory!" For she *could* play the banjo, and it appeared that she must have said so to Francis in those first days. "He must have dashed home and made out lists every night!" she concluded as she dragged it out. It was unstrung, but new strings lay near it, coiled in their papers. And under the papers, so like them that he had forgotten to destroy it, lay a veritable note.

"It isn't really from him to me," she thought, her heart beating unaccountably as she sat back on her heels and tore the envelope open. "It's from the Francis he thought he was, to the Marjorie he thought I was."

But she read it just the same.

"For my dear little girl, if she comes true," was the superscription.

"I don't know whether you'll find this first or last, honey. But it's for you to play on, sometimes, in the evenings, sitting on the window-seat with me, or out on the veranda if you'd rather. But wherever you sit to play it, I may stay quite close to you, mayn't I?"

She was tired and overstrained. That was probably why she put both arms around the banjo as if it was somebody that loved her, and cried on it very much as if it were a baby. And when she went back to her room to replace things as she had found them she carried it with her.

She was calmer after that, for some reason. She had the illogical feeling that some one had been kind to her. She put her things away in the drawers, and even had the courage to lay out for herself the all-enveloping gingham apron, much shortened, which Mrs. O'Mara had loaned her till she and Peggy could run up some more. She supposed Francis would want her to start in with the cooking that night. So she put on her plainest dress and easiest shoes, and then, there being nothing else to do, took the banjo out into the sitting-room and began to string it. And as she strung she thought.

She was going to have to be pretty close to Francis till her term of service was up; she might as well not fight him. It would make things easier all round if she didn't, as long as she had to keep on friendly terms before people.

The truth was, that she couldn't but feel softened to the man who had written that boyish, loving note. "Even if it wasn't to the her he knew now, it was to the Marjorie of last year, and she was a near relation," thought the Marjorie of this year whimsically.

So when Francis came back with the rest of her baggage he found her on the window-seat with the banjo in her lap, fingering it softly, and smiling at him. She could see that he was a little startled, but he had himself in hand directly, and came forward, saying, "So you found the banjo. I got it for you in the first place. Is it any good?"

"Oh, did you?" inquired his wife innocently. "Yes, it's a very good banjo. Maybe I'll find time to play it some day when the housework for the men is out of the way. What do I do when I begin? And hadn't we better go over now?"

"I didn't expect you to start till to-morrow," he explained. "I've taken one of the men off his regular work to attend to it till then."

"Oh, that's kind of you," she answered, still friendly and smiling to a degree that seemed to perplex him. "But perhaps you could take me over to-night and show me. I'll get supper for us two here, if you like, and afterward we can go over, and you can introduce me to your men as the new cook. I hope they'll like me as well as Pierre."

He looked at her still as if she were behaving in a very unexpected way. A tamed Marjorie was something new in his experience; and tameness at this juncture was particularly surprising. Francis was beginning to feel like a brute, which may have been what his wife intended.

"That's very kind of you," he managed to say. "You're sure you are not too tired for any of that?"

"Being tired isn't going to count, is it?" she asked, smiling. "No, I don't mind doing it. It will be like playing with a doll-house. You know, I love this little place."

In her wicked heart she was thinking, "He shall miss me—oh, if I can keep my temper and be perfectly lovely for three months he shall miss me so when I go and get my divorce that he will want to *die*!" And she looked up at him, one hand on the banjo, as if they were the best friends in the world.

"It isn't time to get supper yet, is it?" she pursued. "You used to like to hear me sing. Don't you want to sit down here by me while I see how the banjo works, just for a little while?"

"No!" said Francis abruptly. "I have to—I have to go and see after a lot more work."

He flung out the door, and it crashed after him. And Marjorie laughed softly and naughtily to herself over the banjo, and pushed the note that had dwelt within farther down inside her dress. "I wish I had the rest!" said she. "Let me see. The kodak was for both of us to go out and take pictures together, of course. The snowshoes—that would have had to wait till winter. The basket and trowel were so we could plant lots of lovely woodsy things we found around the cabin, to see if they would take root. And he must have been going to teach me to fish. I wonder why he wasn't going to teach me to shoot. There must be a rifle somewhere—maybe it hasn't lost its note, if it was hidden hard enough. And he remembered how I liked 'surprises.' He certainly would have made a good lover if I hadn't——"

She did not finish. She got up and hunted for the rifle, which was not to be found. Then she went into the kitchen and hunted for stores, and wondered how on earth a balanced menu could be evolved from

cans and dried things exclusively. But the discovery of a cache of canned vegetables helped her out, and as she really was a good cook, and loved cooking, what Francis returned to was not supper, but a very excellent little dinner. And his wife had found time, as well, to dress herself in the most fluffy and useless-looking of rosy summer frocks, with white slippers. She looked more fragile and decorative and childish than he had ever seen her, leaning across the little table talking brightly to him about her adventures in the discovery of the things that made up the meal.

An old quotation about "breaking a butterfly upon a wheel" came to him as she chattered on, telling him delightedly how she had made up her mind to surprise him with tomato bisque if it was her last act, and how she had discovered a box that was labeled "condensed milk," and opened it with infinite pains and a hatchet; and how after she had nearly killed herself struggling with it, she had finally opened it, and found that what it really contained was deviled ham in small, vivid tins; and how she triumphed over Fate by using the ham with other things for *hors d'oeuvres*; and how she finally found powdered milk in other tins, and achieved her goal after all.

She was exactly as she would have been if all had gone well; and it is not to be supposed that Francis could help feeling it. At first he was quiet, almost gloomy; but presently, as she talked gaily on about all the trifles she could think of—domestic trifles all of them, or things to do with the cabin and its surroundings—he gave himself up to the enjoyment of the hour. It was as if he said to himself, "I'll forget for this little space of time that it isn't real." He looked absorbedly into the little vivid face at the other side of the table, and once, before he thought, put out his hand to take her hand where it lay, little and slim and fragile-looking, on the table. He drew it back quickly, but not before Marjorie had seen the instinctive motion.

She smiled at him brilliantly, and touched him lightly on the shoulder as she passed.

"Come, help me, Francis," she said. "This is our house, you know, and I mustn't do everything alone. And then I must hurry over to the other cabin, and look over my new kingdom, and it would be a shame to do it after your faithful slaves had gone to bed. They would have to get up and dress and stand at attention, wouldn't they, when they heard your august footstep?"

She laughed openly at him as she went into the kitchen, and he followed her and helped her clear away obediently and smiling.

"And now, we'll go over," she said, when everything was in place again. "Get me my long blue cape, Francis, please. It's hanging against the door in my room."

He came and wrapped her in it, and crossed with her the space between the two cabins.

"They're up yet," he said, and knocked on the door.

CHAPTER VIII

There was nothing surprising or exciting to behold when the door flew open, and the two entered.

"Oh, I've met you before," said Marjorie politely to the man who had opened it. She had danced with him the night before, and it was pleasant to find that she had not to deal entirely with strangers. He was a tired-looking, middle-aged Englishman, with a tanned, plump face that had something whimsical and what Marjorie characterized to herself as motherly about it. And the fact that he was clad in a flannel shirt and very disreputable overalls did not make him the less distinctively gentle-bred. He greeted her courteously, and took out his pipe—a pipe that was even more disreputable than his clothes.

"Mrs. Ellison wanted to come over to-night and see what she had to do,"
Francis explained.

"You mean that you were in earnest about her volunteering to take Pierre's place?" demanded the Englishman, looking at the little smiling figure in pink organdy.

"I know I look useless," interposed Marjorie for herself. "But Mr. Ellison will tell you that I really can work hard. If somebody will only show me a little about the routine I'll be all right."

"I've taken over Pierre's job for the moment," he replied. "Assuredly

I'll show you all I can. But it's rough work for a girl."

Marjorie smiled on.

"Very well, show me, please," she demanded, as she would if the question had been one of walking over red-hot plowshares.

She stood and looked about her as he answered her, so intent that she did not hear what he replied.

The place had rows of bunks in various stages of untidiness. It was lighted by two very smoky kerosene lamps, and had in its middle a table with cards on it. Three men sat about the table, as if they did not quite know whether to come forward and be included in the conversation or not. At the further end Marjorie could see the door that led to the cooking-place, and eyed it with interest.

"These are all of the men who are here," Francis explained. "There is another camp some miles further in the forest."

"Am I to cook for them as well?" demanded Marjorie coolly.

"Oh, no," the Englishman answered. He seemed deeply shocked at the idea. "They have a cook. By the way, Mrs. Ellison, it is only poetic justice that you should have taken over this job; for do you know that the reason Pierre gave for his sudden flight in the direction of marriage was that you and Mr. Ellison looked so happy he got lonesome for a wife!"

"Good gracious!" gasped Marjorie before she remembered herself. . . .
"That is—I didn't know our happiness showed as far off as that."

She did not dare to look at Francis, whom she divined to be standing rigidly behind her. "And now could you show me the place where I have to cook, and the things to cook with?"

Mr. Pennington—Harmsworth-Pennington was his veritable name, as she learned later—took the hint and swept her immediately off to the lean-to. The *tout-ensemble* was not terrifying. It consisted of a kerosene stove of two burners, another one near it for emergencies, a wooden cupboard full of heavy white dishes, and a lower part to it where the stores were.

"The hardest thing for you will be getting up early," he said sympathetically. "The men have to have breakfast and be out of here by seven o'clock. And they take dinner-pails with them. Then there's nothing to get till the evening meal."

"Of course there'd be tidying to do," suggested Marjorie avidly, for she hated disorder, and saw a good deal about her.

"If you had the strength for it," said Pennington doubtfully.

"Francis thinks I have," she answered with a touch of wickedness.

Francis, behind her, continued to say nothing at all.

She spent five minutes more in the lean-to with the opportune Pennington, and gathered from him, finally, that next morning there would have to be a big pot of oatmeal cooked, and bacon enough fried for five hungry men. Griddle cakes, flapjacks, or breadstuff of some kind had to be produced also; coffee in a pot that looked big enough for a hotel, with condensed milk, and a meal apiece for their dinner-hour.

"I just give 'em anything cold that's left over," said Pennington unsympathetically. "There has to be lots of it, that's all."

Marjorie cried out in horror.

"Oh, they mustn't have those cold! But—do they have to have all that every morning?"

"Great Scott, no!" exclaimed the scandalized Pennington. "Some days they just have flapjacks, and some days just bacon and eggs and bread. And sometimes oatmeal extra. I didn't mean that all these came at once."

She felt a bit relieved.

"I'll be in to-morrow at six," she assured him, still smiling bravely.
"I think I can manage it alone."

"One of us can always do the lifting for you, and odd chores," he told her.

After that she met the other men, and went back to the cabin. Francis was still following her in silence.

"How nice they are, even the grumpy ones!"

she told him radiantly. "Don't forget to knock on my door in time to-morrow, Francis."

She gave him no time to reply. She simply went to bed. And in spite of all that had come and gone she was so tired that she fell asleep as soon as she was there.

She was awakened by Francis's knock at what seemed to her the middle of the night. Then she remembered that the pines shut off the light so that it was high daylight outside before it was in here. A vague feeling of terror came over her before she remembered why; and for a moment she lay still in the unfamiliar bed, trying to remember. When she did remember she was so much more afraid that she sprang out hurriedly, because things, for some reason, are always worse when you aren't quite awake. Or better. But there was nothing to be better just now.

She bathed and dressed with a dogged quickness, trying meanwhile to reassure herself. After all, it was only cooking on a little larger scale than she was used to. After all, it was only for a few months. After all, she mightn't be broken down by it. And—this was the only thing that was any real comfort—it would free her so completely of Francis, this association with him, and the daily, hourly realization that he had treated her in a cruel, unjust way, that when she went back she would be glad to forget that he had ever lived; even the days when he had been so pleasant and comforting.

If Francis knew that the little aproned figure, with flushed cheeks and high-held head, was terrified and homesick under the pride, he said nothing. Nothing, that is, beyond the ordinary courtesies. He offered to help her on with her cloak. After one indignant look at him she let him. The indignation would have puzzled him; but Marjorie's feeling was that a man who would doom you to this sort of a life, put you to such a test as Francis had, was adding insult to injury in helping you on and off with wraps. He, of course, couldn't grasp all this, and felt a little puzzled.

She walked out and over to the door of the lean-to, leaving him to follow.

Pennington's kind and motherly face was peering anxiously out. It came to Marjorie that she was going to have a good deal of trouble keeping him from taking too much work off her shoulders. Some men have the maternal instinct strongly developed, and of such, she was quite sure, was Pennington. She wondered what he was doing so far from England, and what she could do to pay him back for his friendliness—for she felt instinctively that she had a friend in him.

Sure enough, he had started the big pot of water boiling for the oatmeal, and was salting it as she entered.

"Oh, let me!" she cried, and before his doubting eyes she began to stir the oatmeal in.

"I suppose there never was a double boiler big enough," she began doubtfully. "It would save so much trouble."

"We might make one out of a dishpan, perhaps, swung inside this pot," he said.

"And I always thought Englishmen weren't resourceful!" she commented, smiling at him. "We'll try it to-morrow."

Meanwhile, having stirred in all the oatmeal necessary, she lowered the burners a little and began on the coffee. Then she saw the point of the other stove, for she found she needed it for the bacon and biscuits. The actual work was not so complicated; the thing that appalled her was Pennington's insistence on the awful amount of food needed for the six men and herself. But, of course, as she reminded herself, there *was* a difference between cooking for Cousin Anna and herself on the maid's day out, or for Lucille and herself, and cooking for six hungry men who worked in the open air at reforesting. She did not quite know how people reforested, but she had a vague image in her mind of people going along with armfuls of trees which they stuck in holes.

Presently the breakfast was prepared, and Pennington banged briskly on a dishpan and howled "Chow!" in a way that was most incongruous. He really should have been a Rural Dean, by his looks and his gentle, almost clergymanly genial manners, and every time Marjorie looked at him in his rough clothes she got a shock because he wasn't one.

There was a long trestled table down the middle of the men's cabin, and each man, streaming out, picked up a plate and got it filled with food, and sat himself down in what seemed to be an appointed place. There were mugs for coffee, and Marjorie, under Pennington's direction, set them at all the

places, and then went up and down filling them. There was a tin of condensed milk on the table, set there by Pennington's helpful hand.

She ran up and down, waiting on her charges, and feeling very much as if she were conducting a Sunday-school class picnic. The men, except Pennington and the other young Englishman, who never talked to the last day she knew him, seemed struck into terrified silence by their new cook.

And then a terrible thought came over her—it was rather a funny one, though, for the excitement of doing all this new work had stirred her up, rather than saddened her. She had never prepared any dinner-pails for them. She fled back into the cook-place precipitately, snatched the pails down from the shelf, and began feverishly spreading large biscuits with butter and bacon.

"There's marmalade in the big tin back of you," said Pennington's softly cultivated Oxford voice from the doorway. "And if you fill the small buckets with coffee they will take them, together with the rest of their dinners."

"But is that enough variety, just bacon and marmalade sandwiches?" she asked.

He nodded.

"There are tinned vegetables that you can give them to-night, if you wish."

So, he helping her, they got the last dinner-pail filled before the hungry horde poured out again. Each passed with a sheepish or courteous word of thanks, took his pail and went on. It did not occur to Marjorie till she saw Pennington go, eating as he went a large biscuit, that he must have cut his own meal very short in order to help her.

"What nice people there are in the world!" she breathed, sinking on the doorstep a minute to think and take breath.

She sat there longer than she really should, because the air was so crisp and lovely, and just as she was beginning to rise and go in to the summoning dishes, a small striped squirrel trotted across the grass and requested scraps with impudent wavings of his two small front paws. So she really had to stay and feed him. And after that there was a bird that actually seemed as if it was going to walk up to her, almost as the squirrel had done. He flew away just at the most exciting moment, but Marjorie didn't hold it against him. And then—why, then, she felt suddenly sleepy and lay down with her cloak swathed around her, under a tree, for just a minute. And when she looked at her wrist-watch it was eleven o'clock.

She felt guilty to the last degree. What would they say at the office to a young woman who took naps in the morning?

And then the blessed memory that there was no reason why she shouldn't do exactly as she pleased with her time, so long as the dishes were done after awhile, came to her.

"There's no clock in the forest," she thought, smiling drowsily; and lay serenely on the pine-needles for another half hour.

When she did go in, the quantity of dishes wasn't so terrific. There had been no courses. Each man had left behind him an entirely empty plate and mug and knife and fork; that was all. And Marjorie seemed to have more energy and delight in running about and doing things than she had ever known she possessed, in the heavy New York air. She washed the dishes and swept out the cabin with a gay good will that surprised herself. She tried to feel like Cinderella or Bluebeard's wife or some of the oppressed heroines who had loomed large in her past, but it wasn't to be done. After that she was so hungry—her own breakfast had been taken in bites, on the run—that she ate up all the remaining biscuits, after toasting them and making herself bacon sandwiches as she had for the men; quite forgetting that her own abode lay near, filled to repletion with stores of a quite superior kind. The bacon sandwiches and warmed-over coffee tasted better than anything she had ever eaten in her life.

And then there was a whole long afternoon ahead of her, before she had to do a solitary thing for the men's supper!

"I must have 'faculty'!" said Marjorie to herself proudly, thinking more highly of her own talents than she ever had before. The fact that as a filing-clerk she had not shone had made her rather meek about her own capacities. She had always taken it impudently for granted that she was attractive, because the fact had been, so to speak, forced on her. But there had been a very humble-minded feeling about her incapacity for a business life. Miss Kaplan, for instance, she of the exuberant emotions and shaky English, had a record for accuracy and speed in her particular line which was unsullied by a single

lapse. And Lucille, lazy, luxury-loving Lucille, concealed behind her fluffinesses an undoubted and remorseless executive ability. Compared to them Marjorie had always felt herself a most useless person. That was why she always was meeker in office hours than out of them. And to find herself swinging this work, even for one meal, without a feeling of incapacity and unworthiness, made her very cheered indeed. The truth was, she was doing a thing she had a talent for.

"And I'm not tired!" she marveled. The change of air was responsible for that, of course.

She went back to her forgotten cabin, singing beneath her breath. It had a rather tousled air, but in her new enthusiasm she went through it like a whirlwind. She attacked her own room first, and created spotless order in it. Then she went at the living-room. Then—it was with a curious reluctance—she climbed the stairs to Francis's absurd little curtained balcony.

Francis, evidently, did not sleep so very well, or he had not that night at all events. The couch was very tossed, one pillow lay on the ground with a dent in its midst as if an angry hand had thrust it there, and, most unfairly, hit it after it was down. The covers were "every which way," as Marjorie said, picking them up and shaking them out with housewifely care. Francis's pajamas and a shabby brown terry bath-robe lay about the floor, the bathrobe in a ridiculously lifelike position with both its sleeves thrown forward over the pillow, as if it were trying to comfort it for all it had been through.

Everything had aired since morning, so she disguised the couch again in its slip-cover, put the cretonne covers back on the pillows, and the couch stood decorous and daytime-like again. She laid her hand on the pillow for a moment after she was all through, as if she were touching something she was sorry for.

"Poor Francis!" she said softly, smiling a little. "After all, he isn't so terribly much older than I am." She felt suddenly motherly toward him, and like being very kind. That maltreated pillow was so funny and boylike. "It isn't a bit like the storybooks," she mused. "In them you get all thrilled because a man is so masterful. Well," Marjorie tried to be truthful, even when she was alone with herself and the couch, "I guess I was thrilled, a little, when he carried me off that way. I certainly couldn't have gone if I'd known about the housework business. But now, the only part of him I like is when he *isn't* sitting on me. . . . I wonder if I'll ever be the same person, after all this?"

She never would. But, though she wondered, she did not really think that she was changing or would change. As a matter of fact, she had made more decisions, gone through more emotions, and become more of a woman in the little time since Francis had carried her off than in all her life before. The Marjorie of a year ago would not have answered the challenge of her husband to prove herself an honorable woman by taking over a long, hard, uncongenial task. She would have picked up her skirts and fled back to New York with Logan.

"I suppose it's the war," said Marjorie uncomfortably. "Dear me, I did think that when the war was over it would be over. And everything seems so *real* yet. I wonder if when I'm an old, old lady talking to Lucille's grandchildren I shall tell them, 'Ah, yes, my dears, your Grand-aunt Marjorie was a very different person in the days before the war! In those days you didn't have to be in earnest about anything. You didn't even to have any principles that showed. Life wasn't real and earnest a bit. People just went to tea-dances and talked flippantly, and some of the men had drinks. And everybody laughed a great deal, and it was decadent, and the end of an era, and a lot of shocking things—but it wasn't half as hard as living now, because there weren't standards, except when they were had by aunts and employers and such people. Ah, them was the days!' And the grand-nieces, or whatever relation they'll be to me, will look shocked, because they'll be children of their time, and it will still be fashionable to be earnest, and they'll say, 'Dear me, what a terrible time to have lived in!' And they'll be a little bit envious. And they'll say, 'And were even you frivolous?' And I'll sigh, and say, 'Yes, indeed, my dears! I married a worthy young man (as young men went then) in a thoughtless moment, and then when he came back I wouldn't stay married to him. But by that time the war was over, and we'd all stopped being flippant and frivolous. So I washed dishes for him three months before I went and left him.' And they'll commend me faintly for doing that much, and go away secretly shocked."

Marjorie was so cheered up by her own fervent imaginings by this time that she stopped to sit down on the arm of a chair, all by herself, and laugh out loud. And so Francis saw her, as he came in for something, and looked up, guided by her laugh. He had scarcely heard her laugh before for some time. She was perched birdlike on the arm of the chair at the foot of his couch, just to be glimpsed between the draperies of the balcony. She looked, to his eyes, like something too fragile and lovely to be real. And she was laughing! That did not seem real, either. She might have been pleasant, even cheerful, but this sprite, swinging there and laughing at nothing whatever, almost frightened him. For an awful moment he wondered if he had driven Marjorie mad. . . . He had been unkind to her—hard on her, he knew.

Before he could stop himself he had rushed up the stairs to the little balcony.

"Marjorie—Marjorie! What were you laughing about?" he demanded in what seemed to her a very surprising way.

"Why, don't you want me to laugh?" she demanded in her turn, very naturally.

"I—why—yes! But you frightened me, laughing all by yourself that way."

"Oh, I see!" said Marjorie, looking a little embarrassed. "People often look surprised when I forget, and do it on the street. I think about things, and then when they seem funny to me I laugh. Don't you ever have thoughts all by yourself that you laugh over, when you're alone?"

Francis shook his head. He had a good mind, and a quick one, but he did not use it as something to amuse himself with, as Marjorie did with hers. He used it to work with.

"I beg your pardon for startling you," he said. "But——"

"I know. It looked queer. I was just thinking how different everybody and everything is since the war. We're all so much more grown up, and responsible. And I was hearing myself talk to Lucille's grandchildren, and tell them all about the days before the war, when everybody said they just didn't care. . . . Aren't things different?"

Francis nodded.

"Yes, they're different. I don't know exactly how, but they are. And we are."

"Do you think you are?"

Francis sat down on the couch, looked at her, bright-eyed and grave, and nodded again.

"Yes. All the values are changed. At least they are for me and most of the men I came across. I don't think the women are so different; you see, the American women didn't have anything much to change them, except the ones who went over. We were in such a little while it didn't have time to go deep."

He meant no disparagement, but Marjorie flared up.

"You mean me—and Lucille—and all the rest!" she accused him. "You're quite wrong. That was just what I was telling Lucille's grandchildren. We are different. Why, do you think I would have thought I owed you anything—owed it to you to stay up here and drudge—before the war? I never thought about being good, particularly, or honorable, or owing things to people. Oh, I suppose I did, in a way, because I'd always been brought up to play fair. But never with the top of my mind. You know yourself, all anybody wanted was a good time. If anybody had told me, when I was seventeen—I was seventeen when the war started, wasn't I?—that I'd care more about standards than about fun, I'd have just thought they were lying, or they didn't know. And right and wrong have come to matter in the most curious way."

"I think perhaps," he answered her—they had quite forgotten that they were enemies by now—"that the war was in the air. Maybe the world felt that there wouldn't be much chance for good times for it—for our generation—again, and snatched at it. You know, for a good many years things won't be the same, even for us in America, who suffered less, perhaps, than any other nation in the world. Life's harder, and it will be."

"Oh, always?" demanded Marjorie. "You know, Francis, I always wanted good times worse than anything in the world, but that isn't saying I had them. I didn't. Won't I ever have any more? That few weeks when I raced around with you and Billy and Lucille was really the first time I'd been free and had fun with people I liked, ever since I'd been born. And—and I suppose it went to my head a little bit."

She looked up at him like a child who has been naughty and is sorry, and he looked over at her, his face going tense, as it did when he felt things.

"I don't think we were exactly free agents," he said musingly. "Something was pushing us. I'm not sorry . . . except that it was hardly fair to you——"

She leaned toward him impulsively, holding out her hand. He bent toward her, flushing. They were nearer than they had been since that day when his summons to war came. And then Fate—as Mr. Logan might have said—knocked at the door.

CHAPTER IX

The two on the balcony moved a little away from each other. Then Marjorie, coloring for no reason whatsoever, stepped down the toy stairs that wound like a doll's-house staircase, and went to the door.

It was Peggy O'Mara, no more and no less, but what a Peggy! She looked like an avenging goddess. But it was not at Marjorie that her vengeance was directed, it was plainly to be seen, for she swept the smaller girl to her bosom with one strong and emotional arm, and said, "You poor abused little lamb! I've come to tell you that I know all about it!"

Marjorie jerked herself away in surprise. For one thing, she had been very much interested in the conversation she had been carrying on with Francis, and had entirely forgotten that she might ever have had any claim to feel abused. For another thing, Peggy knew more than she should, if Logan had kept his promise.

"Won't—won't you come in?" she asked inadequately. "And please tell me what you mean."

"Mean! I mean I know all about it!" said Peggy, who was sixteen only, in spite of her goddess-build, and romantic.

She came in, nevertheless, holding tight to Marjorie as if she might faint, unaided; guided her to the downstairs couch, and sat down with her, holding tight to her still.

"Yes," said Marjorie, with a certain amount of coldness, considering that she was being regarded as an abused lamb, "you said that before. And now please tell me what it is that you know all about."

"Well, if that's the way you take being defended," said Peggy with a certain amount of temper, "I'll just go back the way I came!"

"But, Peggy, I don't know anything about it!" she pleaded. "Please tell me everything."

"There's nothing much to tell," said Peggy, quite chilly in her turn. But now she had more to face than Marjorie. Francis, militant and stern, strode down the steps and planted himself before the girls. He fixed his eye on Peggy in a way that she clearly was not used to stand up under, and said, "Out with it, Peggy!"

So Peggy, under his masculine eye, "made her soul."

"It's nothing that concerns you, Francis Ellison!" she began. "It's simply that I've learned how a man can treat a woman. And you—you that I've known since I was a child! And telling me fairy-tales of bold kidnapers and cruel husbands and all, and I never knowing that you were going to grow up and be one!"

Marjorie laughed—she couldn't help it, Peggy was so severe. Francis looked at her again in some surprise, and Peggy was plainly annoyed.

"I should say," said Francis with perfect calm, "that our honorable friend Mr. Logan had been confiding in you. His attitude is a little biased; however, let that pass. Just what did he say?"

"Just nothing at all, except that you were a charming young man, and he wished that he were as able to face the world and its problems as you," Peggy answered spiritedly. "None of your insinuations about his honor, please. And shame on you to malign a sick man!"

"Oh, is Mr. Logan sick?" asked Marjorie, forgetting other interests. She turned to Francis, forgetting their feud again, in a common and inexcusable curiosity. "Francis! Now we'll know what it really was that ailed him—the nervous spells, you know? I always *told* you it wasn't fits!"

"How do you know it isn't?" said Francis. "Peggy hasn't said."

"She wouldn't be so interested if it was," said Marjorie triumphantly.
"It takes an old and dear wife to stand *that* in a man."

They had no business to be deflected from Peggy and her temper by any such consideration; but it was a point which had occupied their letters for a year, off and on, and there had been bets upon it.

"Let me see, I suppose those wagers stand—was it candy, or a Hun helmet?" said Francis.

"Candy," said Marjorie. "But it was really the principle of the thing.

Ask her."

Francis turned back to Peggy, who was becoming angrier and angrier; for when you start forth to rescue any one, it is annoying, even as Logan found it, to have the rescue act as if it were nothing to her whether she was rescued or not.

"Now, what really does ail him, Pegeen?" he asked affectionately. "Did you see him, or don't you know?"

"Of course I saw him—am I not nursing him? And of course I know!
Poor man, the journey up here nearly killed him."

"How? It seemed like a nice journey to me," said Marjorie thoughtlessly.

"There's no use pretending you're happy," said Peggy relentlessly. "I know you're not. It's very brave, but useless."

"But has he fits?" demanded Marjorie with unmistakable intensity.

"He has not," said Peggy scornfully. "I don't know where you'd get the idea. He fainted this morning when he tried to get up. He didn't come down to breakfast, and we thought him tired out, and let him lie. But after awhile, perhaps at nine or so, we thought it unnatural that any one should be asleep so long. So I tiptoed up, because when you're as fat as mother it does wear you to climb more stairs than are needful. And there was the poor man, all dressed beautifully, even to his glasses with the black ribbon, lying across the bed, in a faint."

"Are you sure it was a faint?" the Ellisons demanded with one voice.

Peggy looked more scornful, if possible, than she had for some time.

"We had to bring him to with aromatic spirits of ammonia, and slapping his hands. And the doctor says it's his heart. That is, it isn't really his heart, but his nerves are so bad that they make some sort of a condition that it's just as bad as if he had heart-trouble really. Simulated heart-trouble, the doctor called it. You understand, he doesn't pretend, himself; his heart makes his nerves pretend, as well as I can make it out. Sure it must be dreadful to have nerves that act that way to you. I wonder what nerves feel like, anyway."

Peggy herself was getting off the topic, through her interest in the subject.

"But how did you find out that I was beating Marjorie?" inquired
Francis calmly, pulling her back.

She shot a furious glance at him.

"I wish you hadn't reminded me. I'd forgotten all about hating you for your horrid ways. It was just before he came to. He thought he was talking to you, and he said, 'You had no right to force her to do that work, Ellison, it will kill her.'"

"And was that all?" asked Marjorie.

"Wasn't that enough? And I ask you, Marjorie Ellison, isn't it true? Hasn't Francis forced you to come over here and do his cooking for him? Oh, Francis, I can't understand it in you," said poor Peggy, looking up at him appealingly. "You that were always so tender and kind with every one, to make a poor little thing like Marjorie work at cooking and cleaning for great rough men."

Francis had colored up while she spoke. One hand, behind his back, was clenching and unclenching nervously. He was fronting the two girls, but turned a little away from Marjorie and toward Peggy, so Marjorie could see it. Aside, from that he was perfectly quiet, and so far as any one could see, entirely unmoved. Only Marjorie knew he was not unmoved. That dark, thin, clenching hand—she had seen it before, restless and betraying, and she knew it meant that Francis was angry or unhappy. She felt curiously out of it all. She had made up her mind once and for all to go through with her penance, if one could call it that. Her mind was so unsettled and hard to make up that, once made up on this particular point, she felt it would be more trouble to stop than to go on. She leaned a little back against Peggy's guarding arm, and let the discussion flow on by her.

"Marjorie is free to go at any time; she knows that," he said.

Marjorie looked at him full. She said nothing whatever. But Peggy's
Irish wit jumped at the right solution.

"Yes, free to go, no doubt, but with what kind of a string to it?" she demanded triumphantly. "I'll wager it's like the way mother makes me free of things. 'Oh, sure ye can smoke them little cigarette things if ye like—*but* if ye do it's out of my door ye'll go!'"

Marjorie thought it was time to take a hand here. Francis was standing there, still, not trying to answer Peggy. He seemed to Marjorie pitifully at their mercy; why, she did not know, for he had neither said nor looked anything but the utmost sternness. And Marjorie herself knew that he was not being kind or fair—that he had not been, in his exaction. Still she looked at that hand, moving like a sentient thing, and spoke.

"Peggy, some day I'll tell you all about it, or Francis will. You and Francis have been friends for a long, long time, and I don't want you to be angry with him because of me—just a stranger. And for the present, I can tell you only this, that Francis is right, I am doing this of my own free will. You are a darling to come and care about what happens to me."

Peggy was softened at once. She pulled Marjorie to her and gave her a sounding kiss.

"And you're a darling, too, and you're not a stranger—don't we love you for Francis's sake—oh, there, and I was forgetting! I suppose I'm not to be down on you, Francis. But I couldn't help thinking things were queer. It's not the customary way to let your bride spend her honeymoon, from all I've heard. Oh, and it's five o'clock, and it takes an hour and a half to get back, though I borrowed the priest's housekeeper's bicycle."

She sprang up, dropping from her lap the bundle of aprons which
Marjorie had waited for.

"Mind, Francis, I've not forgiven you yet," she called back. "When poor Mr. Logan is better I'll have the whole story out of him, or my name's not Margaret O'Mara."

She was on her bicycle and away before they could answer her.

"And it's time I went over to the cook-shed," said Marjorie evenly, rising, too, and beginning to unfasten the bundle of aprons. They were a little hard to unfasten, from the too secure knots Mrs. O'Mara had made, and she dropped down again, bending intently over them to get them free. Suddenly they were pushed aside, and Francis had flung himself down by her, with his head on her knees, holding her fast.

"Oh, Marjorie, Marjorie!" he said. "Don't stay. I can't bear to have you acting like this—like an angel. I've been unfair and unkind—it didn't need Peggy to tell me that. Go on away from me. And forgive me, if you can, some time."

She looked down at the black head on her knees. It was victory, then—of a sort. And suddenly her perverse heart hardened.

"Please get up, Francis," she said in the same cold and even voice she had used before. "I haven't time for this sort of thing; it's time I went over and got the men their supper. They'll be ready for it at six, Pennington said."

He rose quietly and stood aside, while she took off the apron of Mrs. O'Mara's that she had been making shift with, and put one of the new ones on in its place, and went out of their cabin. She never looked back. She went swiftly and straight to the cook-shed and began work on the evening meal. There was a feeling of triumph in her heart. And nothing on earth would tempt her to go now. Francis was beginning to feel his punishment. And she wasn't through with him yet.

She found an oven which sat on top of the burners, and had just managed to lift it into its place when Pennington walked leisurely in behind her.

"I had to come back to get your husband," he explained, "and I thought
I'd see if you were in any troubles. Let me set that straight for you."

He adjusted it as it should be, and lingered to tell her anything else she might wish to know.

"I'm going to give them codfish cakes for breakfast," she confided to him, "a great many! But what on earth can I have for their dinners?"

"There is canned corn beef hash," he suggested. "That would do all right for to-night. Or you might have fish."

"Where would I get it?"

"Indians. They come by with strings of fish to sell, often. I think I can go out and send one your way."

"You speak as if there were Indians around every corner," she said.

"No-o, not exactly," he answered her slowly. "But the truth is that I saw one, with a string of fish, crossing up from the stream, not long ago. As I was riding and he walking, I think it likely that I shall intercept him on my way back. That is, if you want the fish."

"Oh, indeed, I do," she assured him eagerly. "That is—do you think the Indian—he won't hurt me, will he? And do you think he would clean them for me?"

"I think I can arrange that with him," Pennington, who was rapidly assuming the shape of a guardian angel to Marjorie, assured her.

"And now I must go and tell your husband that he's wanted down where the men are."

"Thank you," she said, looking up at his plump, tanned, rather quaint face—so like, as she always thought, a middle-aged rector's in an English novel—with something grotesque and yet pathetic about it. "I don't know what I'd do without your help. In a day or so I may get to the point where I'll be very clever, and very independent."

She smiled up at him, and he looked down at her with what she characterized in her own mind as his motherly expression. "You're such a little thing!" he said as if he couldn't help it. Then, after a hasty last inquiry as to whether there was anything more he could do, he went off in search of Francis.

She looked after him with a feeling of real affection.

"He's the nearest I have to a mother!" she said to herself whimsically, as she addressed herself to the preparation of the evening meal. She had conceived the brilliant plan of doing the men's lunches, where it was possible, the night before. In this way, she thought, though it might take a little more time in the afternoon, it would make things easier in the mornings. Such an atmosphere of hurry as she had lived in that morning, while it had been rather fun for once, would be too tiring in the long run, she knew. And the run would be long—three months.

The Indian came duly with the fish, all cleaned and ready to fry. She was baking beans in the oven for to-morrow's luncheons. So she baked the potatoes, too, and hunted up some canned spinach, and then—having miscalculated her time—conceived the plan of winning the men's hearts with a pudding. She was sure Pierre's cookery had never run to such delicacies. And even then there was time to spare. The men were late, or something had happened. So she looked to be sure that there was nothing more she could do, and then strayed off to the edges of the woods, looking for flowers. She found clumps of bloodroot, great anemone-flowers that she picked by the handful. There were some little blue flowers, also, whose name she did not know; and sprays of wintergreen berries and long grasses. Greatly daring, she put one of the low, flat vases she had found in her cabin in the center of the men's trestle-table, and filled it with her treasure-trove. Then, a little tired, she sat down by the table herself, resting for a moment before the drove should come home.

They were in on her before she knew it. She thought afterward that she must have fallen asleep. How dainty and how winning a picture of home she made for the rough men, she never thought. But the men did, and the foremost one, a big, rough Yankee, instinctively halted on tiptoe as he saw her, leaning back in her chair with her eyes shut. Marjorie was not in the least fragile physically, but she was so little and slender that, in spite of her wild-rose flush and her red lips, she always impressed men with a belief in her fragility.

"Look at there, boys!" he half said, half whispered; and the crew halted behind him, looking at Marjorie as if she were some very wonderful and lovely thing.

The steps, or perhaps the eyes fixed admiringly on her, woke Marjorie. She opened her eyes, and smiled a little. She had gone to sleep very pleased, on account of the flowers, and of having arranged her work so it fitted in properly.

"Oh, you've come!" she said, smiling at them as a friendly child might smile, flushed with sleep. "Did you have a hard day? Everything's ready."

She was up and out in the cook-shed, half-frightened of their friendly eyes, before they could say any more. That is, to her.

"Gosh, that's some wife of yours!" said one of them to Francis, who was a little in the rear of the others. "But ain't she a little thing?"

Francis simply said "Yes" constrainedly. He had heard all that before. Pennington, who did not as a rule like girls, had been telling him what a lucky devil he was, as they went over to the working place together. He also had said that Marjorie was a little thing. And the note in his voice as he said it had insinuated to Francis, who was all too sensitive for such insinuations, that she was scarcely the type of woman to cook for a men's camp. Francis felt quite remorseful enough already. He sat down with the rest, while Marjorie brought in first the big platter of fish, then the vegetables, and a big pitcher of cocoa which she had made.

"Some eats!" said another of the crew, and Marjorie dimpled appreciatively. While she went out again, after something she had forgotten, one of the Frenchmen whispered bashfully to Pennington, who was Francis's assistant. He smiled his slow, half-mocking, half-kindly smile, and passed it on to Francis.

"Ba'tiste says that he wonders if the lady would sit down and eat with us. Do you think she would, Ellison? It's a long time since any of us had a lady keep house for us."

"I'll ask her," said Francis, the taciturn. He would rather have done a good many things than go to Marjorie with a request, as things stood between them, but there was nothing else for it. He came on her, standing on tiptoe at the cupboard, like a child, trying to reach down a cup. She had counted one too few.

He stood behind her and took it down, reaching over her head.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Pennington!" she said, taking it for granted that it was her accustomed helper.

"It isn't Pennington; it's—me," said Francis. "I—I wouldn't have bothered you, but you see the men sent me out here on an errand."

"The men sent you on an errand?" she said wonderingly. "That sounds topsy-turvy. I thought you sent them on errands."

"Not this kind. They want to know if you won't sit down and eat with them to-night. The flowers and the food made a hit, and they agree with everybody else in the world, as far as I can see," said Francis, with bitterness in his voice, "that this is no work for you to be doing."

"Did they dare to say so?" said Marjorie angrily.

"No—oh, no. Don't mind me, Marjorie. I'm a little tired and nervous,
I expect—like Logan," he ended, trying to smile. "Will you come?"

"Why, of course!" said Marjorie instantly. "And I think it's *sweet* of them to want me! Tell them just to wait till I take my apron off, and I'll be with them."

He went back and she followed him and sat down. At first she felt embarrassed, a little—she felt as if she were entertaining a large dinner-party, and most of them strangers. But Pennington, her unfailing comfort, was at one side of her, and the friendly, if inarticulate, Ba'tiste at the other; and presently she was chattering on, and liking it very much.

None of the men had seen much of women for a long time. A couple of the better-class ones went into town, or what passed for it, occasionally, to such dances as the few women near by could get up. But that was practically all they saw of girls. And this "little thing"—it was a phrase they always used in speaking of her, till the very last—with her pretty face and pretty, shy ways, and excellent cooking—and more than all, her pluck—won them completely.

And when she finally, with obvious delight in their delight, produced the pudding, everything was over but the shouting, as they told her husband afterward. She had been a bit apprehensive about it, but it proved to be a good pudding, and large enough. Just large enough, though. They finished it to the very last crumb, sauce and all, and thanked her almost with tears. Pierre, it appeared, had not cooked with any art, he had merely seen to it that there was enough stoking material three times a day. From the moment of that meal on, anything that Marjorie wanted of those men, to the half of their weekly wages, was hers for the asking.

She liked it very much. Everybody likes to be admired and appreciated. She could not help casting a glance of triumph over at Francis, where he sat maritally at the other end of the table, the most silent person present.

Pennington helped her clear away after supper. Indeed, competition to help Marjorie clear away was so strong that Pennington had to use his authority before the men settled down to their usual routine of card-playing or lounging about on the grass outside. She accepted his help gratefully, for she was

beginning to feel as if she had always known him. She did not think of him in the least as a man. He seemed more like an earthly providence.

"You know, I really am very strong," she explained to him as he said something that betrayed his feeling that this work would be too much for her. "I think I shall be able to do all this. Really, it isn't anything more than lots of women have to do who keep boarders. And it isn't for——"

She stopped herself. She had been on the point of saying, "And it isn't for long, anyway." She did not know what Francis had told the men about their plans, or his plans for her cooking, and she was resolved to be absolutely loyal to him. When she went he should have nothing to say about her but that she had behaved as well as any woman could.

"If you're ready, we'll go back to the cabin, Marjorie," said Francis, appearing on the edge of the threshold, looking even more like a thundercloud than normal lately.

She hung up the dishcloth, gave Pennington a last grateful smile, and followed Francis back.

"Pennington's a good fellow," he said abruptly as they gained their own porch, "but I don't want you to have too much to do with him. He's kindly and all that, but he's a remittance man."

Marjorie's eyes opened wide with excitement at this. She had heard of remittance men, but never seen one before.

"How perfectly thrilling!" she said.

CHAPTER X

Francis looked at her as if she had said something very surprising.

"Thrilling?" he said, apparently considering it the wrong adjective.

She nodded.

"Why, yes. I've read of remittance men all my life, but I never dreamed I'd meet one. And—I always wanted to know, Francis," said she, as she opened the door and walked in and settled herself cozily on the window-seat. "What does he remit? They never say."

"He doesn't remit," explained Francis rather disgustedly, following her over and sitting down by her at the other corner of the seat. "Other people do it."

"'Curiouser and Curiouser! I begin to think I'm in Wonderland!'" she quoted. "I think the easiest way for you to do will be just to tell me all about remittance men, the way you do a child when it starts to ask questions. Just what are they, and do they all look like Pennington, and are they trained to be it, or does it come natural?"

"A remittance man," Francis explained again, "is a term, more or less, of disgrace. He is a man who has done something in his own country which makes his relatives wish him out of it. So they remit money to him as long as he stays away."

If he expected to make Marjorie feel shocked at Pennington by this tale he was quite disappointed.

"And does Pennington get money for staying away, besides what he helps you and gets?" she demanded. "What does he do with it all?"

"I don't suppose it's a great deal," said Francis reluctantly.

"Well, all I have to say is, I'm perfectly certain that if anybody's paying Pennington to stay away from England, they're some horrid kind of person that just is disagreeable, and doesn't know his real worth. Why, Francis, he's helped me learn the ways here, and looked after me, as if he was my mother. He's exactly like somebody's mother."

Francis could not help smiling a little. Marjorie, when she wanted to be—sometimes when she did not want to be—was irresistible.

"But, Marjorie," he began to explain to her very seriously, "however much he may seem like a mother,

he isn't one. He's a man, though he's rather an old one. And he did do things in England so he had to leave. I don't want him to fall in love with you; it would be embarrassing for several reasons."

"But why should he fall in love with me?" she demanded innocently.
"Lots of people don't."

"But, Marjorie," her husband remonstrated, "they do. Look at Logan, now. No reason on earth would have brought him up here but being in love with you. You might as well admit it."

"All I ever did was to listen to him when he talked," said Marjorie, shrugging one shoulder. She liked what Francis was saying, but she felt in honor bound to be truthful about such things. "And besides you, there was only one other man ever asked me to marry him—I mean, not counting Logan, if you do count him. Oh, yes, and then there was another one yet, with a guitar. He always said he proposed to me. He wrote me a letter all mixed up, about everything in the world; and I was awfully busy just then, selling tickets for a church fair of Cousin Anna's. I never was any good selling tickets anyhow," explained Marjorie, settling herself more nestlingly in her corner of the window-seat; "and so when he said somewhere in the letter that anything he could ever do for me he would do on the wings of the wind, I wrote back and said yes, he could buy two tickets for the church fair. And, oh, but he was furious! He sent the check for the tickets with the maddest letter you ever saw; and he accused me of refusing him in a cold and ignoring manner. And I'd torn up the letter, the way I always do, and so I couldn't prove anything about it to him. But he didn't come to the fair. Ye-es, I suppose that was a proposal. The man ought to know, shouldn't he?"

Francis was tired; he had a consciousness of having behaved unkindly that weighed him down and made for gloom. He had come in with Marjorie for the purpose of delivering an imposing warning. But he couldn't help laughing.

"I suppose so," he acknowledged. "Never mind, Marjorie, you didn't really want him, did you?"

She shook her head.

"Oh, no. Nobody could. Or—wait, somebody must, because I think he's married. But he wasn't the kind a girl that cared what she got wanted."

But Francis went back to Pennington.

"About Pennington," he began again. "You don't know how easy it is for you to let a man think you're encouraging him, when you really aren't saying a word or doing a thing, or think you aren't. I want you to promise me you'll be very careful where he's concerned, even cold."

"Cold!" she said indignantly. "But I'm married! You seem to forget that!"

Francis had not forgotten it in the least. He forgot it all too little for his own comfort, he might have told her. But he was rebuked.

"I didn't know you went on the principle that you had to act exactly like a regular married woman," he apologized with meekness.

"I do," she said shortly.

He rose and went over to where the banjo lay and brought it back to her. It was growing dusk now in the little cabin.

"Play for me, and sing, won't you, Marjorie?" he asked abruptly. "I haven't heard you for a long time."

In Marjorie's mind there arose the memory of that boyish, loving little note that she had found under the banjo, and for a minute her throat clutched so that she couldn't answer. She had moments of being so intolerably sorry for Francis that it hurt; quite irrational moments, when he seemed to need it not at all. This was one.

"Yes," she said, pulling herself together. "That is, if you will take my word for it that I have no designs on poor old Mr. Pennington."

"Of course I know you haven't," he said. "It was the other way about that I was afraid of."

"His having designs on me?"

She laughed aloud as she began tuning her strings. It did seem like the funniest thing she had ever heard. The picture of Pennington, girt with a sack for an apron, with that plump, quaint face of his, and those kindly, fussy ways, drying cups for her and having designs while he did it—it was enough to make

even Logan laugh, and *he* had never been known to be amused by anything that wasn't intellectual humor.

"Just a-wearyin' for you,"

she began, in her soft little sympathetic voice, that wasn't much good for anything but just this sort of thing, but could pull the heartstrings out of you at it, and sang it through. She went on after that without being asked, just because she liked it. She knew where the simple chords were in the dark, and she sang everything she wanted to, forgetting finally Francis, and the woods, and everything else in the world except the music and the old things she was singing.

When she had finally done, after an hour or so, and laid the banjo across her lap and leaned back with a little laugh, saying "There! You must be tired by this time!" Francis rose with scarcely a thank-you, and walked out of the door.

"I want a turn in the air before I come to bed," he said.

Marjorie said nothing. She was sleepy, as usual—would she never get over being sleepy up here?—and she laid the instrument on the floor and stretched out thoughtlessly on the window-seat, instead of going off to bed as she had been intending to do. As for her husband, he walked across the veranda straight into a group of his listening men. The music had drawn them over, and, regardless of mosquitoes, they were sitting about on the steps, liking the concert.

"We owe you a vote of thanks for importing that little wife of yours, Ellison," said Pennington, getting up and stretching himself widely in the moonlight. "Maybe if I do some more dishes for her, she'll come and sing for us when she knows it, sometime soon."

Francis had an irrational wish to hit Pennington. But there was no reason why he should. Pennington's particular kind of flippancy was merely a result of his having been, in those far days before he was a remittance man, an Oxford graduate. So was his soft and charmingly inflected voice. But, quite reasonlessly, it was all Francis could do to respond with the politeness which is due to your almost irreplaceable second-in-command on a rush job. His manners once made, he decided that he didn't want the air, after all. He faced about, saying good-night to the risen men, who responded jovially or respectfully, according to their temperaments, and returned to the cabin where he was, for all they knew, living an idyllic life with the wife he adored and who adored him.

He went over, drawn in spite of himself, to the window-seat where Marjorie lay. There was enough moonlight to see her dimly, and he could tell that she had, all in a minute, fallen asleep. She looked very young and tired and childish in the shadows, with her lips just parted, and her hands out and half open at her sides.

"Marjorie! Marjorie, dear!" he said. "Wake up! It's time you were in bed."

He spoke to her affectionately, scarcely knowing that he said it. She was very tired, and she did not wake till he put his hand on her shoulder. Even then she just moved a little, and turned back to her old position.

He finally bent and lifted her to a sitting position, but she only lay against him, heavy still with sleep.

"Don't want to get up," she murmured, like a child. So finally he had to do as he had done the night he brought her home, pick her up bodily and lay her on her own bed. Her arms fell from his shoulders as he straightened himself from laying her down. "'Night," she said, still sleepily and half-affectionately; and Francis did not kiss her good-night. But he did want to badly. Francis, unlike Marjorie, was not sleeping well these nights.

But then he was used to his work and she was not used to hers. He called her quite unemotionally next morning, and she rose and went through her routine as usual. All the camp watched its mascot apprehensively, as if she might break—well, not every one, for two of them were tough old souls who thought that hard work was what women were "fur." But, aside from these unregenerates, they did more. Fired by Pennington's example of unremitting help, they did everything for her that thought could suggest. They brought her in posies for the table; they swept out the cabin for her; they dried her dishes in desperate competition; they filled the kerosene stoves so thoroughly that there was always a dripping trail of oil on the floor, and Pennington had to lay down the law about it; they ate what she fed them gladly, and even sometimes forbore to ask for more out of a wish to seem mannerly.

And Marjorie liked it to the core. The lightening of the work was a help, and it made things so that she was not more than healthfully tired, though sometimes she felt that she was more than that; but, being a woodland queen, as Pennington called it, was pleasantest of all. She came to feel as the time

went on, there alone in the clearing with them, that they were all her property. She mended their clothes for them, she settled their disputes, she heard their confidences and saw the pictures of their sweethearts and wives, or, sometimes, photographs of movie queens who were the dream-ideals of these simple souls. Sometimes she went out to the place where they worked, before the work moved too far away for her to reach it in a short time. And, curiously enough, she found that she was not lonely, did not miss New York, and—it seemed to her that it was a rather shocking way to feel—she did not in the least feel a "lack of woman's nursing, or dearth of woman's tears."

She got along excellently without Lucille, Cousin Anna, and the girls in the office. And, thinking it over sometimes at twilight, in those rare moments when there weren't from one to three of the men grouped adoringly around her, and Francis wasn't chaperoning her silently in the background, she felt that the work was a small price to pay for the pleasantness of the rest of her life there. Always before she had been a cog in the machinery, wherever she had been. At Cousin Anna's she was a little girl, loved and dominated. With Lucille she was free, but Lucille, in compensation, helped herself to the ungrudgingly given foreground. But here she was lady and mistress, and pet besides. In short, the punishment Francis had laid out for her was only a punishment to him. She could see that he felt guilty by spells. She thought, too, that he had times of being fond of her. How much they meant she could not tell. But in spite of his warnings she became better and better friends with Pennington, always exactly, at least as far as she was concerned, as if he were a maiden aunt of great kindness and experience. Indeed, Pennington, she thought, was what kept her from missing girls so.

He never told her anything about himself. He might or might not have been a remittance man; but he mentioned no remittances, at least. Once he spoke of his childhood, the kind of childhood she had read sometimes in English children's books, not like her own prim American suburban memories of Sunday-school and being sent to school and store, and sometimes playing in her back yard with other little girls. He had had a pony, and brothers and sisters to play with, and a governess, she gathered; and an uncle who was an admiral, and came home once to them in his full uniform, as a treat, so they could see how he looked in it. And there had been a nurse, and near by was a park where the tale went that there were goblins. But it all must have been very long ago, she thought, because Pennington looked forty and over. And all his stories stopped short before he was ten. After that he went to Eton, he told her, and told her no more.

She did not ask. She liked him, but, after all, he was not an important figure in her life. The goal she never forgot was Francis's admission that she was an honorable woman; and, underneath that, Francis's missing her terribly when she was through and left. Still, when Pennington would come and demand tea from her of a Sunday, and she would sit in her little living-room, or out on the veranda, with the quaint yellow tea-set that was a part of the furnishings, and pour it for him and one or two of the other men, she would like having him about. He talked as interestingly as Logan, but not as egotistically. She felt as if she were quite a wonderful person when he sat on the step below her, and surrounded her with a soft deference that was almost caressing, but not quite. And in spite of Francis's warnings she made more and more of a friend of him.

The explosion came one Sunday afternoon in June. She came out on the veranda, as usual, with her tea-tray, about four, and waited for her court. Peggy came over once in awhile on Sundays, too. Logan never came. Peggy had never said any more about him since her one outburst, but Marjorie knew that he was ill yet, and being nursed by the O'Maras. This day no Peggy appeared. Indeed, nobody appeared for some time, and Marjorie began to think of putting away the tea-things and considering the men's supper. And then, just as she had come to this resolve, Pennington came through the woods.

He was not sauntering in a seemingly aimless manner, as he usually did. He was walking straight for her, as if she were something he had been aiming for for hours. And he did not drop at her feet negligently on the steps, as he usually did, and call her some fanciful name like "Queen of the Woodlands," or "Lady Marjorie." He sat erectly on a chair across from her, and Marjorie bethought herself that he was very much like a curate making a call. The kindly expression was always on his face, even when he was most deeply in earnest, and he was apparently in earnest to-day.

"I stopped the other men from coming," began Pennington with no preface. "I wanted to have a long talk with you. I want to tell you a story."

"I wish you would," she said, though she had had so many scenes of late that, without any idea what was coming, a little tremor of terror crept around her heart. She leaned back in her rustic rocker, there on the veranda, and looked at him in her innocent, friendly fashion. He paused a little before he began.

"Once upon a time," he began abruptly, "there was a man who had a very fair start in life. His people saw to it that everything was smooth for him—too smooth, perhaps. He didn't realize that he could ever be in a position where they wouldn't be able to straighten things out for him. He was a decent enough chap; weak, perhaps, but kind, at least. He went to school and college, and finally took orders, and was

given a living in a county near where his people lived. Life went along easily enough for him, and perhaps a bit stupidly. Too stupidly. He got bored by it. So after a while he gambled. He played the stock-market. Presently he used some money that was not his—that had been intrusted to him by another. He lost that. So he had to give up everything—home, friends, profession, country—and go and live in a strange country. His people, good always, straightened things out for him, at a great sacrifice; but they made it a condition that he should stay where he was. Time went on, and things were forgotten. And the people who had made him promise not to return died. They left him, in dying, some money. Not a great deal, but enough to keep him comfortably. And he didn't know what to do. He was happy, for the first time in his life, with a little friend he had found, some one almost like a daughter, some one who seemed, in humble ways, to need him to help her in what wasn't a very easy part of her life. So he stayed yet a little longer. And presently he found that he was in danger of something happening. He had never been very good at making himself feel as he wished to feel, or at holding his feelings to what they should be, let us say. And his feelings for this little daughter were not quite, he was afraid, like a father's. But he still did not know what to do, Marjorie. She would never care, and there were reasons why he did not want or expect her to. It was only that he wondered which was right—which he ought to do."

Pennington stopped.

Marjorie colored up.

"What—what do you mean? Why—why do you tell me about it?"

"Because," said Pennington, "I would like to know what you think that man ought to do. Ought he to go back home, against his people's wish, but where he belongs, and try to pick up the rest of his life there, or do you think that the need of him over here is enough to counterbalance the danger he runs? You see, it's rather a problem."

Marjorie was a perfectly intelligent girl. She knew very well that Pennington was, at last, telling her the outlines of his own pitiful story. And he was leaving the decision in her hands.

She sat quietly for awhile, and tried to think. It was hard to think, because there was a queer, hazy feeling in her head, and her hands were hot. She had felt unusually excited and energetic and gay earlier in the day, but that was all gone, and only the hazy feeling left. She did not want to move, or, particularly, to speak. She wondered if a trip she had made that afternoon before to a little swampy place, where she had sat and strung berries for an hour, had been bad for her.

But there was Pennington—he looked very large, suddenly, and then seemed to fade away far off for a minute, and have to be focused with an effort—and he had to be answered.

"I think," she said hesitatingly, "that he ought to do what seemed to him right, without thinking of his feelings, or—or any one else's."

"But that's just the trouble. He couldn't see which *was* right."

Marjorie tried to focus harder than ever. She wanted to be unselfish, and tell him the thing that was right to do, at any cost—though she had not realized how much Pennington's help and society had been to her. She felt a terror at the idea of his going, the more because she felt ill. But that didn't count—that mustn't count. You have no right to let a man stay where he may fall in love with you, merely because you need him for a maiden aunt or something of the sort. And that was the ultimate and entire extent of her affection for him, strong though it had come to be.

"I think—I think that man had better go back to the place where he had really belonged at first," she said in a low voice. "No matter how much the girl missed him, or needed him, she had no right to want him to be hurt by staying near her."

"You really think that?" he said.

"Yes," she answered. And then incoherently, "Oh, Mr. Pennington, I do want to be good!"

She meant that she had done enough wrong, in acting as she had toward Francis in the first place. She felt now, very strongly, that all the trouble had come from her cowardice when Francis came home. She should have shut her teeth and gone through the thing, no matter what her personal feelings had been at first. It would all have come out right then. She knew now that she and Francis, the plunge once taken, could have stood each other. And she would have kept her faith. She had learned the meaning of honor.

"You are good," said Pennington in a moved tone. "Then—I have my answer. Yes—I'll go back."

She leaned her heavy head on the chair-back again. He seemed once more suddenly remote.

"I—I wish you weren't going," she said, only half conscious of what she said.

He leaned forward, suddenly moved, and caught her hand hard. Still in that dream, she felt him kiss it. She did not care. And then, still in the dream, Francis's quick tread up the steps, and his sharp voice —

"And I believed in you!"

CHAPTER XI

She looked at him in a blind sort of way. His words made only a hazy impression; but neither of the men could know that.

"Believed in me?" she echoed, smiling faintly. "Why, did you?"

"Yes," said Francis with a concentrated fury that reached even her confused senses. "But I never will again! I thought—I was beginning to think—you were the sort of woman you said. But you're just a flirt. Any man is better than the one you're married to."

"I—I think you want me to go," she said, trying to see him. She could see two Francises, as a matter of fact, neither of them clearly.

"Yes, I do. Either of these men you've befooled can see you on your way. And I'll start divorce proceedings, or you may, immediately."

He said more than that; but that was all she could get. The words hurt her, in spite of their lack of meaning. Francis hated her; he thought she was a bad girl, who never kept her word. And she wasn't.

"I—I want to be good," she said aimlessly, as she had said to
Pennington a little earlier. "I"—she lost the thread again—"I'll go."

She rose, dropping the cup and saucer on her knee, and not stopping to pick them up. She caught hold of the doorpost to carry her in, and dropped down on a seat inside. It was not that she was weak, but she felt giddy. She wondered again if it was the swamp. Probably. She finally made her way back to her own room, mixed herself some spirits of ammonia and took it, and sat down to pull herself together. Through the wooden partition she could hear the furious voices of the men on the porch outside. She wondered if Francis would say more dreadful things to her while he took her over in the side-car. She hoped not.

Presently the dizziness departed for a few minutes, and she tried to pack. She did not seem able to manage it. If she was allowed to stay at the Lodge with the O'Maras, she could send Peggy over to gather up her things. Yes, that would be the best way to do.

She pinned on her hat and drew her cloak around her, just as she was, and came out. Pennington and Francis were standing up, facing her, and having a quarrel which might last some time.

"I'm ready," she said weakly.

She knew she should have stood up there, and told Francis how unkind and unjust and bad-tempered and jealous he was, and defend herself from his accusations. But she was too tired to do it; and besides, words seemed so far away, and feelings seemed far away, too. Francis and the work at the cabin and Pennington, with his kind, plump, rueful face, and even the O'Maras and Logan, seemed suddenly unreal and of little account. The only thing that really mattered was a chance to go somewhere and lie down and sleep. Perhaps she could lean back a little in the side-car as he took her over.

Francis broke off short in what he was saying, and went without looking at her toward the place where he kept his motor-cycle. Perhaps he thought that it did not matter, now, whether he left her with Pennington or not.

Pennington, for his part, turned around—he had been standing so that his back was toward her—and began to speak. Marjorie thought he was saying something to the effect that he was very sorry that he had made this trouble for her, and that he had been trying to explain; and thought he could make

Francis hear reason when he had cooled off.

"It doesn't really matter," she said wearily. "Only tell him to hurry, because I'm—so—sleepy."

She sank into the chair where she had been sitting before Francis appeared, and leaned back and shut her eyes. Pennington, with a concerned look on his face, came nearer her at that, and looked down at her, reaching down to feel her pulse. She moved her hand feebly away.

"Francis—wouldn't like it," she said; and that was the last thing she remembered distinctly, though afterwards when she tried she seemed to recall hearing Pennington, very far off in the distance, calling peremptorily, "Ellison! Ellison! Come here at once!"

She wondered faintly why Pennington should want to hurry him up. It was about this time that she quietly slipped sidewise from her chair, and was in a little heap on the veranda before he could turn and catch her, or Francis could respond to the summons.

"This is what you've done," was what Pennington said quietly when Francis reappeared. He did not offer to touch Marjorie or pick her up.

Francis flung himself down on his knees beside his wife. Then he looked up at Pennington, with a last shade of suspicion in his eyes.

"What do you think it is?" he asked. "Is she really fainting?"

"You young fool, no!" said Pennington. "She's ill."

"Ill!" said Francis, and gathered her up and laid her on the settee at the other end of the porch. "What's the matter, do you think? Is it serious?"

His words were quiet enough, but there was a note of anguish in his voice which made Pennington sorry for him in spite of himself. But he did not show much mercy.

"It is probably overwork," he said. "We've all done what we could to spare her, but a child like this shouldn't be put at drudgery, even to satisfy the most jealous or selfish man. You've had a china cup, my lad, and you've used it as if it was tin. And it's broken, that's all."

Francis looked down at Marjorie, holding her head in his arms. It lay back limply. Her eyes were half open, and her heart, as he put his hand over it, was galloping. Her cheeks were beginning to be scarlet, and her hand, when he reached down and touched it, burned. He looked up at Pennington with an unconscious appeal, unmindful of the older man's harsh words.

"Do you think she'll die?" he asked.

"I have no way of knowing. If she does, you have the consolation of knowing that you've done what you could toward it."

"Oh, my God, don't, Pennington!" cried out Francis, clutching Marjorie tighter unconsciously. "It's as true as gospel. But let up now. Get somebody. Do something, for heaven's sake! You know about medicine a little, don't you?"

"Take her inside and put her to bed," Pennington commanded shortly. "I'll take your motor-cycle and go for Mother O'Mara. I can get a doctor from there by to-morrow, perhaps."

Francis gathered the limp little body up again without a word. Only he turned at the door for a last appeal.

"Can't you tell at all what it is?"

"Fever, I think. She's caught malarial fever, perhaps. She wouldn't have done if she'd been stronger. Take her in."

So Francis carried his wife over the threshold, into the little brown room he had decked for her so long ago, and laid her down again. Her head fell back on the pillow, and her hands lay as he dropped them. He stood back and looked at her, a double terror in his heart. She would never love him again. How could she? And she would die—surely she would die, and he had killed her.

"I'm—going," she said very faintly, as a sleep-talker speaks. She was not conscious of what she said, but it was the last straw for Francis. He had not slept nor eaten lately, and he had worked double time all day to keep his mind from the state of things, ever since he had brought her back. So perhaps it was not altogether inexcusable that he flung himself on the floor by the bedside and broke down.

He was aroused after awhile by the touch of Marjorie's hand. He lifted his head, thinking she had come to and touched him knowingly. But he saw that it was only that she was tossing a little, with the restlessness of the fever, and his heart went down again.

He pulled himself up from the bedside, and went doggedly at his work of undressing her and putting her to bed.

She was as easy to handle as a child; and once or twice, when he had to lift or turn her in the process of undressing, he could feel how light she was, and that she was thinner. She had always been a little thing, but the long weeks of work had made her almost too thin—not too thin for her own tastes, because, like all the rest of the women of the present, she liked it; but thin enough to give Francis a fresh pang of remorse. He felt like a slave-driver.

When he had finished his task, he stood back, and wondered if there was anything else he could do before Pennington came back with Mrs. O'Mara, and with or without a doctor. He felt helpless, and as if he had to stand there and watch her die. He got water and tried to make her drink it—ineffectually—he filled a hot water bottle and brought it in, and then thought better of it. She had a fever already. Then he thought of bathing her in cold water; but he could not bring himself to do that. He had already done enough that she would hate him for, in the way of undressing her. He must never tell her he had done that. . . . But she would hate him anyway. So he ended by sitting miserably down on the floor beside her, and waiting the interminable hours that the time seemed until the others returned.

He had expected Mrs. O'Mara to reproach him, as Pennington had, as being the person to blame for Marjorie's state. But the dear soul, comforting as always, said nothing of the sort. She said very little of any sort, indeed; she merely laid off the bonnet and cloak she had come in, and went straight at her work of looking after Marjorie. Only on her way she stopped to give Francis a comforting pat on the shoulder.

"It's not so bad but it might be worse," she said. "Anybody might git them fevers without a stroke of work done. An' she's young an' strong."

Francis looked up at her in mute gratitude from where he sat.

"An' now clear out, lie down and rest, down on the couch or annywhere ye like, till I see what's to be done to this girl," she went on.

He went out without a word, and sat down on the window-seat, where the banjo lay, still, and picked it up mechanically. He could see Marjorie, now, with it in her hands, singing to it for the men—or, sometimes, just for him. How gay she had been through everything, and how plucky, and how sweet! And just because she was gay he had thought she was selfish and fickle, and didn't care. And because she had never said anything about how hard the work was, he had thought—he could forgive himself even less for this—that it wasn't hard. Looking back, he could see not one excuse for himself except in his carrying her off. That might have worked all right, if he could have kept his temper. He let his mind stray back over what might have been; suppose he had accepted Logan's following her up here as just what it was—the whim of a man in love with Marjorie. Suppose he had believed that Pennington could kiss his wife's hand without meaning any harm; suppose, in fine, that he had believed in Marjorie's desire and intention to do right, even if she had been a coward for a few minutes to begin with?

Then—why, then—

By this time, perhaps, he could have won her back. If he had not laid down the law to her—if he had not put her to the test. What business had a man in love to make terms, anyhow? It was for him to accept what terms Marjorie had chosen to make for him.

He flung himself down on his knees by the window-seat, heedless of any one who might come or go.

"Oh, God," prayed Francis passionately, as he did everything. "Give me another chance! Let her get well, and give me one little chance then to have her forgive me! I don't care what else happens if that only does!"

He did not know how long he knelt there, praying with such intensity that he sprang aside when some one touched him on the shoulder.

"She's goin' to be all right in the long run," said Mrs. O'Mara. "I gev' her a wee drink o' water, an' she kem to herself fur a minute. An' I says, 'Me dear, where did ye git yer fever?' An' she says, 'The swamp, I think. Don't I have to travel to-day? I'm in bed.' An' I says, 'Not to-day nor anny day till ye want, me child,' and she turns over an' snuggles down like a lamb. An' I've sponged her off with cool water, an' she feels better, though she's off agin, an' I'm afraid the fever'll be runnin' up on us before the doctor

can git here."

"You mean she isn't sensible now?" demanded Francis, whose eyes had lighted up with hope when she began to speak.

"Well, not so's ye could talk to her. An' ye might excite her. Them they loves does often."

"Then I wouldn't," said Francis recklessly. "Oh, Mother O'Mara, I've been such a brute——"

"Hush, hush now, don't ye be tellin' me. Sure we're all brutes wanst in awhile. Ye feel that way because the child's sick. Now go out and watch fer the doctor, or do annything else that'll amuse ye."

He obeyed her as if he were a little boy. He was so miserable that he would have done what any one told him just then—if Logan, even, with his cane and his superciliousness, had given him a direction he would probably have obeyed it blindly.

Mrs. O'Mara went back to the sick-room. How much she knew of the situation she never told. But Peggy was not a secretive person, and Peggy had arrived at a point with Logan where he told her a good deal, if she coaxed. They never got it out of the old lady, at any rate.

Marjorie was quieter, but still not herself. Mrs. O'Mara, who was an experienced nurse, did not like the way she had collapsed so completely. She was afraid it was going to be a hard illness, and she knew Francis was breaking his heart over it.

"Still it may be a blessin' in a way," she said half aloud. "You never can tell in this world o' grief and danger. I wonder has she people besides Mr. Francis. They've never either of them said."

The doctor came and went, and Monday morning dawned, when Francis had to go to work whether or no. And Pennington quietly took over Marjorie's duties again, and the men tiptoed up to the cabin where she lay, and asked about her anxiously, and young Peggy came over and took turns with her mother in the nursing, and Logan, much more robust and tanned than he had been in several years of New York life in heated apartments, came with her and sat on the porch waiting till she came out; and Francis saw him there, and thought nothing of it except that he was grateful to him for being interested in Marjorie.

He realized now that it was all he need ever have thought. But he realized so many things now, when it might be too late!

The days went on relentlessly. Finally they decided to send for her cousin, the only relative she had. Francis was a little doubtful as to the wisdom of this, for he knew that Marjorie had never been very happy with her cousin, but it was one of those things which seem to have to be done. And just as they had come to this resolution; a resolution which felt to Francis like giving up all hope, Marjorie took a little turn for the better.

It was not much to see. She was a little quieter, that was all, and the nursing did not have to be so intensive. Mrs. O'Mara and Peggy did not feel that they had to sit with her all the time; there were periods when she was left alone. Francis felt more bitterly than anything else that he had to go on with his work, instead of staying in the house every moment, but it was better for him. He would have driven the O'Maras mad, they told him frankly, walking up and down, looking repentant. Peggy was not quite softened to him yet; but the older woman was so sorry for him that any feelings she may have had about the way he had behaved were swallowed up in sympathy.

"And it isn't as if he weren't gettin' his comeuppance, Peg," she reminded her intolerant young daughter. "Sure annything he made her suffer he's payin' for twice over and again to that."

"And a very good thing, too," retorted Peggy, who was just coming off duty, and casting an eye toward the window to see where Logan was. He was exactly where she wished, waiting with what, for him, was eagerness, to go off through the woods with her.

"I suppose, now ye've a man trailin' ye, there's nothin' ye don't know," said her mother. "And him a heretic, if not a heathen itself. I've only to say to ye, keep yer own steps clean, Peggy."

"He is a heathen—he doesn't believe a blessed thing; he said so himself!" said Peggy with what sounded like triumph. "The more reason for me to convert him, poor dear! Empty things are easier filled than full ones. If he was like them in there, with a religion of his own, I wouldn't have a show. But as it is, I have my hopes."

"Oh, it's converting him you are! Tell that to the pigs!" said her mother scornfully. "And now go on; I suppose you're taking a prayer book and a rosary along with you in that picnic basket."

"No," said Peggy reluctantly. "I'm softening his heart first."

She had the grace to giggle a little as she said it, and the O'Mara sense of humor rode triumphant over both of them then, and they parted, laughing. Francis, entering on one of his frequent flying trips from work to see how Marjorie was, felt as if they were heartless.

Mrs. O'Mara, at the sight of his tired, unhappy young face, sobered down with one of her quick Irish transitions.

"Ah, sure now it's the best of news. The doctor's been, and he says she's better. So it won't be necessary to send after the old aunt or cousin or whatever, that ye say she wasn't crazy over. Come in an' see her."

Francis, a new hope in his heart, tiptoed into the little brown bedroom where Marjorie lay. It was too much to hope that she would know him. She had been either delirious or asleep—under narcotics—through the days of her fever. And once or twice when she had spoken rationally, it had never been Francis who had happened to be near at the time.

She lay quite quietly, with her eyes shut, and her long lashes trailing on her cheeks. When Francis came in she opened her eyes as if it was a trouble to make that much effort. She was very weak. But she looked at him intelligently, and even lifted one hand a little from the coverlet, as if she wanted to be polite and welcome him. He had been warned not to make any fuss or say anything exciting, if this should come; so he only sat down across from her and tried to speak naturally.

"Do you know me, Marjorie?" he asked, trying to make his voice sound as it always sounded. But it was a little hoarse.

She spoke, in a thread of a voice, that yet had a little mockery in it.
She seemed to have taken things up where she dropped them.

"Yes, thank you. You're my sort of husband. This—this is really too bad of me, Francis. But, anyway, it was your swamp!"

Just the old, mocking, smiling Marjorie, or her shadow. But it did not make him angry now; it seemed so piteous that he should have brought her to this. The swamp faded to nothingness as a cause of her illness when he compared it to his own behavior.

"Marjorie," he asked, very gently so as not to disturb her, "would it be too exciting if I talked to you a little bit about things, and told you how sorry I was?"

"Why—no," she said weakly, shutting her eyes.

"I was wrong, from start to finish," he said impetuously. "I'm sorry.
I want you to forgive me."

"Why, certainly," she said, so indifferently that his heart sank. It did not occur to him that he had never said that he cared for her at all.

"Is there anything I could get you?" he asked futilely as he felt.

"I'd like to see Mr. Pennington. He was kind to me."

"Marjorie, Marjorie, won't you ever forgive me for the way I acted?"

"Oh, yes," she said, lying with shut eyes, so quiet that her lips scarcely moved when she talked. "I said so. But you haven't been kind. It's like—don't you know, when you get a little dog used to being struck it gets so it cowers when you speak to it, no matter if you aren't going to strike it that time. I don't want to be hurt any more. I don't love Pennington—he's too funny-looking, and awfully old. But he was kind—he never hurt my feelings. . . ."

She spoke without much inflection, and using as few words as she could. When she had finished she still lay there, as silent and out of Francis's reach as if she were dead. He tiptoed out with a sick feeling that everything was over, which he had never had before. She was so remote. She cared so little about anything.

He went back to work, and told Pennington that Marjorie wanted to see him. When the day was over he returned to the cabin again, and found Mrs. O'Mara on duty once more. Pennington sat by Marjorie, holding her hand in his, and speaking to her occasionally. Francis looked at him, and spoke to him courteously. Pennington smiled at him, and stayed where he was. Marjorie, Mrs. O'Mara said, seemed to cling to him, and his presence did her good. And—she broke it as gently as she could—though the

patient was on the road to getting well now, she was disturbed by his coming in and out. She seemed afraid of him.

Francis took it very quietly. After that he only came to the bedroom door to ask, and stepped as softly as he could, so that she would not even know he had been there. And time went on, and she got better, and presently could be dressed in soft, loose, fluffy things, and lie out on the veranda during the warmest part of the day, and see people for a little while each. It was about this time that Francis went to sleep at the bunk-house.

"Why doesn't Francis ever come to see me?" she asked finally. "There are a great many things I want to know about."

Pennington, whom she had asked, told her gently.

"We thought—the physician thought—that he upset you a little when you were beginning to be better. He is staying away on purpose. Would you like to see him?"

"Yes, I think I would," she said. "Can Peggy come talk to me?"

Peggy could, of course. She came dashing up, from some sylvan nook where she had been secluded, presumably with Logan, fell on Marjorie with hearty good-will and many kisses, and demanded to know what she could do.

"I—I want to see Francis and talk to him about a lot of things," said Marjorie, "and I thought perhaps if you'd get me a mirror and a little bit of powder, and——"

"Say no more!" said Peggy. "I know what you want as well as if you'd told me all. I'll be out in a minute with everything in the world."

She returned with her arms full of toilet things, and for fifteen minutes helped Marjorie look pretty. She finished by brushing out her hair and arranging it loosely in curls, with a big ribbon securing it, like Mary Pickford or one of her rivals. She touched Marjorie's face with a little perfume to flush it, and draped her picturesquely against the back of the long chair, with a silk shawl over her instead of the steamer rug which Mrs. O'Mara, less artistic than utilitarian, had provided.

"There," she said, "you look like a doll, or an angel, or anything else out of a storybook. Now I'll get Francis."

CHAPTER XII

Marjorie waited, with a quietness which was only outward, for Francis. She did not even know whether he would come; she had only seen him once; he had said he was sorry for the way he had acted, and asked her to forgive him, but then it wasn't the first time he had done that.

"It's getting to be just a little morning custom of his," said Marjorie to herself, trying to laugh. But she was in earnest about seeing him. Away down deep in her she was not quite sure why she wanted to. She was not angry with him—she seemed to herself past that. Of course, there were things to arrange.

It seemed like a sorry ending to it all. She had meant to ride triumphantly through the work, and walk off leaving a crushed Francis behind her; and make such a success of something back in New York that he would spend years being very, very sorry. . . . Well, he did seem sorry. But it was only because he felt guilty about her being ill, not, so far as she could tell, because he cared a bit about her any more. And it really was not his fault, her illness. She had been well and happy, and even liked the work. The doctor had said that the miasma in the swamp, and her sitting by it for hours, making a wreath of flowers like a small girl, were alone responsible. And even if he was softening the blow, she had been tired and worried before she came up; the housework at the cabin wouldn't have been enough. She must tell Francis so. He *did* take things so hard.

When he came, led by Peggy, neither of them seemed to know what to say for a little while. Francis sat down by her and spoke constrainedly, and then merely stared and stared.

"Well, what is it then?" demanded Peggy, who was hovering about, and, unlike the Ellisons, seemed to have no emotions to disturb her. "Has she two heads, or had you forgotten her looks entirely?"

"I think I must have forgotten her looks entirely," he answered slowly, never taking his eyes off Marjorie. "You know—well, I hadn't seen you, Marjorie, for some time. But you always were beautiful."

Marjorie turned pink up to the ribbon bow that sat out like a little girl's at one temple.

"Was I?" was all she found to say.

"Yes," he said, and said no more.

At this juncture Peggy rose.

"Well, I'm sorry not to stay here and help you carry on this fluent conversation," she said, tossing her head. "But I have an engagement elsewhere. If you want me ring the bell."

This was more or less metaphorical—probably a quotation from Thackeray—because there was no bell in sight. But at any rate Peggy left with one of her goddess-like sweeps, and was to be heard thereafter calling Mr. Logan with a good-will. Presently the others, sitting silently, heard his voice answer gaily, and then no more. They had met and were off together as usual.

"You see," said Marjorie, "he really didn't care for me. I think he and Peggy will marry each other one of these days, even if she is only sixteen."

"She will get over being sixteen, of course," said Francis, still in the preoccupied voice. "I suppose it's her superb vitality that attracts him. She is actually making him almost human."

Marjorie smiled faintly at that.

"You don't like him much, do you?" she said.

"Do you remember, in your letters, how you always called him 'your friend with the fits?'"

"Well, wasn't he?" said Francis defensively.

"Well, I don't think it was fits," she answered, balancing her ideas as if they had met only to discuss Logan; "it was some sort of a nervous seizure. At any rate, Peggy nursed him through one of the attacks, so if she does marry him she knows the worst. But maybe they won't be married. I remember, now, he told me once that an emotion to be really convincing must be only touched lightly and foregone."

"That man certainly talks a lot of rot," said Francis. It was curious how, whenever they were together, they fell into intimate conversation—even if everything in the world had been happening the minute before. The thought came to Marjorie. "Now, my emotions," Francis went on, "have certainly been too darn convincing for comfort for the last year. If I could have touched any of them lightly and foregone them I'd have been so proud you couldn't see me for dust. But they weren't that kind. . . . Marjorie, I've been through hell this last while that you've been sick."

"I'm sorry," she said. It gave her the opening she had been looking for. "But that partly was what I sent for you to talk about. Not hell—I mean—well, our affairs. I'm well enough now to be quite quiet and calm about them, and I think you are, too. That is," she added, half laughing, "if you could ever be quiet and calm about anything. What I've seen of you has either been when you've been repressing yourself so hard that I could see the emotions bubble underneath, or when you'd stopped repressing, and were telling me what you really thought of me."

"Oh, don't!" he said, wincing.

"Well, why not, Francis? You see, it's sort of as if we were both dead now, and talking things over calmly on the golden shore. . . . Isn't it lovely here! Oh, you don't know how nice it is to be getting well!"

"And I made you go through all that," he said chokingly, reaching out instinctively for one of the thin little hands that lay contentedly outside the silk shawl, and then pulling back again.

Marjorie looked at him consideringly. She couldn't help thinking, for a moment, how lovely this would be if it wasn't a case of the golden shore; if Francis and she hadn't messed things up so; if they had come up here because they loved each other, and trusted each other to make happiness; and if Francis, instead of taking his hand back that way, had held hers as if he had the right to. And she remembered suddenly their marriage night. He had flung himself down beside her and wrapped her in his arms, and she had not quite liked it; she had shrunk away from him. She was so weak now, and it felt a little lonely—if he put his arms around her now she thought she would like it. But then she was ill yet, and emotional; probably it was the same feeling that made men propose to their nurses when they were

convalescing. A nurse had told her about it once, and added that it was considered very unethical to take a man up on that sort of a proposal. That was it—you just wanted somebody to be kind to you.

"Perhaps if I had a cat," said Marjorie inadvertently, aloud.

"Would you like one?" demanded Francis. "I'll get it this afternoon."

"Yes, I guess so," she answered, coloring again. "But what made you think of a cat?"

"Oh, I just did," she answered untruthfully. "You see—you see, I'm not strong yet, and my mind rambled around in an inconsequent sort of way. It just happened on cats. But, Francis, you mustn't reproach yourself. I know you are feeling altogether too badly about what you did. But you mustn't. That's just the way you're made. You haven't nice tame emotions, and in a way you're better so. Why, people like you, all energy and force and attraction, get so much farther in life. You're going to be a wonderful success, I know, just because you are so intense. You meant all right. I know lots of girls who would have been awfully flattered at your being so jealous. They'd have thought it meant you were in love with them terribly."

"They'd have thought right," he said.

She looked at him—she had been talking with her eyes on a green tree over in the distance. His head was bowed, and his hands clenched on his knees, and he had spoken again in the muttering voice he had begun with.

"I suppose you were," she said with a little wistful note in her voice that neither of them knew was there. "But never mind; I want to talk now about what we are both to do next. If you are really feeling as badly as you say about my being sick, I don't suppose you mind how long I take to get well. I'm afraid it will be quite a little while longer."

He started to speak, but she held up one hand and stopped him.

"And after that I'll go back to Lucille, if Billy isn't home."

"He is," said Francis. "He came over in one of the transports in July, while you were ill. That was the only reason I didn't drag Lucille up here."

"Where are they?" demanded Marjorie a little blankly. But after all she should have expected this.

"In the flat you and Lucille had. Lucille likes it."

"How can she?" sighed Marjorie. "Well, she's never tried this. . . . I wonder what I'd better do? I think I heard something about a place where they have flats just for business women. Perhaps Billy could arrange for me to get one before they're all gone. He always loved attending to things like that for people. I can't go back to Cousin Anna. I've been through too much. Why, you mayn't think it, but I'm grown up, Francis! I'm about twenty years older than that foolish little girl you married. I—I wonder I haven't wrinkles and a little wisp of fuzzy gray hair!" she added, trying to smile.

"Don't!" said Francis again, looking at her childish face, with its showers of loose curls, that was trying to be so brave. He dropped his eyes again to the clenched hands that were tensed, one on either knee. "I was foolish and young, too, then," he added. "I think I'm older, too."

"Yes . . . it was a mistake," she said in a far-off voice.

"I wish it hadn't been," he said.

"Why, I was thinking that, too!" she said. "Isn't it a pity that we weren't as old then as we are now! Responsible, I mean, and wanting as much to do right things. That was one thing about it all. I want to do right more than anything else these days; and I think you do, too. And it wasn't in style then—do you remember our talking it over up here once, when we were having a little friendly spat? But I suppose ——"

"I suppose you would never have married me if you'd been so old and wise," he said.

She considered.

"But neither would you have," she objected.

Francis looked up at her suddenly, flashingly. "You know better," he burst out. "You know I'd marry you over again if I were forty years old, and as wise as Solomon. The kind of love I had for you isn't the kind that gets changed."

Marjorie lay for a minute silently. Then she looked at him incredulously.

"But you said——" she began very softly.

"I said things that I ought to be horsewhipped for. I loved you so much that I was jealous. I do think I've learned a little better. Why, if you wanted to talk to some other man now, even if I knew you loved him madly, if it would make you happier I think I'd get him for you. . . . No. No, I don't believe I could. I want you too much myself. But—I've learned a better kind of love, at least, than the kind that only wants to make you miserable. I *did* get Pennington for you when you were so ill, and wanted him instead of me. Count that to me for righteousness, Marge, when you think about me back there in the city."

"Then—you mean—that you love me just as much as ever?"

She lay there, wide-eyed, flushed and unbelieving.

"As much? A thousand times more—you know it. Good heavens, how could any one live in the house with you and not care more and more for you all the time?"

"But, then, why did you——"

"Because I was a brute. I've told you that. And because it made me unhappier and unhappier to see you drifting away from me, and then, every time I could have done anything to draw you a little closer I'd lash out and send you farther away with my selfishness and jealousy. I didn't know it was any surprise to you. It's been the one thing you've known from the beginning——"

She shook her head.

"Every time you lost your temper you said you'd stopped loving me. And that nobody could love the bad girl I was, to flirt and deceive you——"

"I've no excuse. I haven't even the nerve to ask you to try it a little longer. But believe this, Marjorie; the very hardest thing you could ask me to do——"

She laughed a little, starry-eyed,

"If I asked you to go and do the cooking and cleaning for your beloved men, that you made me do?" she asked whimsically.

He nodded matter-of-coursely.

"It would mean Pennington doing my directing, and I don't think he's up to it; he's a fine second in command, but he can't plan. Yes, I'd do it in a minute, though it would probably mean the job I'm making my reputation on going smash. Do you want me to? If the whole thing went to the devil it would be a small price to pay for getting even another half-chance to make good with you. May I, Marjorie? Say I may!"

He was bending forward, alert and passionate, as if it were a chance to own the world that he was begging for. She told him so.

"It is—my world. I mean it, Marjorie. I don't deserve it, and I don't see how you can trust me, but let me do that. Or anything. I don't care how hard or how ridiculous, if it would mean that some day I could come back to you and you'd consider—just consider—being my wife."

"But, Francis! But, Francis, I don't want you to be ridiculous! I don't want you to fall down on your work. I don't want you to do anything——"

"I know you don't. That's the worst of it. And it's coming to me."

She was silent for a little while.

"It hadn't occurred to you, then, that perhaps—perhaps living in the house with you might have made me—well, a little fonder of you?"

She did not know what she had expected him to do when she said that. Anything but what he did do—sit perfectly still and unbelieving, and look as if she had stabbed him.

"No," he said finally. "That couldn't happen. Don't talk to me that way, Marjorie. It's cruel. Not that you haven't the right to be cruel."

It was Marjorie's time of triumph, that she had planned for so long, in those days when the work was

hard and things were lonely sometimes. But she did not take it. She only put out one shy hand, for it was a little hard for her to go on talking, she was getting so tired, and said timidly:

"But it is true, Francis. I—I am fond of you. And if there's anything to forgive, I have. You know you can't be so dreadfully angry with people when—when you like them. You—why, you don't have to wait and have tests. I'll stay with you now, if you want me."

He stared at her a little longer, still incredulous. Then with an inarticulate cry he was down on his knees beside her long chair, and he had her in his arms, just as he had held her the night before he went away, just after they were married. No, not just the same; for though he held her as closely and as tenderly, there was something of fear still in the way he kept his arms about her; as if he did not really think it was true. He knelt there for a long time, and neither of them moved. He did not call her affectionate names; he only kept repeating, "Marjorie! Marjorie! Marjorie!" over and over again, as if her name would keep her close to him, and hold her real.

She laughed a little again presently.

"It's really so, you know, Francis."

"I don't believe it in the least!" said Francis, in a more assertive voice than he had used yet. He laughed, too. She looked at the dark, vivid face so near hers, and so changed from what it had been five minutes before.

"Well, you did take a lot of convincing!" she said demurely. "I felt so bold——"

"Darling," said Francis, kissing her parenthetically, "do you think it would be too much for you if you sat on my knees a little while? I can't get at half enough of you where you are. And doctors say that being too long in one position is very bad for invalids."

"You might try," said Marjorie docilely; "though, honestly, Francis, I don't feel any more like an invalid than you do. I feel perfectly well and strong—let me see if I can stand up!"

He really shouldn't—Mrs. O'Mara told him that severely two hours afterwards—but at that particular moment he would have done anything in the world Marjorie requested. He lifted her to a standing position very carefully, and held her supported while she tried how she felt being really on her feet again. It was the first time. Until now, Pennington had carried her in and out, while Francis felt a deadly envy in his heart.

"See, I'm all well!" she said triumphantly, looking exactly, as he told her, like a doll, with her lacy draperies and her shoulder-length curls, and her slim arms thrown out to balance herself. He let her stand there a minute or so, and then pulled her gently over and held her for a while.

At least, they thought it was a while. It was much more like two hours; there was so much to talk over, and explain, and arrange for generally. They decided to stay just where they were, for a little while at least, after Francis's work was done. Marjorie was to get strong as quickly as possible, and they were both, after their long practice at being unhappy, to try to be as happy as possible. And the very first time that Francis was jealous, or objected to any one kissing her hand or traveling from New York to take her away from a cruel husband, Marjorie was to leave him forever. This was his suggestion.

"But I don't think I would," said Marjorie thoughtfully, lifting her head a little from his shoulder. "I never did, did I, no matter what you did to me? You couldn't even make me go when you sent me—I preferred malarial fever."

Francis said nothing to that, except to suddenly tighten his arms about her. He was not yet at the point where he could make a joke of her illness. She had been too near the Valley of the Shadow for that.

So they were still sitting very comfortably together, discussing their mutual life—they had planned as far as the tenth year of their marriage—when Peggy descended upon them again.

Marjorie flushed and made a faint effort to escape, but Francis sat immovably, exactly as if Peggy were not there at all.

"Oh!" said Peggy.

"We've made up," said Francis coolly.

"Then I suppose you won't be wanting me on the premises," said Peggy, making a dive for the door.

"I would be delighted if there was a whole procession of you, like a frieze," said Francis, "walking by and seeing how happy I am."

"Oh, but I wouldn't!" protested Marjorie. "Do let me get up and be respectable, Francis. There *will* be a procession going by presently—you know the men all come and ask how I am every day."

At that reluctantly he did put her back in her chair, where she lay for a little longer, starry-eyed and quite unlike an invalid. Peggy went inside, judging that in spite of Francis's protests they would be perfectly happy alone; and, besides, she wanted to tell her mother. The two on the veranda stayed where they were.

"But what about the cooking?" demanded Marjorie presently.

"It's been all right while you were sick. We are going to get through sooner than I thought."

"Oh, I'm so glad," she sighed. "I really did want you to get the work done, and succeed—I never hated you that much, at the worst."

"Don't talk about the work!" he said passionately. "The work didn't matter a bit. And I tell you this, Marjorie, if I can help it you shall never do another stroke of work as long as you live!"

"That's going too far, as usual," said Marjorie calmly. "You certainly are a tempestuous person, Francis Ellison! I'd be unhappy without something to do. . . . May I play on the banjo sometimes in the evening, and will you stay quite close to me when I do?"

"You mean——" he asked.

"I mean that you didn't destroy all those notes when you lost your temper with me. To begin with, you left note-shaped places in the dust, on all the things you had put there for me—you really will have to let me do a little dusting occasionally, dear!—and so I hunted. One note was under the fresh banjo strings. . . . And you may well be glad you forgot it."

"Why, dearest? Did it make you a little sorry for me?"

"Oh, so sorry! In spite of all you'd said and done, somehow—somehow when I read that I think I began to fall in love with you all over again. . . . I cried, I know. I didn't know then that was what was the matter with me, but I know now it was. You had wanted me so much, there in our dear little cabin; and try as I would to keep telling myself that it was a last year's you, it kept feeling like a this year's."

"It was," he said fervently. "It was this year's, and every year's, as long as we both live."

"As long as we both live," echoed Marjorie.

They were both quiet for a while. The sun was setting, and the rays shone down through the trees; through a gap they could see the west, scarlet and gold and beautiful. Things felt very solemn. Marjorie put out one hand mutely, and Francis took it and held it closely. It was more really their marriage day than the one in New York, when they were both young and reckless, and scarcely more than bits of flotsam in the tremendous world-current that set toward mating and replacement. They belonged together now, willingly and deliberately; set to go forward with what love and forbearance and earnestness of purpose they could, all the days of their life. They both felt it, and were still.

But presently Marjorie's laughter awakened Francis from his muse. He had been promising himself that he would make up to her—that he would try to erase all his wild doings from her mind. She should forget some day that he had ever put her in an automobile, and borne her away, Sabine fashion, to where he could dominate her into submission and wifehood. He had gone very far into himself, and that light laugh of hers, that he loved, drew him back from the far places.

"What is it, dear?" he asked.

"I was just thinking—I was just thinking what awfully good common sense you showed, carrying me off that way. And how proud of it I'll be as long as I live!" said Marjorie.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK I'VE MARRIED MARJORIE ***

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