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*"Surely you must have read it long
ago" Page 360*

JEWEL WEED

BY
ALICE AMES WINTER

Author of
"The Prize to the Hardy"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
HARRISON FISHER



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OCTOBER

TO
MY FATHER AND MOTHER
CHARLES G. AND FANNY B. AMES

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JEWEL WEED

CHAPTER I

A LIGHT FROM THE FAR EAST

In the mists of the infinite, events poise invisible, awaiting their opportunity to incarnate themselves. They fasten, each after his kind, on these human lives of ours, as germs find the culture soil they love; so it follows that to the commonplace comes a life of dull routine, foolish happenings seek out the sentimentalist, sordid events seek the sordid and on the mystic dawns the mysterious. Calamities wait there, too, until Fate points out a weak spot in character on which they may pounce relentless with the temptation that pierces it. As there are certain things that would scarcely dare to happen to certain people, so other greater events would hardly condescend to those whom they recognize as being their own inferiors.

Once in a while, particularly when a man is young or beginning a new phase of life, there come times when the things that are to be seem almost tangible. They press until he feels them crowd, while he waits with tense expectation for them to become visible to the crude eye of outer experience.

Perhaps it was due to a certain occultism in the atmosphere that Ellery Norris felt this pressure of the future on the afternoon of Mr. Early's reception to Ram Juna. Norris was a new young man in a new young city, and he had come West to live. However short and futile life may look to the old, it appears a big and long thing to twenty-three. Here in St. Etienne he was to work and work hard; among these people, now all strangers, he was to find the friends of his lifetime; here were to come all the experiences of struggle, failure, success, perhaps of love.

He turned and glanced with a little sense of relief at Richard Percival seated beside him. Dick was the one stanch thing out of his past; Dick he had known and loved at college; Dick was even now showing himself a friend; and all these other folk were but the ghosts of things to come. Then he laughed lightly at himself for his own fantasy, and returned to the survey of his surroundings.

The vast new hall in which they sat, a hall young in years but old Gothic in pretense, might have suggested a possessor of the stately and knightly type rather than a little cockatoo like Mr. Early; but man has this advantage over the snail, that, whereas, the snail is obliged to construct a home around its slimy little body, man may build his habitation to match his imagination and ambition. In the West, moreover, it is the custom to leave the low-vaulted past and build more stately mansions as fast as the increasing purse will permit.

The great room was cool, even on a glowing summer day. Its heavy walls shut out the heat and its narrow windows gave but a creeping light which lost itself in the vaulted spaces above. It was archaic in a modern fashion, too archaic to be quite convincing when combined with present-day ornaments and luxuries, too splendid to belong to any one except Mr. Early, and yet, withal, a satisfying place, dim and fragrant on this July afternoon. The pale summery gowns of the women and the sprinkling of dark coats of the few men present modified its gorgeousness.

To-day Mr. Early surely had reason to congratulate himself on his amplitude of space, for if ever a big background was needed, it was when the public had come in its hundreds to look upon the huge Hindu who stood beside the host, dwarfing him as well as the throng in front. Swami Ram Juna overtopped them all in inches, as in serenity.

Mr. Early, whose physique was of the Napoleonic order, just as much body as was necessary to incase a mighty soul, had, in spite of his few inches, an air of distinction which demanded and received attention. Ram Juna, on the other hand, betrayed no expectation of adulation. Rather was he utterly oblivious of it. Over the heads of those to whom he had been speaking his far-seeing eyes gazed into that nothingness which is popularly supposed to be full of spiritual significance. He was oblivious of the earth.

Here, then, before the group of guests, in fine contrast, like a tropical bird caught among thrushes, stood this big bronze creature, magnificently gowned in a long flame-colored garment touched upon its borders with strange embroideries and girdled about its ample waist with a

wide sash of dull oriental red. The polished face was set off by a turban of snowy white, in whose center blazed, like a bloodshot eye, a single enormous ruby. Everything about Ram Juna was superlative—his size, his raiment, his rapt gaze, his doctrine.

But after all, though the Hindu occupied the position of honor in the social stage, Norris found it hard to keep his attention fixed on that bird of paradise, who, at best, was sure to be but a temporary interest in these western states of America, where facts, not theories, loom large. The new young man's eyes wandered to the audience, made up of people like himself. The unknown catches us for an instant, but our own kind are perennially absorbing. Since he and Dick were perched on a deep window-sill, which brought them at right angles to the row of chairs, he began to study the faces on this side and that.

A little in front of them a woman of thirty or more, exquisitely dressed in summer white, pretty and complacent, leaned back in her chair. Happening to catch Percival's eye he looked inquiry.

"Mrs. Appleton," whispered that young man, and lifted his eyebrows as if to express astonished admiration, then made a wry face. Norris smiled his understanding and glanced back at the self-satisfied prosperity beneath her filmy hat. Then, suddenly, at the far end of the room, another face caught him—a profile of a girl's head, outlined against a high bench-back, her dreamy eyes fixed on the speaker. It was a cameo-like face, not animated, but delicate and finely lined. Norris knew her in a flash. This was the girl whose photograph had stood on Dick's mantel at college and of whom Dick had sometimes spoken in those rare intimate hours when he talked of his mother or of his purposes in life. Ellery forgot the rest of the room and watched her until a sudden forward lunge of Mrs. Appleton's hat shut her off, and brought him back to consciousness of the place and the supposed interests of the day. He turned back with a sigh to Ram Juna, telling himself with some amusement that other minds than his own were wandering far afield, and that the attitude of polite interest came as much from the conviction that Esoteric Buddhism was "the thing," as from any real absorption.

Already the Hindu had been talking to them for an hour. His speech had that precision and purity both of word and of enunciation by which a foreigner, trained in our classics, often shames our slovenly every-day English. He spoke, not as one who wishes to convert others to his own point of view, but, rather, as though unconscious of their presence, he poured out the fullness of his meditations in self-communion. The upward-turned eyes were half closed. Occasionally there was a flicker of the eyelids or a touch of scorn when he contrasted the eastern ideal of eternal repose with the western reality of endless struggle. Then for a moment he seemed to realize the presence of his auditors, ashamed now of their telephones, their public schools and even of their philanthropies, in the face of this supreme contempt for the things that fade.

Suddenly he opened wide his great eyes.

"And you," he said, "you, with your guns, your armies and your ignorances, you think to rule us. Well, so be it! We grant to you dominion as a man gives to a child the sticks and straws for which it loudly clamors in its petty plays. But our treasures are the higher thoughts which alone are worthy of the man. These we reserve."

The great oriental ruby above his forehead seemed to burn more brilliantly than ever as if to shame the frivolous occidental jewels that twinkled before it.

"Yes," he went on, "these gems we do not submit to force. They are not to be ravished by blood and iron. Yet even these, our sacred treasures, we gladly share with those who, in humility and in the life of meditation, seek with us the universal truths. And truth, what is it? It eludes the scalpel of reason. It is the master and not the servant of logic. The only truths worthy to be known are those which are to be experienced by the soul in her hours of solitude. Then does she cease to think. Then does she cease to reason. Then does she know."

He was dogmatic and they fell under his sway. A hush deeper than silence lay upon his audience as the Swami stood for a moment as though lost in himself. Recalling his surroundings he spoke again.

"My friends in this land, who are coming to understand with us, and we are not numerous even in India—the land of inspiration—my friends, whom you call by some long name which I have forgotten, ask me to tell you a little of what we know concerning the order of the universe. I will unfold." As though giving instruction in elementary arithmetic, Swami Ram Juna began to sketch the adventures of the soul as it flies from one existence to another. His words were vivid and definite.

At this point Dick Percival's lips began to move with the cynical amusement of youth.

"Pretty positive, isn't he, about the things no mortal knows?" he whispered to Norris.

Softly spoken though the words were, Ram Juna instantly fixed his eyes upon the guilty youth. It was a habit of the Hindu to hear everything that rose above the sound of a thought.

"You think I speak of mysteries!" he demanded, suddenly breaking his discourse and leaning like a pine tree toward Percival. "You think that in a closet some one weaves a fantastic theory of life and lives. But no! What have I told you? What I speak, that has my soul known, as has many another soul. I tell of astral bodies. I have acquaintance with them as have you with the body of the young friend who sits beside you. I could show you—even you, whose eyes are covered with a film—I could show you! But no! It is too petty to demonstrate by a show."

He moved a step backward and looked in a half-questioning way at the silent group in front.

"Perhaps," he murmured hesitatingly, "perhaps it is by childish methods that one must teach the child."

He muttered a few unknown words with his eyes still fixed on guilty Dick Percival, then he turned to Mr. Early.

"My kind host," he said with a courteous gesture, "will you permit that I show to the unbelieving young gentleman an astral body?"

He turned and strode away toward dimness dimmer than that of the great hall, in the direction of that wing where rooms had been assigned him. A little rustle of pleased anticipation ran through the petticoats of the room. Interest ceased to be perfunctory and became genuine. This was more fun than doctrine, after all. Who wouldn't be gratified at the chance of meeting an astral body—at least in a crowd? Alone, in a dark room, at midnight, it might prove less enjoyable.

Presently the Hindu returned, carrying in his hand a strangely twisted retort and something that looked like a primitive brazier.

"Look," he said, "let us take some simple thing. I shall destroy the body of flesh and show you the body of shadow. I see roses in the strange jar yonder. You call them American beauties? Yes. Very well, I shall show you the ghost of an American beauty. Perhaps the unbelieving young gentleman will pluck one for me."

Dick rose, pulled one of the flowers from among its fellows and handed it across heads to the Swami, who took it gravely.

"Even this simple form of life," he explained, "has its astral existence. With seeing eyes it would be visible to you now, hidden inside the flesh of the flower. In order to make it the plainer, I shall destroy the body of the blossom and leave its spirit. That spirit you shall see. Look, I lay this beautiful rose upon this metal plate and cover it that the heat may be more intense. I consume it with the flame until the fire devours its shape and leaves only its ashes."

A tense silence fell upon the waiting room, as Ram Juna thrust the covered rose into the brazier. At last he lifted the cover and displayed a little gray shapeless heap.

"The rose is dead," he observed quietly. He turned now toward the glass phial, in the bottom of which lay a few grains of pinkish dust. Into this he poured the ashes of the burned flower. He lifted it high in air and surveyed it.

"The rose is dead," he repeated, "but under the right conditions you shall see what we may call its ghost. See. A gentle warmth. I hold it not too close to the devouring flame. A gentle warmth."

Those at the back of the room were rising now to peer over the hats of the more fortunate in front, but the hush remained unbroken. The dark eyes of the Hindu were bent on the glass before him, and a mystical smile played about his mouth.

In the bottom of the retort, in the bluish heap, began a movement, as though something alive were striving to free itself from bonds and rise. It heaved and struggled in the dusty mass, grew stronger, and instead of a shapeless writhing there came an upshooting pyramid, which gradually took upon itself form. A ghostly apparition of stem, of leaves, of a dusky red rose, grew more and more distinct until it glowed from its prison of glass, and Ram Juna smiled.

"The rose is dead!" he said for the third time.

A gasp of appreciation and awe passed through the room. The Swami turned to Dick Percival.

"That which I know, I speak," he said simply.

Then with a sudden abrupt movement he shook the phial away from the warmth and held it up.

"Now only the poor body of ashes is within," he went on. "The spirit is truly fled, until it shall find itself another incarnation, and we say that the flower is for ever dead. What then is this death with which we play and which plays with us? But I weary you with my too long discourse. Give me your pardon. I shall no more."

There rose the sound of moving skirts and loosening tongues. The spell of oriental mysticism was broken and this became but one of many entertaining things to be chattered about in moods that varied from credulity to amusement. The ordinary reception atmosphere took possession, and the tinkle of animated feminine voices filled the air.

On the outskirts of the throng, which pressed forward to greet the host and to press the fingers of the seer, lingered the two young men, one of whom had stirred the unshakable. Norris looked vaguely around as at unknown faces, and Dick nodded in this or that direction in that offhand manner which invites people to keep their distance rather than to seek further intercourse, but the woman who was handsome and thirty refused to be held at arm's length.

"How-do, Mr. Percival? Glad to see you back. You have the genius of distinction, even in small things. How natural that the Swami should single you out for notice and so announce your home-coming to the world!"

"Is this the world?"

"Our little world," Mrs. Appleton laughed; and as she spoke she peered curiously at Norris with the air of a naturalist who needs as many specimens of young men as possible for her collection. Dick smiled, whether with amusement or with cordiality it would be impossible to say.

"Mrs. Appleton, may I introduce Mr. Norris, who has come here as a new citizen. Apart from

other considerations, we are grateful to anybody that swells the census, aren't we?"

"So glad!" she murmured. "Mr. Percival must bring you to my lawn-party next week." 15

But even while Norris expressed his thanks, Dick's eyes wandered, until, with a cheerful start, he caught his companion's arm.

"There she is, Ellery," he said. "This way."

Norris knew in his heart that he was waiting for that summons, and he turned and followed as Percival began a slow progress through the crowd toward that uncompromising stiff-lined bench of the kind that Mr. Early affected, where sat the girl like a cameo, beside a woman somewhat older than herself.

The younger woman lifted her eyes and caught from afar the greeting of the advancing men. That there should be no sudden illumination, no swift blush in her nod of recognition, gave Dick a slight feeling of irritation. He had regarded a little polite display of delight as in some way his right. But if she was undemonstrative, she had the virtues of her failing, for there was a certain serenity even in the broad curve with which her hair clung to her temples, and in the overcrowded room her smile was as refreshing as a draft from a cool spring. Both of these women were marked by a repose of manner which distinguished them from the eager crowd that was pushing toward the latest new apostle. It was the elder who put out a welcoming hand. 16

"Ah, Dick," she said, "you are at home at last. How good it is to see you! When did you come?"

"Last night. Mother sent me over here to-day with the promise that I should see you—and Madeline." His eyes traveled to the girl beyond. "And this, Mrs. Lenox, Miss Elton, is my good friend, Norris. You already know that we were lovely together in college, and in life we hope not to be divided. You'll be good to him, won't you?"

In Mrs. Lenox's greeting there was that mixture of kindness with shrewd instant analysis that becomes a habit with women of the world, and Norris stiffened with fresh realization that he was raw and unaccustomed to her suave atmosphere. He would have liked to be his best self before Percival's friends, and he felt like an oyster. Even the gentle eyes of Miss Elton seemed to measure him. Fortunately they thought chiefly of Dick, and when did Dick's facile tongue fail him?

"Of course this would be the first spot on which to reappear. No one but Mr. Early would dare to give a reception in July," Mrs. Lenox exclaimed. 17

"And the absurd thing," Dick retorted, "is that you all come—back into town, leaving birds and waters—at Mr. Early's bidding."

"Yes, my respect for my sex rises when I see them so eager to prostrate themselves before a simple seeker after truth with a turban and a ruby. A turban and a ruby do so illuminate the search for truth!"

"You are a scoffer," laughed Dick. "Why are you here?"

"Foolish one, I came to scoff. I must see all there is to be seen. If there is an apple to be bitten, I must bite. I have floated in with the flood and out with the ebb of almost every fad from crystal-gazing to bridge. I always hope that one of them is going to be worth while."

"But you can't call the Swami's philosophy 'a fad'," objected Norris.

"No, perhaps that wasn't fair. Ram Juna is really very celestial in a ponderous kind of way, isn't he? When he talked the simple old truths I liked him, but not in the esoteric explanations and profounder mysteries. I have chased Mystery for more years than I shall own, and, so far as I can see, whenever you open the door on her secret chamber, she shuts a door on the other side and is gone into a further holy of holies. I've come to disbelieve in those who tell me that they have caged her at last." 18

"That's what I say," exclaimed Dick. "A man knows too much when he tells you that Mystery is five feet three, weighs a hundred and twenty-six pounds and eats no meat."

"It's too much like a mixture of legerdemain and theology."

"I always liked juggling!" exclaimed Miss Elton. "And I like the ruby. See it now, gleaming over the ranks of war-paint and hats."

"I believe the ruby interests you both more than the search for truth," Dick laughed.

"And well it may!" Mrs. Lenox flashed back. "Once it belonged to a magnificent rajah ancestor, who hugged it to his soul, and held it too precious to be worn by his favorite wife. But now Swami Ram Juna has renounced the pomps and indulgences of courts and become, as I said, an humble seeker. He, too, loves the ruby—not from any vulgar love of display—but because to his soul it is a mystic symbol of Adhidaiva—the life-giving energy, refulgent as the sun behind dark clouds. Isn't that a pointer for those of us who want diamonds and things? I believe I'll ask Mr. Lenox for a symbol or two this very evening." 19

"You seem well-informed."

"Oh, Mr. Early posted me. It's humiliating to think that perhaps he designed that as an easy way of getting the facts spread abroad and so preparing a way for the truth-seeker. And he also told me that they have very good copies of the *Bagavad Gita* at McClelland's for a quarter, so you may keep up with the advance guard at small expense. I have to know things in order to keep my husband posted with entertaining gossip. Men always want to know every little thing and

then lay the blame of gossip at the door of women.”

“I doubt if it is a difficult task for you to keep Mr. Lenox amused,” said Norris, smiling at her.

“Moreover,” added Percival, “I understand that when your frivolities cease to amuse, Mr. Lenox can divert himself by helping your father in the building of a new little railroad or something of that kind.”

“True, but building new railroads, beguiling though it be, proves more wearing to the nerves than does my conversation, so I must still practise the art of rattling. But I needn’t practise it on you,” she went on, glancing at Miss Elton under her eyelids. “Now, Dick, I am going to give you my very uncomfortable seat on this bench and let you and Madeline talk over old times, and new times which are to be still better. Perhaps Mr. Norris will go about with me and meet some of the people—beard the western prairie-dog in his den, so to speak.”

“Now that is really good of you, Mrs. Lenox. You know this is the first time Madeline and I have come together since we got through college and have been recognized as grown up. In fact, I’m not used to her in long dresses yet.”

He glanced at the smiling girl as Mrs. Lenox nodded and turned.

“How lovely Miss Elton is!” exclaimed Norris as they moved away together. “Of course I’ve seen her picture in Dick’s room, but it did not do her justice.”

“Lovely, indeed!” Mrs. Lenox answered heartily. “You have chosen the one word to be applied to Madeline Elton, both to her spirit and to her face—not thrilling, perhaps, but satisfying, which is better. She and Dick were inseparables through their childhood. It is rather a taken-for-granted affair, you know.”

“I guessed as much, though Dick never said anything.”

There was something so confidential and kindly in her manner that Norris forgot his awkwardness and felt moved to confidence in return.

“Dick was born to all good things,” he went on. “I sometimes wonder how that feels.” Then, seeing that she glanced at him inquiringly: “Dick always seems to me one who needs only to stand still, and Fortuna takes pains to hunt him up and offer him her choicest wares. Life looks to him more like a birthday party than like a battle-field. I say it not in envy, but with the awe of one who has had to scrabble and who sees endless scrabbling ahead. But I believe part of the charm that I feel about Dick is his manifest predestination to good luck.”

“One piece of his luck, if I am not mistaken, is in your coming here. There is no friend like a college friend for every-day wear,” she answered kindly.

“Well, I owe my position here to him,” Norris went on. “When he found that I had an uncle back in Connecticut who owned a share in the *St. Etienne Star*, he began to pull wires both at that end and this to get me a place on the editorial staff. I’m afraid that nothing but wires would have got it for me. So here I am making my first bow to society under the shadow of his cloak.”

“Of course you came here.”

“What, really, is Mr. Early?”

“Apostle, expounder of the universe, business man, prophet.”

Norris laughed.

“He’s our display window. The way in which he manages to keep a little lion always roaring on the bargain-table astonishes us all every day. And when he runs short of foreign lions he roars a bit himself. Privately, I think he’s more entertaining than the imported article. *St. Etienne* would be merely a western city without him.

“Now,” she went on, “I’m going to introduce you to some other girls. To me, as to Dick, Miss Elton may be the bright particular star, but she is not the only light.”

So Miss Elton and Percival were left alone in the crowd.

“Madeline,” said the young man, “does this getting through college make you feel as though you had suddenly had your cellars taken away and your attics left foundationless in space? The question is ‘what next?’ That’s what I used to ask you in the good old days when we played mumbly-peg together. What shall we play now?”

“I know what I shall play. There is home, with mother enraptured to have me at her beck and call again; and, of course, there are musical and social ‘does’. They are going to be such fun that I do not know if I shall have room to tuck in a little study. But I suppose you must have a harder game. Yes, you must.”

“And are you so contented with the dead level? I fancied you were going to be ambitious.”

She turned her head and looked out through the narrow mullioned window beside her as though to avoid his eyes, but she answered quietly:

“If I have any ambitions, they are not very imposing. Let’s talk about yours; or rather let’s not talk about yours here. There are too many people and too much Swami. We are out at the lake, at the old summer home. Run out and dine with us to-morrow. Father is almost as anxious to see you as I am. You know you are his chief consolation for the fact that I am not a boy.”

“Thanks. May I bring Norris? Not that I’m afraid of the dark by myself, but that I really want you to know him.”

"Bring him of course, Dick," she said without enthusiasm.

"And now do you suppose I can get you a cup of coffee or a sherbet?"

"Hush, I don't know whether anything so vivid is possible. I believe, out of deference to Ram Juna, the refreshments are light almost to Nirvana. You can't insult a man who lives on a few grains of rice by making him watch the herd gorge on salads and ices, can you?"

"And do you really believe that great mountain of flesh was built out of little grains of rice?"

"Mrs. Appleton—you remember her?"

"She has pounced on me already. She remembers that I waltz like a dream."

"Dick," said Miss Elton scornfully, "don't make the mistake of considering yourself a plum. Mrs. Appleton told me that the Swami feeds on dew and flaming nebulae."

"Humph!" said Dick, "I think he's a big bronze fraud."

"Oh, come, men may be great without playing foot-ball," she laughed.

"Well, he's not for me. I can believe in almost any kind of a prophet except one that works miracles."

"Who knows? The Swami may be the molder of your destiny," said Madeline gaily, with youth's lightness in referring to the vague future.

"He may; but I'd lay long odds against it."

"I must be going." Miss Elton rose. "The crowd is thinning, and Mrs. Lenox looks impressively in my direction. We are going out together on the train. Their new country place is near us, you know. And you, ungrateful one, I suspect, have not even spoken to Mr. Early yet. Go and 'make your manners,' like a good boy. I'll expect you to-morrow afternoon. Mr. Norris, Dick has promised to bring you with him to dinner to-morrow. Till then, good-by."

"Come, Ellery, we'll face the music, now that the real attractions are gone," said Dick.

Mr. Early extended two hands, ponderous in proportion to the rest of his body, in fatherly greeting.

"Ah, Percival, my dear fellow, so you are done with Yale and back again in St. Etienne? I welcome you out of the fetters of mere bookishness into the freedom of real life, where it is man's business to serve, and not to absorb."

Dick blushed guiltily as several surrounding ladies turned their lorgnettes on him, but Mr. Early went on, undisturbed and very audible:

"I do not introduce you to Swami Ram Juna, because introductions belong to the world of conventionalities, and he lives in that world where real human relations are the only things that count; but I put your hand in his, in token of the contact in which your spirit may meet his great soul."

"Very good of you, I'm sure," murmured Dick, as the Swami bent his head and gave him a penetrating look.

"You, too, then, are a seeker?" Ram Juna inquired in a low tone, but with his delicate and distinct enunciation.

"Ah—I hope so," Dick answered hastily, and with an evident desire to push the topic no further. "And this, Mr. Early, is my old chum, Norris, who has come West to be on the editorial staff of the *Star*."

"The *Star*? It is the symbol of illumination. Is then your *Star* devoted to the enlightenment of mankind?" asked Ram Juna, transferring his fixed gaze.

"In a sense—yes," Norris faltered with a swift guilty recollection of certain head-lines in last night's edition.

"He who writes must think. He who thinks goes below the surface. He who goes below the surface is moving toward the center," said the Swami oracularly.

Mr. Early's broad face expanded into a benevolent smile, and an oncoming instalment swept the young men away.

"Does Mr. Early learn his remarks by heart?" asked Norris.

"I don't know. But let us be seekers. Let us seek dinner, and fresh air. Give me fresh air—anything but Nirvana!"

CHAPTER II

MOTHER AND SON

To have been captain of the foot-ball team, which some student of sociology has called the highest office in the free gift of the American people, might seem glory enough for one life; but

Richard Percival was of such stuff that all past triumphs became dust and ashes. He was greedy of the future. Now that the doors of college were fairly closed, that career became to him but as a half-dreaming condition, before one wakes.

On this summer evening, however, it was easy to prolong the dream, since the hour was one for quiet of body and for wandering visions. The room was large and suffused with that restfulness which comes to homes where serene and thoughtful lives have been lived. There were long straight lines; there was a scarcity of knickknacks; there were pictures gathered because they were loved and not to fill a bare space on the wall; there were books and books and books, many of them with the worn covers of old friends. Here, clasped in the arms of another old friend of a chair, half-sat, half-lay his mother, and near her lounged Ellery Norris, the friend whose delicate mingling of love and admiration was as fragrant wine to Dick, who believed in himself because others had always believed in him. The dying twilight, laden with rose-spiciness and with the first shrill notes of the warm night, came in through high narrow windows. Everywhere was the sweet repose that comes after sweet activity, and the center of it was the fragile woman who lay back in her chair, caressing with light hand the head of the young man who sat upon the rug and leaned against her knee.

Norris was looking at Mrs. Percival with a kind of wondering admiration which the son saw with a touch of pity. Poor old Norris! It must have been tough to grow up without a home. As for this fragrant type of femininity, young Percival took it for granted—at least in the women that belong to a man; and the other women hardly count.

Everything made Dick feel very tender toward his past, very well satisfied with his present, very secure about his future. All would be good. That was the natural order of the universe. He had always found it easy to do things and to be a good deal of a personage.

He stared up silently at the space above the mantel where hung a portrait that gazed back at him, with features pale in the fading light. Singularly alike were the boyish face that looked up and the boyish face that looked down, though the painted Percival, a little idealistic about the eyes, wholly firm about the mouth, appeared the more determined of the two. Perhaps this came from the shoulder-straps, the blue uniform, and the military squareness of the shoulders.

"Yes, you are like him, Dick." Mrs. Percival spoke to his thoughts. The boy looked up startled.

"Am I?" he asked. "I wish I might be. I wish I might be half so much of a man."

"And I hope you will be more—no, not that. He was my all. I can hardly wish you to *be* more, but I hope you will *do* more. At least you don't have a drag on you from the beginning, as he had. Has Dick told you the story, Ellery?" She turned with a gentle smile toward the other man. "You see I can't help calling you Ellery. Dick's letters have made you partly mine already. We are not strangers at all."

Norris flushed and impulsively laid his firm square hand over the slender one that was stretched upon the chair arm nearest him.

"You don't know how glad I am to be yours, and to have you for mine," he said. "I never knew my mother."

"You know then how Minnesota was a pioneer state, and how she sent a fifth of her population to the war, and Dad among the first? You know how the First Minnesota held the hill and turned the day at Gettysburg, though few of them lived to tell of their own bravery? It makes the lump come up in my throat even to remember it, just as it did when I first heard the news and knew that my boy-lover was there."

There was silence a moment.

"Ah, Dick, you have a young body to match your heart," Mrs. Percival went on, "but Dad, before he was twenty, carried a bullet in his side. He had to conquer pain before he could spend strength on other things."

Dick rubbed his cheek with the mother's trembling hand.

"Yes," he said soberly, "it must have been harder to endure the sufferings that clung to him and killed him at last than it would have been to give everything in one swift sacrifice. Endurance,—that's a word I don't know, do I, mother?"

"No, dear, that's the word you know least; but you'll have to learn it."

"Ellery, I guess that's where you have the advantage of me." Dick looked up with a smile.

"If I have, it's been a dour lesson," Norris answered with a wry face.

"Well, if Dad gave his life to his country by dying, I mean to give mine by living," Dick went on. "There must be things that need doing."

"More than there are men to do them," said his mother softly. "You have his spirit and his genius. You have health, too. Don't put a bullet in your young manhood."

"What do you mean, mother?"

"There are a thousand wounds besides those from a gun. I'm counting on you to live his life as he would have liked to live it—to be his son, Dick."

"You mustn't expect the sun and the moon to stand still before me."

"Oh, well, I dare say I'm as foolish as other mothers." Mrs. Percival laughed as though she must do that or cry. "But you were certainly born to something, Dick. You've shown it ever since you

organized your first militia company and whipped the five-year-olds in the next street.”

“And he’s kept right on bossing his particular gang ever since. Richard Dux,” smiled Ellery.

The boy grinned up at them, and his mind traveled to those later days when that leadership of his was so easily acknowledged as to be axiomatic. He saw in panorama the stormy joys of college life with the victories of the field. He beheld again the quieter hours when the young men saw visions together and felt themselves called to put shoulder to the car of righteousness, while they discussed with the sublime self-sufficiency of inexperience the politics and sociology of the world. The fellows all believed in him as one of those who are destined to be prime pushers at the wheel. Perhaps he would be among those conquerors who climb aboard and ride, forgetful of the plodding crowd which toils at the drudgery of progress but does not taste its glory. So many oblivions go to make one reputation.

Dick knew that power was in him. To others it showed in his unconscious self-confidence of carriage, in his eyes that glowed, in the electric something that compelled attraction.

But now college visions were fading into “the light of common day”. The boys had gone home to be men. Success began to look not like an aurora, but like a solid structure built of bricks that must be carried in hods. Hods are uninspiring objects.

Dick stared at the pile of unlit logs in the fireplace and felt the rhythmic strokes of his mother’s hand upon his well-thatched head as she watched him in sympathetic silence; but he saw the eyes of his fellow classmen and felt their good-by hand-clasps. Again the train thumped with monotonous rolling as it brought him ever westward and homeward. Farm after farm, village and town, city upon city, long level prairies that cried out of fertility, the rush and roar and chaos of Chicago, and then more cities and rivers and hills and lakes, and now the blessed restfulness of home and twilight. He had seen it all many times before—two thousand miles of space to be covered between New Haven and St. Etienne. On this last journey it had taken on a new significance to his eyes,—a significance which matched his dreams. It was instinct with meaning of which he was a part.

This was his country, huge, half-formed, needing men. Its bigness was not an accident of geography, but a pregnant fact in the consciousness of a people as wide as itself. Thousands of redmen once covered it, and it was then only a big place, not a great country. It must be a mighty race who would master those miles of inert earth.

God breathed His spirit into the earth and it became a living man. Man—His image—must breathe the spirit into the earth and make it a living civilization.

His father, with a Gettysburg bullet bruising his life, had nevertheless played the part, and done his share toward turning a frontier village into a noble city. With a thrill Dick saw himself building the structure higher on its firm foundations, making it great enough to match the wide fertile acres that lay about it, and the dazzling Minnesota sky that hung above. So he built his castle of achievement in the air, where his own glory lay mistily behind his service to his fellow men. Already the thing seemed done—vague and yet, somehow, concrete.

“Pooh, what is time? A mere figment of the imagination!” exclaimed Dick suddenly. “Was it day before yesterday that I came home? Forty-eight hours have put a gulf between the old and the new me. Condensed time,—just add hot water and it swells to six times its original bulk.”

His mother smiled indulgently at her son’s vagaries of speech, and he went on:

“Moreover, I’ve been away four years,—years of vast importance, it seems to me. I come back and everything is going on in the same old way. Every one is interested in the same old things. They don’t seem to think anything exciting has happened, except that the city has doubled in size and there has been another presidential election. They aren’t a bit stirred up over me. They aren’t even deeply moved because Ellery over there is wielding an inexperienced editorial pen. Everything is familiar, but I’ve forgotten it all. It’s hard to pick up the threads.”

“More than that, boys. The threads are not all done up in a neat bunch and handed to you as they are in New Haven. St. Etienne’s point of view is not always that of the gentleman and the scholar. Its great men are not of the campus, but those who control the destinies of others, sometimes by wealth, oftener by the genius of power. But, after all, this is the real world.”

Dick laughed again.

“And a world after my own heart, mother.”

“Yes, I think you will fit in,” she said with maternal complacency. “Both of you,” she added with sudden remembrance.

“The fitting-in on my part will have to be a process of swelling, I guess,” Norris said whimsically. “Small and narrow as is the berth I have at the *Star* office, I shall have to be bigger than I am before I fill it.”

“Oh, you’re all right. You’re fundamentally all right, and that means you’ll rise to every opportunity you get.” Dick’s voice took on some of the patronage of a leader for his follower. “I’d bank on Ellery Norris if the rest of the world turned sour.”

“Thanks,” said Ellery briefly, and their eyes met in that interchange of assurance which is the masculine American equivalent for embrace and eternal protestation. Mrs. Percival smiled to herself, amused yet pleased by the frank boyish affection.

“What kind of a time did you have at Mr. Early’s reception?” she asked abruptly.

"Oh, it was a circus with three rings. In the middle ring there was a performing hippopotamus of a Hindu. He was really a sunburst. Then in the farthest ring there were a thousand women with big hats, all talking at once. But in the nearest there were just Madeline and Mrs. Lenox, and that was a good show. By Jove! Madeline is prettier than ever, and hasn't found it out yet. That's the advantage of sending a girl off to a women's college where there is no man to enlighten her."

"Pretty! That's not the word to describe Miss Elton. She's too simple and dignified," remonstrated Norris.

"Bowled over already, are you?" Dick jeered.

"Ellery is quite right," Mrs. Percival interrupted. "Madeline has something Easter-lily-like about her."

"You grow enthusiastic, mother."

"I love her very dearly, Dick."

"Norris and I are going out to see her to-morrow. We'll take the motor, I guess."

Mrs. Percival beamed down at him and gave his head an affectionate pat, and the son glanced up with a blandness that might easily have become a smirk. Yet his mother's complacent satisfaction with the inevitable irritated him. Madeline Elton might be the most admirable combination of the virtues and the graces, but he wanted to find it out for himself.

Mrs. Percival rose with the air of one who has heard and said what she desired.

"Good night, dear boy," she purred as Dick struggled to his long legs. "How good it is to have you to lean on and trust! These have been lonely years while you were away. Now I shall leave you two to your quiet smoke."

Dick kissed her hand and then her lips, as though to show both reverence and love. Norris, too, stooped and kissed her hand, and the two watched her as she moved in her slow way up the stairs. As she disappeared, Norris turned and laid an arm over Dick's shoulder.

"That's the kind of thing, Percival, that you do not wholly appreciate unless you've gone without it. I grew up without any atmosphere to speak of, and I've been gasping for breath all my life. I wonder if I shall ever get a full allowance of air to live in."

As they looked, friendly eye into friendly eye, Ellery seemed to review his own life in contrast with Dick's. Dick had background; he had to begin everything for himself. He had earned most of his way through college; he had earned his standing among the men as he had earned his standing in scholarship, by dogged persistence instead of by the right of eminent domain to which Dick was born. He had never envied Percival's readier brain, wider popularity, more profuse fortune; but something close to envy crept upon him now for this refinement of home, this delicate mother-love. This was a loss not to be made good by pluck or perseverance. Love was the gift of the gods.

CHAPTER III

AN OCCIDENTAL LUMINARY

Over next door, beyond the thick laurel hedge, on this same evening, Mr. Sebastian Early, now that the last of his guests had withdrawn the silken wonder of her reception skirts, was settling down to a quiet evening with his turbaned guest.

Now Mr. Sebastian Early is far too intricate a person to be dismissed, as Mrs. Lenox disposed of him, with a phrase and a laugh. In early life, it is true, he had seemed a commonplace and insignificant young man. His first appearance before the public was as the inventor of a hook-and-eye, but his hook-and-eye had such unusual merits that it seemed, according to the engaging pictures and verses in the street-cars, to simplify most of the sterner problems of every-day life. As its lineaments began to stare at passers-by from thousands of huge bill-boards over the length and breadth of the land, dimes turned to dollars in Mr. Early's ever-widening pockets, and for the time he felt himself a man of distinction. Yet in these later and regenerate days, Mr. Early sometimes had a moment's anguish as he remembered those miles of unesthetic bill-boards, which once marred the meadows and streams of his native land; for with a widening horizon, there had crept upon him a rising spirit of discontent.

Perhaps it was that divine discontent, which William Morris celebrates, that makes men yearn for higher things. Department stores still rolled out their multitudinous cards of hooks-and-eyes, but the person of Sebastian Early passed unnoticed in the crowd. He yearned for fame, not for his product, but for himself, and the same ability that led him to serve the wants of the public in hooks now drove him to study its social demands. Like many another unfortunate, he began to perceive that dollars alone were not enough of a key to unlock the magic door. In this over-fed land, people with money are growing too common. Therefore to gold one must add power and distinction, if one would keep one's head above the herd. This must one do and not leave the other undone.

Sebastian determined to make himself interesting. The public has a fawning respect for fame. One or two abortive attempts convinced Mr. Early that his literary efforts would bring him not even the distinction of infamy. At last he hit upon an idea. He would be a patron of the Arts—not one of your little ordinary buyers, but a man whose purse was, so to speak, regilded by mind. He spent six months of hard work as a student of the situation and then he made his début. He selected a few gems of half-forgotten eighteenth century literature—gems that deserved to be given life-preservers on that stream of oblivion into which they were too surely being sucked. These he brought forth in tiny volumes, wide-edged and thick-papered, illuminated as to capitals and bound in ooze or in old brocade on which were scattered a few decorations, calculated, so unthinkable were they, to upset the reasoning power of the average reader, and thus prepare him for the literary matter which he should find within.

These books naturally “took.” They invited no man to read, but they were interesting to look at and therefore particularly adapted to those occasions when one must make a small gift to a friend. Scarce a center-table in the country but held at least one. The beauty of it was that the literary matter cost him nothing, and the books were their own advertising bill-boards; for wherever they went they lay in conspicuous places.

From books Mr. Early passed on to furniture; and he begot strange shapes, wherein forgotten Gothic forms were commingled with forms that never man saw before; and these also took. So the circle widened, until glass pottery and rugs were gathered into the potpourri of Mr. Early’s genius.

Finally he established his magazine, *The Aspirant*, for he began to feel the need of explaining things—chiefly himself—to his expanding circle. *The Aspirant* had covers of butcher’s paper; and the necessity for self-defense at last developed in Mr. Early that literary style which he had found it impossible to cultivate while he still had nothing to say. He grew a peculiar ability for self-glorification and for slugging the other man. Particularly caustic did his pen become in respect to those, whether painters, musicians, poets, novelists or reformers, who had endeared themselves to the great mass of the public. *The Aspirant* always called the public “the rabble,” and you can’t damn humanity more easily and cheaply than by calling it “the rabble.” Naturally every one hastened to buy Mr. Early’s furniture, his rugs and his pottery, and diligently to read *The Aspirant*, in order that he or she might escape the universal condemnation. Be *outré* and you’ll be right; be right and you’ll be *outré*; be *outré* anyway: was the simple creed.

To those penniless celebrities to whom purchase of Mr. Early’s commodities was over-expensive, there was another way out from under. They might visit Mr. Early’s hospitable home, and so contribute their mite to the halo of distinction that surrounded him. The great ones came to St. Etienne. They ate and drank and were exhibited to an admiring throng. They gave lectures, introduced from the platform by Mr. Sebastian Early; they went away and *The Aspirant* chronicled their satellite excellences. No such ex-guest need fear a blow in the face upon its pages. All these things came before the public—more and more before the public every year. They kept Mr. Early’s growing corps of assistants busy, inventing new furniture and new forms of invective.

It is needless to say that the hook-and-eye was never included in the illustrious list of Mr. Early’s productions. That gentleman frequently blessed himself in private that his first commodity had been put upon the market as the “Imperial,” and not as the “Bright and Early” as he had once half-resolved. Only a few knew who was responsible for the bill-boards.

Still even his new enterprises paid. He was a good business man, and he shared with “the rabble” an appetite for cold cash. Nor did the crafty Arts exhaust either his abilities or his desires; for though he had no wish to pose before the world in the over-done rôle of a millionaire, still he needed money and ever more and more money. To get it he kept his hand in many a business enterprise and his eye on many a speculation of which the gaping world did not dream. Even his right-hand editorial writer knew not of his left-handed dip into an electric light company here or a paving contract there, for his left hand had assistants too,—quiet, unobtrusive, even shy,—men who could lobby a bill “on the quiet,” or wreck an opposing company, even though they did not know the difference between Hafiz and chutney. And Mr. Early’s mind was of such a broad catholicity that it would be hard to tell which side of his career he most enjoyed, the variety-show or the still-hunt.

Thus it will be seen that this great man, who was a credit to the new art movement of our time, and of whom St. Etienne, a young western city, felt justly proud, was in his usual element when he introduced to the society, in which he was now a fixed star, a light from the Far East. And Swami Ram Juna seemed so sure that he himself was right and all the rest of the world was wrong, that Mr. Early felt him to be a kindred spirit.

The impression deepened as he found himself alone with the Hindu. He had rather dreaded the strange demands and customs that might meet him; but the man of bronze and the snowy turban proved himself to be the best of table companions, suave, courteous and sympathetic. He seemed even to take a kindly interest in such matters of a day as Mr. Early’s incursions into the realms of art and literature. Through dinner they chatted almost gaily, and afterward, while Mr. Early smoked, the Swami joined him in the slow sipping of a liqueur.

There is a frankness of those who have nothing to hide; there is a frankness which makes a mask for him who is, below the surface, all mystery. As Sebastian studied his companion, he told himself that this simple creature was after all a man, perhaps adapting himself to public demands as any clever fellow would; and, as this thought occurred to him, Mr. Early’s benevolence increased.

"You ought to write a book," he said with the air of one projecting a novel thought. "With your gift for expression, and your—ah—insight into realities, you couldn't fail to make a success of it."

"It is my intention," said the Hindu.

Mr. Early looked a little taken aback, but brightened again with a new suggestion.

"Why not do it here?" he asked. "Come, where could you find a more fitting place? You have your rooms in a wing of the house all to yourself. That gives you perfect solitude. I should be delighted to have you for my guest while you do your work; and when you finish, I know enough of the tricks of the trade to help you push it a bit."

"Of a certainty truth is self-vigorous, and needs no tricks to keep it living."

"Ah, yes," the man of business answered cheerfully. "But one may boost it,—one may boost it, my dear fellow."

The Swami bent his great head and appeared to meditate. When he looked up, his spiritual eyes were narrowed to a speculative slit, and he studied the face on the other side of the comfortable log fire. 49

"My friend, you are generous. You offer me a home, and I am fain to accept it, if I may put the offer in another form. For the present I must return to India. Too long already have I been away from the atmosphere which is to me life. I must see some of the brothers of my soul. I must saturate myself with repose and with the underlying—with Karma. Also, in this too-vigorous country, that is unattainable. But here, in this place, one who is filled with the message might give it forth to his brothers—or perhaps to the sisters, who appear the more anxious for it. Here the very energy of the air says 'give' rather than 'grow'. If I might a year—six months hence—accept your hospitality?" He looked tentatively at Mr. Early.

"My home is yours. Do what you like with it," said Mr. Early benignly. He was thinking how well a picturesque cut of the Hindu's head would look on the covers of *The Aspirant*, combined with a judicious puff within.

The Swami smiled serenely. 50

"I observe," he went on in his delicate voice, "that the wing on the ground floor, in which you have given me room, has two apartments, divided by a little passage, and that the little passage gives not upon the public highway, but upon a garden, quiet and lovely, that faces the sun and is shut in by brick walls and hedges. The farther one of these rooms is bare and but slightly furnished, though my bedroom is sumptuous like that of a maha-rajah. Still the bare small room pleases me best. If I might have this room when I come again! If I might keep the bare room sacred to my meditations, all unentered save by myself! It means to me much that no alien mind, no soul of a common servant, should mar the serenity of the atmosphere in that spot where I sit alone with myself. I would have it dedicated to the greater Me. It would be the cap-sheaf—do you not so say in this land of great harvests?—thus to give shelter not only to my body, but to my soul, in this bare and quiet little room."

"Why, certainly, certainly!" Mr. Early could not help thinking that a guest who spent most of his time alone in an empty room would prove no great tax upon his entertainer. 51

"I thank you," said Ram Juna, rising and making a salaam of curious dignity and courtesy. "You bid me lecture. You bid me write and instruct in the sacred truths. That will I do when I come again; and my consolation shall be the unblemished hours when I sit alone in the little room which faces the sun. You comprehend me? You understand?"

And Mr. Early, who never, if he could help it, spent a half-hour in either solitude or idleness, answered again:

"Why, certainly, certainly."

"In some months, then, I may return, noble friend. And now I will bid you farewell until the dawn."

The Swami, with marvelous lightness of foot in spite of his huge body, made off for his own domain. If Mr. Early, who now sat and yawned alone by the dying fire, could have peeped in on the excellent Ram Juna, he would have been much gratified by the evident satisfaction with which the Oriental surveyed the quarters which were one day to be his. The Swami strode at once across the bedroom, across the little passage that opened into the garden, into the unused room beyond. Here with a swift thrust he turned on the electric light, then moved from window to window, opened them, examined the heavy wooden shutters which he closed and unclosed, craning his bull-neck through the opened sashes. Around and under each piece of furniture he peered, nodding and smiling his approbation of everything. As he came out, he paused for some moments to examine the lock on the door. 52

"Quite inadequate, quite inadequate," he muttered with a frown. "We must do better than that."

He stood and thought a moment, then put out the light, stepped to the garden door and disappeared into the night.

With so light a tread did he come back that Mr. Early, should he have been listening, could have heard no warning footstep to tell him that his guest was returning.

Back in his own bedroom, Ram Juna peeped into the luxurious bath-room with placid delight.

"So much water, so easily hot," he said. "It is admirable. All is admirable." He sank in a heap,

cross-legged, in the middle of the floor, with large hands folded over his stomach, and large eyes narrowed, while a kindly smile spread over his face, and his head nodded at rhythmic intervals, for all the world like a benevolent Buddha. The ruby glowed and sparkled like a living thing in the light and movement; and thus he sat for some hours.

53

CHAPTER IV

AT MADELINE'S

54

"Now," said Richard Percival, as he and Norris stowed themselves away in his automobile, "we shall leave the city, in which are contained how many loves and struggles and silk umbrellas at reasonable prices, and go to the lake where there is no civilization to bother and distract. The lake is 'The Lake' *par excellence* to St. Etienne. It was created by Providence for summer homes. Therefore it was placed only ten miles from the Falls. Providence was a good business woman. Generations of savages lived and died—chiefly died—here. They came where the Father of Waters roared and tumbled and they made their prayers to the Great Spirit, but the sight never suggested to them a great city. Then came the Anglo-Saxon, whatever he is, and harnessed the power of the river, and built ugly gray mills, dusty with flour, and turned his log huts into houses of brick and stone, and erected saloons and department stores. And when he had worked like Dædalus—and you've probably forgotten who Dædalus was, now that you have been a few weeks out of college—when he had worked like Dædalus, I say, and got the hardest of it done, he began to look at something besides the Falls and to pine for means of dalliance. Behold then at his hand, Lake Imnijaska! And now Madeline Elton is the best thing on its shore. Gee up, old motor!"

55

They sped along and Dick took up the tale. He was used to talking while Norris listened and appreciated.

"Evidently you don't know who Dædalus was or you would have answered back. What kind of an omniscient editor are you going to make, think you? Never mind, Dædalus is dead; and, anyway, Edison has beaten him by six holes.

"The lake, as I was saying, twists and turns so that it gets in more shore to the square inch than any other known sheet of water. Therefore the real-estate dealer loves it. And if you elevate your longshore nose and sniff at our lake because no salt codfish dry upon smelly wharves and no sea anemones or crabs appear and disappear with the tides, then will the entire population of St. Etienne rise and howl anathemas at you. They will run you out of town on the Chicago Express, and as you fly for your life they will shriek after you, 'Well, anyway, we feed the world with flour!' Yes, sir, that is the way we Westerners argue."

56

Dick halted at the top of the hill up which the faithful motor had coughed, and the two looked down on the shimmering blue that stretched below them with arms of broken opals sprawling for miles, now here, now there. Long tortuous passages opened out anew into ever more bays, as though the water were greedy to explore. Around it rolled the woodland in billows of intense green with sandy beaches in the troughs and straight cliffs at the crests. The green islands were vivid in color. So was the sky above, like the flash in a sapphire. A half-dozen sails fluttered gull-like, and as many launches darted along, suggesting living water creatures.

"By Jove!" Ellery exclaimed, moving uneasily. "When you sniff this air it makes you want to stand on tiptoe on a hilltop and shout. And when you look at these colors, they are too brilliant to be true."

57

"Even you, you old conservative slow-poking duffer!" cried Dick. "This is the land to wake you up. It calls 'harder—harder!' every-day."

"It's a different kind of beauty from what I'm used to." Ellery sobered down again. "I've been trying to analyze it ever since I came West. It wouldn't appeal to the tired or the world-weary. Its charm is for the vigorous and the confident and the hopeful—for the young."

"For us, my boy," Dick said.

"At Madeline's," as Dick called it, with that obliviousness of the older generation shown by the younger, Norris felt as they entered, as he had felt at Mrs. Percival's, that he was in a candid, human, refined home, with a full appreciation of the finer sides of life. They passed through the drawing-room and by long glass doors to the broad piazza, with every invitation to laziness, easy chairs, cushions, magazines, all made fragrant by a huge jar of roses and another of sweet peas. And there was not too much. The veranda in turn gave upon a wide expanse of green that stretched steeply down to that cool wet line where the lapping waters met the lawn. The trees whispered softly around. Every prospect was pleasing, and only man was vile; for there was another man, sitting in the most comfortable of chairs and engaging Madeline all to himself, as he contentedly sipped the cup of tea that he had taken from her hand. This other man, whose name was Davison, was making himself agreeable after the fashion of his kind, a fashion quite familiar to every girl who has been so unfortunate as to get a reputation, however little deserved, for superior brains.

58

"Afternoon," he said, "I didn't suppose any other fellows except myself were brave enough, to call on Miss Elton. I hear she's so awfully clever, you know. Taken degrees and all that sort of thing. Give you my word it comes out in everything around her. Why, this very napkin she gave me has a Greek border. Everything has to be classic now."

"Not everything, Mr. Davison," said Madeline indulgently. "You know I am delighted to have you here." She turned abruptly to the new-comers as though she had already had a surfeit of this subject. It is a pleasant thing to have had a good education, but one does not care to spend one's time thinking about it, any more than about how much money there is in one's pocket.

59

"You had a fine ride out?" Madeline asked.

"Great!" answered Dick. "To be young, on a summer day, seated in a good motor with a thoroughly tamed and domesticated gasoline engine, and to be coming to see you—what more could we ask of the gods?"

"You see Percival feels that he must lard the gods into his intercourse with you, Miss Elton," Mr. Davison interjected.

"That's because the gods have become nice homey things," retorted Dick. "Even in the West we couldn't keep house without Dionysius assisted by Hebe to superintend our afternoon teas, and Hercules as a patron of baseball."

Madeline laughed and cast a grateful look in his direction.

"You see how pleasant it is to feel familiar with the gods so that you can use them freely," she said.

"So you don't think it's necessary, in order to be clever, to despise everything that's done nowadays, because the Greeks used up all the ideas first?" asked Davison.

"Not at all. Nature conducts a vast renovating and cleaning establishment, and whenever any old ideas look the least bit frayed or soiled around the edges, pop, in they go, and come out French dry-cleaned and as fresh as ever. They're sent home in a spick-span box and you couldn't tell 'em from new."

60

"If we don't get anything new I hope that we, at least, get rid of some of the old things—fears and superstitions," said Madeline. "Things that are holy rites in one age are so apt to be holy frights in the next."

"Say, did you ever go down the streets of Boston and notice the number of signs of palmists and astrologers and vacuum cures?" exclaimed Davison. "But perhaps it ain't fair to take Boston for a standard."

Ellery, a true New Englander, stared at him in astonishment, as one who heard sacred things lightly spoken of.

"Most of us can see how funny we are," Davison pursued.

"Can we?" murmured Dick.

"But Boston," he went on calmly, "has lost her sense of humor. She peers down at everything she does and says, 'This is very serious.' That's why she takes astrologers in earnest. They're in Boston. Anyway, I think you were mighty sensible to come back to us, Miss Elton, rather than to stay in the unmarried state, alias Massachusetts. A girl really has a much better chance in the West."

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"Yes, that's where Miss Elton showed a long head," said Dick with evident glee.

"But really now, joking apart," Davison went on, having made his opening, "don't you think it's unsettling to a girl to do too much studying?"

"I hope you are not deeply agitated over the eradication of womanliness," Madeline remonstrated. "Really, Mr. Davison, it isn't an easy thing to stop being a woman—when you happen to be born one."

"But there are plenty of unwomanly women," he objected.

"That's true," she answered, "but I believe womanliness is killed—when it is killed—not through the brain, but through the heart. It's not knowledge, but hard-heartedness that makes the unwomanly woman."

She glanced up and met Norris' eyes. It was not easy for him to join in the chatter of the others, but he was thinking how she illuminated her own words. Manifestly she was not lacking in mind, and quite as evidently her brain was only the antechamber of her nature. She gave him the impression of "the heart at leisure from itself". There was the unconsciousness of sheltered girlhood, but already, in bud, the suggestion of that big type of woman who, as years mellow her, touches with sympathy every life with which she comes in contact. What she now was, promised more in the future, as though Fate said, "I'm not through with her yet. I've plenty in reserve to go to her making."

62

"Intelligence," said Dick pompously, "is the tree of life in man, and the flower in woman—and one does not presume to criticize flowers."

Mr. Davison changed his method of attack.

"Oh, of course I'm up against it," he said, "with you three fresh from the academic halls. But I can tell you you'll feel pretty lonely out here. The street-car conductors don't talk Sanskrit in the

West. They talk Swede."

"Oh, this,—this is home!" cried Madeline, springing up as if to shake off the conversation. "You don't know how I love it! It's fresh and vigorous and its face is forward." She flung out her arms and smiled radiantly down on the three young men, as though she were an embodiment of the ozone of the Northwest.

63

"Sing to us, please, Madeline," said Dick.

"Very well, I will," she said. "I'll sing you a song I made myself yesterday, when I was happy because I was at home again. Perhaps it will tell you how I feel, for it's a song of Minnesota." She turned and nodded to Mr. Davison, and then slipped through the doors to the room where the piano stood.

The long shadows of afternoon lay across the lawn, and the grass, more green than ever in the level light, clasped the dazzling blue of the quiet waters. The three men stretched themselves in their easy chairs, as a stroked kitten stretches itself, with a lounging abandon which is forbidden to their sisters, as Madeline's voice rose fresh and true and touched with the joy of youth.

"Ho, west wind off the prairie;
Ho, north wind off the pine;
Ho, myriad azure lakes, hill-clasped,
Like cups of living wine;
Ho, mighty river rolling;
Ho, fallow, field and fen;
By a thousand voices nature calls,
To fire the hearts of men.

"Ho, fragrance of the wheat-fields;
Ho, garnered hoards of flax;
Ho, whirling millwheel, 'neath the falls;
Ho, woodman's ringing ax.
Man blends his voice with nature's,
And the great chorus swells.
He adds the notes of home and love
To the tale the forest tells.

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"Oh, young blood of the nation;
Oh, hope in a world of need;
The traditions of the fathers
Still be our vital seed.
Thy newer daughters of the West,
Columbia, mother mine,
Still hold to the simple virtues
Of field and stream and pine."

The song stopped abruptly, and Dick sprang to his feet.

"Good, Madeline!" he exclaimed. "You make me feel how great it is to be part of it."

"Do I?" she said. "I thought of you when I wrote it. Oh, here come father and mother back from their drive."

Mr. Davison rose hastily.

"I'd no idea it was so late," he said. "I must be going. Miss Elton, I didn't mean a word of all that about your being so clever. You're all right."

"Thanks for the tribute," Madeline smiled as he disappeared down the drive. "Dick, I wish you'd always be on hand when he comes. He makes my brain feel like a woolly dog."

65

"Rummy chap," said Norris.

The older people came in to greet the boy they had known all his life, to ask the innumerable usual questions, to say the inevitable things through dinner.

Afterwards, when the last fragments of sunset burned through and across the water, they gathered on the piazza. It was that dreamy hour when women find it easy to be silent and men to talk. Madeline and her mother sat close, with hands restfully clasped in their joy at being together. Mr. Elton eyed the two young men from his vantage of years of shrewd wisdom. Both the boys were clean-shaven, after the manner of the day, a fashion that seems to become clean manliness, vigorous and self-controlled. Both were good to look at; but here the resemblance ended, for Dick's long slender face and body lithe with its athletic training, was alive and restless, as though he found it difficult to keep back his passion for activity; Ellery, big but loosely joined, had the dogged look of one that held some of his energy in reserve. A good pair, Mr. Elton concluded, and felt a sudden spasm of longing for a son—not that he would have exchanged Madeline for any trousered biped that walked, but it would be a great thing to own one such well of young masculine vigor as these.

66

"It's going to be great fun for us old fellows to sit back and watch you young ones," the elder man ejaculated. "There are several good-sized jobs waiting for you."

"That's a good thing," said Dick. "When there's nothing to do, nobody'll do it."

"And it will be a tame sort of a world, eh? Well, thank the Lord, it's none of our responsibility any longer. You've got to tackle it. The new phases of things are too much for me, with a brain solidified by years."

"You might at least help us by stating the problem," said Norris.

"You see, it's like this. Until a few years ago every census map of the United States was seamed by a long line marked 'frontier.' That line is gone. That's the situation in a nutshell. Our work, the subjugation of the land, is about done, and the question is now up to you; what are you going to do with it? You know the old story of the man who said he had a horse who could run a mile in two-forty. And the other fellow asked, 'What are you going to do when you get there?' We've done the running and our children are there. Now what? You must develop a whole set of new talents—not trotting talents, but staying talents."

"I suppose," said Norris slowly, for Dick was silent, "circumstances bring out abilities. That's the law that operated in the case of the older generation, and we'll have to trust to it in ours."

"That's true. But I sometimes wonder if, after all, we are helping you to the best preparation. We send you back to get the old education. The tendency of old communities is to rehash the traditions until they become authority. New communities have to face problems for themselves and solve them by new ways. The first kind of training makes scholars. The second brings out genius. The old makes men think over the thoughts of others. Heaven knows we need men who will think for themselves!"

"Well, 'old and young are fellows'," said Dick. "To-day grows out of yesterday."

"Yes, if it grows. The growing is the point. It mustn't molder on yesterday. You must have enough books to get your thinkers going, but not more. You must not feast on libraries until you get intellectual gout and have to tickle your palate with dainties. A good deal of stuff that's written nowadays seems to me like literary cocktails,—something to stir a jaded appetite. That's my friend Early's specialty—to serve literary cocktails. But the appetite you bolster up isn't the equivalent of a good healthy hunger after a day out-of-doors."

"When nature wants a genius, I suppose she has to use fresh seed," said Dick.

"And genius is creative," Mr. Elton went on. "So far, the genius this country has developed is that which takes the raw material of forest and river and creates civilization. And let me tell you that's a very different job from heaping up population."

Silence fell on the little group and they became suddenly aware of lapping waters and the sleepy twitter of birds, and even of a long slender thread of pale light that struck across the lake from a low-lying star. Madeline gave a little sigh and pressed her mother's hand.

Dick flushed and hesitated in the darkness, with youth's confidence in its own great purposes and youth's craving for sympathy in its ambitions. Mr. Elton's combination of kindness and shrewdness seemed to draw him out.

"It sounds impertinent and conceited for a young fellow like me to talk about what he means to do."

"Fire away. I knew your father, Dick."

"Then you'll know what I mean when I say that it has always been my ambition to live up to his traditions—his ideal of a man's public duties."

Mr. Elton nodded and Dick went on, while Ellery eyed him with some of the old college respect, and Madeline leaned eagerly forward.

"I don't mean any splurge, you understand, but the same quiet service he gave. Father left his affairs in such good order that there isn't any real necessity for me to try to add to my income. Of course, it isn't a great fortune, but it's more than enough; and my ambitions don't lie that way. There's a certain amount of business in taking care of it as it stands. Mother is glad to turn the burden of it over to me. She's done nobly—dear little woman—but—"

"I understand. It's a man's business."

"Yes," said Dick, with the simple masculine superiority of four and twenty. "That's enough of a background for life, you see; but I long since made up my mind that public affairs—affairs that concern the whole community—are to be my real interest."

"So you're going into politics, Dick?" said the older man slowly.

"Well, not to scramble for office," Percival answered with a flush. "We fellows have been well-enough taught, haven't we, Ellery? to know that it is rather an ugly mess—I mean municipal affairs in this country. The local situation, here in St. Etienne, I have yet to study; and I don't mean to lose any time in beginning."

Mr. Elton made no reply for a moment, and when he spoke there was an unpleasant cynicism in his voice that galled Dick's pride.

"The young reformer! Well, I suppose a decent man with a little ability could do something here, if he knew what he was going to do. It's a good thing to get on your sea-legs before you try to command a ship."

"Father!" Madeline cried out, unable to contain herself. "Don't you be a horrid wet blanket!"

The three looked at her to see her face aglow with the lovely feminine belief in masculinity that also belongs to the early twenties.

"That's all right," said the elder Elton unemotionally. "I wasn't wet-blanketing—I know things are needed. There's plenty of corruption wanting to be buried, and most of us are content to hold our noses and let it lie. Or perhaps we give an exclamation of disgust when it is served up in the newspapers. Reform if you must, but don't reform all day and Sundays too; and build your cellars before you begin your attics."

Then he went on a shade more heartily: "It's a mighty good thing for some of you young fellows to be going into politics; perhaps that's the chief work for the next generation. And Norris—what of you?"

Ellery started. It had been a silent evening for him, but his silence had glowed with interest, not so much in the conversation as in his own thoughts. Two things had forced themselves home,—the first when he looked down on that expanse of vivid water, vivid sky, vivid green. Here a man, even a young man, might waken to all his faculties and make something of life. He need not plod dully through years, to reach success only when he is old and tired. The landscape poured like wine into Ellery Norris' veins.

And now here was the other side. He had watched with fascination the restfulness of Miss Elton's hands, the one that held her mother's, the one that lay quietly in her lap. He watched her steady eyes that kept upon her father and Dick as they talked. He saw her face glow with sympathy and interest and yet remain calm, as if secure in the goodness of the world; and he told himself that he was glad this wonderful thing belonged to Dick. Dick's restlessness would be held in leash, as it were, by this steadfastness.

Once she half turned as though she felt his scrutiny, and queer pains darted through his body when her eyes met his.

Now when Mr. Elton attacked him, he came back from his far-away excursion with a sense of surprise that there was a present, but he smiled cheerfully.

"Oh, I'm not a very important person. I'm just beginning to learn the trade of a newspaper man, and I'm afraid I shan't be able to think about much but city news and bread and butter for the next few years."

"No telling what may happen, with his Honor, the mayor here, backed up by the power of the press. We'll make St. Etienne a model city in the sight of gods and men, eh, boys?" said Mr. Elton good-humoredly, but rising as if to cut short the conversation.

"Can't we take a walk before Ellery and I go back to town?" asked Dick.

"Go, you kid things. I haven't seen the evening paper yet, and that's more to my old brain than moonlight strolls." Mr. Elton dismissed them.

The three young people set out upon a path that twisted by the lake shore, bordered on its inner side by trees that had become in the darkness mere shapeless masses out of which an occasional mysterious thread of light brought into sight some uncanny shape. The purple of the evening zenith had sunk into deeper and deeper blue, pricked here and there with stars. Bats were wheeling in mysterious circles among the tree-tops, and the air was full of sounds that seem to come only at twilight.

"Isn't it strange that though every one of those trees is an old friend, I should be frightened at the very idea of being alone among them at night? And yet there's nothing in the dark that isn't in the day," said Madeline.

"Oh, yes, there is," Dick rejoined. "There's more being afraid in the dark."

She laughed and they went on in silence.

"Who's been building a new house, just on the very spot I always meant to own some day—right here next to your father?" Dick demanded, stopping abruptly.

"Oh, you haven't seen that, have you?" said Madeline. "Let's sit down on this log and look at the stars. That's Mr. Lenox's new house; and I'm so sorry for them!"

"Why grieve for the prosperous? Reserve your tears for the suffering."

"Why, you know, in town, they live with Mr. Windsor, who is Mrs. Lenox's father, and he's a multimillionaire; and it's a great establishment; and the world is necessarily very much with them. So when Mr. Lenox proposed that they should build a country house of their own and spend their summers here, I think he wanted to get out to some primitive simplicity, where the children could go barefoot if they wanted to. But as soon as it was suggested, Mr. Windsor presented his daughter with a big tract, and insisted on building this great palace, and they have to keep so many servants that Mr. Lenox says it is a regular Swedish boarding-house. And there are so many guest-rooms that it would be a shame not to have them occupied; and extra people run out in their motors every day; and the children have to be kept immaculate all the time. So they've brought the world out with them. Mr. Lenox has to dress for dinner, instead of putting on old slippers and going out to weed the strawberry-bed, which is what he would like to do when he gets out on the evening train."

"Poor things, in bondage to their house!" said Norris, and they all looked solemnly at the multitude of lights shining through the trees.

"There are ever so many disadvantages about being among the few very rich people in a western town, where most of your friends aren't opulent," Madeline went on. "When Mrs. Lenox makes a call, she has to wait while the woman changes her dress. And nobody says to her, 'Oh, do stay to lunch,' when they've nothing but oysters or beefsteak, but they wait till they get in an

extra chef and then send her a formal invitation. I believe ours is one of the half-dozen houses where people don't pretend to be something quite different from what they are when Mrs. Lenox appears. And yet she's the most simple-minded and genuine person, and would rather have beefsteak and friendship than *paté de fois gras* and good gowns any day."

"Poor things!" said Dick again.

"I think they are out on the terrace now. Would you like to go over and see them?" Madeline asked.

"No, thank you," said Dick politely. "We won't make their life any more complicated. Besides, I prefer the society of you and the stars to that of the miserable too-rich. And they are not alone."

"Of course not. They never are. But Mrs. Lenox said yesterday that late this fall, when every one else has gone into winter quarters, she is going to ask you and me and perhaps one or two others to visit her; and we'll have a serene and lovely time."

"Do you think that there is any hope that they will have lost part of their money by that time?" asked Dick.

"Father says Mr. Windsor has forgotten how to lose money, and of course Mr. Windsor and Mr. Lenox are all one."

"I must see to it that I don't marry a millionaire's daughter," said Dick.

CHAPTER V

SALAD DAYS

The most desirable thing in life is to have the sense of doing your duty without the trouble of doing it. Therefore days of preparation are always delicious days. There is the mingling of repose with all the joys of activity. To be planning to do things has in it more of triumph than the actual doing. It carries the irradiating light of hope and purpose, without the petty pin-prick of detail which comes when reality parodies ideals.

Dick's first summer at home was a period of delight. He absorbed ideas and so felt that he was doing something in this city of his birth which now, in his manhood, came back to him as something new and strange. The weeks drifted by and he seemed to drift with them, though both mind and body were alert. All the things he learned and all the things he meant to do were tripled and quadrupled in interest when he passed them on to his two counselors-in-chief, Norris, solid and appreciative, Madeline, even more believing and more sympathizing, but glorified by that charm of sex which gilds even trifling contact of man and maid, making her friendship not only gilt but gold.

So he spent his days in prowling about and meeting all sorts and conditions of men, while Ellery slaved in a dirty and noisy office; but when Saturday came and the *Star* went to press at three, Norris, with the blissful knowledge that there was no Sunday edition, would meet Percival, stocked with a week's accumulation of experiences. In the hearts of both would be deep rejoicing as, at week-end after week-end, they stowed themselves in Dick's motor and betook themselves lakeward, nominally to go to the Country Club and play golf, but with the subconsciousness for both that the lake meant Madeline.

There were, to be sure, other people, girls agreeable, pretty and edifying, men of their own type and age, older men who did less sport and more business, but all of these were neither more nor less than a many-colored background to the little three-cornered intimacy which, as Dick said, "was the real thing."

It came to be understood that the three should spend their Sunday afternoons together, not on the cool piazza, where intrusion in its myriad forms might come upon them, but off somewhere, either on the bosom of the waters or on the bosom of the good green earth, who whispers her secret of eternal vitality to every one that lays an ear close to her heart.

The season was like the placid hour before the world wakes to its daily comedy and tragedy; and yet, with all its superficial serenity, this summer carried certain undercurrents of emotion that hardly rose to the dignity of discontent, but which, nevertheless, troubled the still waters of the soul. At first Madeline half resented the continual presence of Norris at these sacred conclaves. He seemed so much an outsider. Dick she had known all her life and she could talk to him with perfect freedom, but his friend often sat silent during their chatter, as though he were an onlooker before whom spontaneity was impossible. Yet as Sunday after Sunday the two young men strode up together, she grew to accept Ellery. First he became inoffensive; then she became aware that his eyes spoke when his lips were dumb; and finally, when words did come, they were the words of a friend who understood moods and tenses. In some ways it was a comfort to have this buffer between her and Dick. It helped to prolong the period of uncertain certainty.

Dick never spoke of love, but the way was pointed not only by the easy restfulness of their comradeship, but in the very atmosphere that surrounded them. She read it half-consciously in

the looks of father and mother as they met and accepted Dick's intimacy in the house, in the warmth of Mrs. Percival's motherly affection when Madeline ran in for one of her frequent calls. Life was full of it, like the gentle half-warmth that comes before the sun has quite peeped over the horizon on a summer morning; and it was well that this dawn to their day should be a long one. Madeline had been away the greater part of four years, and she was now in no hurry to cut short her reunion with the old home life. Dick, too, had his beginnings to make, man-fashion, and they ought to be made before he took on himself the full life of a man. So she was happily content to drift, conscious in a vague dreamy way that the drift was in the right direction, feeling the situation without analyzing it. It was a condition of affairs like Madeline herself, gently affectionate, but not passionate or deeply emotional. She was not of the type of women who rise up and control destiny.

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Norris, for all his passive exterior, had undercurrents that were fervid and powerful, and this first summer in the West, unruffled on its surface, stirred them and sent his life whirling along their irresistible streams. He never lost the sense that he was an outsider, admitted on sufferance to see the happiness of others and allowed to pick up their crumbs. If hard work, oblivion and lovelessness were to be his lot, the hardest of these was lovelessness. Much as he loved Dick he continually resented that young man's careless acceptance of the good things of life, and most of all did his irritation grow at Percival's way of taking Madeline for granted, enjoying her beauty, her sympathy, the grace that she threw over everything, and yet, thought Ellery, never half appreciating them. He himself bowed before them with an adoration that was framed in anguish because these things were, and were not for him. More and more cruel grew the knowledge that the currents of his life were gall and wormwood, flowing through wastes of bitterness.

82

Yet, along with the new grief came a new awakening, at first dimly felt by Madeline alone, then read with greater and greater clearness.

But of all undercurrents, Dick, prime mover and chief talker, remained unconscious, absorbed in his own dawning career, delighting in his two friends chiefly as hearers and sympathizers with his multitudinous ideas.

So it happened that one August afternoon, when it was late enough for the sun to have lost its fury, a not too strenuous breeze drove their tiny yacht through a channel which stretched enticingly between a wooded island and the jutting mainland.

"Let's land there," Madeline exclaimed suddenly. "It looks like a jolly place."

She pointed toward a stretch of beach caught between the arms of trees that came to the very water's edge, and enshrined in a great wild grape-vine that had climbed from branch to branch until it made a tangled canopy.

Dick turned sharply inward and ran their prow into the twittering sand.

"Thou speakest and it is thy servant's place to obey," he said.

"How does it feel to keep slaves? I've often wondered," Ellery said as he jumped ashore and Dick began tossing him rugs and cushions.

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"Very comfy, thank you, and not at all un-Christian," she answered saucily. "Dick, don't throw the supper basket, under penalty of liquidating the sandwiches. I think there's a freezer of ice-cream under the deck, if you'll pull it out. Now, are you ready for me?"

She stepped lightly forward under Dick's guidance, took Ellery's outstretched hands and sprang to the shore, where a kind of throne was built for her against a prostrate log,—all this help not because it was necessary, but as the appropriate pomp of royalty.

"I suspect," said Dick, looking about him with great satisfaction, "that this was a favorite picnic place for Gitche Manito and Hiawatha, in the morning of days."

"That shows how nature can forget," Madeline retorted. "Surely you know the real story, Dick."

"I don't," said Ellery. "Tell it to me."

She snuggled comfortably down into her rugs.

"In early days, which is the western equivalent for 'once upon a time,' a furious storm raged down the lake and tore the water into long ribbons of purple and green. A beautiful girl stood, perhaps on this very spot, with a savage who had rescued her from a sinking canoe and brought her here, dripping but safe. Over there on the mainland her father came running out of the woods in an agony of fear. He saw her here, saw her signals, but the shriek of the storm and the roar of the waters drowned out the words that she frantically screamed toward him. He saw her point to the Indian, who was always feared, always counted treacherous, and his dread of the hurricane changed to terror of the savage. He raised his rifle and the girl's deliverer dropped dead at her feet."

84

"Then fifty years went by, and this became a bower for the eating of sandwiches," added Dick.

Norris was lying on his back and staring through the tangle of grape and maple leaves at the flecks of blue beyond.

"That's a noble story," he said. "I didn't suppose this new land had any legends. It all gives me the impression of being just old enough to be big."

"Isn't that the conceit of the Anglo-Saxon? He calls this a new land because he's lived here only about a half-century. Things did happen before you were born, my dear boy," said Dick.

85

"Indeed! What things?" Norris asked placidly.

"Suppose you enlarge your mind by looking up the stories of the old *coureurs du bois* who used to stumble through these woods when they were the border-land between Chippewa and Sioux." Dick threw a pebble at Norris' face. "Suppose you go up to that inky stream in the north, which twists mysteriously through the forests, black with the bodies of dead men rotting in its mire. I don't wonder they thought the rough life more fascinating than kings and courts. I'd like to have seen sun-dances and maiden-tests; I'd like to have eaten food strange enough to be picturesque, and to have found new streams and traced them to their sources, and to have come unexpectedly on new lakes, like amethysts. It's as much fun to discover as to invent. And then the Jesuit fathers, half-tramp, half-martyr,—they were great old fellows."

"And the Frenchman—where is he?" said Madeline. "Gone, and left a few names for the Swede and the American to mispronounce; but you may come down later, Mr. Norris, and find how law and order, in our own people, fought with savagery out here on the frontier. It's a thrilling story."

"You love it all and its legends, don't you?" Ellery looked from one to the other.

"Don't you?" Madeline asked.

"By Jove, I do!" he cried, sitting suddenly upright as though stirred with genuine feeling. "I love it without its legends. It does not seem to me to have any past. It is all future. It makes me feel all future, too."

"Do you know what's happened to you?" Dick laughed exultantly. "Gitche Manito the Mighty has got you—the spirit of the West—which, being interpreted, is Ozone."

"Something has got me, I admit," Norris cried. "What is it? What is it that makes the sky so dazzling? What is it that makes the leaves fairly radiate light? What is it that, every time you take a breath, makes the air freshen you down to your toes? I feel younger than I ever did before in all my life."

The other two were looking at him.

"Well, our height above the sea-level—" Dick began.

"Oh, rot!" Ellery exclaimed. "It's something more than air—it's atmosphere. You feel here that it's glorious to work."

"You make me proud of you, old boy."

"It's funny how universally you fellows call me 'old boy'. I suppose I was older than the rest of you. I had to take the responsibility for my own life too soon and it took out of me that assurance that most of you had—that complacent confidence that things would somehow manage themselves. But I'm getting even now. I'm appreciating being young, which most men don't."

"Bully for you!" Dick cried. "If you couldn't be born a Westerner, you are born again one. I am moved to tell you something that gave me a small glow yesterday. I met Lewis—the editor of the *Star*, you know, Madeline—and he insisted on stopping me and congratulating me on having brought Mr. Norris to St. Etienne; said he was irritated at first by having a man forced on him by influence, when there was really no particular place for him, but, he went on, 'Mr. Norris is rapidly making his own place. We think him a real acquisition.'"

"Oh, pooh!" Norris lapsed sulkily into his usual quiet manner. "Of course I can write better than I can talk. My thoughts are just slow enough, I guess, to keep up with a pen."

Dick laughed softly as though he were pleased at things he did not tell. Madeline, for the first time, gave her real attention to Mr. Norris, whom she had not hitherto thought worth dwelling on—at least when Dick was about. Never before had this young man talked about himself.

A silence fell.

"Was that a wood-thrush?" Norris asked, manifestly grasping at a change of subject.

"I don't know, and I don't intend to know," Madeline cried, with such unusual viciousness that the two men stared. "Poor birds!" she said. "I've nothing against them, but I'm in rebellion against the bird fad. I'm so tired of meeting people and having them start in with a gushing, 'Oh, how-de-do! Only fancy, I have just seen a scarlet tanager!' and you know they haven't, and they wouldn't care anyway, and their mother may be dying."

Ellery laughed, and Dick said:

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to invent a fad of my own."

"Let us in on the ground floor."

"If you like. I'm learning the notes of the wind in the tree-tops. It has such variety! No two trees sound alike. Hear that sharp twitter of the maples? The oak has a deep sonorous song, and the elm's is as delicate as itself. I believe I could tell them all with my eyes shut."

"One breeze with infinite manifestations. I suppose our souls twist the breath of the spirit to our own likenesses in the same way," Ellery said.

Madeline looked at him and he smiled.

"You're getting poetical, old codger," said Dick. "You must be in love." Ellery blushed, but Dick went on, oblivious of byplay. "I move that we celebrate the occasion by a cold collation. Last

week, your mother kindly made inquiries about my tastes that led me to infer that everything I most affect is stowed away in that comfortable-looking basket.”

So they had supper, and Norris fished a volume of Shelley from his pocket and read *The Cloud*, which Dick followed by a really funny story from a magazine. They fell to talking about their own affairs, which to the young are the chief interests. It takes years “that bring the philosophic mind” to make abstractions stimulating. Finally they wafted homeward under a sky dark at the zenith and becoming paler and paler, violet, rose, wan white, with a line of intense violet along the horizon, and, as they sailed, Madeline sang softly as one does in the immediate presence of nature.

90

This was one day. On another Dick was full of his adventures of the week. He was learning to know his St. Etienne in all its phases. He told them of the lumber mills down by the river, where brawny men, primitive in aspect, fought with a never-ending stream of logs which came down with the current and raised themselves like uncanny water-monsters, up a long incline, finally to meet their death at the hands of machinery that ripped and snarled and clutched. Who would dream, to look at the great commonplace piles of boards that lined the riverbank for miles, that their birth-pangs had been so picturesque?

Or again, Dick told them of those other mills, which were the chief foundation of St. Etienne’s wealth, piles of gray stone, for ever dust-laden and dingy, into which poured a never-ending stream of grain, and out of which poured an equally unceasing stream of bags and barrels laden with flour. Around the wide interiors wandered a few men, gray too, who peeped now and then into caverns where hidden machinery did all the work. Outside, locomotives whistled and puffed and snorted, as they switched the miles of cars to and from the mills. Great vans rolled up with their burdens of fresh empty barrels to be filled and rolled away again.

91

It was the commonplace of daily toil, but Dick made it vivid, because it was in him to see all things as the work of men, and whenever you catch them doing real work, men are interesting.

Sometimes Dick had other stories to tell. In his collegiate days, he had grown familiar with the typical slum and its problems. The class in sociology had visited such. So he went to the slums of St. Etienne, and behold, they were not slums at all, for the slum can not be grown, like a mushroom, in a night. It must have a thousand nauseous influences stagnating for a long time undisturbed. But here were meager little wooden huts, flanked by rusting piles of scrap-iron, or flats along the river-bottom where the high waters of spring were sure to send the dwellers in these shabby apologies for homes scrambling to the roofs, or drive them to the shelter of the neighboring brewery. Here as the waters swept under the stony arches of the bridges, old women tucked up their petticoats and fished for the richness with which a city befouls its river. Here they made themselves neat woodpiles of the drift of the sawmills, and turned an honest penny by exhibiting on their roofs gaudy advertisements of plug-tobacco, that those who passed on the bridge above might look down and read and resolve to avoid the brand thus obnoxiously glorified.

92

Sometimes Dick had to relate a picturesque interview with a policeman who unfolded to him unknown phases of life, for though he believed in himself, Percival also believed in the other man, and therefore made him a friend. Every one likes a jolly friendly prince, and that was Dick’s type.

Or he would dip into a police court where all the stages of wretchedness were pitchforked into one another’s evil-smelling company, so that it ranged from the highest circle of purgatory to the lowest depths of hell.

“Why do you go to such places, Dick? It’s nauseating,” Madeline exclaimed.

93

“Why?” he demanded. “I suppose that sometime, when I’ve made over my information into the neat systematic package that you prefer, I shall start a soul-uplifting row. I look forward to that as my career. You ought to get a career, Madeline.”

“A career? I know the verb, but not the noun,” she retorted saucily. “I’m afraid mine is nothing but the trivial task, flavored with all the flavors I like best.”

Sometimes, when they went home together at night, Percival had stories to unfold to Norris alone—stories he could not tell Madeline, of things found in the mire, upon which the healthy happy world turns its back when every night it goes “up town” to pleasant hearthstones and to normal life. These were tales of foul sounds and foul air, where men and women gathered and drank and gambled and laughed with laughter that was like the grinning of skulls, hollow and despairing. They were stories of girls with sodden eyes and men with wooden faces—of innumerable schemes to suck money by any means but those of honor. And these were the phases of his study that Dick looked upon with a kind of anguished fascination, as more and more he saw how the hands stretched out of that mire smirched the city which he hoped to serve.

94

Sometimes, and this was when they were with Madeline again, Ellery would have his experience to tell, redolent of printer’s ink, and full of the interest of that profession which is never two days the same—stories of how business toils and spins and is not arrayed like Solomon. Norris, too, was beginning to run up against human nature both in gross and in detail, and to know the world, from the fight last night in Fish Alley up to the doings of statesmen and kings. Madeline had little to tell, for she was living quietly at home, taking the housekeeping off her mother’s hands and driving her father to the morning train. She had few episodes more exciting than an afternoon call or a moonlight sail. But the young men brought her their lives, and when she had made her gay little bombardment of comment, they felt as though some new light had fallen

upon familiar facts. The very simplicity of her thought put things in the right relation and gave the effect of a view from a higher plane.

There were many times when they did not discuss, but gave themselves to the joy of young things. They sailed, and Madeline held the tiller; and, when evening came on, they curled down with cushions in the bottom of the boat and sang and chattered the twilight out. They played golf and tennis, and the blood leaped in their veins, for whatever they did, they did it with heart and soul. As for their relations with one another, these were taken for granted, and what they meant, not one of the three stopped to question. It was enough that they were sweet and satisfying in silence.

Late in the season there came a Sunday, memorable to Ellery, when Dick had gone away for some purpose, and, after a little self-questioning, Norris ventured alone for his afternoon with Madeline. She welcomed him with such serene unconsciousness that he wondered why he had hesitated.

"I'm not so good a sailor as Dick, Miss Elton," he said. "Will you trust yourself with me?"

"Being an independent young woman, I'm willing to depend on you."

"A truly feminine position."

"It means that I am quite capable of seizing the helm myself if you should fail me," she laughed.

"And I am masculine enough to determine that you shall get it only by favor, not by necessity," he retorted.

"That suits me quite well," Madeline answered gravely.

"And you are not apprehensive of storms in the vague far-away?"

"Don't. I'm so contented with things as they are that I do not want to think of far-aways or of anything that means change."

"You are satisfied with to-day?" he persisted.

"Perfectly."

Ellery flushed with traitorous rejoicing that Dick was absent. It was a day of sunshine—not the ardent blaze of summer, but the crisp glow of October that seems all light with little heat. The lake was so pale as to be hardly blue, and girdled with soft yellow, touched only here and there with the intenser red of the rock maples. Back farther from shore rose the tawny bronze of oaks. The light breeze flung the *Swallow* along with those caressing wave-slaps that are the sleepest of sounds.

To sail under that sky, with Madeline leaning on her elbow near at hand, they two separated from the rest of the world by wide waters, was like a brief experience of Paradise. Ellery watched the light tendril of hair that touched her cheek, lifted itself and touched again, near that lovely curve above her ear. The cheek was warm and creamy but untouched by deeper color. He fell into that mood of blessed silence that, as a rule, comes only when one is solitary.

As they rounded at the dock he came back to himself with a sudden wonder if she had missed the titillation of Dick's chatter, for she had been as silent as he.

"I'm afraid I have been very dull. I enjoyed myself so much that I forgot to try to amuse you."

"It's been a heavenly sail, exactly to match the day," Madeline answered with a deep contented sigh that filled him with delight. "I was this moment thinking what a comfort it was to know you well enough so that I didn't have to talk. It's a test of comradeship, isn't it?"

As they smiled at each other, his heart leaped with the consciousness of a bond below the surface.

He treasured this crumb of her kindness, not because she was niggardly, but because there was little that belonged to him and to him alone. Sometimes, in the rush and roar of the office, came the memory of her eyes and her voice of assurance.

"What will our comradeship be like, when—when she is Dick's wife?" he questioned himself, and then fell to work with fury.

Thus the delightful summer died into the past; there came a winter only less good, with its dinners and dances, with quiet fireside evenings, and yet another summer of the same close friendship that began to take on the semblance of a permanent thing in life, all the richer as experience grew deeper and knowledge wider and the best things dearer.

Whether they read or sang or discussed, though the world saw little done, these three young people had the inestimable happiness of knowing one another.

Along the wide straight street of the city surged the usual shopping crowd. Largely petticoated was it, for o'daytimes man must be busy at his office that woman may have this privilege of going shopping. Surely there is no other stream in the wide world that is so monotonous as this human never-ending current. The same types, the same clothes, the same subjects of conversation in the fragments that catch the ear. And seldom does one see a face that looks even cheerful, much less happy,—all intent on matching ribbons.

“The world is too much with us; late and soon;
Getting and spending we lay waste our powers.”

Thus might they cry aloud, if they were condemned to proclaim their sins, like the long banner of bat-like souls that Dante saw passing in similar fashion beneath his eye. 100

And yet, in spite of its monotony, humanity is perennially interesting to itself. Therefore among the strenuous, the hurrying, and the anxious-eyed, one girl loitered on dilatory foot from wide window to wide window.

“Girl” seems an inadequate word to describe Lena Quincy. It may be applied to any youthful feminine person, and Lena, in spite of her carefully-groomed shabbiness, was by no means one of the herd. She affected one like a bit of Tiffany glass, shimmering, iridescent, ethereal; and no ugliness in her surroundings could take away that impression.

Every one who looked at her at all looked twice. She had grown so used to this tribute that it hardly affected her unless it came from one who merited her interest in return.

Now she was wandering from one to another of the ladies with the waxen faces, the waxen hands and the wooden hearts, who gazed back unmoved from behind their plate-glass; though it was not the fixed and amiable smiles of the lay-figures that caught her attention, but rather the curious way in which this one's braid was laid on the gown, or the new device in buttons, there beyond. 101

Now she turned and studied the human flux in front. She was not shopping, save in sweet imagination. This was her theater, and she was fain to make the show last as long as possible. Her absorbent gaze saw everything. Yet it was selective too, for it passed swiftly over the chaff of the shabby and fixed itself on the wheat of the properly gowned. Sometimes she wove romances about her swiftly-disappearing actors, romances not of heart and soul but of garments, of splendors and of money; but even such entrancing tissues of her brain vanished like pricked soap-bubbles when there passed in the body one of those select few whose skirts proclaimed perfection. Could dreams stand against reality? Yet the dreams were blissful, though, when they were gone, the girl was left steeped in the bitterness of envy.

It is said that there is a consolation in being well-dressed that religion itself can not afford. It is to be remembered that there is also the pharisaism which always forms a hard shell about every kernel of religion; and the pharisaism of the correct costume is the most complacent of all forms of self-righteousness. Lena's lips grew positively pale as she saw it pass, drawing its rustling petticoats close to its side. She hungered and thirsted for this form of righteousness. 102

It was early April, and there was a savage nip in the air, for Winter shook his fist at the world long after he dared to come out of his lair. Spring refused to sit in his lap for more than an instant, but leaped from that affectionate position, ashamed of her intimacy with the hoary sinner, and the buds swelled slowly and swelled exceeding small.

Other women hurried, but Lena did not feel the cold except when she saw a set of magnificent Russian sables with a cordial invitation to “Buy now”. Her eyes suddenly filled with tears at her own impotence. Why had God created her such as she was and then denied her the perquisites of her desires? It was as though nature should make the heart of a rose and should leave off all the out-shaken wealth of petals, whose reflected lights and shadows make the flower's heart lovely.

With the mist clearing from her eyes Lena walked onward to the next big sheet of glass, and looked through a wealth of Easter hats and bonnets at the mirror that was meant to manifold their charms. She did not see the millinery, but there was comfort in the really good glass, not like her parody at home which cast a pale green tinge over a distorted image. 103

On Lena nature had really spent herself. The very texture of her skin made the fingers itch to caress its transparent delicacy that let through a tender flush. Every curve of her body suggested hidden beauty, and the way she turned her head on her shoulders left one feeling how music and painting fall short of expressing the loveliest loveliness. But, having accomplished a miracle, fate had left it without a meaning and thrown it on an ash heap. No wonder that it resented its position.

Every man who passed Lena on the street looked at her; some of them spoke to her; but she was possessed of a self-respect that kept her from responding to such overtures. She prided herself on her virtue. Certain it was that the admiration of the other sex never set her vibrating with delicate emotions, never increased by a single beat the pulses of her heart, except when it suggested some definite benefit to herself. With reason, Lena congratulated herself on her firm resistance to the many-formed temptations that come to beauty housed with poverty. 104

Now, as she looked in the milliner's glass, she saw her own face, rose-like and delicate. She saw the great violet eyes, so innocent that they almost persuaded herself, as they did others, that some creature more celestial than ordinary humanity wondered from behind them at the world. She saw the fair soft curls that clung about her forehead, and the sight of these things gave a momentary peace to her soul. Then she surveyed the dingy felt hat that rested brutally on the

silken wonder of her hair, and rebellion rose again.

"It's a comfort that my collar fits so well," she reassured herself. "After all, there is nothing more important than a collar. I don't look in the least 'common'."

Among the hats stood a photograph of a popular actress, pert and pretty. The sight of it sent Lena's thoughts afield into new wastes of bitterness.

The idea of the stage had once come to her like an inspiration. Nothing could be more easy and natural to her than to act; nothing more delectable than the tribute paid to the star. Money, flowing gowns, footlights, tumults of applause had seemed inevitable. Lena shivered now, with something else than cold inside her flimsy jacket, as she remembered the crumbling of her dream. She saw again the fat man with the sensual mouth who had given her a job; and felt again her tingling resentment when she found how small the part was, and how poorly paid. She remembered how she had held herself aloof from the other girls, who, like herself, had trivial parts, and how they had snubbed her in return; how even the little that she did was made ridiculous through the trick of a hook-nosed, gum-chewing rival, and how the first audience that she faced had tittered at her stumble. A wave of heat succeeded the shiver at this point in her remembrance. Then she recalled her impertinent answer to the vituperation of the manager, and how he had sworn at her for a damned minx, who thought herself a professional beauty.

"Vulgar! Vulgar! Vulgar!" she said to herself in impotent anger. She wished they could all know how she despised them. For she could act! She was still sure that she could play any part—except that of patient endurance. Yet, so far, hardship was all that life had offered her. A chance! That was it. So far, she had never had a ghost of a chance. Would fate—or luck—or Providence—or whatever it is that rules, never give her a turn of the wheel?

Next to the art of the milliner was displayed the art, less interesting to Lena, of the brush. Before the picture store a span of horses shook their jingling harness, and a brightly-buttoned coachman waited, with impassive face turned steadily to the front. There came from the doorway a girl who was lifted above the pharisaism of clothes into the purer ether. She was calm-eyed and well-poised, and Lena hated her for the rest of her life for her obliviousness of the sordid. Behind her walked a young man who now opened the carriage door and lingered a moment and laughed as he talked with the girl who had taken her seat. Lena involuntarily drew her feet closer beneath her skirts that no careless glance of that girl should fall upon their shabbiness. She looked at the man as she looked at the Russian sables. He was a type of that delectable world from which she was shut out.

"I should be ashamed to be silly about fellows, the way some girls are," was her inward comment. "But I'd just like to have people see me with a thing like that dangling around me. And I shall, some time. I'm a whole heap prettier than she is."

The carriage door shut abruptly. Lena's too thin boots, out of plumb, suddenly slipped on a half-formed piece of ice. She made a desperate grab at the smooth surface of the window and then came ignominiously down—not wholly ignominiously, however, since her accident brought to her aid the man who was a type.

She didn't have to stop to consider that the man would notice neither her hat nor her boots. She knew it instinctively and instantly. But the rose-petal face and the big eyes were overwhelmingly present to her consciousness. She saw them reflected in the look on his face as he bent over her.

"I hope you're not hurt."

"Not in the least. Only humiliated." Lena smiled, because people are always attracted by cheerfulness.

"You are sure you have not twisted your ankle?" he insisted.

"Nothing but my hat and my hair," she pouted. "Thank you for coming to my rescue."

"It wasn't much of a rescue," he said.

"Are you sorry I didn't have a tragedy and give you a chance to play hero?" she inquired naïvely.

"When you are in need, may I be the one to help?" he said with growing boldness.

Lena flushed and nodded as he lifted his hat and was gone. She walked slowly homeward, actually forgetting to stop at her favorite window in the lace store, so occupied was she with the latest story she was telling herself. It was a story in which a large house with soft rugs and becoming pink lights occupied the foreground, and somewhere in the background hovered a man who was a type and who loved to spend money on diamonds. The vision was so lovable that she lived with it all the way, even through the narrow entrance of the lodging-house and up the narrow stairs, saturated with obsolete smells—smells of dead dinners—to the very instant when she opened the upper door and faced bald reality and her mother. Mrs. Quincy sat by the window in a room on the walls of which the word "shabby" was written in a handwriting as plain, and in language far simpler than ever Belshazzar saw on the walls of Babylon. It fairly cried itself from the big-figured paper, peeling along its edges; from the worn painted floor; from the frayed rug of now patternless carpet; from the sideboard that looked like a parlor organ. Even from the closet door it whispered that there was more shabbiness hidden in the depths.

Mrs. Quincy herself was a part of it, for she was to Lena what the faded rose is to the opening one, a once beautiful woman, whose skin now looked like wrinkled cream.

Lena shut the door and came in without speaking. She flung her hat and coat on the bed in the corner, where a forlorn counterpane showed by the hollows and hills beneath that it had given up all attempt to play even. The girl sat down listlessly with her hands in her lap.

"You've been gone a long time, Lena," said the mother in a delicately querulous voice. "You're fortunate to be able to get out instead of being cooped up in this little room the way I am." Mrs. Quincy coughed with conscious pathos. "I sometimes wonder if you ever think of your poor mother and how lonely she is most of the time. But I'd ought to be used to people's always forgetting me."

"Much I have to come home to!" Lena answered. "You're about as cheerful as barbed wire. But you can comfort yourself! I shan't be able to go out at all much longer, any way."

"Why, what's the matter now?"

"Do you expect me to wear a felt hat all summer?" Lena asked sharply. "I'm ashamed to be seen in that old thing and I should think you'd be ashamed to be so stingy with me."

Her mother sighed and lapsed into the creaking comfort of her rocking-chair.

"I ain't stingy," she said at last. "But if you had your way you'd spend every last cent of the pension the very day it comes. I've got to look out we don't starve. If you'd only make up your mind to work and earn a little instead of livin' so pinched! I'm sure I'd work if I could. But there! there ain't nothing for me to do but to set and suffer, and nobody knows what I endure."

"I wasn't born to be a working girl," said Lena sullenly. "I've got the blood of a lady if I haven't got the clothes of one."

"Well, when it comes to eating and drinking, blood don't count much. Everybody's got the same appetite."

"No, everybody hasn't," retorted the girl. "I haven't any appetite for canned baked-beans and liver."

"You eat them, anyway."

"I know it, worse luck!"

There was a tingling silence for a moment and then Lena spoke with sudden energy.

"Mother, what can I do? I'm not one of those girls who can go ahead and don't care. I haven't been brought up as they have. The only thing you've taught me is that my father was a gentleman and that I am a beauty. And what good does that do me?"

"Teachin' is respectable."

"I can't teach. I couldn't pass a teacher's examination to save my life. I don't know how to do anything. And I won't sink below the level of decent society. I'd starve first. Do you suppose I haven't thought it all over a hundred times?"

"You can sew very nicely. I'm sure everything you make has real style."

"Go into a shop at starvation wages to make pretty things for other girls to wear? I stopped along near Madame Cerise's to-day and looked at some of the girls near the window, with their hair all lanky and their faces sunk in, working for dear life on finery. Mother, is that what you want for me?"

There was hungry appeal in Lena's voice, that some mothers would have felt; but Mrs. Quincy was not on the lookout for other people's shades of emotion.

"Well, if you'd any sense you'd take Joe Nolan, as I've told you fifty times if I've told you once. He's got real good wages, and you could twist him around your little finger."

Lena's teeth came together with a click.

"Joe! Well, perhaps, when there's nothing else left but the poorhouse. It's pretty tough if I have to marry a mechanic."

"Joe's a good deal of a man. He won't always be a mechanic, Lena. He's got too much ambition."

"He may, or he may not. Anyway, he'll bear the marks of a mechanic all his days. I'm not his kind."

Lena rose and went across the room to lean on the little dressing-table and survey herself in the old green glass. This was her panacea for every woe. The little pucker in her forehead straightened itself out.

"Look at me, mother," she demanded, turning around. "Do you think all this is meant to scrub and sew and cook for the foreman in locomotive works? Because I don't."

She was smiling, but her mother did not smile in return.

"I believe I was most as pretty as you are when I was a girl," Mrs. Quincy said. "And that was all the good it did. I thought I was making a grand marriage when I got your father; but he seemed to sort of flatten out and lose all his ambition after we was married. He didn't seem to care about anything, though I used to give him my opinion pretty plain. And it's mighty little he left me when he was took," she added vindictively.

Her daughter eyed her speculatively.

"Well, I'm not going to be taken in the way you were," she said sharply. "You thought a good old

name and a promising career were enough; and father didn't keep his promises. I want money and not the promise of money."

"And where will you find him?" sniffed Mrs. Quincy, to whom "it" and "he" were synonymous. "I don't notice any millionaires crowding up to you, for all your big eyes and your great opinion of yourself."

"That's just it. If I could only meet them!" Lena got up and walked restlessly about the room. Her eyes fell on the last night's copy of the *Star*, opened to that chatty column headed "Woman's Fancies". She had read it with absorbed interest. Her body halted now, for the muscles often stop work when the mind becomes possessed of a great idea. She stood for a long time and looked from the unwashed window-pane while a new resolve slowly hardened itself within.

"I'll try, I'll try, I'll try," she said to herself, and her heart thumped uncomfortably. "And if I take it to the office myself, when they see me perhaps they—"

Aloud she said nothing, for she had early learned the great lesson that the best way of getting her own will with her mother was to do what she wished first and argue about it afterward.

"What have we got for supper, mother?" she asked.

"Nothing," said Mrs. Quincy sharply.

"Nothing? Well, give me some money and let me go and get something."

Mrs. Quincy reluctantly lifted her skirt and began to explore her petticoat below. She shook open the mouth of a pocket into which she dived to return with a knotted handkerchief. Lena looked on impatiently as the knot was slowly untied and a small hoard of silver disclosed.

"There," said Mrs. Quincy. "You can take this quarter, Lena, and do get something nourishing. Don't buy cream-cakes. I feel the need of what will stay my stomach."

"I'll get baked-beans," answered the girl with a short laugh.

"Yes, do. I shan't have another cent till next pay-day comes. We've got to make this last. Get some tea, Lena—green, remember. The beans won't cost more than twelve cents. I don't see how you can have a new hat."

"Well, give me ten cents, anyway," Lena answered with unexpected submission.

"What do you want it for?"

"Please, mammy," Lena said coaxingly. "I won't buy cream-cakes or anything to eat. I want to invest in a gold mine."

Mrs. Quincy gave her a sharp look and grudgingly handed out a dime; for Lena's voice was instinct with hope, and hope was such a rare visitor in the dingy little lodgings that Mrs. Quincy grew generous under its magnetic warmth.

"Now what'd you want that ten cents for?" she asked curiously when the girl came back. "My land! Only paper and pencil? I thought you was going to do something grand."

CHAPTER VII

LENA'S PROGRESS

About a month after Lena had made her investment in the raw materials of the writer's art, Dick Percival happened to drop into the sooty and untidy office where for more than a year Norris had been engaged in manufacturing public opinion.

"Hello!" he cried as he opened the door. Then he stood transfixed at the vision that met his sight, for a very blond and fuzzy head was bent over Ellery's desk and a very startled pair of blue eyes was raised to meet his own. There stood a rosebud dressed in gray. Is there anything more demure and innocent than a pinky girl in a mousy gown? Dick's hat came off and a deferential look replaced the careless one.

"Hello, yourself!" said Norris. "You announce yourself like a telephone girl. Come in. What do you mean by troubling the quiet waters of my daily toil?"

"I beg your pardon," said Dick politely. "If you are busy I—"

"That's all right. Miss Quincy and I can postpone our confab without inconveniencing the order of the universe." Miss Quincy was already gathering her notes, and she smiled at Dick in a half-shy way that said, "I remember you very plainly." As she disappeared slowly down the hall, Dick started after her.

"Great Scott, Ellery!" he ejaculated. "How you have lied to me about the grubbiness of your work! If this is your daily grind, I don't mind having a whirl at the editorial profession myself."

Norris laughed.

"It isn't the sum total of my duties," he said.

"Who is Hebe?" asked Dick.

"Well, she's rather a problem," Ellery replied. "I believe she appeared a few weeks ago at Miss Huntress' office—the woman editor, you know—with a catchy little article on fashions. It happened that the boss was in the office, and we consider it rather a grind on him, for he was much taken by either the article or the eyes, and she got a little job as a sort of reportorial maid-of-all-work. Funny, isn't it? If a man is buying a rug, he wouldn't think of deciding on it because it was green, without testing its wearing qualities; but in nine cases out of ten a girl gets chosen because of her eyes. That's all I know about her. Pretty, isn't she?"

118

"Pretty! Is that all the command you have of your native language? You ought to lose your job for that. Why she's—never mind—I haven't time now."

"Neither have I," answered Norris sharply. He remembered that long ago Dick had called Madeline pretty. It is a cheap and easy word. "I haven't time for you, either. Will you go away; or will you keep still while I finish this work?"

"Waltz away." Dick sat down on the window-sill and fell into a meditative state of mind. Once or twice he walked to the door and looked down the hall, while Norris plugged steadily away and ignored the presence of his friend.

After a prolonged silence, Dick spoke again, solemnly:

"I should like to meet her."

"Whom?"

"Miss—Quincy, did you call her?"

"Oh! Isn't she rather out of your class?"

119

"Pshaw! Don't talk of classes, now that you're out of college. Do you know anything about her?"

"Nothing," said Ellery shortly. "I don't consider it my business to go beyond my official relations."

"Well, I haven't any business relations not to go beyond," said Dick. "So I mean to pursue the inquiry."

"Do as you like," Ellery answered. "Is that what you came down here to talk about?"

"No," said Dick, changing his manner. "I came to talk up an editorial campaign. You don't know my chum, Olaf Ericson, do you? He's the biggest man on the force, and he's a corker. I've learned more from him about bad smells than I did in two years of chemistry at New Haven. He knows this town from the seventh sub-cellar up, and 'him and me is great friends'. Seriously, Norris, I've begun to get hold of just the facts I wanted about 'the combine', and it's information that is so very definite and to the point that I believe I can make it hot for them. I want the public to be kept informed on everything that is to their discredit. Now the *Star* is a fairly clean paper, as papers go. I want help."

120

"You'll have to go up higher for that, my boy. It's not for a freshman like myself to direct the policy of the paper. It would be a pretty serious matter to run up against those fellows. Mr. Lewis, the old man, is out, but when he comes back we'll go and have a talk with him."

"Talk to him! I should think so!" Dick exclaimed, and he began to pace the room and pour out the floods of his information, in wrath of soul and glow of spirits at his resolve to clean things up.

Meanwhile in Miss Huntress' office, farther down the hall, Lena was discussing with that determined person the possibility of supplying the public with more of the kind of literature for which women, in particular, are supposed to have a mad desire. Miss Huntress was an adept at filling her page with personalities by which those who know nobody may have almost as great a knowledge of the great as those who have achieved the proud distinction of being "in it". Lena had written a highly successful series of articles on "St. Etienne as seen from the shop windows," and she longed for new and similar fields to conquer.

"I've been wondering," said Miss Huntress, "if you couldn't get up some catchy little things on private libraries and picture galleries. If you can raise some photographs to go with them, you might make quite a hit. That's the kind of thing that takes. You see it makes people able to talk about the inside of rich folk's houses."

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"I suppose you would want me to begin with Mr. Early," said Lena, hardly knowing what reply to make.

"Never mind Mr. Early. Everybody knows just what he's got and how his place looks. You might include him later, but I should start with people who are more exclusive and yet whose names everybody knows. Now there's Mr. Windsor and Mrs. Percival. By the way, Mr. Norris is awfully intimate at the Percivals'. Perhaps he'd help you to an introduction. If Mrs. Percival would let you write up her library, you may be sure there'd be a lot of others who would follow her example. You might try it, anyway. Go and see her. Tell her what a hard time you are having to earn your own living. Your looks will carry you a long way."

"I think young Mr. Percival is in Mr. Norris' office now. Some one came in while I was there and I think he called him Percival," said Lena faintly.

122

"Say! is that so?" exclaimed Miss Huntress. "Now's your chance! Go in and ask while he's there. He'll find it hard to refuse to your face."

"You go," interposed Lena. "If I go, it will look as though I knew. But you can walk in all innocent."

Therefore the conversation on matters which were to change the destiny of a city was interrupted by a smart knock on the assistant editor's door, and Miss Huntress, eminently self-possessed, walked in on the two young men.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Norris, I didn't know you had any one here," she began. "But I won't keep you a moment. The truth is, I want a series of articles on the private libraries of the city, and, knowing that you are acquainted with Mrs. Percival, I thought you'd help the paper to an opening there."

"Let me introduce Mr. Percival," said Norris. "He can give you more information than I can."

"Well, this is lucky!" ejaculated Miss Huntress.

"Our library isn't a show affair," Dick said stiffly. "My mother, I am sure, would be very unwilling to submit to that kind of a write-up. My father was a book-lover, not a book-fancier. It's essentially a private collection." 123

"I'm sorry you feel that way about it," Miss Huntress rejoined equably. "Of course, nowadays, I can't admit that there's any such thing as privacy. And it isn't only that I want the articles, Mr. Percival. I want to help along a girl that needs the work, and an awfully nice girl she is. We haven't any regular job for her, and all I can do is to throw odd bits of work in her way. She has an old mother to support, and it would be a real charity to her if you'd look at it in that light. Miss Quincy is a perfect lady, and you may be sure she'd take no advantage of you to write up anything sensational or impertinent."

Dick started and glanced consciously at Norris, who grinned back.

"Of course that puts another light on it," Mr. Percival said after a decent pause, and trying to compose his face to a judicial expression. "I'd hate to put a stumbling-block in the way of a girl like that. Ah-um—I'll speak to my mother about it, Miss Huntress, and I dare say I can persuade her to allow it." 124

"That's very good of you," Miss Huntress answered,—with sad comprehension that a complexion like Lena's was a great aid to a literary career. "You couldn't manage to let Miss Quincy go up this afternoon, could you?" she went on with characteristic energy in pushing an advantage. "It would be a good thing if she could get her first stuff ready for the Saturday-night issue."

"My mother, I suppose, is driving this afternoon," Dick said hesitatingly. He went through a hasty calculation and saw reasons for cutting out certain of his own engagements. "See here, Miss Huntress, if you're in such a hurry, I don't mind taking Miss Quincy up and telling her what I know about old editions and rare folios. I'll make it right with mother afterward."

Miss Huntress' face cleared perceptibly.

"You're awfully good, Mr. Percival. Won't you come down to my office now, and I'll introduce you to Miss Quincy? This is a real favor." Dick shot a glance of triumph at Ellery, believing himself a skilled sly dog of a manipulator, and not knowing that he was the manipulated. Norris spoke in scorn. 125

"I suppose righteousness and reform can wait now."

"You can bet they will. I'll call on you to-morrow afternoon, Norris."

"That's the usual fate of reform. Don't be a fool, Dick." But Dick was already disappearing down the corridor in pursuit of the able woman editor.

The girl waiting in the disordered office looked more than ever like a bridesmaid rose, pink and ruffled and out of its proper setting, as she saw Mr. Percival coming.

"Miss Quincy," said Dick, "I have a motor down stairs, and I'll take you up to the house right away, if you don't mind."

If she didn't mind!

When youth starts out to revolutionize the world, it meets with many distractions. Even in the hour that Dick spent in the quiet old library with Miss Quincy, he met with distractions. He tried to keep her mind on missals and Aldine editions, but she persisted in poring over old copies of *Godey's Lady's Book*, which she found tucked away in a forgotten corner. Nobody but Lena could have scented them out.

"The fashions are so funny, Mr. Percival!" she insisted. "Do look at these preposterous hoop-skirts and the little short waists. Did you say that no one knows how that gold leaf was put on that ugly old book? How absurd! I must put that down. I suppose that is the kind of thing I have to write up." 126

"Be sure you don't get mixed up and describe monkish fichus and gold leaf on the bias, or you'll be everlastingly disgraced in the office."

"Never mind. I'll learn your horrid old pieces of information in a few minutes. Do let me look at this a little longer," Lena answered so prettily, and pointed with so dainty a finger, and glanced up so pathetically, that Dick too became absorbed in *Godey's Lady's Book*.

"Weren't they frightful guys?" Lena went on. "But I dare say the men of that time—what is the date?—1862—thought they were lovely."

"Very likely, poor men! You see they hadn't the privilege of knowing the girls of to-day and they thought their own women were the top-notch."

"Now you are horrid and sarcastic," said Lena.

"Never a bit. I find it impossible to believe that there was ever before so much beauty in the world. There was here and there a pretty girl, like Helen of Troy, and they made an awful fuss over her."

"But she must have been really wonderful."

"Yes, if a girl is as much run after as that, she must either be a raving beauty or else she lives in the far West."

"But, you know, there aren't so very many real beauties nowadays, are there?" She glanced sidewise at him in an adorable manner.

"I can't remember more than one—or two," said Dick judicially.

Lena laughed softly.

"I think it must have been very nice to be one of the few and be made a fuss over, instead of—"

"Instead of what?"

"Instead of having to grub and struggle for your bread," Lena answered,—and there was a misty look in the big eyes she turned up to him.

"Poor little girl!" said Dick. "You certainly are not of the kind who ought to battle with the world. Haven't you any man who could shelter you a little?"

Lena shook her head, with an air of patient suffering.

"My father is dead," she said. "He was of a good family, as you might know by my name, but he was wounded in the war, and he never got over it. Of course he was very young then. He wasn't married till long afterward. He died when I was a little thing."

"That was the history of my father, too!" Dick felt a glow of kindred experience. "See, that is his portrait over the mantel."

Lena looked very lovely and spiritual as she gazed up at the quiet face that looked back at her, and Dick watched her. Then she drew a full breath and turned her eyes on him.

"You are like him," she said softly, and something in her voice made the words a thrilling tribute.

Then she added: "Yes, but he left you in comfort, and we—my mother and I—"

"Will you let me come to see your mother some time?"

Lena's heart beat fast with mingled fear and hope, but all Dick saw was a startled and sweet surprise.

"I should be almost ashamed to have you come," she said with a soft blush and a look of shy invitation. "We are so poor and we live in such a shabby place."

"If your shabbiness comes because of your father's sacrifice for his country it is something to be proud of," Dick answered.

Through Lena's mind there passed a swift memory of quarrels and bickerings, of daily smallnesses, which were her chief recollection of her father. She looked frankly up into Dick's face.

"Yes," she said. "That ought to make it easy to bear. Now I must not talk about myself any more. What did you tell me about that funny old book?"

"And I may come to see you and your mother?" Dick persisted.

"If you do not forget us to-morrow,"—Lena glanced at him out of the corner of her eyes in a way calculated to make him remember.

"I shan't forget," said Dick.

He took out a small note-book and wrote down the address she gave him. And she gave herself a little shake and pulled out a much larger note-book. "I ought not to waste my time and yours this way, but, you see, I'm not much of a business woman. I sometimes forget altogether."

Dick thought her very preposterous and charming as she set to work with an air of severity; and so she was—the last thing on earth made to do serious work. They leaned together over one treasure after another, in that electric nearness that moves youth so easily, and sends a tingling sensation up the backbone.

When she suddenly rose, her cheeks were pinker and more transparent than ever, and her eyes softer and dreamier.

"Let me take you home in the motor," said Dick.

"Dear me, no," Lena exclaimed. "I'm afraid you think me entirely too informal already. I—I'm so stupid and impulsive. I'm always doing wrong things and not thinking till afterward. Good-by, and thank you, Mr. Percival."

After he had bowed her out, Dick plunged into a big chair and spent a few moments in analyzing his own character. He perceived that in some ways he differed from most of his friends. Now

Ellery and Madeline and most of the others lived along certain conventional lines, with certain fixed interests and habits. That kind of existence would be intolerable to him. He liked to star his days with all kinds of colored incidents that had no particular relation to his main work. He liked to run down every by-path, explore it a bit, and then come back to the highway. Those small excursions were apt to take a man into leafy dells where there were ferns and flowers too shy to fringe the dusty plodding thoroughfare. Dick liked that figure. It revealed to him a certain lightness of heart and poetry in himself that distinguished him from the prosy grubbers. This sprinkling of life with episodes was like a little tonic. It kept him vivid and alive.

Take this very afternoon just passed. It meant little, of course, either to him or to the pretty little pathetic reporter girl, but it had injected a bit of pleasure into her routine, and given him an insight into another kind of maiden from the well-kept, sheltered women he knew best. Such things help a man's larger sympathies. He was glad that he could enjoy many types of men and women.

A rumble of wheels outside brought him out of this particular by-path into the highway.

"What a dispensation that the mater didn't come home in the middle of it!" he said with a sigh of satisfaction.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FALLS

According to his promise, Dick presented himself at Ellery's office on the next afternoon. He wore a brisk and moving air.

"Miss Quincy is not here to-day," Norris said without looking up.

"I know it," Dick answered promptly. "Are you through yet?"

"I've finished with the ephemera of this particular Tuesday, and before I begin on those of Wednesday, I have a few precious moments to waste on you." Ellery wheeled his chair around.

"Do you know that this is Decoration Day and a holiday?"

"Is there anything a sub-editor does not know?"

"Have you ever been to the Falls of Wabeno?"

"No."

"And you call yourself a true citizen of St. Etienne? Come with me and see the populace chew gum amid scenes of natural beauty." 133

"I thought we were going to agitate civic reform."

"We'll agitate as we go along. Come, Ellery, it's a superb day. I feel like the bursting buds. Let's get out."

"My dear Dick," said Norris, "the trouble with you is that you never want to do anything; you always want to do something else. I begin to think that there are compensations to a man in having fate hold his nose to the grindstone. He learns persistence, willy-nilly."

"Stop your growling. Up, William, up, and quit your galley-proof. I am willing to bet that my flashes in the pan will do things before I am through."

"I dare swear they will get way ahead of my grubbing," Ellery rejoined, slamming his desk. "Come, I'll go with you."

On the southern outskirts of the city lay a park where art had done no more than retouch nature. Here a placid stream suddenly transformed itself into an imposing waterfall, plunging with roars over a rocky cliff, and sending its spray whirling high in air to paint a hundred illusive rainbows amid outstretching tree-branches or against a somber background of stone. 134

Dick left his motor near the brink of the cliff above the Falls and the two climbed down the steep bank, stopping now and again to yield to the fascination of rushing water and to snuff the fresh-flying mist as it swept into their faces.

Caught in the gully below, the stream, which had suddenly contracted a habit of unruliness, tumbled onward under trees and through overhanging rocks until it joined the Mississippi a half-mile away.

There were other people, hordes of them, tempted by May sunshine.

"What is it, Ellery," Dick demanded, "what deep-seated idealism is it that draws these crowds to the most beautiful spot near town as soon as spring offers more than half an invitation?"

"It certainly isn't a poetry that crops out in their clothes or in their conversation," Norris grumbled. "The staple remark seems to be, 'Gee, ain't it pretty?'"

"You mustn't expect to see aristocracy here; this is too cheap, and too easy to reach. Your aristocrat prefers less beauty at greater effort and more cost. This is the place to touch elbows 135

with the populace.”

They had climbed down the long winding steps by this time, and were leaning against the parapet of a small rustic bridge that crossed below the Falls.

“Let’s sit down on that bench,” said Dick, “and let the sunshine trickle through the trees and through us, and feel the spray in our nostrils, and delight in hanging maidenhair ferns, and watch the girls go by—the girls in pink and blue dresses, each leaning on the arm of a swain who grins. It’s vastly more fun than a fashionable parade.”

The branches met overhead, darkening the narrow chasm; the steep banks were spattered with dutchman’s breeches that fluttered like butterflies poised for a moment; down stream a few yards, where the valley widened, lay a tiny meadow where the sun fell full on a carpet of crow-foot violets that gave back the May sky. Two squirrels chased each other around a big maple, and a blue jay looked on and commented.

“Why is this stream of girls and men out for their holiday like baked ice-cream?” asked Dick. “That isn’t a conundrum; it’s a philosophic question.”

“I know, they give you the same sense of incongruity,” Ellery answered lazily.

“But I like them,” Dick pursued. “I like a great many more kinds of people than you do, Norris. You are narrow-minded. You want to associate only with the good and true and bathed.”

“Oh, I wish well to the majority of the race, but there are some that I do not care to eat with.”

Something in Ellery’s voice made his friend turn and survey him.

“You look tired. You’re working too hard. Don’t make the western mistake of thinking frazzled nerves mean energy.”

“That isn’t my kind,” Ellery smiled. “I’m all right. Let me spurt for a while. I got my position through favor, Dick, yours and Uncle Joe’s. I didn’t particularly deserve it, and I didn’t know anything about the work; so, for your sake as well as my own, I have determined to make good. Friendship may give a fellow his chance, but it doesn’t hold down a job, you know.”

“Pooh! You’ve made good already. A man can be tremendously experienced—for the West—when he’s been at a thing a year. Look at me and my work.”

“What do you consider your work? Road inspector?” For, to tell the truth, Norris was not wholly satisfied with Dick’s year of dawdling around the streets.

“My profession,” Dick answered with oracular gravity, “is a combination of hard work and fine art. It requires both toil and genius. I think I may say, with all natural modesty, that I have shown great natural aptitude for it. My profession is making friends. I have made friends useful and ornamental, friends great and small, friends beautiful and friends the opposite—which reminds me of your previous question, city politics. Whom do you suppose I supped with last night?”

“Whom?”

“With the Honorable, or by courtesy dubbed Honorable, William Barry,” Dick replied triumphantly.

“‘Piggy’ Barry?” ejaculated Ellery, turning on Dick in surprise. “Alderman Barry? The boss?”

“‘Piggy’ does somehow sound more appropriate than ‘Honorable’,” Dick said meditatively.

“And is he one of the people you like?” questioned Ellery with unfeigned surprise.

“For business purposes, yes. If I’m going to get into politics some day, it becomes me to cultivate local statesmen, doesn’t it? I took the great man to the theater, or at least to something that called itself the theater, and I gave him an excellent supper afterward. He seemed to appreciate it and my society.”

“I dare say you made yourself agreeable. Do you expect he will help you in your public career?”

“Not voluntarily, perhaps; but I wanted to know him, better and better. Under benign influences, he is indiscreet. He reminded me last night of Louis XIV. He might have said, ‘St. Etienne, it is I,’ but in his simpler and less sophisticated language, he was content to remark, ‘I’m the whole damn show, see?’”

“I’m glad he knew enough to put the appropriate adjective before show,” said Ellery grimly.

“And yet I suspect that, even in that statement, he lied,” Dick went on. “I studied him last night. You’ll never persuade me that that man, whose head is all face and neck, does the intricate planning and wire-pulling that runs this city. I’ve an idea Barry is only the two placards on each side of the sandwich-man. He may be the adjective show, but I doubt if he’s the man.”

“Have you discovered who is the real sandwich-man?”

“No, I haven’t. My reasoning is inductive. I see numerous little holes with small tips of threads sticking through them, but when I try to get hold of the threads to pull them out and examine them, the ends are too short or my fingers are too big. But get hold of them I shall, sooner or later, by hook or crook. If I don’t give some of those fellows the slugging of their lives, my name isn’t Richard Percival.”

“I suspect that it is Richard Percival,” said Ellery with a whimsical glance of affection.

“This, as I read it, is the history,” Dick went on. “Six years ago, when you and I were sub-

freshmen, and unable to take an active part, there was a brief spasm of reform. It was a short episode of fisticuffs and fighting, which is for a day—a very different thing from governing, which goes steadily on from year to year. But this reform movement did result in giving the city a good charter.”

“The Garden of Eden was once fitted out with an excellent system of government.”

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“Exactly. Charters, left to themselves, do not regulate human nature. The good citizens of St. Etienne went their own busy business way and left the less occupied bad citizens to adapt the charter to the needs of life; and that was an easy job, so easy that it has apparently been possible for one man to manage it. The charter put great power into the hands of the mayor. There have been three mayors elected under it, and they have all been ‘friends’ of Billy Barry.”

“I wonder if the next will be,” queried Ellery thoughtfully.

“And the majority of every working committee appointed by the city council is made of ‘friends’ of Piggy, who shows a fine disregard of party lines in his affiliations. William is one more product of this horseless wireless age—a crownless king.”

“What makes you think that he isn’t the power he seems?”

“A lot of things. The business interests behind him do not seem to be wholly his. That is another field for investigation.”

“You started yesterday to tell me about a big policeman.”

“Yes, Olaf Ericson, with the eyes and mustache of a viking above a blue uniform. When I met him last he had just had the melancholy duty of cutting down a poor wretch that had hung himself, and of sending for the coroner. He told me that the pathetic part of it was that the dead man was a total stranger in the city; and then he winked and asked if I knew that though the city paid the coroner his salary, the state guaranteed an extra fee of ‘saxty dollar’ to that official for every stranger who met with sudden death within our limits? I didn’t know, but I do now. I took pains to look up last year’s records and, curiously enough, out of one hundred and seventy-six cases that required the services of a coroner, one hundred and fifty-one were those of strangers. That would add about nine thousand dollars to a quite moderate salary. Another queer thing is that Doctor Niger—the coroner, you know—is Billy Barry’s brother-in-law.”

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“Great Scott!” said Ellery.

“Great Barry, say I. Now it may be my historic sense, or it may be mere curiosity, but I mean to hunt up the personal history of those hundred-odd strangers who died forlorn and lonely within our gates.”

“Work quietly, Dick, and get your facts well in hand.”

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“I intend to. But when I have it all, don’t you suppose your chief, Lewis, will be willing to publish the record?”

“I hope so.”

“I dare say the day will come when Barry and I shall cease to be friends,” said Dick cheerfully. “One must submit to the inevitable. But let’s keep the papers dribbling out information to the public. By the time the coroner story is finished, I expect to have another ready.”

“Tell me.”

“Not yet. What used old Eddy to preach to us in rhetoric? ‘Before you attempt composition, be sure that you have a rounded thought.’ This isn’t round, it’s elliptical. Big Olaf is a friend useful. He’s a shrewd fellow, who’s been looking stupid for some time. The ‘bunch’ hasn’t been treating him square. You can guess what that means. Anyway, he is sore as well as shrewd, and now I fancy he belongs to me.”

Norris turned with a start and stared Dick in the face.

“How did you get possession of him?” he asked sharply.

“Well, what if I bought him?”

“Do you mean that you are making up to him what Barry’s dirty hands have failed to give? You are bribing him to act as your spy?”

143

“I do not suppose there is any harm in my hiring a private detective.”

“That depends on whether he is already a public official, and on how you pay him, and what you pay him for.”

“Ellery, those fellows have sentries and pickets and fortifications and guns always in battle-array against us and our kind. The only thing to do is to gather hosts and ammunition on the other side.”

“True. But there isn’t any use in fighting dishonesty with dishonor. Dick, don’t lower your standard to the mere flinging of mud.”

But Dick did not appear to listen. His eyes were caught by one of the passing couples and he sprang to his feet.

“Let’s follow the stream a little farther,” he said, moving as he spoke. “The gorge grows wilder and more enticing the farther you go.”

He walked hurriedly down the path, and Ellery, whose mind seldom leaped, but progressed by

orderly steps, followed in some bewilderment. An instant before Dick's face had worn the profound air of a man on whose shoulders rested mighty problems. Now every movement was boyish and exultant. He laughed to himself. The stream thundered and one does not ask a friend to shout out his minor moods, so Ellery forbore to question.

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Suddenly the brook burst through overhanging cliffs of party-colored sandstone out of its thread-like gorge into the wide chasm of the Mississippi. A small steamer lay at anchor and tooted a discordant horn to signify to the world that she intended to be up and doing. A crowd of phlegmatic-faced revelers stood upon the bank and watched her with absorbed indifference, while a smaller number pushed aboard and prepared for true joy by laying in a store of cracker-jack and peanuts at a diminutive counter.

"Just in time!" Dick ejaculated and he shoved Ellery on to the swaying deck as the hawsers were swung loose.

They whirled out into mid-stream and exchanged the fine feminine delights of the brook for the bold masculine ones of the great river, whose craggy banks rose high, like fortifications, forest-crowned. Tangles of woodbine, clematis and bitter-sweet sprawled down over striated rocks. The boat twisted its way through a current that boiled up from below in whirlpools. Here and there huge logs plunged downward like water-monsters, as they threaded between wooded islands, where meek-looking cottontails squatted and twiddled their noses at the passing craft; on, on, until, far off, loomed the boldest highest cliff of all, its top crested by a quaint old slit-windowed round tower of a fort, once a border defense against Chippewa and Sioux, now backed by the sleek lawns of well-groomed officers.

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Ellery looked around at his fellow passengers, contentedly munching their peanuts and conversing in broad English flavored with Norse. They were a good-natured assemblage, who choked and snorted and chuckled and whinnied in their laughter. Norris' eyes were caught by one girl, conspicuously because plainly dressed. As she turned her profile, he glanced at Dick. Dick too was staring at her, and even while Ellery eyed him, he raised his hat and bowed gravely, with a deferential air that became him.

"So," exclaimed Norris under his breath, "that was why we tore like madmen to catch this boat!"

"It would have been a pity to lose it," Dick responded innocently. "It is a delicious bit of scenery from here to the fort. I wanted you to see it."

146

"Pink and white scenery with yellow curls," jeered Ellery.

Dick made no reply and Ellery went on.

"She has a young man already. You can't go and take her away from him. That wouldn't be playing fair."

"The man with her is an oaf. He has a loose mouth that wabbles when he opens it to pick his teeth."

"So you think that though you may not snatch her bodily, you may make her wish to be with you instead of with him, and that the wish will lie fallow in her heart. Dick, you are a student of human nature," Ellery said, half amused, half irritated.

"I dare say he is a gentleman at heart. Oafs always are."

"What you really do," Ellery continued, "is to make her uncomfortable and conscious of his clothes and his sprawl. She flushed when she saw you, and she has been sitting stiffly ever since."

"Oh, drop it, Norris."

Ellery shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know what you want to do it for," he said. "You're a queer combination, Dick, of the whole-souled reformer and the abject goose."

147

"Nothing inconsistent about being a philanthropist and a philogynist. By Jove! She's pretty in her *malaise*, pink, and pecking like a little wren at her oaf. Ellery, it's a brute of a shame that such as she should be cast before him—she, a fine lacy creature who shows her breeding through it all."

"How much are you in earnest?"

"There you go again!" Dick turned on his friend with a kind of exasperation. "You belong to that period of social development when they ask a man's intentions if he looks twice at the girl he dances with. I don't have to be in earnest, thank Heaven! But when I get a chance to look at anything so lovely as that girl, I mean to do it, just as I look at a flower or a picture. I don't mean to lose all the delicious froth of life. Do you happen to know her first name?"

"Lena," answered Ellery shortly.

"Lena! It's a delicate fragile little name—not meant for a girl who has to plug her way through life. Her real name is Andromeda, poor child—chained to the rock and momentarily expecting the jaws of poverty."

148

"You know, Dick, the attention that seems like a trifle to you, with a life full of interests, may look like a serious affair to her."

"See here, old man, you needn't be so snippy. Must I confine my philanthropy to the old and

ugly to keep it above suspicion? I'm just so far interested in this, and no more, that I'm sorry for that little girl, and if I saw a chance, I'd do her a good turn, as I pass along; and if I didn't think more of you than of any other man, I wouldn't give you the satisfaction of rendering so much of an account of myself."

Ellery was silent and looked at the river with its whirlpools, at the cliffs, gray with stone and pale green with May, and sometimes at Dick, who leaned forward with his chin in his hand, apparently absorbed in thought, but occasionally shooting a glance at Lena who laughed and chattered with Mr. Nolan in a sort of intermittent fever.

The steamer tooted and splashed at the landing below the fort, and turned herself about for the return trip. Sand-martins dropped from their holes in the cliffs and skimmed across the bows, and the breeze blew fresher as they headed up stream. Still the two friends sat in silence, though once Percival looked across and laughed, as though he enjoyed the other's seriousness.

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"Norris, you are funny," he said.

"Why?"

"You always see consequences to things."

"Most things have both causes and effects," Ellery retorted, ruffled.

"I deny it," said Dick.

When they creaked at the dock, Dick suddenly pushed forward so that he almost touched Lena in the crowd that was hurrying to shore.

"Good afternoon, Miss Quincy," he said. "I hope you have enjoyed this little sail as much as I have."

Knowing that he had watched her ever since they started, she looked up at him with flushed inquiry.

"Yes, it was lovely," she said.

"Come on, Lena," exclaimed her escort, seizing her arm. "I guess we ought to hurry. There'll be an awful crowd on the street-cars."

"If you'll allow me," said Dick, "I have an automobile up near the Falls, and I'd be delighted to —"

"We come by the cars and I guess they're good enough for us to go home by," Mr. Nolan interrupted roughly. "We're blocking the way here. Come, Lena." He glowered at Dick's lifted hat and added quite audibly: "Confound the dude! Thought he could cut in, did he?"

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"Now then," said Dick as he dropped back, "the oaf made a mistake. If he'd gracefully accepted my offer, he'd have gone up several pegs in her estimation. As it is, when her pretty little feet get trodden on by the crowd on the back platform, she will view us with regret as we whizz by. Poor little Andromeda!"

They loitered as the other "trippers", now filled with zeal to catch the trolley, pushed past them up the glen, and soon they were practically alone. Nature reasserted her sway as though there had never been laughter and babble along the musical stream and under the over-arching trees. The friends walked more and more slowly. A white thing lay on the path before them, and Dick stooped to pick it up, while Ellery looked on with mild curiosity.

"It's a letter, stamped and sealed." Percival peered at it closely, for though the level sunlight flooded the tops of the trees, down here by the stream it was fast growing dark.

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"Not much sealed, either," he added, noticing what a tiny spot of the flap stuck tight to the paper beneath. "Some one has dropped it here. By Jove, Ellery, it's addressed to William Barry! I'd give a farm in North Dakota to know what's in it."

He turned it again and stared at the back.

"I noticed," said Ellery, "that there was a mail-box near where we left the automobile. You can post it as we go along."

"Yes," assented Dick. He glared at the name of William Barry as though it fascinated him. Then he tucked the letter into his breast pocket.

As the motor began to champ its bit, Norris remarked:

"You forgot to mail that letter, Dick."

"So I did," said Dick. "No matter. I'll post it in town. It will go all the quicker."

CHAPTER IX

AN INVITATION

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A full month slipped away after the little excursion down the river before Dick saw Lena Quincy

again. In fact he had almost forgotten her. That day, if it was recalled at all, was chiefly memorable because it marked a change in his attitude toward his chosen occupation. It seemed that revelation after revelation poured upon him. The intricate threads of city politics fascinated him more and more as he began to understand whence they led and whither.

But one day on the street Dick met and passed Lena. She gave him a little bow—wistful, it seemed to him, and she looked tired and thin. His conscience smote him. He had really meant to do a common kindly thing to cheer this girl, but it had slipped his mind. That night he hunted up her address in his note-book and found his way to the dismal lodging-house.

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Four cheap-looking young persons were loitering in the parlor, two were drumming on a piano that was out of tune, and the room smelled fusty. The assembled group giggled and disappeared upon his entrance, and Lena, when she came down the stairs, flushing with embarrassment and pleasure, looked as much out of place as he felt. He stood before her, hat in hand. It would be impossible to talk to her in such a room.

"Miss Quincy," he said, "it is such a perfect night that it is neither more nor less than self-torture to stay indoors. Can't you be a bit unconventional and go out with me to the band concert in the park?" He remembered that she went about with the oaf.

Lena hesitated. She realized that this call was a crucial affair to her, though his long delay in coming proved it to be a casual matter to Mr. Percival. She must make no mistake. In her instant's hesitation, while her soft eyes were looking inquiringly into his face, she had an inspiration.

"I should love it, Mr. Percival," she said with that little air of reserve that set her apart. "But don't you see, I—I—can't go with you—until—until you know my mother and unless she approves."

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"Of course," said Dick, quite unconscious of Lena's play-acting.

Lena turned and twisted a bit of worn blue plush trimming on the shelf over the gas-log before she showed him a blushing face.

"The only thing I can do is to ask you to come up stairs and meet mother. She can hardly move about enough to come down."

She led the way with anxiety in her heart as to how her mother would behave. Would she show irritable astonishment if Lena treated her with gentle deference, and asked her permission to be out in the evening with a strange young man? But Mrs. Quincy knew a thing or two as well as her daughter, and Dick saw only that the room was very ugly, that Lena moved about with lips compressed and voice gentle and full of tender consideration, to make her mother as comfortable as possible before she went away.

"And I shan't keep you up late, mother, dear," Lena said with a final kiss that made Mrs. Quincy wink to keep back the statement that she saw herself waiting for the return of her daughter.

The fresh evening air was delicious after this. Dick felt all his chivalry again stirred. It made no difference that Lena said little to keep up her share in the conversation. Dick was content to do the entertaining himself, and satisfied when Lena laughed. He bubbled over with fancies old and new, and even the old ones took fresh life. The college stories and jokes that everybody knew, the commonplaces of his world, set Lena exclaiming with delight. The excitement of the night, and they two alone in the crowd, made the little girl cling to his arm for fear they might be separated! There were quieter moments when they wandered to the outskirts and found a bench for a moment's rest.

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Once he spoke of some of the rough sides of her work, and she answered quietly that she was used to such things and managed to forget their hardship. Dick glanced at her face, self-contained in the gas-light. He remembered her mother and the ugly room. He had a vision of a sweet spirit bearing an adverse fate with dignity, and now giving him, in return for his small act of courtesy, the perfume of her presence, her beauty, her wondering admiration. For the time it seemed to Lena herself that she was what he fancied her. She was only showing him, she thought, the best side of herself. It was natural that she should hide the other.

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The clock in the steeple far above tinkled out ten, and Lena drew herself to attention.

"Oh, not yet," Dick exclaimed. "Let's go somewhere and get an ice."

Again Lena hesitated. Even so small a luxury tempted her for its own sake, and she liked to be with Mr. Percival. With Jim Nolan she would have gone in a moment, but she was determined that this man should not think her too easy of access.

"I think not," she said reluctantly. "I must go home to mother. She isn't used to being up late, and she needs my help."

She knew that she had answered well when he urged:

"Very well, then. If you will give such very little nibbles of your time, you must give me more of them. Will you come out again—to the theater—off in the motor—anywhere?"

Lena could hardly speak, but she smiled up her thanks.

"Oh, Mr. Percival!" she said.

As he walked away after seeing her home, he felt himself irritated with the other women, the women to whom ease and pleasure are a matter of course.

So they fell into the way of making little expeditions together, and Dick no longer joked with Ellery about this delectable morsel of pinkness, but kept his growing intimacy to himself. This dell by the way, into which he had strayed by accident, was becoming more fascinating than the crammed highway with its buzzing life.

July and August and September passed and, in spite of her reserve, Dick felt that he was coming to know little Lena well. He had told her all about himself, his mother, his three-cornered intimacy with Norris and Madeline, his plans for his own future, and to all she listened, sometimes with a dreamy far-off look in the big eyes, sometimes with a swift smile of sympathy, in spite of the fact that he and his point of view were often puzzling to her. And he brought dainties and flowers to the dingy room.

Lena, on her side, thoroughly enjoyed some phases of her acquaintance with Mr. Percival. Apart from all other considerations, it was a real pleasure to prove herself the actress she knew she was. She pretended, when she was with him, that she was a wholly different kind of person. It was fun to do it well and convincingly and deliberately. It was exhilarating.

But deeper, far deeper than her histrionic satisfaction lay the hope that Dick Percival might be the key to some other kind of life than that she led; and as the months went by, this hidden intimacy, delicious to him because of its very remoteness, began to irritate her. Was he ashamed of her? Was he playing with her? Privately she found Prince Charming, unless he meant something more than a half-hour now and again, something of a bore. Of what pleasure could it be to her that he was rich and happy and full of plans and in touch with all that was delightful, if he gave none of this to her?

One evening she seemed listless as she sat enduring an account of a garden party he had been to the day before. He had thought it might amuse her, but it evidently didn't.

"I'm always telling you of my affairs," he said half querulously. "Why don't you give me your experiences?"

"There's nothing to tell," she said dully. "You've had so many interesting things happen, and you expect ever so many more lovely things to come, but I've always been pinched, and I shall have to keep on pinching for ever, I guess."

"Nonsense!" Dick answered impulsively. "The future is sure to bring you better things."

She looked down a moment, and Dick had an impression that she was holding back tears. At any rate, when she lifted her head again, her face wore a cold little stare that he had never seen before, and that seemed to hold him at arm's length.

"I'm quite alone with the people I have to live among," she said. "I'm not like them, and I don't care for them."

"Am I one of your kind?" Dick asked. He reviled himself the next moment for having said so much, but Lena seemed to draw no inferences, though her color heightened a little as she answered:

"Oh, you! There's only one of you, unfortunately. You are a little oasis in my desert. I'm very grateful for you, but—"

Lena had said such things before. Dick began to revolve plans for a larger kindness, and, in his slow masculine intellect, fancied that it was all his own idea to try and bring this small person into contact with those who would appreciate her and with whom she could be happy,—for of course Lena herself was quite submissive to her lot.

To Dick's friends this long summer dawdled itself away much as the previous one had done. There were the same week-ends at the lake, with Dick more full of vivacity than ever, Ellery growing more certain of himself, Madeline rounding slowly out of girlhood into womanhood. Yet there was a difference. Half a dozen Sundays, when Percival was too busy, Ellery, half-irritated with his friend, half-exultant in his desertion, spent the quiet afternoons *à deux* with Madeline.

It seemed to Norris that some indefinable change was coming over Dick. At times he was vivid, even fantastic, and again he lapsed into erratic silences out of which he came at new and unexpected points. He developed ideas that appeared to his friend not quite in keeping with the sterling Dick of old. He was less sensitive, so thought Ellery, in his code of honor as he saw more and more of the crooked ways of men. Once Norris met him walking with one of the cheaper aldermen, and he wore a duplicate—in gilt—of the alderman's walk and swagger. He talked politics and reform, but with less emphasis on his ideals and more on the game, which seemed to mean the fun of catching the rascals red-handed and turning them out.

Madeline, as Ellery studied her, was unaware of any change either in Dick himself or in his attitude toward her. It was like her to be above suspicions or small jealousies.

So summer slipped into October, and there came a month of lovely days. Winter, after a feint, slunk into hiding again, and the only result of his excursion was a more splendid red on the maples, a more glowing russet on the oaks. Indian summer reigned in his stead, flinging broadcast her gorgeous colors and her melting mellowness. That men might not surfeit of her sweets, she tempered her daytime prodigality of heat by nights of frost. People were coming back to town, a few, very few, in velvet gowns, but mostly in rags and anxious about their autumn wardrobes; and yet these were days to make one long, as one does in spring, for the smell of the good brown earth and the sniff of untainted country air. The atmosphere was full of glowing warmth that penetrated to the heart and made every face on the street reflect some of its delight; for autumn with her thousand charms and witcheries was proving that she died, not

from gray old age, but in the fullness of her prime.

Madeline Elton, therefore, wished herself back again with the fallen maple leaves and the pines that held their own; and Mrs. Lenox was fitting temptation to desire as the two hobnobbed over cups of tea in easy friendliness. When Dick Percival appeared, Mrs. Lenox saw the way to make her bait irresistible.

"Dick," she cried, "just the man! Don't you pine for sunshine in your nostrils instead of city smoke? Doesn't the thought of winter coming, cold and long, make you appreciate these last heavenly gleams? Do you remember what a delicious week you and Mr. Norris and Madeline spent with me a year ago?"

"Yes, to everything," said Dick. "All of which means—what? No cream, please, Madeline."

"All of which means," answered the lady, "that Mr. Lenox and I are wise in our generation and do not fly to the city when the first birds go south; that I want Madeline to come and pay me a visit; that, as a kind of sugar-plum, a chromo, if you please, to induce her to buy my wares, I propose that you and Mr. Norris should join us on the Sunday of next week. What do you say?"

"May the Lord prosper you, and I'll do my part as an attraction," Dick replied heartily. "But I choose to be a sugar-plum rather than a chromo, especially if Madeline is going to eat me."

"I didn't need any additional inducement, Mrs. Lenox," said Madeline. "Yourselves and all outdoors are surely sufficient. It will be good to get away from the grime. Now what bee have you in your bonnet, Dick?" For a new look had come into his face as she spoke.

Percival had been glancing around the cheerful comfortable room whose very books and pictures suggested peace of mind. It seemed to him that he looked with Lena's longing eyes rather than with his own, familiar with these surroundings. He was thinking how little his small courtesies counted, and how much these women could do if they chose. Why shouldn't he be bold? Madeline and Mrs. Lenox were simple-hearted enough to take his plea at its true value, and not misunderstand his motives. They would be interested in Lena in exactly the same way he was. He smiled at Madeline's serenely inquiring face.

"Well, Dick?" she asked again.

"I was wondering whether I dared to suggest a little act of human kindness to you two. You women are so much more ready to do such things than men are, but we are more apt to run up against the cases where it is needed. There's a pathetic little girl doing some hack work for the *Star*. Norris knows her. She's just one of those delicate creatures that ought to live in the sheltered corner of a garden, and she's out on a bleak prairie. She's about as much like the people she has to associate with as an old-fashioned single rose is like a cabbage. Even her mother, who is the only relative she has, is nothing but a fretful porcupine of a woman. I've been to see them a few times and the situation seems to me almost intolerable. If ever a girl needed a friend or two, it's she—not for charity, you understand, but just for real contact with people of her own kind. Now a man's not much use in such circumstances, is he? But naturally I think you are about the best kind of a friend in the world, so I came up this afternoon partly to see if you wouldn't give her a hand."

"It sounds as though it might be more of a pleasure than a painful duty."

"So it would. You'd take to her, I know," the young man went on eagerly. Mrs. Lenox watched him in somewhat irritated amusement. "She hasn't your brains, of course, Madeline, but she has such charm, such simplicity and freshness, that you can't help liking her. And she grubs away at perfectly uncongenial work, and lives with this fusty old mother in a fusty little lodging-house. It makes me sick to think of such daily crucifixion. I've no business to say it, I know; but when you spoke about a week at the lake, I couldn't help thinking what such a thing would mean to her. She'd think herself in Paradise."

"I suppose, Dick, that this is your adroit and tactful way of suggesting that I should ask her," Mrs. Lenox said, laughing.

And Madeline, who, if Dick had proposed that Mrs. Lenox should turn her very charming summer home into an orphan asylum, would have considered that the proposition, as coming from him, was entitled to consideration, put in:

"I think it would be a lovely thing to do, Vera."

"And we should probably let ourselves in for a frightful bore."

"And you might entertain an angel unawares," said Dick.

Mrs. Lenox knit her brows and meditated. She didn't quite like Dick's championship of this unknown girl, nor did she trust to his judgment; but, like a wise woman, she wanted to know what was the thing that had attracted him, and was big enough in heart to be willing to do a good turn wherever she could.

"This is the oracle of the Pythia," she said at last. "We will not commit ourselves to anything at the behest of Richard Percival. On my way to the station, now, in fact, Madeline and I will go to see this rose among cabbages. We will introduce ourselves as your friends, Dick. If we think you are a mere deluded male thing, there the matter ends. If we, too, are carried away by enthusiasm, we will invite her on the spur of the moment, and Mr. Lenox, who, like most married men, is a connoisseur in pretty girls, can talk to her. Will this suit you, Dick?"

"Excellently," said Dick, "I know the result."

"Then you'll come next Saturday? Madeline is coming day after to-morrow and I'll write to Mr. Norris. Heaven send these days of sun continue. Now if we are to pay this call, and I am to catch my train, we must be off."

Miss Quincy, having quarreled with her mother over her extravagance in buying a feather boa with the proceeds of her last small check, was seated by the window, industriously concocting a new hat. The Swedish "girl", whose unfortunate fate it was to minister to the wants of Mrs. Olberg's lodgers, gave a kind of defiant pound on the door, opened it and thrust in a disheveled blond head, followed by a hand puckered from the dish-water.

"Haar's cards, Miss Quincy," she said, "Dar's twa ladies down staars."

She dropped the cards on the floor and disappeared. Lena, in great curiosity, picked them up and read aloud:

"Mrs. Francis Lenox; Miss Elton."

"For the land's sake! Who air they?" asked her mother.

"Two of the biggest swells in town."

"Well, what on earth do they want here? We ain't very swell."

"Perhaps they want me to report some party or something," said Lena.

She was losing no time in giving her hair one or two becoming jerks and going through a series of wriggles meant to impart grace and style to her costume.

"Perhaps they want to give you a million dollars," said Mrs. Quincy sarcastically.

Lena, with heart burning with mingled shame at her own shabby surroundings, curiosity at their errand, and awe for the mighty names, entered the little parlor which gave the impression of never having been cleaned since it was born with its cheap worn plush furniture, its crayon portraits and its two vases of gaudy blue and gold. She faced the two ladies seated on the impossible chairs. Lena was almost as startling an apparition in that room as was Ram Juna's rose in the dusty phial—whether a miracle or a clever trick. She looked so untouched by any vulgarity in her surroundings, so fresh and true, so instinct with virgin dignity, that the eyes that met her own were filled with the tribute of surprise; and she exulted in some hidden corner of her soul.

In the half-hour that they spent together she measured her new acquaintances carefully.

"And these are women of the world!" she said to herself. "Why, they're boobies. I could do them up any time."

For Lena did not know that women of this type are the most protected creatures on the face of the earth. The knowledge of good is given them, but not the knowledge of evil.

So she told them all about herself, which was what they seemed to want to hear, and when they went away Madeline said:

"I wonder if there are many such born to blush unseen. What an exquisite little tragedy she is!"

And Mrs. Lenox answered: "U—u—m! Well, I've asked her, haven't I? I think the microbe of Dick's impulsiveness must have got into me."

Lena stood back in the shadow of the room to watch her departing guests. Then she ran up stairs with light steps, ruffling her plumes like a cocky little lady-wren as she went back to the dreariness where Mrs. Quincy sat rocking her inevitable creaking chair.

"Well!" asked her mother after a pause, a pause just long enough, the daughter knew, to fill her with irritable curiosity.

"Well," Lena answered smartly, "and what do you think? They came to call, if you please, because Mr. Percival asked them to; and they were sweet as honey. And Mrs. Lenox asked me to spend a whole week at her country place."

"For the land sake!"

"I guess," Lena went on with complacency, "Mr. Percival must have said something pretty nice."

Her mother stared at her speechless, and it was such an unusual thing for Mrs. Quincy to be struck dumb that Lena was correspondingly elated as she rattled on.

"Such dresses! I'd give anything to have such clothes and wear them with that kind of an everyday, don't-care air. My, but Mrs. Lenox is a stunner! But the Lenoxes are just rolling in money; and they say Mr. Lenox hadn't a red cent when she married him and gave him his start. It's lucky I have another check coming from the *Star*. I'll need more things than ever it will buy to go out there. I must begin to get ready right away."

The mention of expenditure brought Mrs. Quincy back to her normal state of mind, and she resumed her rocking. Lena's means and extremes in shopping were her standard grievance.

"I might know that 'ud be the next thing. Of course you'll be spending every penny you can rake and scrape on clothes, so's to look fine for your new fine friends. It's no matter about me. I can go without a decent rag to my back, so long as you've got feathers and flummery."

"Well, I earned the money. I don't see why I shouldn't spend it. I'm not robbing you," said Lena sulkily.

"You might contribute a mite to your own board."

"I'll save you my board for a week," snapped the girl.

Mrs. Quincy changed her tack. "And leave me shut up in town," she resumed. "I should think you'd think twice, Lena, before you went off gallivantin' and left your poor old mother here alone. Nobody seems to think I need any pleasure."

"I'll write and ask Mrs. Lenox if she won't take you instead of me."

"Take me! I should think not! I wouldn't be hired to leave my own place and go off like a charity case among a lot of rich people who looked down on me because I was poor. I've got too much self-respect to jump at an invitation, like a pickerel at a frog. But there! You never think twice about things."

"Suppose I did refuse. You'd fly out at me for not making the most of my chances," said poor Lena, on the verge of tears.

Mrs. Quincy was temporarily silenced by the truth of this reply, and Lena pursued her advantage.

"Come now, mother, do you want me to get out of it?"

"Oh, I suppose you'll have to go, or I won't have no peace to my life," Mrs. Quincy grudgingly responded.

"Yes, you shall. If you say so, I'll give it up now and never say another word about it."

"And *act* injured to death," said her mother. "No, you go!"

"After you've done everything you can to spoil it for me," answered Lena, not half realizing how well she spoke the truth, and how both by inheritance and by precept her mother had trailed the serpent over her life. To Lena, fortune and misfortune were still things of outward import, and almost synonymous with possession and non-possession. Yet, in spite of Mrs. Quincy's dour looks, Lena found herself singing as she moved swiftly about the room. Spontaneous joy was a rare thing with her. The first peep into the delectable world was entrancing.

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CHAPTER X

BITTER-SWEET

It was all charming, if a little strange—the friendliness of Miss Elton when Lena met her at the station, the smart trap and groom that met them at the end of their short journey, the very way in which Miss Elton took possession of those awe-inspiring objects, and the respectful curiosity of the loungers at the country station. As she stepped into the carriage, Lena caught a glimpse of a cart-horse with so many ribs as to suggest that the female of his species had yet to be created. He looked so like her mother, that he gave her a spasm of anguish which she tried to forget, as they were whirled down the road with its fringe of straight-limbed trees. Never had the world looked more lovely. Her spirits were lifted up.

Mrs. Lenox met them at the door with hospitable effusiveness, but Lena's crucifixion began from that moment.

"The man will carry your bag up for you," said Mrs. Lenox.

As Olaf obediently stepped forward, Lena flushed and thought: "They both noticed that it was only imitation leather."

Mrs. Lenox walked up stairs with them, chattering gaily with Madeline, and Lena followed in embarrassed silence at the charming freshness and daintiness of everything about her.

"I've put you and Miss Elton in adjoining rooms," said Mrs. Lenox, smiling kindly at her, "so that you needn't feel remote and lonely on your first visit here."

The man put down the bag and disappeared, and a trim maid came forward to help Lena off with her coat which, with a sudden pang, she wished were lined with satin instead of sateen.

"Sall Ay unpack you bag?" said the little maid politely.

"No, thank you. I prefer to do it myself," said Lena desperately. It was more than she could endure to have a strange girl spying out the nakedness of the land. Yet when the little maid said, "Vary well, ma'am," and walked into the next room, Lena wondered if she had made a mistake. She heard Miss Elton's cheerful address of the appalling personage with the puffed up bit of hair and the saucy cap.

"How do you do, Sophie?"

"Good day, mees. As thar anything Ay can do for you?"

"I fancy my dress would be better for a good brushing after the dusty train, and the gown I want is in the top tray of the little trunk, Sophie."

The door closed and Lena wondered in terror what of her small store of finery she ought to put on, and when she ought to go down stairs. She solved the first question to the best of her ability

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and sat down on the edge of a very clean beflowered chair in despair about the other, when there came voices in the hall, and Madeline tapped on her door, and called:

"Don't you want to come out and see the baby?"

Now Lena detested babies as sticky and order-destroying vermin, but in relief she said: "A baby? Oh, how lovely!"

"Come," said Mrs. Lenox. "The proper study of womanhood is baby." Lena went out to find a very small person in a very tottering condition, steered up and down the hall by another be-capped maid who was holding tight to his rear petticoats, while Mrs. Lenox trotted by his side, pulling a woolly lamb that baa'd with enchanting precision, and allowing her skirts to be worried by a small puppy, whose business in life was to bite anything hard that lay on the floor or that wiggled. Mrs. Lenox and Miss Elton sat down on the floor to trowse and to be trowled amid laughter and hair-pulling and frantic yelps from the puppy, while Lena looked on and said: "Isn't he cunning?" and wondered whether she ought to sit on the floor or not. She wondered if this were indeed the millionaire Mrs. Lenox of whom she read with awe from the "In the swing" column as being present at such and such "society functions", thus and thus attired.

Somehow Mrs. Lenox, seated on the floor, with her hair over one eye, disconcerted Lena more than any amount of grandeur would have done. She felt as one might who should catch the Venus of Melos cutting capers. Then the redoubtable lady jumped up, tucked in a few hair-pins, gave a final shake to her small son and said:

"I dressed little Frank myself this afternoon. Don't you think I did a good job? Dressing a baby combines all the pleasures of the chase with the requirements of the exact sciences, Miss Quincy. Now let's go down and have some tea before big Frank gets home. I think we've time for a little friendly chat."

This time Lena followed with greater sense of security. She knew her dress was pretty and becoming, though inexpensive; and as for conversation, that to Lena's mind meant clothes and society, with which she felt a journalistic familiarity.

"Perhaps you prefer cream in your tea?" said Mrs. Lenox, with hand poised over the little table.

"No, thank you, I like lemon," answered Lena, who had never tasted it before and now thought it very nasty indeed. Then she wondered why she had told such a small useless lie.

But it was comfortable to be in a big lovely room with a pile of logs blazing in a great fireplace, and soft lamps shedding a glow rather than making spots of light. She wished she had, like Madeline, picked out a very easy chair instead of the stiff one she had selected, but she felt too shy to move until Mrs. Lenox suggested it, and then she was embarrassed because she was embarrassed. She wondered if she should ever be able to do things like these women, without thinking of what she was doing.

Madeline was idly turning the pages of a magazine and now she held it up.

"Look at these illustrations. Aren't they stunning?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Lenox. "I'm growing tired of that kind of thing. It isn't art; it's a fad. The trouble with most of this modern work is that it is too smart and fashionable. The clothes are more important than the people."

"Quite a contrast to ancient art, where the people were everything and the clothes nothing," Madeline retorted. "After all, I rather like the modern way. The old Greeks were not a bit more real people. They were nothing but types."

"And very decapitated and de-legged types," said Mrs. Lenox with a laugh. "And dirty, too—like the Sleeping Beauty. Do you know, it gives me the shivers to think of the Sleeping Beauty, lying there for ages, with dust and cobwebs accumulating on her. I'm sure I hope the prince gave her a thorough dusting before he kissed her."

"You are horribly realistic, Vera—a person with no imagination."

"I think I have just shown a truly vivid imagination."

"It is the business of imagination to build up a world of loveliness and order."

"I don't agree with you. I think it is the business of imagination to project things as they really are. I don't want to slip out from under reality and see only beauty. Beware, Madeline, or you will degenerate into a mere optimist."

"Isn't it funny that if your opponent can call you an optimist, he feels that he has delivered a knock-down blow to all your arguments?" Mrs. Lenox suddenly pulled herself together and turned toward Lena, who sat silently drinking her tea and taking no part in the conversation.

"Did you tell me that your mother is an invalid, Miss Quincy?"

"Not exactly; but she can't go about much. It seems to play her out to walk."

"It must be very hard on her to stay in the house all the time. I wonder if I might take her to drive with me once in a while?" A scarlet flush passed over Lena's face at the very idea of her mother's querulous vulgarity being displayed to this woman, and Mrs. Lenox could not help seeing her embarrassment.

A little wave of pity swept over the older woman. It must be a cruel fate to be ashamed of one's surroundings. Mrs. Lenox herself was one of those serious-minded persons who regard their opportunities as responsibilities. She waged constant warfare with the dominion of externals,

and believed with all her heart that the life was more than raiment; but a momentary doubt assailed her as to whether, after all, it might not be easier to conquer things when one owned them, rather than when one had to do without them. It has generally been Dives who is represented as enslaved by the goods of this world. Perhaps Lazarus, if his heart is absorbed in sordid longing for what others have and he has not, stands just as poor a chance of the kingdom of Heaven.

What could she do to make Miss Quincy feel at ease? The girl certainly had brains and character. Dick had told them of her brave bearing of burdens. This stiff back and this silence were but the tribute of shyness to new surroundings. So ran Mrs. Lenox's swift thoughts and she set herself to make Lena talk about the things with which she was familiar, to link her past to this present.

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Evidently the same thought was flitting through Madeline's brain, for before Mrs. Lenox spoke she began:

"Do you know, Miss Quincy, I have felt a little envy of you ever since Dick first told us about you."

"Envy! Of me?" Lena exclaimed, moved to genuine surprise.

"Yes," Madeline went on, leaning forward, eager to explain herself. "You see, I seem to have had a good deal of training, which looks as though it should prepare me to do something, and then—then I don't do anything. It makes me feel flat and unprofitable. I'd like to feel like you every night—as though I'd really accomplished a thing or two."

"Isn't it like Madeline to try to make the girl feel the dignity of drudgery!" Mrs. Lenox said to herself.

"The stuck-up thing!" thought Lena; "rubbing it into me that she does not have to work for her living."

She was tempted to make a sharp answer, but remembered her diplomacy and held it in.

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"Work isn't always so pleasant when you're in it," she said.

"Everything is apt to look rough around the edges until you hold it off and get a view of it as a whole," Mrs. Lenox put in. "Even love—sometimes. But I think that, next to love, work is about the best thing in life."

"Oh, that depends," Madeline cried. "When I read papers at clubs, people talk about my 'work', but nobody thinks that it is worth while. I'd like to earn a dollar, just as a guaranty that some one thought the thing I did was worth it."

"Gracious!" Lena exclaimed in genuine surprise. "Do you really feel that way about earning money?"

"Don't you?" Madeline asked in return; and each looked at the other uncomprehendingly.

"No, I don't," Lena burst out sullenly, but forgetting to be shy. "I feel degraded by every dirty five-dollar bill I get by being a slavey. People make you feel that way. You get it rubbed into you every day."

"No, no," Mrs. Lenox cried, remorseful now that their talk had drifted into such intimate personalities. "I am sure, Miss Quincy, nobody feels that way about a woman that works, except, perhaps, people whose opinion you can well afford to despise." This was a shaft that struck so near home that Lena could hardly hold back the tears. "I am sure I think a thousand times more of a woman who does her honest share than I do of the helpless ones who lie down on somebody else and whine," Mrs. Lenox went on.

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Madeline was inwardly bemoaning her own lack of tact. She really wanted to make a friend of this girl, because Dick had asked her to, and here, at the very beginning, she had stumbled, and all that was meant to show her regard and sympathy but served to make a gulf between them.

Mrs. Lenox darted a look at her and sprang suddenly to her feet.

"Oh, here's Frank," she exclaimed with an air of relief. "Come in, boy, and have some tea and fire. It was good of you to come so bright and early."

"Earlier than bright, I'm afraid," he said.

Lena looked with interest toward the door. Frank Lenox was great in St. Etienne, first because he was the son-in-law of old Nicholas Windsor, a potentate of the first local magnitude, and second, because he was pushing to still greater success the enterprises that the elder man had begun. So people talked about him in the street-cars by his first name. Lena felt that it was a privilege to look at him, big, clean, with that mingling of alertness with power which is the characteristic of the American business man. It was an experience of absorbing interest to see the half underhand caress he gave his wife in passing, and to find herself actually shaking hands with him. He seemed imposing and friendly and yet quite like other people, as he looked around for a capacious chair and his wife handed him a cup of tea. She was conscious that he looked at her with great interest. She recognized the expression in masculine eyes and it soothed her ruffled spirit. It was the constant affirmation of her beauty, a beauty which had in it something dream-like that made men's eyes dream. After all, she could always get along with men.

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"If you'd know what brought me home before my time, it was not your charms, my dear, but a mad desire to get away from Harris, who cornered me and opened up the negro question. I saw nothing for it but to take to the woods."

"It makes my traditional abolition blood boil to see how public opinion seems to be settling down and dallying with heresy and injustice again," Madeline exclaimed. She looked flushed and vigorous, and Lena stared at her and wondered how she could care for such things. Was it pure affectation?

"Oh, you're young, my dear," said Mrs. Lenox laughingly. "You must hold all your opinions violently. And you haven't been South. Things can't help looking different down there."

"Vera!" cried Miss Elton so explosively that Lena sat up straighter than ever, "you're not really a renegade yourself, are you?" and she spoke as though her life depended on the answer.

"Certainly not," Mrs. Lenox answered. "But I'm growing tolerant toward the poor old world as it is. I'm willing to let it grow slowly instead of insisting that it shall all be immediately as good and wise as I am. I'm learning to respect other people's point of view and to suspect that my mind is not such an ingenious mechanism as I once supposed it to be."

"Moreover, since she has married, she has contracted a habit of taking the opposite point of view," said her husband.

"Oh, that's one of the jokes that has successfully withstood the ravages of time," said Mrs. Lenox scornfully.

"Very well, then, I'll say that you are getting on toward middle life and have had your enthusiasms corrupted by a worldly-wise father and husband. But I dare say that Miss Quincy, being young, is quite as explosive as you are, Madeline. So we shall be two against two."

He looked with a challenge toward the girl, and perhaps Lena might have managed the expected saucy answer if she had not suddenly remembered that her shoes were shabby and she had meant to keep them hidden under her skirts. This memory destroyed her new-found equilibrium, so she blurted out a weak, "I really don't know anything about it," and then blushed hotly at her own awkwardness.

"It's a stupid subject, anyway," said Mr. Lenox. "I fled from town to avoid it. Let's not talk about negroes."

"Tell us what has happened in the great world," said Mrs. Lenox, leaning forward with her elbows on her knees and chin in hands.

"Another Jap victory," he said. "And I'll take a second one of those little cakes please, if Miss Quincy will leave one for me. It cuts me to the heart to see how the young girls of our generation stuff on little cakes. If they'd only take example by these same Japanese, who develop strategy and patriotism on rice, cherry blossoms and gymnastics, there'd be some hopes for us as a people."

He glanced again at Lena in a very amiable manner, as though he expected her to be saucy in return, but she blushed with mystification and mortification. She had felt doubtful as to whether she ought to take another of the little cakes, but they were very good, and she was young enough to love goodies, without many chances at anything so delectable as these particular bits. And now to be detected and made fun of! She began to question if she should be able to get along with these men, after all.

"Thank you," he went on after a pause. "And now that I'm comforted with cake, another cup of tea, Vera; and then, if you would complete my happiness, just give me a posy out of that bouquet for my buttonhole."

His wife rose, pulled a flower from a vase and pinned it to his coat.

"Here's mignonette! That's for dividends," she said, and she put her fingers in his hair and gave his head a little shake.

"Don't infringe on my head,—it's patented," he said. "Now go and sit down, and I will tell you something really exciting as well as instructive. I know about it because I have the privilege of helping the good work with a few dollars. Professor Gregory has dug up two or three hundred old manuscripts somewhere near Thebes, and he cables that they belong to the first century after Christ, that he expects them to illuminate most of the dark recesses of the time, and that I am privileged to share the glory by making an ample contribution. Doesn't that stir your young blood? I never hear of these things without a passionate desire to go to some respectably aged land and dig and dig and dig. It's a choice between doing so and making things in this very new land for some other fellow to dig up six thousand years from now. Which would you choose, Miss Quincy?"

Lena was extraordinarily pretty, and he had a theory that pretty girls were made to be talked to. Lena thought so too, yet all she said was, "I should think the digging would be very dirty work, though."

He glanced at her swiftly, and, though there was nothing unfriendly in the look, she felt an uncomfortable shiver. She fell into a miserable silence which she hardly broke when the others addressed her with a deliberate question or made some manifest effort to include her in topics introduced for her benefit. These attempts were only too apparent to her and rasped her soul the more. These people had such a perplexing way of saying whatever came into their heads. They were serious and frivolous at unexpected places. They were not at all "elegant"; they were natural, but their naturalness was not of Lena's kind. Mr. Lenox rose and smiled at his wife.

"I think I must go and have a look at my latest son," he said. "He is a very interesting person. At present he seems to be composed of two simple but diverse elements, a stomach and a sense of

humor." At the door he paused again and said, "Have you seen our new coat of arms, Madeline? —two kids rambunctious?"

He went away and sounds of manifest hilarity floated down the stairs. And then dinner was announced, and he looked so good-tempered when he returned and gave Lena his arm that her spirits were again lifted up. She had never before been escorted to a meal as though it were an affair of ceremony.

"I met an old fellow to-day," her host began with persistent attempt to draw her out, "that told me that for two years he had dined on bread and milk. And then I felt that I was a favorite of fortune to be able fearlessly to storm the dining-room. Happy the appendix that has no history."

Lena giggled helplessly. Was it amusement that she saw in Mr. Lenox's eyes as he unfolded his napkin and surveyed her?

"It's an awesome thing, isn't it, to be living in a world darkened on one side by the servant question and on the other by the appendix, like Scylla and Charybdis?"

She found herself sitting down to face the mysteries of a meal whose type was different from any hitherto met in her brief experience of life. Her internal summing up was, "Of course I can't make any impression on Mr. Lenox. He likes the other kind of woman."

She looked at Mrs. Lenox, a woman of restraint and dark hair and straight lines, and contrasted her with herself, a thing of curves and sunshine colors. She did not know that a man never cares for a type of woman, but only for woman in the concrete. Poor little Lena! When the evening was over and she found herself at last in her too-splendid bedroom, she put arms and head down on the dressing-table and sobbed. These people were simple where she was complicated and complicated where she was simple. It was all uncomfortable and different. She thought of Jim Nolan's unfrilled conversation, of his clumsy, rather inane compliments, of his primitive amoeba-like type of humor. She saw the whole course of her life of mean shifts and wranglings with her mother; and though its moral niggardliness was unappreciated, its physical meagerness sickened her in contrast to the ease and beauty of these newer scenes. She must climb out of that life, somehow, by hook or crook; if this were the alternative, she must grow to its likeness, no matter how the birth-pangs hurt. She would face it. She would even rejoice in the opportunity to study these women and mold herself to their outward form of *bien aise*. She would—she would. Faint and far-away voices came to her, and she wondered if Mr. and Mrs. Lenox were discussing her and laughing, as she would do in their place, at her gaucheries. The meaner you are yourself, the easier it is to believe in the meanness of others. It was the most godlike of men who taught the godliness of all men. Lena could not imagine that these people could either like or respect her unless she were molded after their pattern and had as much as they had.

And Miss Elton! She hated Miss Elton for that irritating calmness, for that easy appropriation of the good things of life. She hated with a hate that tingled her spine and shook her small body. The tragedy of littleness made her grit her teeth as she thought of the unconscious girl now going to bed in the next room.

"I'll get even with her somehow," was Miss Lena's resolve. "Just let me get the hang of things a little, and I'll show her!" Miss Quincy was conscious that though she as yet lacked knowledge of their world, she had the advantage of the inheritance of guile.

But things! things! things! Lena thought a little of the irony of it—that all her life she had pined to be set in luxury, and yet now and here the very rugs and chairs and soft lights, the pictures of unrecognized subjects, the unfamiliar delicacies before her at the table, all seemed to loom up and crush her into insignificance by their importance and expensiveness. They were her masters still.

But it was not Lena's way to waste her time on abstractions. While she sat and watched her fire crumble away into ashes, she was chiefly occupied with the concrete, and there entered into her soul and took possession of its empty chambers and began to mold her to her own purposes the demon of social ambition, which is not the desire to do or to be, but rather the longing to appear to be and to seem to do—to take the chaff and leave the wheat.

Mastered by this powerful spirit, Lena actually did make great strides in the next few days. She learned to lounge quite comfortably, to pretend with verisimilitude, even to chatter a little, helped chiefly by a certain persistent light-weight on the part of Mr. Lenox; but the life was hard and the rewards meager. All the time she suspected Miss Elton and Mrs. Lenox of despising her, because she had so much less than they. Their kindness was but an added insult.

CHAPTER XI

POLITICS AND PLAY

It was with joy that Lena stood, on Saturday night, with Mrs. Lenox and Miss Elton on the veranda, and hailed the advent of a large red automobile, which disgorged, besides Mr. Lenox, two dress-suit cases and two young men. Mr. Percival had liked her in her natural state and

with him she would not need to "put on style". He was to her the shadow of a great rock in a desperately thirsty land. The only kind of pretense that he demanded was that she should be a dear innocent little girl, and that rôle came easily. She smiled and blushed and saw that there was a difference in his eyes when he greeted her from the look he bent on the other two ladies. It was balm to her spirit to think that this man, who admired her, was himself admired by the people whom she suspected of despising her; and that they did admire him was evident. They were hardly seated at dinner before Mrs. Lenox began:

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"Dick, I have just been reading your last night's speech at the Municipal Club and I'm quite effervescing with it. I want to put you up on a pedestal and call the attention of Mr. Frank Lenox to you. He is one of the innumerable excellent gentlemen, over the length and breadth of the land, who are so busy running everything else that they let city politics go to the place that I'm not allowed to mention. It does my heart good to see you taking it up in earnest."

"It was a good speech, all right. I've read it, too," said Mr. Lenox. "And I'm all the wretch my wife calls me. I wish I'd heard you in your frenzy, Percival, though I have less faith in speeches and principles than she has. Reform is only a seed, you know, and most seeds never come to maturity or bear fruit. So most people justly doubt the reformer."

"Do you think we're thin sound-waves who do nothing but vibrate?" said Dick.

"Not at all; but I mean there are no such things in the world as abstractions. There are only men and women. Thoughts don't seethe; men and women seethe. Principles don't reform or corrupt; men and women do the reforming and corrupting. If you want to do things, don't begin by making the air resound with denunciations of wickedness; but make people believe in you and despise the other fellow. When they like you they'll begin to think about your ideas."

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"I don't know any better way to make people believe in me than to stand up for what I think to be right," said Dick sharply.

"Stand up all you like," Lenox answered. "But the trouble with most good people is that they are contented to stand up. To arrive anywhere you've got to get right down and scrap."

"Oh, I'm only trying my muscle a bit," Dick answered laughingly. "I do not intend to do much generalizing except in the way of advertisement. I'm planning to put a spoke in the wheels of a few particular wrongs."

"That's what I hope. It's easier to fulminate than to fight."

"Then you'll be glad to know that Dick has already been answerable for galvanizing the Municipal Club into new life," Ellery put in. "It has been, as you know, a delightfully scholarly affair, any of whose members were quite capable of writing a text-book on civics; but Dick has roped in a lot of new men and stirred up the old ones."

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"To what end?"

"Well, for two things; we have appointed committees to keep close tab on all of the proceedings of the council—to attend every meeting—and others to work up the ward organizations so that we shall be prepared to work intelligently and together by the next election. We want to get some clean business man, who is well known, to stand for mayor. There's a chance for you, Lenox."

Lenox laughed. "You've caught me there, haven't you? I am condemned for being still in the stage where I am content to mention things with indignation. However, if you have really gone so far, I'm more than willing to trail after you. I'll at least back you with a few facts, such as every business man knows, and I'm good for a substantial contribution toward any campaign you may undertake. And what I do there are others who will do, too."

"I'll not forget your promise," said Dick.

As usual, when men talk public affairs, the women had been content to listen, but Madeline's temperament was too strong for her restraint.

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"It's all very well for you to put your hand in your pocket, Mr. Lenox," she cried, "but I don't want to hear you trying to undermine Dick's idealism. If he does not have the comfort of some purpose higher than the daily fight, how can he endure it? Don't persuade him to run through life on all fours and never look at the stars."

Mr. Lenox looked at her warmly.

"Thank the Lord for you women," he said. "You do not forget that there are stars and sky above the city smoke. If it were not for you and your kind, I'm afraid most of the world would be tied to the ground like serfs."

"Oh, I fancy nature has liberated a few of you, and I am glad to believe that Dick is among the free," she said.

She sat beside Dick, but she turned from him and spoke to Mr. Lenox. When Percival, softened by her words and the tone of belief in which they were spoken, looked up, he saw, not her eyes, but, across the table, those of Lena, big and sympathetic. As he gazed into them he saw all of Madeline's confidence in him, all of Madeline's ideals, but the more spiritual, the more feminine, because they were unspoken. Lena's eyes were eloquent even if she was silent; internally she was really resenting Madeline's tone, which seemed to her to assume that Dick was somehow Miss Elton's particular property. "Perhaps you needn't be so sure, missy," she thought.



"You look like incarnate song" Page 199

After dinner, when the three men found their way to the drawing-room, Mrs. Lenox had started Madeline on a career of song. She was already in the midst of a curious weird Roumanian thing, and Norris made straight for the piano. Lena, ethereal in pale blue, was sympathetically listening to perfection. She had lost her look of incongruity with her surroundings. The dreamy eyes and the transparent skin found their setting in her filmy gown and the rich soft light. Dick drew in his breath. He seemed never to get used to her. Naturally he found a seat near her. She was his protégée.

"Don't you sing, Miss Quincy?" was his inevitable query.

And she replied with inward anguish, "Not at all."

"But I'm sure you do. You look like incarnate song," he persisted. "You're playing modest."

Lena cast down her eyes and said, "I am a very truthful little girl."

"Have you had a good time here?"

Then she looked up with kindling face. "Oh, so good! You can't know how I thank you, Mr. Percival. I know I owe it to you. I feel as though I were breathing the air I belong in, at last. It's so different from—but you know all about my life," said Lena brokenly. "And Mrs. Lenox is so sweet and kind, I just love her!"

"And Miss Elton?"

Lena stiffened and made no reply for an instant.

"Miss Elton is quite as clever as you men, isn't she?" Lena asked, in quite another tone of voice.

"Infinitely more so," said Dick cordially.

"Do you like it?" she asked in a breathless way.

"Why, yes, in Madeline," he answered. "She isn't a bit priggish, you know, but just naturally interested in everything good. Why? Don't you and she get on?"

Lena gave an uneasy little twist as though she did not enjoy the question, and she sighed.

"Why, frankly, I don't wholly. It's my own stupid little fault, of course. I'm not clever. She's very charming; but she gets a little tiresome to me."

"Does she?" said Dick ponderingly.

"It's very hateful of me to say such things about your particular friend," said Lena contritely. "Besides, I don't mean—what do I mean? I never thought it out. But it's so easy to tell you everything, Mr. Percival. And I think it's rather nice for a girl to be more silly and inconsequential part of the time." She laughed in a gurgling little fashion.

"I believe it is," said Dick speculatively, as he looked at her. "But Madeline's awfully jolly, you know. I've had more good times with her than with any other girl I know. No nonsense about her."

"That's it,—no nonsense," said Lena, and this time her laugh was not so pleasant; and Dick glanced across at Madeline with a kind of resentment. "It isn't like Madeline to go back on a fellow that way," he said to himself. "Of course she's had all kinds of advantages over this poor little thing; but it's small of her not to forget them. I trusted her to make things sweet; and for the first time she has disappointed me." He looked at Madeline with a distinct feeling of irritation as she rose from the piano. Mr. Lenox came and absorbed Lena, whom he was teaching to answer him saucily. Lena enjoyed this process, and it had inspired her to a really clever device, namely, to say vulgar little things in a whimsical way, as though she knew better all the time but wanted to be humorous. A good many other people have had the same brilliant

idea, but it was none the less original to Lena, and it saved a lot of trouble and pretense. Norris and Miss Elton were hobnobbing and laughing at the other end of the room, and Dick followed them.

"Have you been out of town, Dick?" Madeline asked as he came up. "I tried to get you over the telephone a day or two ago, and they told me you were away."

"Yes." He laughed exultantly as he sat down. "I ran down to the penitentiary at Easton, just to make sure that I wasn't mistaken in a fact or two."

"What now?" asked Norris.

"I've been told that Barry—the lord of St. Etienne, Madeline—is at last tired of his humble but powerful place, and intends to show himself the master that he really is by running himself for our next mayor. Now even this docile city would hardly exalt a man whom it knew to be a criminal with a record of two years in the pen,—under another name, of course."

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"Is it possible that Barry—"

"I've verified my facts. There is only one man in the city besides myself that knows this, and he's Barry's closest friend. There'll be a jolly old sensation in the bunch, when I spring my mine."

"If nobody knows it, how did you happen to find out?" asked Madeline impulsively.

There was just a moment's silence, and in that instant Norris had a flash of memory. He seemed to see Dick eying a letter addressed to William Barry, Esquire. Even while he remembered, he hated himself for daring to suspect that Dick would be capable of anything really shabby or dishonorable. Yet he did suspect—nay, more—he was sure; and the pause, the look of innocent inquiry on Madeline's face grew intolerable. If Dick would say nothing, he, Norris, must.

"We newspaper men," he rushed in gaily, "get hold of a vast amount of information that people flatter themselves is secret."

Percival looked at him and grinned. The girl turned slowly from her amused survey of Dick to study Ellery's face, which showed his discomfort in its flush. If a girl so gentle could feel scorn, Ellery would have thought he detected a touch of it. Certainly there was a hint of grieved surprise as she spoke, with her eyes still fixed on Norris.

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"I'm very sorry, Dick," she said humbly. "I didn't mean to be prying. I've grown so used to asking you about everything. Mr. Norris ought to get a better mask."

She laughed lightly, but Ellery's face grew hotter. He wondered if she suspected him of some underhand trickery, and Dick realized it, yet kept amused silence. For an instant he hated Dick, and felt a wild impulse to defend himself; but second thoughts came quickly. She loved Dick and was therefore slow to impute evil to him. Dick loved her, and if he had for once played the petty knave, it was the place of a friend to protect her against that knowledge. That had been the instinctive reason for Norris' words, and he was not going back on them now. Yet Ellery's brain whirled to think how swiftly and by what simple means he might have toppled her slowly-ripening friendship into the mire. Ellery's imagination piled superlatives on every act and expression of his lady. If she looked light disapproval, it was worse than another's scorn. And Dick—for whom he had thrown away the thing he most valued in the world—Dick exclaimed gaily:

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"Don't be suspicious, Madeline. Are all secrets disgraceful? Can't you trust your old friends?"

"Of course I'm not suspicious," she answered indignantly. "I only mean to beg your pardon, Dick, and I assure you again that I'm not curious, even. I asked this question as I have asked a thousand others, and that would have been the end of it—except for Mr. Norris' face."

She smiled as she turned away, and Dick lifted his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders as much as to say, "What difference does it make, anyway? What difference!" Dick didn't care whether she despised Ellery or not—he didn't care enough to speak an honorable word of explanation.

Mrs. Lenox came up crying, "Come, my triple alliance, Frank has carried Miss Quincy off to the billiard-room to give her a lesson. Let us go, too, to see that they do not get into mischief."

Dick hurried away to usurp Mr. Lenox's place, Madeline tucked her arm through that of Mrs. Lenox, and Norris was left to follow in outer darkness.

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When bedtime came, Norris detained Percival.

"Come out for a smoke and a turn," he said. "The night is frosty, and you'll sleep all the better for a sniff of fresh air."

"What are you so glum about?" he asked, as Dick tramped in silence.

He was moody and enraged himself, but too proud to let his anger be seen.

"Not mad, most noble Norris, only thinking."

"Unfold your thoughts."

"I was thinking about Madeline," answered Dick, and Norris' heart thumped, for he too was thinking about Madeline. "I wonder if the kind of training that she and all girls of her class get is the thing, after all. I'm not talking about knowledge, you understand. I'm not such a cad as to grudge a girl the best there is in the world. But there's something else. It's the electric feminine, I suppose, that makes them the powers behind every throne. Fate is always

represented in petticoats, you know. It sometimes seems as though the better-trained girls had all that side of them kept out of sight and polished into nothingness. Why are they taught to ignore the biggest power that's in them? Why, even that untrained little Miss Quincy is vivid with some sex-fascination that the more fortunate girls do not often have."

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"Oh, she is only a colored light. The sunlight has all other colors latent in itself. How do you dare to make any comparison between Miss Quincy and your lovely Miss Elton?"

"Great Scott! Don't say 'my Miss Elton!'" Dick exclaimed. "Madeline doesn't belong to me." And he added politely, "Worse luck! She and I have always been like brother and sister. That's all there is to it."

"Are you sure?" demanded Ellery, with hot thrusts of mingled anguish and exultation stabbing through his bosom.

"Sure!" said Dick equably. "Why, even if I loved her, my dear fellow, I should know, from her unruffled serenity, that there was no hope for me. But Madeline isn't a very emotional creature, Ellery. She has too much brains for that,—a girl to cheer but not inebriate."

"I don't want a girl to make me drunk," ejaculated Norris.

"Well, I do," rejoined Dick.

"And though Miss Elton's emotions do not lie on the surface, I'll warrant they are there," Ellery went on as though letting off pent-up steam. "They are like her voice—like all her motions—neither loud nor faint, but exquisitely modulated. She seems to me like the embodiment of innocence,—not the innocence of ignorance, but the untaintedness of a mind that goes through the world selecting the best, as the bee takes honey and leaves the rest. There's no subject, so far as I can see, on which she is afraid to think; but I can not imagine that any subject would leave a deposit of mire in her mind."

"Gee whizz!" scoffed Dick. "How fluent your year of journalism has made you! What a great thing it is to be a serious-minded young man with eye-glasses, engaged, while yet in youth, in molding public opinion through the mighty agent of the press! And Madeline is another of the same kind."

"I wish I were of her kind," said Ellery stiffly. "You may poke fun at me as much as you like, Dick, but it's beneath you to jeer at her."

"You old duffer, aren't you two the best friends I have in the world? I like the clear and frosty mountain peaks."

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"How did you find out about Barry?" Ellery asked abruptly.

"I do not have to tell you any more than Madeline." Seeing the grim look on Norris' face, Dick went on, "Let's go in and to bed. We seem to rub each other the wrong way to-night. If we don't separate soon we shall be having a French duel."

CHAPTER XII

AN ENGAGEMENT

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The gates of the delectable world, it seemed to Lena, opened very slowly, and the mild fragrance and warmth that dribbled out to her through their narrow crack intensified her outer dreariness. Once in a while Mrs. Lenox or Miss Elton did her some little kindness. Occasionally Mr. Percival came to see her, but her shame of her mother and her home made these visits a doubtful pleasure. The sordid monotony of her work oppressed her every morning and depressed her every night. The little money that she earned fell like a snow-flake into the yawning furnace of her desires. Bitter is the fate of her to whom the goods of this world are the final good, and to whom those goods are denied.

There came a night when a certain great lady gave a dance, and Lena was deputed by the feminine head of the staff of the *Star* to report these doings of society. At first the chance looked to her delightful. She was to have a peep into the world of charm which was her dream and her ambition. She walked through the wide empty rooms with their soft lights and masses of flowers. She surveyed the dining-room, a wilderness of candles, orchids and maiden-hairs. She felt her feet sink luxuriously into the rugs, oh, so different from the threadbare ingrain carpet at home! She peeped into the ball-room, smilax-draped and glowing as if eager to welcome the guests to come. Through it all she carried a prim air, making businesslike notes on her little pad; but beneath her very demure exterior raged a storm of rebellion that these things should be and not be for her. The world was one huge sour grape; and yet she must smile as though it tasted sweet. There were blurs in her eyes as she stumbled up the back stairs, whither her way was pointed, that she might stand in a corner of the dressing-room where the now fast-arriving ladies were laying off their wraps. She swallowed a lump in her throat and winked hard in the attempt to forget or ignore the careless looks thrown at her by these ladies, as the maids removed the long cloaks made more for splendor than for warmth, or drew up the gloves on bare arms less lovely than her own. Many of the women looked twice at her, and she thought,

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and resented the fact, that they were surprised to see so much beauty. She could not be impersonal like the other reporters,—sensible girls, taking all this as a part of the day's work, and whispering names to one another, which Lena, too, must catch and treasure for her reportorial harvest. She must glance with swift inclusiveness at the more striking gowns, that later she may serve them up in the technical slapdash of the social column.

An hour of it left her faint and sick, not with cynical scorn of the spectacle, but with longing and self-pity. The crowd in the dressing-room was thinning now, but, whether she had finished her duty or not, she must escape. She could endure it no longer. Again she made her way down the narrow non-angelic stairs and out at a little side door. The night air was sweet and cold. She paused for a moment under the light of the porte-cochère to watch the string of carriages and the swirl of silk and laces that passed through the opening door, to listen to gusts of music that came to an abrupt end as the outside door shut on her.

Suddenly a figure loomed beside her, and she look up to see Dick Percival, straight and big, with the electric light gleaming on his white shirt-front, where his overcoat fell back. There was an unpleasant sternness in his deeply-shadowed eyes.

"Miss Quincy!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here!"

"I was sent to report it," said Lena weakly. "I'm going home now."

"Going home alone? Nearly midnight?"

"What else can I do? It's what the other girls—reporters, I mean—have to do."

"I shall walk home with you," said Dick sharply, and he drew her aside into the shadow, as though ashamed of being seen, and piloted her in silence to the sidewalk. Lena gave a little sob as he drew her arm through his, and still they walked on until the lights of the great house grew dim in the distance and only the quiet of the city streets by night enveloped them.

"Ought you not to go back now? You'll lose all the pleasure," said Lena timidly.

"Are you doing much of this kind of thing?" Dick demanded.

"This is the first time."

"I hope it will be the last," he answered glumly.

"So do I—I don't like it," whispered Lena.

"I—I can't endure it—Lena!" Lena started as she heard her name. "Lena, come over here into the park for just a moment. I want to talk to you."

"I can't. It's awfully cold, and—" said Lena, but she followed his lead as she remonstrated.

"And you have on a wretched little thin coat. Why aren't you decently dressed?"

"I haven't anything." Lena spoke under her breath. Dick stamped his foot as a substitute for a curse, whipped off his heavy great-coat, wrapped her in it, and pushed her down on to a bench.

"Lena," he said, standing squarely in front of her, "I know I've no right to hope for anything—no right to speak, even, when you know me so little; but, by Heaven, I can't endure to see you grinding out your life in this way, when there's even a chance that you will let me prevent it. You flower of a girl, you! Oh, Lena, I love you—I love you!"

He caught a small white hand that held together the heavy coat, and kissed it in a kind of frenzy, while Lena, rigid with desire to be quite sure what this signified, peered stolidly at him from over the big collar. She was too wise in her generation to leap to conclusions about the ultimate meaning of Dick's passion. She would not unbottle any emotion until she knew.

"Lena, if you could see how I love you, you'd trust me, I think, even with yourself. If you will be my wife—"

Something in Lena seemed to break, and she gave a gasp of relief and gratitude that was almost prayer and approached love. Then she buried her face in her hands and sobbed aloud, as Dick put both arms around her and drew her head to his shoulder.

"Lena, can you—do you love me a little?" he whispered, as if in awe.

"Oh, Mr. Percival," said Lena, "I do! How could I help it? But I could not dream of your loving poor little insignificant me."

"And how could I help it?" he said, mocking her. "Little, you may be, but this part is bigger than the whole world. You belong to me now, and I won't have you depreciate yourself."

"Oh, Mr. Percival, is it true?"

"Suppose you say 'Dick', and thank God that it is."

"Dick, Dick, Dick—it is," said Lena very softly, and she frankly put her arms around his neck, and her soft lips to his cold cheek, so that he lost himself in an ecstasy of delight and wonder.

So they sat in the doubtful shadow of a leafless maple, on a hard park bench, on a chilly November night, and though Dick was half frozen they were both more than happy. And they talked, in lovers' fashion, over the great fact, and how it all happened.

The mellow chimes of the city hall began to strike twelve—a most persistent hour, and Lena started into consciousness.

"Dick, I must go home," she said. "None of those girls, the nice girls, Miss Elton or any one like

that, would do such an improper thing, would they?"

"I should think not," said Dick. "I wouldn't ask them to."

"And I wouldn't allow them," laughed Lena. "Now come, like a dear boy, and walk home with me."

"There are so many more things that I want to say," remonstrated Dick. "Stop a moment under this light and let me see your eyes, Lena. You'll have to look up. I want to talk plain business to you. First, you'll give up this reporting folly, won't you?"

"To-morrow," said Lena joyously.



They talked in lovers' fashion Page
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"What an admirably obedient wife you are going to make! But I'm glad you hate it. If ever you feel a mad desire to take it up again, we'll go into the library together and write up *Godey's Lady's Book*. I want your life to be sweet and sheltered and filled with good things now."

"Oh, Dick, to think of that kind of a life coming to me!"

"It ought to have come to you long ago. It was bound to come, because it belongs to you. But things being as they are, you must give yourself into my keeping as soon as possible, sweetheart. There's no reason why we shouldn't be married at once, or nearly so, is there, dear?"

Here Lena hesitated, a little in doubt whether she ought to show maiden reluctance, and her lover went on with his argument.

"You are so alone, dear. Don't let any foolish hesitation prolong this bad time of yours."

"What about my mother?" demanded Lena, with a sudden descent to the region of hard facts.

"Do you want her to live with us?" Dick asked with a gulp.

"No, I don't!" Lena answered so sharply that Dick started in surprise, and she gathered herself together.

"It would take a long time for me to explain things to you," she went on in gentler accents. "But, Dick, mother and I are not very happy together. I'll tell you all about it some time. Perhaps she would be just as contented to live somewhere else."

"Very well," said Dick with a sense of relief. "We must make her comfortable, of course." In reality nobody else's comfort made a rap's difference just then. "I dare say we can find some jolly little apartment and somebody to take care of her."

"Hire somebody for her to find fault with," said Lena, with a return of acid. "What about your mother?"

"Oh, I couldn't let mother live anywhere but in the dear old home. It's too big and lonely for her by herself, so we must share it with her. And no other place would ever have the flavor of home, either to her or to me."

Lena stopped short in her progress.

"Does the house belong to you or to her?"

"Technically to me, I believe—not that it makes the slightest difference, dear."

"Then I should be mistress of it, not she?"

"I'm sure she'd be only too glad to turn the housekeeping cares over to your pretty little hands," said Dick, smiling, but a little uneasily. "She's a good deal of an invalid, you know. But there's plenty of time to think of all these details. I suppose you've had to worry about the little things

until it's become a habit," he added in a kind of apology to himself.

"I've been a bond-slave so long," said Lena, "that I'd like to feel perfectly free and mistress of everything around me." She straightened her back and squared her soft shoulders.

"So you shall be!" answered Dick happily. "Even of your husband."

"Oh, that, of course," said Lena with an enchanting pout. "Now here we are, and it's very late. You must go. Good night."

"Good night," said Dick. "I suppose I must not keep you. To think I have the unbelievable good fortune to kiss you good night, sweetheart."

Mrs. Quincy turned over in the lumpy bed which she and her daughter shared and said, with a querulousness undiminished by her sleepiness, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Lena Quincy, gallivanting around at this hour of night. It ain't decent. But there!"

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"I guess I know my business," Lena snapped.

She turned out the gas to undress in the dark rather than encourage her mother's conversation. She needed to think. An awful problem had just presented itself. How was she to get a trousseau?

It was in another mood that Dick Percival walked home. Whenever anything very great and wonderful happens to us, we are apt to bow our heads and cry, "What am I, that this should be given to me?" Doubtless he is the noblest man who most often feels this exultant humility. This was Dick's hour on the mountain. The depth of his own tenderness, the deliciousness of his passion swept over him like a revelation, as he asked himself in wonder how it could be that this love had sprung up at once, like Aphrodite from the waves, where no one could have suspected such a marvel. He himself had been without realization of how his passing interest had deepened its roots until now they fed on every part of him. Love had startled him like a stroke of lightning out of a clear sky, but it was evident that it was no light that flashed out and then disappeared. It had come to stay.

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Then came self-reproach. He remembered with hot cheeks that he had actually joked with Ellery about her in early days, and let himself be bantered in return—had that he was, incapable of appreciating at first sight the woman he was to love. He had thought her an exquisite trifle, almost too illusive to be taken seriously. Now that very illusiveness was the thing that gripped him closest, like poetry and music and all the finer elements of life, the most impossible to explain, the most supreme in their dominion. Beauty meant all this. He found himself repeating, "Beauty is truth. Truth beauty. That is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." And Lena was beautiful. How beautiful! He trembled in flesh and spirit at the vision of her face turned up to him out of the black November darkness, at the memory of the fine texture of her cheeks and lips.

He did not stop to ask himself whether he and Keats were agreed in their definition of beauty. Moreover, poor Keats never had the delight of anything so pink and golden and blue-eyed as Lena Quincy.

CHAPTER XIII

AN AWAKENING

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A little scrawl of a note, delivered just after breakfast at Mr. Elton's door, brought Madeline to visit Mrs. Percival, who, like her mother, seemed to be in continual need of her.

She found that lady lying in her favorite chair in the library—the chair that had been her refuge in the days of her early widowhood, that had comfortably housed her when books carried her away from her own world of sorrows and problems into the world of illusions, the chair in which she had dreamed of the great things that were to come into a younger life, not her own, and yet deeply her own,—her son's.

Now she lay back in it with clasped hands, thinner than usual and with eyes sadder. Madeline came in like a young Hebe, glowing with health and vigor, and infinitely tender toward fragility.

"You are ill, dear mother Percival," cried the girl, dropping to her knees and slipping an arm behind her friend's back in an unconscious attitude of protection.

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Mrs. Percival's fingers followed the soft curve that the girl's hair made around her forehead.

"No, dear," she said slowly, "but I had something to tell you. I wanted to speak to you myself, before any one else had the chance."

"Please tell me quickly."

"So many of my dearest hopes have come to nothing!" Mrs. Percival went on, with a little bitterness that Madeline thought unlike her. "Each blow, as it falls, seems the hardest to bear. I've tried to accept whatever happens, graciously. It isn't always easy, Madeline, dear."

"Yes?" said Madeline.

"Dick—"

"Is anything the matter with Dick?" Madeline rose with a little cry.

"Dick does not think so," his mother answered. "My child, you have seen something of this little Miss Quincy?"

Madeline's eyes dropped for the tenth of a second and a heaviness took possession of her body; then she lifted her head bravely.

"Yes," she answered, "I know Miss Quincy—quite the most beautiful girl I have ever seen."

"Very beautiful," echoed Mrs. Percival. "So I too thought, the only time I ever saw her. Well, Madeline, what I have to tell you is that Dick is to marry her."

The girl saw that the older woman's hands were trembling, and she laid her own warm young palms over the cold old ones.

"I hope Dick will be very happy," she said softly. "I—I'm not a bit surprised. We ought to have seen that it was coming. And Dick loves her!"

And she laid her cheek against Mrs. Percival's, but the other pushed her away and stared into the eyes so near her own.

"And you can take it so quietly?" she asked. "Forgive me, dear, if for once I break down the barriers of reserve. I love you so much, let me be frank. Surely you know what I hoped, what I thought."

"You thought Dick and I loved each other," Madeline said bravely.

"I hoped so. Heaven knows I hoped so."

"We are too good friends for that, dear Mrs. Percival. One needs a little something unexplored and unexpected in a lover; don't you think so? Dick and I knew each other in kilts and pig-tails."

"Well, it seems I am as much of an old fool as Dick is a young one," Mrs. Percival said bitterly. "I'm good for nothing but to lie here and comfort myself with dreams."

"You're an old dear, and Dick is a young one," Madeline tried to laugh. "And Miss Quincy is exquisite—charming."

"An old fool," repeated Mrs. Percival. "Now listen, sweetheart! If Dick marries this girl, I have no intention of forgetting that he is my son, and that she is his wife. I shall do all I can to help her to be worthy of him; but before that happens, I am going to have the satisfaction of speaking to just one person in the world—you—exactly what I think about it. From what Mrs. Lenox told me, after her visit in the country, and from what I saw myself, I think she is a vulgar little image overlaid with tinsel."

"Oh, don't!" Madeline cried. "You and I do not really know her, but we can trust Dick. He's too fine himself to be attracted by anything but fineness. She must have character to have made the fight she has with fate."

"Attracted by character! Pins and figs! My son is just like all the others, I am finding. He's attracted by pink flesh. And as for heart and soul—all the women that Dick has known well have been women of refinement. He takes their purity and nobility for granted, as a part of womanhood. He thinks he's marrying you and me. His reason has nothing to do with it."

For the moment Madeline had no answer, and Mrs. Percival went on:

"It's foolish to care what people say about your tragedies. Oh, you needn't shake your head. This is a tragedy, Madeline. And I do care about the world. I hate to think of the whispering and gossiping because my son—my son—has fallen a victim to a cheap adventuress."

"Nonsense," Madeline broke out. "Miss Quincy isn't an outcast, just because she has had the world's cold shoulder. And people aren't so silly as to let such external things prejudice them."

"Don't mistake me, dearie. I'm not taking exception to the girl because she works. We're all—those of us that are good for much—the mothers and wives and daughters of men who work, and we share in their labor. I could admire and love a real worker, but this butterfly creature affects me like a parasite—a woman who wants to get and not to give. It's just because I feel that she isn't a real worker that I am afraid of her."

"And that, even if it is true, may be only the result of sordid surroundings." Madeline's heart misgave her, for she had learned to respect Mrs. Percival's judgments. "She'll blossom out and add womanliness to beauty in such an atmosphere as you and Dick will give her."

"Spontaneous generation will not do everything. You must have the germ of a heart before you can develop the whole thing. Do you think you can really change a girl who has lived for twenty years in the wrong attitude?"

"You are judging cruelly," Madeline cried. "Of course every one has the germs of good."

"And did it ever occur to you that the kind of love that Dick will give his wife may be too good—so far above a coarse-grained woman that it will not touch her comprehension? A lower grade of man might bring her out better."

"It's impossible to think of so exquisite a creature being coarse-grained," Madeline exclaimed. "I, for one, am going to believe in her, and in a year, with you and Dick and mother and Mrs. Lenox and myself all backing her, you'll be proud of her loveliness and tact. I shall be only Cinderella's ugly sister. But you must not ever quite forget me, Mrs. Percival." And Madeline

laughed most cheerfully.

Mrs. Percival smiled in return. "Well, I have had my explosion. It's extraordinary what a relief it is, once in a while. I'm not often so guilty, am I, Madeline? After all, I've told you my fears rather than my convictions. The situation does not seem so bad, now that I have said even more than I think. Hereafter I shall find it easy to hold my tongue."

"And you will try to like her?" Madeline asked anxiously.

"Of course, my dear. I shall try harder than any one else. I am going in state to pay her a motherly call this very afternoon, feeling all the time like a plated volcano." Mrs. Percival leaned back with a small *moue*, then sat up again. "There's my boy's latch-key in the lock now," she said.

Dick halted at the door when he saw the two and knew that they must have been talking of him. He had something of an air of defiance thickly overlaid with innocence; but Madeline went to meet him with hands outstretched.

"Dick," she exclaimed, "I congratulate you with all my heart. She's the prettiest creature in the world."

Dick, manlike, regarded this as the highest possible tribute to his beloved and glowed in return. His defiance dropped like a shell and he shook Madeline's hands with enthusiasm.

"You're a trump," he said. "I shall not forget how good you have been to her; and I hope you two will always be friends."

"I should think so! I should like to see your trying to prevent us, Dick," said Madeline saucily. "And your mother is going to love her, too, when—"

"When we are married," Dick answered with silly masculine self-consciousness.

"And that is to be soon!"

"As soon as I can manage it. I can't bear to have Lena living as she does now; and there's no reason why we shouldn't cut it short."

"No reason at all. I don't wonder you feel so. Good-by, both of you."

Dick saw her to the door and Madeline walked out with her usual deliberate serenity.

She found her way home with bottled-up emotions, as a hurt child holds in the cry until he gets to the spot where mother's breast waits for the inarticulate sobs. Everything she had done and said seemed to have been the act of some far-away self, that had hardly any connection with the real Madeline. The earth danced around her and she was incapable of real thought. And yet the well-trained, automatic body that was her outer shell conducted itself with reason. It even stopped in the living-room to kiss her mother; it apparently skimmed a new copy of *Life*; it convoyed her slowly up stairs to her own room, where it shut and locked her door. But here her real self resumed control, as she threw herself into an easy chair by the window and stared out at the desolation of December where dead leaves went whirling in elfin eddying clouds.

For a few moments she let the solar system rock and reel around her, and watched everything she had thought stable go up in smoke. Then upon the world, swirling and pounding meaninglessly, there came an intense quiet. She knew that the outer world was as serene as ever; but a great throbbing pain within showed her that it was only her own little atom of self that was revolutionized. Nature was not upset. There was still order for her to hold fast to. For the first time she began to analyze herself and her emotions.

She could not say that she had planned her future, but it had seemed so natural and inevitable that she had accepted it without planning, almost without thought. Dick and she had belonged to each other ever since they could remember. At ten they had been outspoken lovers, and ever since there had been that intimate comradeship that seemed to her to imply the unspoken relation, behind, above, below. All this she had taken for granted, like mother-love and her own dawning womanhood. And now Dick, the chief corner-stone of her edifice, was torn away, and the whole airy structure toppled and dissolved.

"I've been assuming all this," she said to herself, "and marriage isn't a thing to take for granted. Shouldn't I have resented it if Dick had appropriated me as though I belonged to him and had lost my freedom of choice? I've been unfair to him. And now—if I should never marry—there are surely plenty of good things left in the world. But are there?"

Madeline had always been characterized by those who knew her as lovely and placid. And why not? What else should life draw out of a girl of normal nature, surrounded by protecting love, given the good things of life as by right, shielded from the knowledge of evil, never facing a problem more exciting than those of Euclid. But now something began to stir in the unknown depths of her nature. For the first time in her life she had had a blow. There rose before her a vision of endless maidenhood. She saw herself as she had seen other women—uninteresting women, she had thought them. Now they seemed to her like tragedies—women whose lives did not count, either to themselves or to the world, middle-aged, somber, unrelated. To be childless, to eat and dress and wear the semblance of womanhood, even to play a little part in society, and yet to be but half a woman! To be no link in the generations! This was unendurable. The first demand of every soul is for life, and yet life is life only when it is part of the future. To live oneself one must live in others. All the mother hidden in the depths of her rose and cried out against any destiny that shut her out from the great stream of humanity.

"I shall be a side-eddy in the current. I shall grow stagnant and slimy and lead nowhere. And the

rushing waters will go leaping and laughing past.”

She got up and moved restlessly up and down the room. She looked again out of the window at the sober end of the winter day. In the tree branches that clattered outside, her eyes fell on an empty nest.

“And am I to be such a thing?” she said. “Surely all the world must bow down in pity for the solitary woman.” Some half-forgotten lines came back to her:

“Mine ear is full of the rocking of cradles.

For a single cradle, saith Nature, I would give every one of my graves.”

By her little practice piano her eyes fell on the pages of Schubert’s unfinished symphony.

“Unfinished!” she said. “And yet even there is the phrase that comes and comes again, sweeter and more full of meaning in every renewed variety. So I must have love to play through my life, or else it will be nothing but a medley. It must be my music’s theme; even if the symphony is unfinished. Are there women who can do without it, who can take a life alone and make it sweet and satisfying? Not I, oh God, not I! I’m no exceptional creature. I’m just a plain woman. And if life doesn’t give me wifehood and motherhood, it gives me nothing. I wonder if all women feel this way. This pretty little Lena,—is she bursting with primal need of giving and taking? At any rate she has put something in Dick’s face that was never there before—that I’d give my soul to see in a man’s face when he looks at me.”

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Hitherto the world had ambled along in an amiable way; and now it suddenly turned and delivered a blow in the face. Every one is destined to receive such blows, some get little else. But the test comes in the way they are received. You may use belladonna as a poison, or you may use it to help the blind to see. So when pain comes, you may take it to your bosom and suckle it till it becomes a fine healthy child, too heavy for you to carry; or cast out the changeling and leave it on the doorstep to die. It matters little how much anguish skulks about the outside of life, so long as it finds no lodgment in the sacred shrines of the heart. Madeline met her first grief and fought it off; and, even while she thought it had given her a mortal wound, came the revelation of the powerlessness of the poor thing. She put her arms down on the window-sill to cry deliberately, but something dried her tears.

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“I couldn’t put that look in Dick’s face, but could he put it in mine? Was this taking of things for granted the best love of which I am capable? I’ve found out to-day that there are all kinds of things in me that I have never dreamed of before, and passion is one of them, and rebellion. Great heavens! I might have married him and been serene and never found things out.”

She seemed to be looking at a new Madeline; and while she stared, startled, this self grew greater and stronger.

“This is not the end of life; it is the beginning,” she whispered. “I’ve been looking down the wrong road. Dick has no such power over me as to consign me to misery everlasting. I am mistress of my own fate. I have not handed it over to him. Happiness is not a thing to get. It is a state of mind to live in. It is my own affair, not that of others.” She rested her chin in her hands and fell into a girl’s day-dream, in which the nightmare was forgotten.

Twilight fell at last, and faint sounds came up to her to remind her that down stairs there were well-beloved people who did not know and should never know of her little vigil. Her father must be coming home. It was time for her to put on her armor and go down. Armor is one of the necessities of life. If we can’t wear it in steel plates on the outside, we must mask the face with impenetrability and the manner with pretense. Never let the heart be vulnerable. Yet, try as we may, something of our weakness is laid bare. Hereafter Miss Elton might be serene, but would never again be placid.

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But now she was quite herself.

Down stairs her father read the paper and her mother sat near the big table, hem-stitching. For them everything was settled, and settled satisfactorily. They knew whom they were going to marry, and whether love was to be a success, and where they were going to live, and what they were going to do. Henceforth, for them the game meant only pleasantly plodding onward along paths already marked out. Just a wholesome common marriage, planted with the seed of love and watered with small self-sacrifices. How could they possibly remember the restlessness of youth, to whom all these things are hidden in the mists of the future, and who is longing for everything and sure of nothing?

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Madeline sat down at the piano and her hands fell inevitably into phrasing the “unfinished symphony.” She became aware that her mother laid down the stitching and Mr. Elton’s evening paper ceased to crackle. As she stopped her father stood behind her. He bent and kissed the little parting in her hair.

“Your music grows sweeter and richer day by day, little girl,” he said. “I suppose as more comes into your life you have more to give. I’m glad that you give it out to us old folks at home.”

Madeline wheeled about and sprang to her feet.

“Ah,” she exclaimed, “if you have finished with your stupid old paper, I’ll give you a real piece of news. It’s a ‘scoop’ too, for no reporter has got hold of it yet. Dick Percival is engaged to little Miss Quincy.”

Both father and mother stared at her in silence. She stood a little behind the chandelier, where the light shone full on her face, and in neither mouth nor eyes could they see the trace of

shadow. On the contrary, there was a radiant loveliness about her that astonished those that loved her best.

Then Mr. Norris was announced.

Now when Miss Elton had her first peep into her soul, and so stirred up the possibilities in her nature, she also awoke to new insight into what was going on behind other people's eyes. The day when she could look a young man squarely in the face and say to him whatever she thought had passed. The period of unconscious girlhood, much prolonged in her case, came to an end. Since, in this world, shadow goes with sunshine, so demons tag after angels; and with the dawn of her sweeter womanhood, Madeline developed a new spirit of contrariety and coquetry that astonished no one so much as herself.

When Mr. Norris came in, his apologetic glance told her at once that she had hardly spoken to him since she had turned up her straight little high-bred nose and informed him and Dick that she despised their underhand ways; told her, also, what had not dawned on her before, that here was an abject creature, and that it was the province of womanhood to batter and buffet him who is down, perhaps in secret fear of that day when outraged manhood will rise and claim a tyranny of its own.

So she put out her hand with that stiffness that holds at arm's length and said:

"Oh, how dy' do, Mr. Norris," just as though they had never sailed together in dual solitude, and she allowed her lip to curl in evidence of her disapproval of the much warmer greeting of her elders.

She sat down and eyed and tapped a small bronze slipper, while she ignored the reproachful glances of her mother at her rank desertion of conversational duties. Her father hardly noticed it. He himself so liked young men that he frequently forgot that his daughter and not himself might be the object of their quest. So he plunged cheerfully into an animated discussion of the new tide in civic politics, while Norris dully and conscientiously tried to bear up his end.

Ellery's eyes, however, as well as the thoughts behind those superficial thoughts that guided his words, were absorbed in the other side of the room, where Miss Elton canvassed with her mother the merits of various embroidery silks. She was lovelier than ever. He had thought her perfect before, but to-night she had added a sheen to perfection and made herself entrancing, both reposeful and vivid. He wondered if she had heard of Dick's engagement and if her color covered a pale heart.

Suddenly she flung up her head impatiently, and came behind her father's chair to clap a small hand over his mouth in the middle of a sentence of which Norris had entirely lost track.

"Father, father," she cried, "do you think Mr. Norris wants to come here and maunder over stupid politics all the evening, after he has been writing stupid editorials about them all day? They *are* stupid—I've read some of them." She smiled at the young man. "Wouldn't you both infinitely rather hear me sing?"

Mr. Elton kissed the offending hand before he put it gently down.

"I know I should."

Norris sprang up.

"May I turn your music?" he asked eagerly, but she shook her head as she moved away.

"There isn't going to be any music to turn."

She began to sing the same little Roumanian song that he remembered on their last evening in the Lenox house, and his spirits, lifted for a moment by her smile, went down again.

"Into the mist I gazed and fear came on me,
Then said the mist, 'I weep for the lost sun.'"

She sang passionately and he could have cried aloud. It was true then that she was grieving for Dick.

"The music is uncanny, isn't it?" she said, as she ended and found him near her. "How does it make you feel?"

"If I should find an image for my feelings just at present, you would scorn me for my base material thoughts."

"Find it," she commanded.

"I think I feel like a mince-pie—a maddening jumble of things delicious and indigestible."

She laughed and grew friendly. This, he thought, is, after all, her permanent mood; but before he could take advantage of it another caller, Mr. Early, appeared; and again she basely deserted Norris to the mercies of her father and mother, and devoted herself to the evident beatification of the apostle of the new in art.

One gloomy evening in January Mr. Early sat alone. He had so many tentacles spread out through the world of men and women that solitude was unusual to him. Indeed it had often occurred to him, as an example of the fallacy of ancient sayings, that there was nothing in that old epigram about the loneliness of the great. The higher he had risen in the scale of greatness the more insistently and persistently had the world invaded his life, until even his appreciation of solitude had atrophied.

This particular day had been a hard one. The problems of glass and rugs were unusually complicated, and the interruptions to continuous thought more numerous than usual. Moreover, without warning, like a meteor of magnificent proportions, Swami Ram Juna, with many paraphernalia of travel, had suddenly reappeared to ask for that once-proffered hospitality. Not without state and courtesy could such a being be welcomed; and courtesy takes time. 243

Finally, to discuss the matter of the outer cover for the next issue of *The Aspirant*, a henchman invaded his privacy. Sebastian looked over a pile of designs, and chose a flat but lurid young woman, in a sphinx-like attitude against a background of purple trees. Then came the more difficult question of an aphorism to be printed on the table against which the lurid young woman leaned. It was the habit of *The Aspirant* to convey, even on its outside, wisdom to the world, and the thinking up of smart young aphorisms is not always an easy task. Mr. Early at length evolved: "It has been said of old: 'Know thyself.' I say unto thee, 'Forget thyself. Know thy brother.'" 244

"That sounds fairly well," said Mr. Early wearily, and he dismissed the henchman and settled himself in a particularly benevolent arm-chair, in front of a cheerfully-roaring fire. The place was a remote room, decorated not for public inspection but for comfort. Mr. Early was tired. A certain new question had been waiting in the antechambers of his mind, and to-night he determined to give it leisurely attention; for of late it had several times been borne in him that he was getting along in years and that if he did not intend to die a bachelor, it behooved him to move swiftly. The thought had been quickened into livelier vitality when, at a dinner a few nights before, he had watched the face and studied the figure of Miss Madeline Elton.

She was certainly a rare creature. There was a verve, a magnetic quality to her, that he hardly remembered before. Her beauty, her nobility, her purity he felt to be the artistic attributes of womanhood. No, he not only admired them, they charmed him.

"Yes," said Mr. Early. "By Jove, if she'd lift her little finger at me I believe I'd make a fool of myself over her! And why shouldn't I? Why shouldn't I let myself go? I've got everything else now. A woman of her bigness likes a man who can do things and who controls other men. By Heaven, I believe we were made for each other!" 245

Mr. Early grew so excited by the strength of his new passion that he sprang to his feet and walked up and down to luxuriate in the idea.

Proportionately great was his annoyance when a knock invaded his self-communion, and his man's face appeared at the door to tell him that Mr. Murdock would like to speak with him. While he was yet opening his mouth to anathematize Mr. Murdock, that gentleman entered, familiar and cheerful.

The man who came in was, in his way, a force almost as great and as worthy of regard as Mr. Sebastian Early himself—in fact no less a personage than the power behind the throne of that uncrowned king, William Barry. Though he did not sit on Olympian heights and play with the thunderbolts of jobs and contracts, as Barry did, yet he had an occasional way of interfering in the game, just as in Greek legend Fate loomed large behind the back of Zeus.

Mr. James Murdock was a business genius who dipped into politics, not for office nor yet for glory, but only for gain. Originally a partner of Mr. Early's, when, just as some one else invented a better hook-and-eye, their business was sold out, Murdock let his many-sidedness run riot in a dozen directions. While Mr. Early's abilities led him to "get all there was in it" out of the public on its imaginative side, Murdock worked out his fortune in more practical necessities. St. Etienne was a western city, full of growth and therefore full of needs. There were miles and miles of asphalt to be laid; there were wooden sidewalks crying out to be replaced by stone; there were lighting and watering and park-making; and it was astonishing in how many companies, doing these things, Mr. Murdock had a share, and how frequently his companies secured the contracts for doing them. When rival contractors attempted these public works, there were apt to be strikes and complications which seldom occurred when Murdock had the job. Then all went smoothly and merrily. And this shows how friendship rules the world. For Murdock was the friend of Barry; and Barry was the friend of the strike-ordering walking-delegates. If these three elements, representing the city fathers, the contractors and the laborers, were all satisfied with the way the city's work was being done, who remained to cavil? Certainly not the citizens. St. Etienne's wheels moved almost without friction. 246

But Murdock went further than this. His was a fine instinct for organization. He used Barry like a fat pawn, moved down to the king row, until the boss alderman was able to look abroad on his noble army of small officeholders and contractors, who could be trusted, not only to vote as directed (for to vote is a simple and ineffectual thing), but also to bring up their hundreds and thousands of well-trained dogs to vote, and, if need be, to vote again, and then to see that the votes were properly counted. 247

It was to Murdock's far-reaching mind that Barry was indebted for the regulation of interests by which almost every man who served the city, and particularly those who served it badly and expensively, was tied to Barry by ties closer than those of brotherly love. Whether official, contractor or working-man, they owed job or contract to the influence that Barry seemed to exercise in the councils of the city. It was by Murdock's advice that the better residence district was well-policed, well-lighted, well-paved and generally contented with things as they were. By Murdock's suggestion the city's interests were zealously guarded in the discussions of the council.

When a committee of the Municipal Club visited that august body to listen to a debate on a certain paving contract, they could not help being impressed by the large knowledge of materials and methods displayed by their representatives, and the unanimity with which they agreed that a particular bid was, if not the cheapest, the most deeply satisfying of those offered. What they could not know was the ingenuity with which Murdock saved both the brain and the time of the council by arranging its debate beforehand. But the committee did mention, among themselves, the incongruity between the actual condition of St. Etienne's streets and the wisdom of the Solons.

But, though Murdock's was the brain to originate and systematize schemes of plunder for which Barry alone had been incapable, once in a while the "boss" grew restive under dominion, in spite of the knowledge that, if he should once break with the master mind, he would soon make some fatal mistake and another would become the whole show. So, if the reign of King Barry was for long temperate and orderly, it was because Murdock impressed upon him that royal arrogance breeds discontent and finally revolt, and that by big rake-offs, on the quiet, enough could be gained to satisfy the ambition of a well-regulated man; and that while plundering was done with decency, the reform-talk of the Municipal Clubites would prove no more useful nor ornamental than a Christmas card.

"Don't hog everything!" as Murdock sagely put it. "Let the other fellow have the small end of the trough, and as long as he ain't hungry, he won't squeal."

With equal sternness he repressed Billy's fancy for fast horses and Mrs. Billy's taste for green velvet and diamonds.

"It don't look well on a salary of eighteen hundred," he said. "Just you be contented with having things your own way without talking about it. Throw all the dust you like, but don't let it be gold dust."

"You cut a pretty wide swath yourself," Billy growled.

"I ain't a alderman, serving the city for pure love and a small salary," grinned the other. "A contractor's got a right to make money."

"You make money out o' me," said Billy sourly. "You keep me under your big fat ugly thumb. I guess I can run this business alone. I got all the strings pretty well in my own hand."

"All right, Barry. I'll be sorry to be on the other side, but if you say so, all right."

Barry swore a moment under his breath and changed the subject. So matters went on, with Barry still subservient, but growing daily more inclined to believe himself the autocrat he seemed, daily a little less cautious, a little more fixed in his assurance that the officeholders, the delegates and the saloon men constituted, in themselves, a sufficient prop for his dominion, and that Murdock was a nuisance.

"Of course, it's to his interest to keep me under," he said to himself, "and I dunno' whether I'm a fool to let him do it, or whether I'm a fool to try to break away."

He began to try flyers on his own hook; he gathered many rake-offs of which he said nothing to his mentor; he drank a little more and splurged a little more and looked a little more like a bulldog and less like a man. That the spirit of rebellion was growing up and that the pawn began to take credit to itself for the position of power in which it was placed, came gradually home to Mr. Murdock. It made him at first annoyed, then anxious. So it was that the confidence bred from years of business coöperation drove him this night to look up his old partner.

"Evening, Early," he said as the door closed behind him. "Beastly cold night out. Wish you'd order me a little something hot to induce me to stay by this comfortable fire of yours."

Mr. Early waved his hand toward a chair and settled himself without ceremony. There was this comfort in Murdock: they had known each other too long for pose, and, though the old hook-and-eye partnership was dissolved, and Mr. Early had soared into the realms of Art, they were still closely bound by common interests. So Sebastian met him with cheerful resignation.

"Sit down, Jim," he said. "I don't mind a nip myself. What's up?"

"What's down, you'd better ask. Lord save us! What's that?" exclaimed Mr. Murdock, as he caught sight of the lurid lady lying amid the litter on the table.

"That's the cover of my next magazine. Never mind it. It's not in your line."

"Well, I should say not," said the other with a slow grin. "I've been pretty much vituperated for some of my business deals, but I never sprung a thing like that on the public. 'Forget thyself!' That's good, Early." He winked a wink that came more from the soul than from the eye.

"Oh, drop it, Jim," said Mr. Early, relapsing into the old vernacular. "I'm sick of everything to-night. Here's your cocktail. Help yourself to a cigar."

"You ought to get married, instead of sitting here with the blues all by yourself. Tell you, a warm little wife is a nice thing to come home to."

"Thank you, Jim," said Mr. Early dryly.

They sank into silence, a comfortable silence, permeated with the fragrance of tobacco, with warmth in the cardiac region, and with that crackle of burning logs that satisfieth the soul. But occasionally Mr. Early shot a sharp glance at his companion, and his study did not reassure him. At last he spoke.

"Well, out with it, Jim. It's evident that you've something on your mind."

"You're right, I have," said Murdock with sudden emphasis. "I don't know whether you can help me, but it's second nature for me to try you. I'm getting anxious about Barry and affairs connected with him."

"What about Barry? I thought you had him in your pocket."

"Oh, I've still got him in the pocket over my heart, and buttoned down tight," said Mr. Murdock grimly. "It's because he belongs to me that I'm looking out for him."

"Well," said Mr. Early, and he leaned forward nervously to poke the fire that needed no poking.

"Well! In spite of me, Billy's getting restless. He's getting worse than restless, and I'm afraid to think how he may break out. You know how he loses his sense once in a while. Have you noticed how the *Star* has been running him of late?" Mr. Murdock slowly gathered force in stating his grievances.

"Yes, I've noticed it," said Mr. Early.

"The *Star* is the only paper I haven't got a strangle hold of—at least so I thought. But some of the other dailies are butting in. Say they're afraid not to. Of course, an occasional black eye is all in the day's work. It rather helps things along. Billy expects it, and he isn't thin-skinned. It doesn't make much difference as long as our own organs print what they're told. But, say, this thing is going beyond a joke. Billy has been really cut up over the way this coroner business is getting home to the public. He says if there is going to be squirming, he'll look out that there are other people squirming besides himself. I suppose that's meant as a threat for me. You know there are things—even affairs that you are interested in, Sebastian—that are all on the square, you know, and perfectly right, but they take too much explaining for the public ever to understand them."

"I know," said Mr. Early, still poking the fire.

"And do you know who is back of the whole rumpus?"

"Who?" demanded Mr. Early sharply, looking up.

"Primarily this infernal next-door neighbor of yours."

"Percival?"

"Percival. He's too much of a kid to put himself forward, but he's really the whole thing. He's been sneaking around town for months, picking up information. He has a confounded cheerful way of making friends that has cut him out for the job of politics, if he would just put himself on the right side. Of course he has no more idea of practical politics than—" Mr. Murdock looked around for an object of comparison and concluded lamely, "than that girl on your magazine cover. And what do you think is the latest?"

"What?"

"He's stirred up that mare's nest of a dude club till they've taken to sending a committee to attend every meeting of the council—which is irritating."

"But not necessarily serious."

"Not in itself, though it's getting on Barry's nerves, as you people of fashion say. To tell you the truth, I've had to make a concession to Barry, just to keep him in order. I preferred him right on the council where he is, but he's got a bee in his top-hat. He wants to run for mayor. I suppose he wants to show people what a great man he really is. I gave in to him on that point. Now here comes in the thing that made me look you up. Barry has some sort of an acquaintance with this Percival fellow, and when he proclaimed his intentions, Percival jumped on him with a flat defiance—told him that he had proof of a disreputable affair in Barry's career that would queer him with the whole community. How your neighbor got hold of this thing, I'm jiggered if I can guess. I thought I was the only man in the city that knew it, and it has been my chief club to keep Barry in order. But however he got them, Percival's facts were all square, and Barry collapsed. Now, these two patched up an agreement. Barry promised to give up his candidacy for mayor, and stay in his seat in the council, and Percival, on his part, agreed to keep quiet."

"Well, that suits you all right."

"It would if it ended there, but what I started out to tell you is this: the Municipal Club is beginning to take up city politics in earnest. They are organizing systematically in every ward to be ready for a fight for the council in next fall's election, and, to cap the climax, I was told today that they had succeeded in getting Preston to run for mayor. Now you know they could hardly have picked out a worse man, so far as we are concerned. Preston is popular and strong, and he's perfectly unapproachable. I'd as soon tackle the law of gravitation. It isn't even pleasant for respectable citizens, like you and me, to come out publicly against the whole

movement. We can't afford to do it. Everything we do has got to be done on the quiet."

"You needn't get so hot, Jim. It'll blow over. This kind of thing always does. It's only spasmodic. You ought to know that."

"Well, it's taking a very inconvenient time for its spasms. It may result in spasmodically losing Billy his seat in the council in November. Nice thing if we didn't have a clear majority of aldermen next winter, wouldn't it?" Mr. Murdock was becoming finely sarcastic in his rage.

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"I suppose it would be inconvenient," assented Mr. Early.

"Inconvenient!" growled Murdock. "Is that the strongest swear word you can raise? Do you happen to remember that the lighting franchise expires next fall? Now do we want it renewed, or do we not? Can we afford to lose the biggest thing we've got? Do we want Billy to see it through, or do we not?"

"We certainly do."

"Well, what do you propose to do about it?"

"I don't see that there is much to do except to sit pat, and let it blow over."

"Suppose when it blew over it should be a cyclone and you and me in the cellar? No siree, I'm no sitter-down. I'm a fighter, even when I fight in secret. Damn this feller, Percival, and his gift for making friends and stirring up enthusiasm for himself! I suspect he has ambitions. So much the worse for him, if James Murdock is in the ring against him. Do you know my inferences? I am sure he is not one of the invulnerables. The fact that he made a concession to Barry gives him away. He didn't need to. If Barry can work him by a little flattery and an appeal to their shoddy friendship, he's not one of your out-and-out, no-compromise, reform-or-die fellows. Say, Early, you know him well. Can't you get at him?"

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Mr. Early gave one of those roundabout motions that suggest a desire to wriggle out of the whole matter, and answered slowly:

"I shouldn't wonder if the entire business petered out, anyway. It's almost a year to the next election, and Percival is going to be married in a few weeks to a pretty little girl, who would never stir a man's ambitions to anything more than a smart carriage and pair. He's turned idiotic about her, and let's hope he'll stay so. Just at present I don't believe all the boodle and graft in the world would turn a hair on him. Love and politics, my boy, are no more congenial than water and oil—especially if the politics is rancid."

"We'll have to go into partnership with the lady to keep him down," said Murdock with a grin. "I've formed more unlikely alliances than that in my time. Why, good Lord! what's that?" he exclaimed for the second time that night.

His eyes had fallen upon a tall white column at the back of the room, and at his words the column moved forward and displayed the flowing robes, the snowy white turban, the gleaming ruby of Ram Juna.

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"Pardon my interruption," said the Hindu courteously. "I have been out. I am but just returned. And I come to assure myself that all is well with my admirable host."

"Ah, Murdock, this is my friend, the Swami. He's going to stay with me while he writes a book. I've given him the west ell, off in the quiet of the garden, you know," said Mr. Early.

"With kindness you give it. Obligation is mine," said the Swami, with a deferential movement of his hands. "And I go at once to devote myself to my greatest work. But now I have visited a lady, Mrs. Appleton, who has great interest in me, and who desires to form what she calls a class. I call it, rather, a circle of my friends."

"And what do you do with them?" asked Mr. Murdock, with the same bald curiosity that one displays at the zoo before the performing seals.

"We increase the sum of nobility in the world," said the Swami softly. "We sit together in long white robes, such as you see on me, and we pour out love upon the universe."

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"Oh!" said Mr. Murdock. He was too astonished to pursue his investigations.

"It is a serene and blessed occupation," said the Swami.

"And do they—does the class pay for that?" Murdock recovered so far as to ask.

"Pay? Not so!" said the Swami indignantly. "I ask of life no more than a bare existence and that, a thousand times that, is mine, by the benevolence of Mr. Early."

"They're devilish pretty women, some of 'em, though. You have that reward," said Mr. Early jocularly.

The Swami cast on him a glance of cow-like anger, but Mr. Murdock went on persistently: "And they don't give you any money at all?"

"For myself, no. Some, if it harmonize with their desires, make contribution through me to the great temple in India, where the brothers may assemble, a sacred spot among the lonely hills. Some give to that, but not to me. But I must no longer interrupt. I have made my salute. I go to my remote room."

With a reverential movement of the head, the white column moved away.

"Gee!" said Mr. Murdock. "Can you stand that kind of thing around all the time?"

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"Oh, I'm interested in all kinds of people," said Mr. Early. "And he's the most inoffensive creature. I shall hardly see him. He intends to lock himself up out there in his room most of the time. He meditates in silence ten hours a day and comes forth to give a lecture that nobody understands. He's going to be all the rage."

"And, of course, if he's the rage, you have him. I wish you'd make Billy Barry the rage," said Murdock.

"It's all I can do to popularize myself," said Early whimsically. "I'll think over the situation a bit, Jim, and see if I can see any way out from under. Of course, Percival hasn't any record by which you can discredit him and keep his mouth shut—at least not yet."

As Mr. Murdock took a last sip at the cocktail and made an unceremonious exit, again Mr. Early settled himself for a period of repose, and again he was interrupted.

"Pardon," said the deep voice of the Swami. "You sit alone. Is it permitted that I repose here and join your meditations? For a few moments? In silence, if you will?"

"I wish you'd pour out a little rest," said Early. "I'm tired."

"In spirit and in body," answered the Swami. "The rush of the wheel of life, it exhausts. But I comprehend. I also am a man. The great world of business has its necessities and its value. My outer nature shares in it. Ah, you know not. You think of me only on one side of being. But, like you, I have my sympathies with many things."

Mr. Early made no reply, but sank deeper into his chair. The two sat long in silence. Sebastian looked at the fire and began to build up a picture of Madeline's face. The Hindu was apparently lost to the surrounding world, and yet he occasionally darted a glance of swift, animal-like inquiry at his host.

"Neither do I like the young man Percival," he said placidly, and Mr. Early started.

"It is your next neighbor, Percival, is it not, who annoys?" the Swami inquired equably. "The youth who sneers when first I speak at your house? In India, now, one may do many things that are here impossible. Ah, but yes, you say, here you may do many things that are in India impossible. So goes it. Still more. The same forces exist everywhere; but we in India, we understand the forces that you, brilliant workers with the superficial, you do not understand. I shall be glad to help the benevolent Early, if at any time my services are of value. I know to do many things besides to meditate."

Mr. Early stared in amazement at the unmoved face before him, a face almost as round and mystifying as the syllable "Om", on which its thoughts were supposed to be centered.

"And, remember, I, too, dislike the young man Percival," pursued the Swami blandly.

Mr. Early's mind suddenly stiffened with horror.

"See here," he exclaimed, sitting up, "you understand Mr. Percival is no enemy of mine. He is, in fact, a friend. You mustn't think you'd be doing me a kindness by—ah—injuring him in any way."

"My understanding," said the Swami, still unmoved. "Fear no midnight assassination, noble friend. That is petty—and dangerous. I am not oblivious of the conventionalities. But the mind may be reached, as well as the body. Percival may do as I—you—we—wish. The higher animal at all times controls the lower. Perhaps, at some time, I may serve you. But you weary. The body makes demands. I bid you good night."

He put out a great paw, and Mr. Early grasped it weakly, feeling that he was in the position of one who has started an oil "gusher" and can not control its flow. He might have to light it to get rid of it.

To his own room went Ram Juna, occasionally nodding his head in his serene manner. He carefully locked behind him the door which connected his wing with the rest of the house. A few moments he paused listening, then he crossed his bedroom and the narrow passage that opened on the garden and entered the little unused room beyond. Here all was dark, inky dark, for the heavy shutters on the street side of the room were closed and barred and the shades on the garden front were drawn, shutting out what dim rays the departed sun had left the night. The Swami apparently had no need of greater light, for, neglecting the electric button near the door, he groped quietly about, struck a match and lighted a single candle, with which he returned to the hallway and opened the garden door, standing for a moment with the taper flickering in the rush of cold air that poured in from outside. When he stepped back and closed the door, there stood beside him another man, clean-shaven, lean, sharp-nosed and ferret-eyed, whose footstep was almost as light as that of the Swami himself. Neither of them spoke until they reached the smaller room and the door was locked.

"You shiver, my friend," said Ram Juna. "The night is cold."

"Freezin', an' so'm I," said the other shortly. "You keep me waiting a devil of a time."

"Business, oh my friend, business. Can I utter a word to the ears of your nationality more convincing? I was necessitated to converse with my host, the rich and amiable Early. Ah, the nature of humanity is eternally interesting."

His companion grinned.

"Which means, being interpreted, you've got some lay, I suppose. What is it!"

"Abruptness is to me foreign," said the Swami, waving his great hand with its combination of fat palm and taper fingers. "It disturbs me. Perhaps, some day, I shall need tell you. The amiable Early is as are all mankind. On the one side he gropes among infinities. Do we not all so? On the other side he is tied by this body of clay to the groveling earth. Are we not all so? Am not even I myself?" The Swami turned benevolently toward the other.

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"You bet! And you can sling language about it!" said the man, and he opened his rat's mouth and laughed without noise. Even Ram Juna's face relaxed into its Buddha smile, calm, inscrutable, as the two gazed on each other. Suddenly the younger drew himself together.

"Well, I ain't got no time to spare," he said. "Are they ready?"

"I, as well as you Americans, can be the votary of business," answered Ram Juna. "The first principle of business is promptitude. My friend, they are ready."

"Well, hand 'em over," said the little man. "Now my job begins; and I guess it's as ticklish as yours. You may need the skill, but I need the gall."

"The daring of the leopard when it leaps from the bush where it crouches, the daring which is half cunning, eh, my friend?" said the Swami comfortably. "Here, take the package and go thy way. There will be more in the future. These I brought with me from India, and even the eagle customs found them not. Many night-hours have I spent in preparing them, and mine eyes have been robbed of sleep. It is no slight task to produce a masterpiece."

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"Well, you certainly are a dandy," said the man, examining the contents of his package. "I never seen anything like it. And those big hands, too."

"My hands obey the skill of my mind. And here, under the shadow of the Early, I can work with purer courage. This is the perfection of a place. It was the idea of genius to come here. Hold, let me examine the way before thou goest."

"Aw, there won't be any body in the garden at this time o' night, and at this time o' year."

"Nay, but it is the wise man who leaves no loophole for mistake," said the Hindu, with practical caution.

He blew out the light and stepped in darkness to the entrance with the air of one who would refresh his soul by gazing at the stars and wiping out the trivialities of the day. After he had looked at the heavens, his eyes fell with piercing swiftness upon the shadows of the garden, its bushes, manlike or animal-like in the night.

It was as complete a piece of acting as though a large audience had been there to see, but all thrown away on silence and solitude.

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"Coast clear?" said a voice behind him.

"All is well," said the Swami. "Go forth to fortune."

The door closed softly, and Ram Juna sought the repose he had earned.

CHAPTER XV

THE HONEYMOON

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The first months of winter were full of excitement to Lena. She frequently assured herself that she was rapturously happy, but, while intellectually she accepted the fact, no genial warmth pervaded her consciousness. The entrance to her new life was too brier-sprinkled for bliss. Daily to face her mother's mingling of complaisance, self-pity and fault-finding; to meet Dick's friends, whom Lena, in her suspicions, regarded as thinly-disguised enemies; to scrimp together some little show of bridal finery for her quiet wedding; all this filled her with mingled irritation and gratification.

Most aggravating of all were the persistent attentions of Miss Madeline Elton. No one likes to be loved as a matter of duty, certainly not Lena Quincy, whose shrewd little soul easily divined that this equable warmth of manner, which she dubbed snippy condescension, sprang from affection for Dick and Mrs. Percival and not for herself. Madeline set Lena's teeth on edge, and it must be confessed that Lena often did as much for Madeline, but each politely kept her sensations to herself. Miss Elton always assured her optimistic soul that things would come out all right, that love was a great developer, that small vulgarities of mind were the result of association.

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Lena, on the other hand, might have broken friendly relations once and for all except that she found Miss Elton both useful and interesting. A friendly and very sly conspiracy between Madeline and Mrs. Percival had for its object the helping out of Lena's meager trousseau by certain little gifts, and even of money delicately proffered so that it might not wound a sensitive pride; and since Mrs. Percival was a victim to invalidish habits, it fell to Madeline to act as executive committee. But they need not have troubled themselves about delicacy, for Miss Lena greedily gobbled everything that was offered to her, with pretty expressions of gratitude, to be sure, but internal irritation because the donors were not more lavish.

Madeline, who would have shrunk from accepting a gift except from one she really loved, of course expected Lena to feel the same way, and every one of these presents given and taken was to her an assurance strong of a new bond between them. So they shopped together, and Lena modestly picked out some appallingly cheap affair and said:

"You know I feel that is the best I can afford." And Madeline would whisper, "Take the other, dear, and let the difference be a small wedding present from me. Won't you be so generous?" and Lena was so generous; but she told herself that they were not doing it for her, but only because they were ashamed that Dick should have a shabby bride. And perhaps she was right. It is pretty hard to analyze human motives, so you may always take your choice, and fix your mind either on the good ones or on the bad ones, whichever suit you best. Doubtless they are both there.

Sometimes Lena wished that she had been given a lump sum and allowed to browse alone, for she felt her taste pruned and pinioned by the very presence of Miss Elton, who, though she never ventured to criticize, had yet a depressing influence on Lena's exuberant fancies.

Once, after such a silent sacrifice on her part, Madeline and she drove up to the Percivals' for five-o'clock tea. Her future mother-in-law was in the accustomed seat, and Lena found a footstool near at hand, with a pretty air of affectionate proprietorship that brought a glow to Dick's face.

"Yes," said Lena with a charming pout, "I'm utterly played out, getting myself ready for your approval, sir."

"Poor little girl," he whispered. "If you only knew what an easy task that ought to be!"

"I'm so glad Madeline can go with you," Mrs. Percival said, patting the girl's hand approvingly. "I always think she has such perfect taste. Some people get fine clothes and then make an heroic effort to live up to them, but Madeline has the supreme gift of managing clothes that seem a part of herself."

It is impossible to tell how a speech like this rankled in Lena. Sometimes she had a wild impulse to stand up and stamp and scream out, "I hate the whole lot of you!" but she never did. She kept on smiling and purring and longing for the freedom which would come when she was safely married, had passed her initiation ceremonies, and could command her own money.

But it was wonderful what a fascination she felt for everything that concerned Miss Elton. Every act, every garment, every inflection of the girl she hated most was interesting to her. She watched Madeline like a cat, and disliked her more and more.

At length came the new year, and the day when Lena sat in a carriage by Dick's side and was whirled away on that journey that was to take her out of the old and into the new. Her hour-old husband looked at her with an expression half-quizzical, half-adoring as she sat back and glanced up with a heartfelt sigh, secure at last of her position as the wife of Richard Percival. Until this moment she had never wholly believed it.

"I'm glad the wedding's over," she said.

"And I. More glad that our married life has begun. Lena, Lena, how beautiful you are! When you came down the aisle, I hardly dared to look at you; and yet it seems to me now that you are more lovely here alone with me. I should think God would have been afraid to make such eyes and lips and hair, sweetheart, knowing that He could never surpass them."

He softly touched the little curl that crept out from below her hat and kissed the upturned mouth in that ecstasy that borders on awe.

"Now," he said, "you are never so much as to think of anything unpleasant for the rest of your life. I wonder what you will most like to do?"

"Buy all the clothes I want," cried Lena with such a deliciously whimsical twist of her little lips that Dick laughed at her irresistible wit. That was coming to be one of Lena's most fetching little ways, to say what she meant as though it were the last thing in the world that could be expected of her. It was piquant.

It was no time of year to dally in true lovers' fashion under pine trees in some remote solitude, so Dick took her to cities and theaters and big shops and got his fun out of watching her revel with open purse. Their honeymoon was more full of occupation and less of rapture and sweet isolated intimacy than Dick could have wished, but it was much to watch the color come and go on her cheek in her moments of excitement, to fulfil every capricious whim of her who had been starved in her feminine hunger of caprice, to punctuate the rush of life by celestial moments when she rested a tired but bewildering head against his shoulder and listened silently with drooping lids to all he had to say, to feel that he could answer the admiring glances of other men with the triumphant knowledge, "All this loveliness is mine—only mine." Lena was so happy, so outrageously happy,—and so shyly affectionate, what could the young husband do but take with content the gifts the gods provided; and Dick was lavish and easily cajoled. The simple trousseau helped out by Miss Elton suddenly swelled to new and magnificent proportions. Lena blossomed and glowed; she tricked herself out in the finery that he provided and paraded before him and the glass until they both laughed with delight. Dick felt that he was playing with a new and sublimated doll, it was all so amusing, so inconsequential, and such fun. Although he wondered a little where it would be appropriate to wear the enormous pink hat with drooping plumes which perched on the showily fluffy head now facing him, he quite appreciated the effect.

"Oh, of course you think I'm stunning," Lenapouted. "But the question is, what will other people think?"

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"Other people aren't the question at all," retorted Dick. "Who cares what they think so long as you and I know that you are the very loveliest woman on this whole wide earth—this good old earth."

When they came home, Lena exulted again in the luxurious rooms that Dick had fitted up for her in fashion more modern than the somber dignity of the rest of the house. Here was another new sensation—a household without bickerings. The elder Mrs. Percival, having accepted the situation, was no niggard in her spirit of courtesy, but very gracious as was her wont, and Lena was astonished to find that she and her new mother-in-law ran their respective lines without collisions. The half-invalid older woman breakfasted in her own room and occupied herself with quiet readings and sewings and drivings, but when she did appear on the family horizon, it was always as a beneficent presence.

Lena purred in the presence of comfort; but when you see a kitten serenely snoozing before the fire, it does not do to leap to the conclusion that this kitten would not know what was expected of her on the back fence at midnight.

If storm and stress should ever come, Dick had himself helped her to feel that beauty would fill the measure, wherever it fell short; that however she might sin, beauty was her sufficient apology.

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Mrs. Quincy, established in a little flat with a middle-aged submissive slavey, was as nearly reconciled to fate as her nature would allow. Her rooms were pleasantly furnished, but Lena's mother was full of the genius of discord, and almost automatically she so rearranged her surroundings that each particular article made strife with its neighbor. Harmony and Mrs. Quincy could not live in the same house. When Lena paid her duty visits (and she was irritated at the frequency with which Dick's and Madame Percival's expectations seemed to exact them) she had not only to listen in nauseated impatience to Mrs. Quincy's minute questions and comments on people and things, but she had also to feel her rapidly-developing tastes offended by her mother's domestic order.

"Miss Elton's real kind. She's been here twice since you was here. And she brought flowers."

"Mother! And did you have a newspaper on top of that pretty little table?"

"Land sakes! And if I didn't I should have to watch Sarah every minute to see she didn't put something hot on it or scratch the mahogany top. I can't afford to have everything I've got spoiled. No knowin' when I'll git anything more—dependent as I am on other people."

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"I'll bring you a pretty table-cover then."

"I'd like a red one. But I didn't suppose you'd think of gittin' one."

"Oh, mother, red wouldn't look well in this room."

"Now, I just think a bit of real bright red would hearten it up. If you don't git red, you needn't git any, Lena Quincy, for I won't use it. Are you goin' now? Seems to me you got precious little time for your old mother since you put on all your fine lady airs."

And Lena? Have you ever watched a cecropia moth when it crawls out of its dull gray prison of chrysalis? It is a moist, frail, tottering creature with tiny wings folded against its quivering body, but as the spring sunshine brings to play its magic and infuses its "subtle heats," there come shivers of growth. Great waves seem to pulsate from the body into the wings, and with each wave goes color and strength. In quick throbs they come at last until they look like a continuous current, and before your eyes is a glorious bird-like creature, with damask wings outspread, and flecked with peacock spots, hiding the slender body within. It feels its strength, spreads and preens itself, and is away to the forest to meet its fate.

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Such was Lena in the first months of her marriage. The world's warmth welcomed her, partly in curiosity, and partly because she was in truth Richard Percival's wife, and the protégée of Mrs. Lenox, who took every pains to shield her and help her. The ways of that little sphere that calls itself society she found it not difficult to acquire, when to beauty she added the paraphernalia of luxury. A little trick of holding oneself, a turn of speech, a familiarity with a certain set of people and their doings, and the thing is accomplished. Was there ever yet an American girl, whose supreme characteristic is adaptability, who could not learn it in a few months, if she set her mind to it?

As she experienced the true pleasure of being inside, which is the knowledge that there are outsiders raging to make entrance, she spread her wings, did Madame Cecropia, and the only wonder was that she was ever packed away in the dull gray chrysalis. And now every one forgot that ugly thing, when Lena changed her sky but not her heart.

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Dick and she lived in a whirl; and if he would have liked, after strenuous days spent in spreading political feelers, to have found at home quiet evenings and old slippers, he was rapidly learning that the position of husband to a young beauty is no sinecure. And he admired and loved her too much to fling even a rose leaf of opposition in her path. The very hardship of her past made him tender to every whim of the present. Dick's chivalry was deep-grained, as it is in men who have lived among pure and simple women. In everything that wore petticoats he saw something of his mother, fragile, noble, ambitious for those she loved and forgetful of self. When Lena began to show him things that he could not admire, he laid the blame of them, not to her, but to the world that had played the brute to her. And if he tried to change her it was with apology in his heart

for daring to criticize. But as Lena came to take for granted the ease and comfort of her new life, she more and more laid aside the pose with which she had at first edified her lord, and spoke her real mind. She had fully acquired the manner and the garments of a lady. She could not see that more was needed.

One gray wintry day, as they walked homeward together from a midday musicale, they passed a grimy little girl who whimpered as she clutched her small person.

"What's the matter, girlie?" asked Dick, and as he stopped his wife, too, halted perforce.

"My petticoat's comin' down," sobbed the child.

"Is that all?" said Dick. "I wouldn't cry about such a little thing. I'll soon fix it for you." And he stooped.

"Dick," said Lena imperatively, "there's a carriage coming!"

"Let it come!" said Dick. "Sorry I haven't a safety-pin, girlie, but I guess this one will do till you get home." That impulsive interest in all varieties of human nature was so natural to him that he took for granted that it was a part of our common nature.

He looked up with a smile to see Lena's face crimson with wrath and shame. Her expression sobered him.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

"It was Mrs. Lenox who drove by," she urged. "And she looked so amused."

"I don't wonder. I'm amused myself," he replied gaily.

"A nice thing for a gentleman to be seen doing," Lena went on, with a voice growing shrill like her mother's. "To play nursemaid to a dirty little street brat!" She had said things like this to him before, but always with that little smile and naughty-child air. Now, for the first time she forgot the smile, and this small omission made an astonishing difference in the impression.

"I don't know what else a gentleman should do," answered Dick; "or a lady, either. Mrs. Lenox would have done as much for any baby, her own or another."

"Much she would!" said Lena sharply. "I've been at her house. She has rafts of nurses to do all the waiting on her children. I guess she doesn't let them trouble her any more than she can help. If she's unlucky enough to have the squally little things, she keeps away from them."

Even as she spoke, Lena realized that her acid voice was a mistake, but she said to herself that she was tired of acting, and it did not make any difference what Dick thought now. She was his wife.

"Perhaps you don't know the whole, Lena," Dick answered. "I happen to have seen Mrs. Lenox when she was devoting herself to a sick baby, and Madeline has told me of the kind of personal care she gives."

"The more fool she, when she can get some one else to do it for her," said Lena, with feminine change of front.

"Is that the way you feel about children?" asked Dick soberly.

"I suppose they are necessary evils," said Lena with a smart laugh. "But I'd rather they'd be necessary to other women than to me."

"Well, perhaps that's a natural feeling, when we're young and like to be irresponsible; but I fancy, dear, that things look pretty different as we get along and are willing to pay the price for our happinesses—to pay for love with service and self-sacrifice. As for me, I pray that you and I may not some day be childless old folks."

Lena glanced at him sidewise as they walked, and his somber face showed her that her mistake went deeper than she had suspected.

"I'm sorry I was cross," she said with pretty contrition, but her prettiness and contrition did not have their usual exhilarating effect on Dick. Lena even turned and laid her hand softly on his arm. Still he did not look at her.

"I wasn't hurt by your crossness, dear," he said gently.

Among those to open hospitable doors to the bride and groom was Mr. Early. His house adjoined theirs, and only a hedge separated the two gardens, old-fashioned, with comfortable seats under wide trees on the Percival place, elaborately Italian on Mr. Early's domain, but spacious both, for St. Etienne had the advantage of doing most of its growth after rapid transit was invented, and had therefore never cribbed and cabined its population into solid blocks of brick and mortar, but had given everybody elbow-room, so that its residence district looked much like the suburbs of older cities.

So Dick and Lena went to dine with Mr. Early, and the bride had the thrilling delight of sitting between her world-famous host and an equally illustrious scholar, who had his head with him, extra size, and was plainly bored to death by his own erudition. It was a large dinner, and Lena was alert to study every one, both what he did and how he did it; but chiefly, from her vantage point at the right hand of her host; did she watch Miss Madeline Elton, who sat near the middle of the table on the other side, where Lena could study her face over a sea of violets. Lena was puzzled. Madeline seemed less reposeful and more charming than she remembered. For an instant she wondered if her own beauty, now tricked out by jewels, was not cheap beside Miss

Elton's undecorated loveliness. She noted that the men around the table looked often in Madeline's direction. Even Mr. Early occasionally let his attention wander from his suave courtesy toward herself, and Lena resented this. She deeply admired Mr. Early. His was the big and blatant success which she could easily comprehend, and she exulted at the idea of sitting at the post of honor beside a man distinguished over the length and breadth of the land. Once, even her own husband, Richard Percival, leaned forward and gazed at Madeline as she spoke across the table, and there was a look in his face that Lena treasured in her cabinet of unforgiven things. She flushed with anger. Her hatred of Miss Elton was as old as her acquaintance with her husband, and its growth had been parallel.

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Then her eyes met the glowing glance of a dark face under a turban of soft white silk, and she turned hastily away.

"I see you are looking at my ceiling, Mrs. Percival," said Mr. Early. "It is a reproduction of the beautiful fan-tracery in the Henry VII chapel at Westminster. Doubtless you recognize it. But, alas, it is impossible to attain the spiritual beauty of the original until age has laid its sanctifying hand on the carving. This has had but a year of life for each century that the chapel tracery can boast. And, of course, I admit that the effect must be modified by the surroundings. A dining-room can never have the atmosphere of a church, can it, my dear Mrs. Percival? Though I assure you, I have tried to be consistent in all the decorations and the furniture of this room."

"It's very beautiful," said Lena. "And who is the large gentleman with the long white mustaches?"

"Surely you have met Mr. Preston. He is one of our best type of business men, and the candidate that the new reform element, in which your husband is playing an honorable part, is hoping to set up for mayor. It would be a notable thing for this community if we might have a man of his stamp represent our municipality."

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"I have heard Dick speak of him," said Lena, "And is that the wonderful Hindu of whom I've heard? All the ladies are crazy about him, but I never happened to see him before."

"That is Ram Juna. He has been with me now for two months, and is to stay indefinitely. He is engaged on a work that will, I am convinced, add one more to the sacred books of the world. We need such men in this age of materialism, do we not? And I feel gratefully the beneficent effect of such a presence in my house."

So Mr. Early went on with ponderous sentences and a sharp look in his eye.

But Lena hardly heard him. She was absorbed in the soft lights and the flowers and the wonderful china, most of which, her host told her, had been made in his own works and was unique in the world. But strange as were all these things, her eyes kept coming back, as if fascinated, to the man-mountain in the silky white robe. The big ruby on his forehead seemed to wink and flash at her, and as often as she looked she met the sleepy eyes fixed on her face. Then she was irresistibly drawn to look again to see if he was still watching. For once, she forgot her big blue eyes and her bright little fluffs of hair and all the execution that they were meant to do on the masculine heart, because there was something different in the way this Oriental surveyed her. It was an unblinking and unemotional study.

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Fortunately Mr. Early was content to talk and let her answer in brief. Talking was not Lena's strong point. Mr. Early went on with his monologue, in platitudes about art, and Lena looked interested, or tried to, while she caught scraps of conversation from farther down the table.

Miss Elton was telling a story of her cooking-class in a certain poor district. She had shown a flabby wife, noted even in that region for her lack of culinary skill, how to make a dish at once cheap, palatable and nutritious.

"And I said, 'Now Mrs. Koshek, if you'd give that to your husband some night when he comes home tired, don't you think it would be a pleasant surprise?' But all I could get out of her was, 'I'd ruther eat what I'd ruther; I'd ruther eat what I'd ruther.' And I'm afraid Mr. Koshek is still living on greasy sausages."

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"That might teach you, Miss Elton," said Mr. Preston, "the futility of trying to improve women by reason. Now a man—"

"Oh, pooh, reason! reason!" exclaimed Mrs. Lenox, turning upon him, "I'm sorry for you poor men, you mistaken servants of boasted reason! Reason is the biggest fallacy on earth. It leads men by the straight path of logic to pure foolishness."

"And how is your woman's reason to account for that?" he asked tolerantly.

"Oh, I suppose your premises are never true. Or, if they are, another man's opposite premises are equally true. So there you are. Two contradictions are equally valid, but being a reasonable man you can't see more than one of them."

"And women can see both sides, of course."

"Truly. And flop from one to the other with lightning rapidity. We are too completely superior to reason to have any respect for or reliance on it. Do you think I try reason on my husband when he is in the wrong in his arguments with me! Not at all. I just say, 'I'm afraid you are not feeling well, dear.' And I put a mustard plaster on him. It's extraordinary how seldom he disagrees nowadays. Or when he's very obstinately set on an objectionable course, it's a good plan to say sweetly, 'I'll do just as you like, dear.' He invariably comes back with an emphatic, 'No—we'll do as *you* like.'"

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"I relinquish all claims to be called a reasonable being," said Mr. Lenox with a wry face.

"When we, the unmarried, hear confessions of this kind," said Madeline, "it gives us an incongruous feeling to remember how happy you, the married, seem, after all."

"Getting along becomes a habit," retorted Dick. "Matrimony is like taking opium. It fixes itself on you. I suppose when the hero of Kipling's poem found out that she was only 'a rag and a bone and a hank of hair,' he kept on loving the rag, even while he felt like gnawing the bone and pulling the hair."

He knew he had said an ugly thing. It wasn't like him. He flushed as he saw Mrs. Lenox glance sharply at him.

"Dick, Dick, that is heresy," she exclaimed gaily. "We must pretend there aren't any vampires, and that we do not know what they are made of. If we tell the naked truth, how can we cry out with conviction that the old world is an harmonious and beautiful place?"

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"That isn't your real philosophy," he said.

"No, it isn't," she said. "I sometimes wish it were. If one could have the temperament to shut one's eyes and say, 'I don't see it; therefore it isn't true,' what a very easy thing life would be."

"I don't know," answered Dick. "Going it blind with a dog and a string doesn't generally make it easier to walk."

"That's true," Madeline put in. "A little dog isn't a very good guide up the hilly road of righteousness. As for me, I prefer open-eyed obedience to blind obedience."

"I'll be bound you prefer obedience anyway," Dick said in an undertone, and he looked at her as though something in her hurt him. He turned abruptly to Mr. Preston.

"Preston," he said, "I wish we could hold a special election and put you into the executive chair before your time. Every kind of evil thing is taking advantage of our present lax administration. I believe the crooks of other cities are flying to us on the wings of the wind. One of the plain-clothes men told me to-day that the government detectives have traced a gang of counterfeiters to our beloved city, though they have not succeeded in spotting the rascals' whereabouts. It's rather humiliating to find St. Etienne picked out as a good hiding-place for any villany there is going."

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"You needn't be so sure that a special election or any other kind would carry us in," laughed Mr. Preston. "I'm not so confident as you seem, Percival, that this community is overwhelmed with the consciousness of its rare opportunity."

And so the talk drifted on, as usual, to politics.

After dinner, in the drawing-room, Lena saw her husband in conversation with Ram Juna. The two crossed the room, and Dick introduced the new prophet.

"I fear my too constant inspection disturbed you. Myriad pardons for me," began the Swami in his mellifluous voice. "It is the tribute. When I feel deep interest I am prone to forget all but my study. See, I am the last of a family once powerful and wealthy; yet I hardly regret that heritage that I have lost. I look at you. You are the type of another fate. You are a bride, young, lovely, with the vigor and glory of this new race of America. I envy not, but I wonder. So I look too long."

Lena glanced discomfited at the retreating back of her husband and said, "I'm sure I didn't notice anything peculiar."

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A curious gleam came into Ram Juna's sleepy eyes.

"Ah, then you, like me, love to examine the soul, your own or another's. You have fellow feeling. So you forgive. May I sit here beside you?"

Lena drew aside her petticoats and the Swami shared her little sofa.

"You see that while you make study of others, I make study of you. I should wish to be your friend. I should in fact fear to have you count me an enemy."

Lena blinked at him in an uncomprehending way with her big eyes, and he smiled innocently in return.

"A woman who is an enemy is a danger. But men are tough-skinned and hard to kill. Is it not so? And even a woman enemy is often powerless to hurt. But when a woman hates a woman, then the case is different. A woman is easy to hurt. A little blow, even a breath on her reputation or to her pride, and the woman is wounded beyond repair. Is it not so?"

Still Lena stared blankly at him, but as he did not return her gaze, her eyes followed his to the other side of the room where Miss Elton bent over a table, with Mr. Early on one side of her and Dick Percival on the other.

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"Oh!" she said with a little gasp. "Oh!" And Ram Juna looked back at her and smiled again.

"Therefore I was right to desire your friendship and not your enmity, was I not?" said he. "I, too, am a good friend and a bad enemy. See, Mr. Early shows some wonderful Japanese paintings. Shall we join them in the inspection?"

And Lena went with wonder, and in her mind there began to form vague clumsy purposes which the Hindu would have despised if he had read them.

Nor did her conversation with her husband in the home-returning carriage tend to soften Lena's

heart.

Dick was in an uncomfortable and irritable state of mind which was strange and disconcerting even to himself. Instead of giving her the big hug that was his habit when they found themselves safely alone, he said sharply,

"Lena, you use too much perfume about you. I wish you wouldn't."

"Do I?" asked Lena ominously. "Is there anything else?"

"Well, since you give me the chance to say it, dear," Dick's tone was now apologetic, "I'd a little rather you wore your dinner gowns higher. I know many women do wear things like yours to-night, and your dressmaker has dictated to you; but I think the extremes are not well-bred. Just look at the best women. Look at Mrs. Lenox and Madeline—"

But here Lena gave so sharp a little cry of anger that Dick stopped dismayed.

"How dare you?" she screamed. "How dare you hold up a girl you know I hate as an example to me! If she's so perfect, why didn't you marry her? I'm sure she wanted you badly enough."

Dick shrank back a little. To him love—the desire for marriage—was hardly a thing to be touched by outside hands. He wished Lena would not tear down the veils of reticence so ruthlessly.

"Lena, she did not want me at all. Be reasonable."

"Well, then, you took me just because you couldn't get her, did you? Everything she does and wears is perfection. And there's nothing about me that's right!" Lena had now come to the point of angry tears.

"There's one thing about you that's right; and that's my arms, sweetheart." Dick spoke sturdily in spite of trepidation, for this was a new experience to him. "You know I love you, Lena, I did not mean to hurt you. I thought only that you were a sweet little inexperienced woman, and that you would welcome any hints from your husband's worldly wisdom. Come, don't turn into an Undine, dear, and get the carriage all wet,"—for his wife was now sobbing on his shoulder.

"You've told me lots of times that I was perfect," she cried. "I don't see why you want to change me now. You're so inconsistent, Dick."

"I wish that I could make up for my brutality," said Dick. "How can I, Lena? I feel like the fellow that threw a catsup bottle at his wife's head at the breakfast-table and then felt so badly when he saw the nasty stuff trickling down her pretty curls that he brought her home a pair of diamond earrings for dinner."

"What a horrid vulgar story!" exclaimed Lena.

"Isn't it?" Dick rejoined. "But vulgar things are frequently true, as we learn with sorrow. Lena, can't we believe that our marriage certificate had an affection insurance policy given with it? Don't let us indulge in little quarrels. As you say, they are vulgar. I want love to be not only a rich solid pudding full of plums, but I want it to have a meringue on top."

As he hoped, this made Lena laugh, and she pulled out her over-scented handkerchief to wipe her eyes. Dick shut his lips tightly, grown too wise to speak.

CHAPTER XVI

LENA'S FRIENDS

Lena sat one morning behind the coffee-urn so self-absorbed and smiling that Dick wondered.

"Mrs. Percival," he remonstrated, "you have a husband at this end of the table. Have you forgotten it? What are you thinking about?"

"Dick, I believe I have found a friend—a real friend," Lena jerked out.

"A good many of them, I should say. Who is this fortunate person?"

"Mrs. Appleton."

"Mrs. Appleton!" Dick gulped at his coffee and stared at his wife in some perplexity. "Isn't she a—well, for one thing, a good deal older than you?"

"She'll be all the better guide," Lena retorted with one of her demure pouts. "You know she invited me to join the class she has gotten up for Swami Ram Juna. You needn't grin in that horrid way, Dick. I shall be so wise very soon that you'll be afraid of me."

"Heaven forbid, you dear little inspirer of awe."

"At any rate, she's taken the greatest fancy to me, and I to her. She came here yesterday in the pouring rain, and we spent a long afternoon talking together. We feel the same way about everything. She says that with my beauty, I ought to make a great hit, and she's going to give a big reception in my honor. Of course, with her experience, she can be a great help to me."

"I see." Dick forgot his breakfast entirely, and meditated.

"What is Mr. Appleton like?" Lena persisted.

"He has enough money to make me pale my ineffectual fires, and he adds to that the personality of the great American desert. But I suspect his wife is so wholly satisfied with the golden glow that the latter fact has never penetrated to her consciousness. I think Mrs. Appleton has not yet recovered from her astonishment at finding herself wedded to profusion. It appears to delight her afresh from day to day."

"You can be very nasty about people when you choose." Lena's tone was unmistakably vexed. 300

"Frankly, Lena, I do not like Mrs. Appleton or her attitude toward life. She is the kind of woman who refuses to take the simplest thing simply, the kind that thinks subscription dances and clubs and private cars and family tombs were invented chiefly to show our exclusiveness."

"Well, what are they for?"

Dick laughed. "Most of them to get all the fun there is in things, I should say; and the tombs, to show that love holds even after death."

"I like her, anyway," said Lena. "I like her better than the stuck-up kind of women." The words sound bald. Lena's lips made them seem humorous. It was so easy to avoid disapprobation just by that little smile and whimsical twist of the mouth.

"And whom do you mean by that!"

"You know whom I mean," Lena answered defiantly. "And I consider Mrs. Appleton a great deal more of a society woman than Mrs. Lenox. At any rate she goes a great deal more. And she does not neglect her church duties or her charities, either. She has told me things that she is doing." 301

"I should say she does not neglect them," ejaculated Dick. "She has the art so to regild them that even philanthropy and religion become mere appendages to society. Does Mrs. Lenox belong to Ram Juna's class, Lena?"

"No. Mrs. Appleton asked her, but she wrote that though she was interested in oriental thought, she, personally, found it more satisfactory to get it by reading. Now wasn't that snobby, Dick?"

"Is it snobbish to choose what really suits you, instead of following a craze like a sheep woman?"

But Lena shut her lips tightly. If she had not will, she had obstinacy. She could be resolute in behalf of her realities, luxury, beauty and self. From the moment when Mrs. Appleton first dawned on her horizon, she had recognized her ideal. Here was a woman who was at once showy, fashionable and virtuous. The things that Mrs. Lenox took for granted or ignored were to her matters of absorbing importance. She magnified the office of every detail of social conduct and every minutia of society's "functions". It was worth while to spend a week of soul-fatiguing labor in order that a tea should be just right; and her preparations were not made in silence, but with an amount of discussion and red-tape that filled every crevice of life. She had learned the art of so cramming the days with trifles that there was no room for the big things and she could conveniently forget them. 302

Mrs. Appleton seemed to recognize in Lena the same curious mingling of deep-down barbaric egotism and love of display, with the longing to be civilizedly correct. The two were drawn together.

"I like her," said Lena positively.

"I'm sorry," Dick said gently. "I can't say that I do, and I should be glad if you could find your friends among those I love and respect."

"You needn't try to dictate my friendships," said Lena sharply.

"I did not think of dictating, sweetheart. But when we love each other, we naturally long for sympathy in all things." Dick was making a brave effort.

But there was little use in making this appeal to Lena, to whom love was but a beneficent masculine idiosyncrasy. Dick glanced at her and at his watch.

"I must be off," he said. "I have an engagement to meet Preston and plan out our campaign." 303

"Ours!"

"I'm going to run for alderman of this ward," Dick laughed as Lena flushed. "Don't you approve?"

"How can you be interested in running for alderman?" she asked. "It is such a mean little ambition. I wish you would try for something big. It would be grand to have you a senator, so that we could go to Washington. I should love to be in all the gaities and meet all the distinguished people."

"Why, sweetheart, you don't suppose I care for the great name of city father, do you?" Dick answered laughing. "That's only the end of a lever. I do care immensely to be one of those who will clean up this city and keep it clean. Perhaps, if we do these near-by things, the big ones will come, by and by."

"A sort of public housemaid," said Lena scornfully.

"Exactly!" Dick laughed and nodded.

But Lena shrugged her shoulders and pouted as the door shut and she idly watched her husband's final hand-wave.

He walked down town and the fresh northern air set his pulses quickening. He noted how few gray heads there were, how full everything seemed of the vitality of youth. On the piazzas were groups of happy well-kept children, bundled up for winter play and bubbling over with exuberance. To any passer-by they told that these were the homes of young married people. Everywhere life looked sweet and normal and vigorous. And he knew that for miles in every direction there were more such homes of more such people.

But when he reached the part of town whither his steps were bent, all this was reversed. Here was dirt, if not of body, then of spirit. Here were a thousand evil influences at work. Here was public plundering for private greed; here were wire-pullings and bargainings and selfishness reigning supreme. And these forces were the nominal rulers of a city, the greater part of whose life was good.

However, he was getting the ropes in his hands. These things were no longer vague generalities floating in his mind, as rosy clouds might be backed by thunder-heads on the horizon. They were growing definite. He began to know who were the evil-workers and how they did it. He had the art of making friends, and he made friends among publicans and sinners as well as—well, there weren't any saints in St. Etienne to make friends with. At any rate some of the powers that were began to say that Dick Percival knew entirely too much. And some of the powers that ought to be, but still slept, namely the good citizens of St. Etienne, found their slumbers disturbed by his straight and convincing words.

But to-day all his labors seemed not worth while. There was a sour taste in his mouth. To do the little thing with a big heart was after all nothing but a sham. His ideals, he thought, had simmered down to petty things. He was spending his time in nosing out small evil-smelling scandals and in running for a mean inferior office. He felt nauseated with himself. Worse, he felt a horrible new doubt of his wife. Mrs. Appleton had been to him the type of woman he disliked, worldly, shallow, busy with the sticks and straws; yet now there would creep in a suspicion that some of the things he had forgiven to Lena's beauty and lack of sophistication were close of kin to the older woman's more blatant materialism. Materialism was the thing Dick had not learned to associate with his own women.

This radiant morning, then, he felt himself under the dominion of the grand inquisitors who invented the torture of little things. Life consisted in having slow drops of water fall on his head, one at a time. Family life was slimed with small bickerings, children were a nuisance, society a bore, and the most beautiful woman in the world defiant and uninspiring at the breakfast-table.

It does not take Cleopatra long to wither the ideals.

Dick began to analyze his wife, which is a dangerous thing for a man to do. If a husband wishes to preserve the lover's state of mind, he must continue to think of his wife as a single indivisible creature, not a compound of faults, virtues and charms, lest in some unlucky moment he find that the faults are the biggest ingredient.

Dick, however, was thinking, and the substance of his thoughts was that this little girl, who bore his name, had her seamy side. Up to now, if he noticed a defect, he instantly and chivalrously put it out of his mind, but now certain doubts had knocked so long that by sheer persistence they forced an entrance. Lena, who began by being a sweet, innocent, much-enduring little thing, now that he knew her more and more intimately, was less and less the creature he imagined. To the world in general she was still the big-eyed ingenue, learning to take her place in society. To him alone, it seemed, to him whose love and reverence she ought to have desired, she was becoming indifferent as to the impression she made. Was the other side of her a pose? Dick found himself walking very fast, and he slackened his pace to a respectable gait. If Lena the lovable was a pose, then the inspiration and ideals and joy of his life were frauds. That thought was too appalling. He deliberately stopped thinking about it and turned his thoughts to frauds in city politics, which were easier to endure.

Lena, on the other hand, sitting idly by the window, indulged in a little reflection on her own part. She was revolving with some bitterness her disappointment and disillusionment. She remembered what a glorious gilded creature Dick had appeared to her at one time. Now he was sunk to be a very ordinary young man, with curious and stupid idiosyncrasies, and not nearly so rich and important as many of the people she came in contact with. Might she have done better if she had waited? She too stopped regretting and turned her attention to a novel. She was just beginning to discover the charms of "Gyp." She looked up to see Mr. Early come up the pathway, and a moment later he stood beside her.

"Mrs. Percival," he said, "I have brought you this little vase, the first of its kind that my artists have produced. I thought it so really beautiful that I could not resist laying one before you as a kind of tribute."

"Oh, it is lovely. And am I really the only person in the world who has one?"

"You and Miss Elton." A pang of small jealousy shot through Lena's heart. It was always and everywhere Miss Elton. "I sent her another, but of slightly different shape. I am, as you know, a worshiper of beauty, but all these creations of man's hands are but parodies, are they not, Mrs. Percival, on absolute beauty? They are like ourselves, the creatures of a day. Nature herself, in sea and air and woodland, produces exquisite loveliness, and yet even her achievements are dwarfed when one stands face to face with one of creation's masterpieces—a woman."

And Mr. Early made a ponderous bow as he presented his work of art. Lena was so impressed by this compliment that she wrote it out while it was fresh in her memory, and when Dick came home, she read it to him. He gave a great bellowing laugh that grated harshly on Lena's nerves; and then at sight of her reproachful eyes, he drew himself together and gave her a friendly pat on the shoulder, affectionate, to be sure, but quite different from Mr. Early's chivalrous manner, and said:

"Thinks you better than his old straight-legged tables, does he? Well, I should say so! Serves him right for being an old bachelor, and having nothing but furniture and Ram Juna to illuminate existence. I should expect that combination to drive a man either to drink or to blank verse."

"I don't think it is nice of you to swear, Dick," Lena answered severely, but on the verge of tears.

"Swear, sweetheart? Why, what do you mean?"

"Well, it's almost the same thing to talk about 'blank' verse." Dick laughed again and went directly to the library without even noticing the extremely lovely new dress which his wife had put on for his edification.

Dick's limitations were becoming manifest to young Mrs. Percival. He might be a gentleman, but she feared that he would never be more. There was nothing imposing about him. He had lifted her out of sordid want, but he would not raise her to the pinnacle of greatness. The bland flat face of Mr. Early and his commanding slowness of movement impressed her imagination much as a great stone image might its votary. Here was indeed the truly illustrious. She devoured every floating newspaper paragraph that concerned Sebastian; for she was still under the dominion of the idea that greatness in the dailies constituted greatness indeed. She would have been proud to touch the hem of his frock-coat. How much greater her elation when, on public occasions, he singled her out and stalked across the room to utter in loud tones, intended for the ears of half a hundred, some well-rounded compliment. A conquest of Mr. Early would have been, for Lena, the consummation of achievement; but she could not help seeing that his eyes turned more frequently upon Miss Elton than upon Mrs. Percival—upon Miss Elton, of whom she felt constant jealousy and abnormal curiosity.

Jealousy rose to its height when, on a certain afternoon, from her favorite post beside a window, Lena watched a carriage drive up to Mr. Early's door, and Miss Elton dismount and run up the steps. Mrs. Percival leaned forward to make sure of her eyes, and then she sat and eyed the hole where the mouse had disappeared.

Of course she could not know what was going on inside. When Madeline received a note from Mr. Early, asking her to come and see some very wonderful tapestries that he had just hung, it seemed the most natural thing in the world. Sebastian's house was always more like a museum than bachelor's quarters. He was continually turning it inside out for public inspection, so Madeline went in all innocence, expecting to find a dozen or so of her friends sharing the private view. She was embarrassed, but hardly seriously, as Mr. Early came forward to welcome her.

"Am I all alone?" she said with a little laugh.

"Apparently you are. But I dare say some others will drop in on us in a moment," Mr. Early made answer. "Meanwhile I am favored, for your opinion is what I particularly want. These queer old tapestries have been sent to me from France, but whether I keep them or not depends on whether they seem the right thing in the right place. Will you come this way?"

The big hall had a singularly impersonal aspect. Madeline had never before seen it except when thronged with people, and now that they two stood alone in its wide empty space, she was struck with a certain desolation in it.

"Well?" inquired Mr. Early.

"I can't tell at once," said Madeline slowly. "Beauty is a thing that takes time to unfold itself upon one, isn't it? But I think they are beautiful. They are certainly strange and solemn, and they intensify the dignity of this big room; but they make it seem less homelike than ever. They seem to me things to look at rather than to live with. I suppose their appropriateness depends a little on what you want to make of this place. And you do want it only for a public room, do you not, Mr. Early?"

"I am afraid that is all I am capable of," said Sebastian, looking pensively at her. "You see the home feeling is beyond my achievement. It needs the feminine touch to create that ideal atmosphere. That, Miss Madeline, is above art."

"It is so common, are you sure it is not below art?" Madeline smiled.

"I am sure," responded Mr. Early with conviction. "It is a subject on which I have thought much since you came home last year. Never until then did I wholly realize the lack in my home and in my life. If now, in all humbleness, I am consulting your taste, it is because I have sometimes dared to hope that you, my dear lady, would one day give that final grace to this which would make it indeed a home, instead of the mere abiding place that it is now."

Madeline turned upon him sharply.

"Mr. Early," she said, "it isn't wholly courteous in you to take advantage of my being alone with you in your own domain to speak to me in this way."

"I beg your pardon," Sebastian answered. "It was a wholly unpremeditated expression of what has long been an ardent desire. I did not mean to speak, but your own words seemed to break down the barriers of my passion. I could wish that you would permit me to put it in the form which my heart prompts; but perhaps you are right. Your fine sense of the proprieties must be my rule of conduct. I shall only trust that I may soon find a time to speak when I shall not offend your delicacy, and when, I pray, I may not offend your heart."

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"Neither now nor at any other time should I advise you to go any further," said Madeline laughingly, for it was hard to take the bombast of Mr. Early very seriously. He made her think now of a sort of pouter pigeon. And Sebastian remained only partly satisfied as to the effect which he wished to produce. He wanted to give her something to think about, and so make way for the more impassioned wooing that he was resolved should follow. He was convinced that to stand alone with him in the midst of his splendors would make a strong impression on the mind of any sensible girl. The great hall was certainly a place to capture the imagination—not only from its stately proportions and the mellow coloring that melted into shadow in the far-off roof, but from the multitude of smaller details, the intricate carvings, gathered abroad or made under Mr. Early's own eye, the few priceless paintings, the great jars whose exquisite decorations blended their richer tones with the deeper shades around. In a wide alcove was gathered a collection of portraits of distinguished men and women, statesmen, artists and literati of this country and of Europe, and each picture was accompanied by an autograph letter to the well-beloved Sebastian Early. It could be no small thing to contemplate the possession of this house of notabilities and of the man who had built it up around himself. This, Mr. Early meant, should be the artistic opening of his campaign. And Miss Elton had laughed.

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There was silence for a long minute, and Madeline, glancing nervously at her host, saw that his face was grave and that his eyes were fixed upon her in a melancholy way. She began to feel uncomfortable.

"I think I must be going now," she said.

"You have not told me whether I am to keep the tapestries," Mr. Early humbly objected.

"Oh, I couldn't possibly decide for you. But they seem to harmonize beautifully with this room."

"I am grateful for your decision. Permit me to see you to your carriage, Miss Madeline."

Lena, watching hungrily from her vantage post, noted Mr. Early's obsequious courtesies, Madeline's flushed face, and drew angry conclusions. Nevertheless, she leaned forward and bowed graciously as Madeline drove past.

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"If she should marry Mr. Early, I shouldn't feel as if I had triumphed a bit in getting Dick away from her," she said to herself, with a bald comprehension of her true state of mind. For Lena made up for her pose toward others by a certain unimaginative frankness in her self-communings.

Then, catching a glimpse of another figure, she exclaimed, "Oh, there comes Miss Huntress!" and immediately settled herself with an air of elegant leisure to receive her former superior. Miss Huntress was a source of continual satisfaction to Lena, the opposite of a skeleton at the feast, a continual reminder of present prosperity as compared with past nonentity. To meet her gave Madame Cecropia the same thrill of satisfaction that it still did to draw her dainty skirts around her and step into her carriage, half hoping that some envious girl was viewing her perfections as she had once eyed those of others. On the other hand, Miss Huntress derived almost equal pleasure out of her acquaintance with Lena, whose littleness she measured, and whose small successes she looked upon with amusement, unflecked by envy. Emily Huntress was a plodding person, with much business on hand and an earnest necessity for earning money, and though her canons were not over fine, still she had her standards and lived up to them. She found Lena useful as a source of social information.

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"You want to know what is going on?" inquired Mrs. Percival. "Well, of course you know it's Lent, and there isn't anything much. But if you will come up to my boudoir, I will look over my engagement book, and perhaps I can help you to a paragraph or two."

The word boudoir was a sweetmeat to Lena's palate, combined, as it was, with the knowledge that her visitor, with a sister, kept house in three rooms.

So they went up stairs, and Lena babbled and preened herself, while Miss Huntress frowned and pondered on the difficulties of making anything readable out of her small kernel of information. The arrival of a cup of tea, Miss Huntress, being a woman as well as a reporter, found mollifying to the hardness of life.

"I see," she said with an acid little laugh, "you have the *Chatterer* up here in your unholy of unholies." Her eyes fell on a small magazine which made a speciality of besmirching the good names of the entire country. "Everybody reads it, and everybody pretends to despise it."

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"It's awfully interesting," said Lena, and she went on with a little giggle, "I think I'll just tuck it away before my husband comes in. He doesn't approve of it, you know. Men don't care for gossip. I think it is perfectly wonderful what an amount of scandal it gets hold of. I don't see how they do it. And they've such a naughty way of writing it up, too."

"Nothing very remarkable. In every town of importance they have some one always on the lookout for a promising piece of mud." Miss Huntress eyed Lena speculatively for a moment. "I'll tell you in confidence," she went on, "and I trust you to keep mum about it, for the sake of the times when I helped you—I write for it here. I don't exactly like it, but you know I can't

afford to despise dollars and cents. It's just plain business, after all. There's a demand for that kind of thing and it falls to my lot to supply it."

"And did you write that awful thing about Mrs. Clarke?" cried Lena, sitting up with big blue eyes, and gazing earnestly at Miss Huntress with awe as an arbiter of reputations.

"Yep," replied that lady with a gulp of tea.

"Gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Percival. "I hope you'll never send them anything about me."

"Then you'd better never do anything indiscreet," Miss Huntress laughed maliciously. "But I don't think you would," she went on speculatively. "You're too clever and too ambitious for that. Do you know, I've rather come to the conclusion that it's only rather simple-hearted people who do those things. Take that Mrs. Clarke, now. Of course her husband was a brute, and when the other man came along she fell so much in love with him that she didn't even think of any one else in the world except their two selves. A woman who was incapable of whole-souled passion would have kept an eye on the world and walked the narrow path of virtue."

"Why, you're defending her!" exclaimed Lena.

"Not in the least," said Miss Huntress grimly. "I helped to make her pay the price."

"Oh, well," Lena said with an air of greatness, "there are some of us who can combine the deepest love with decent behavior you know."

"Of course," answered Miss Huntress.

"Now Miss Elton is just that other kind. I believe she never thinks what people say about her," Lena observed. "Not that she'd do anything out of the way, you understand."

"Certainly not." Miss Huntress began to prick up her professional ears. "She's a particular friend of yours, isn't she?"

"Intimate," said Lena. "You know they used to say that Mr. Percival—but of course that was before he met me, and anyway there was nothing in it."

"I know," said Miss Huntress. "I sent a line to the *Chatterer* once about it."

"Did you really? Well, of course, for form's sake, she has to be as nice as ever to me and Mr. Percival. But she has reconciled herself. It's all Mr. Early now."

"You don't say!" ejaculated Miss Huntress with interest.

"She's regularly throwing herself at his head. Why only this afternoon I saw her do the most unconventional thing."

"What was it?"

"Oh, I dare say she was just getting him to subscribe to some charity or something equally innocent. Still, it was queer. But I know her too well to suspect her of any impropriety. She's really the dearest, sweetest girl, Miss Huntress, and I'm the last person in the world to criticize her."

"But aren't you going to tell me?"

"Well, she came, quite alone, you understand, to Mr. Early's this afternoon, and was closeted there the longest time. I couldn't help wondering what it was all about. What do you suppose?"

"That was funny," meditated Miss Huntress.

"I'm certain there's some perfectly natural explanation, if we only knew it," Lena went on. "But she looked awfully flushed when she came out."

"Thank you," said Miss Huntress. "I must be going now."

"Oh, won't you have another cup of tea? Of course, I'm on very good terms with Miss Elton," said Lena, fingering the tray cloth a little nervously. "I shouldn't like her to think I'd criticized her behavior, even to you."

"You needn't be afraid," rejoined Miss Huntress. "I never let on how I get my information. I'd lose my job if I did. Much obliged to you, Mrs. Percival. Things are so dull during Lent that we're thankful for even a few crumbs. I guess that's your husband's step. It must be getting late."

"Oh, good-by! Dick, you dear boy, how glad I am to see you," cried Lena, fluttering to the door to meet her returning lord. "Miss Huntress, this is my husband. Good-by, again. Don't you remember?" she went on, as Dick followed her back into her room. "She used to be my 'boss' when I was a poor little slavey in the *Star* office, before my best beloved prince came and rescued me from dragons and printers' devils."

"And are you so fond of her that you keep up the acquaintance?"

"Oh, I remember how hard it used to be to get 'matter'; and I don't mind helping her out a bit when she's hard pressed."

"You are a kind-hearted little soul, Lena,"—and her husband stooped and kissed her fondly, doing penance in his heart for his doubts of a day or two ago, thoughts cruel, unjust, unwarranted. Lena had never looked more delectable than now, with her head on one side, pouring his tea. She kissed each lump of sugar as she put it in and laughed at her own conceit; and she brought the cup over to his chair and rubbed her apple blossom of a cheek against his with a little purr.

"I'm afraid you think me very silly, Dick," she laughed. "I do not seem to get a bit wiser or better behaved, do I, for all Mrs. Appleton and Ram Juna, and even your lovely high-bred mother? Dick, do you despise me!"

"Despise! Why I love and love you and love you all over," said Dick.

CHAPTER XVII

GRAPE-SHOT

Mrs. Quincy, in her solitary confinement, unloved and complaining, might be considered a figure either repulsive or pathetic, according to the onlooker's point of view. Fortunately there are always a few big enough at heart to turn towards the world a face of affection rather than of criticism, to whom woe appeals more than vulgarity.

So, once in a while in her busy life, Mrs. Lenox found time to drop in as the bearer of a cheerful word and a friendly look to the ugly little apartment where Mrs. Quincy lived in the third story height of domestic felicity.

On an April afternoon she came, like a dark-eyed Flora, her hands loaded with daffodils that might bring a glow of the beauty of spring even to an inartistic spirit. The front door stood open, and a flat has an unrelenting way of laying bare all the skeletons that find no closet room. Mrs. Lenox surprised a scene of domestic economy in the tiny parlor. The curtains had been taken down for fear they would fade, and a large piece of newspaper lay where the sunlight struck the carpet. In the middle of the room sat Mrs. Quincy, and before her on a kitchen chair stood a little tub of foamy soap-suds. A maid was stationed at hand with a bar of soap and a bottle of ammonia, and the steam of homely cleanliness filled the air.

"Good gracious, I declare!" ejaculated Mrs. Quincy, "if it ain't Mrs. Lenox! Come right in. I'm just washin' out my under-flannels and my stockin's. I can't bear the slovenly ways of servants, and it's only myself as can do 'em to suit myself. There, Sarah, you take the things away, and I'll let you rinse 'em out this once. And mind you do it good. Be sure to use four rinsin's. And soft water, mind. And hand me a towel to wipe off my hands. It's real good of you to come and see a forlorn old woman, that I know can't be much pleasure to you, Mrs. Lenox. There ain't many that takes the trouble. And yet time was when I was considered as good-lookin' as that ungrateful daughter of mine, that I slaved for for years. Put them flowers in water, Sarah. I guess a butter jar's the only thing I got that's big enough to hold them."

Mrs. Lenox sat down, wondering if time and life could ever transform the smooth beauty of Lena's features to this semblance of failure which they so closely resembled. Mrs. Quincy's face was like a grain field over which the storms had swept, changing what was its glory to a horror.

The scarlet-faced Sarah hustled tub and chair and dripping garments kitchen-ward. The visitor took up her task of cheerfulness, and Mrs. Quincy cackled and grumbled to her heart's content.

"Lena'd be 'shamed to death if she knew you'd caught me doin' my wash," she whined. "I hope you won't tell her. She can come down on me pretty hard sometimes, I tell you."

"Oh, I won't tell," Mrs. Lenox laughed. "I only wish you had let me help. I was thinking what fun it must be—with a maid to hold the soap. It took me back to nursery days. I used to love to wash dolls' clothes."

"I don't do it for fun," Mrs. Quincy snapped. "But I ain't provided with a servant that's worth her salt. If anybody's dependent, like I am, on a whipper-snapper son-in-law, that ain't got affection enough for me to spend an hour a week with me—why, I guess I have to pinch and scrape wherever I can. No knowin' when I'll git more. I've worked hard all my life for other folks, Mrs. Lenox. You can see by my hands how I've worked. And what do I get for it? A stranger like you is kinder to me than my own flesh and blood. And I know well enough that if Richard Percival throws me a crust, it's only because he would be ashamed to have folks say his mother-in-law was starving. Oh, I let him know that I see through him whenever he comes near me—which ain't very often. And Lena goes days and days and never comes to see me." Her voice and her garrulity were rising, but here a sob gave pause, and Mrs. Lenox rushed in, repressing an impulse to say a word on the elementary laws of give and take in love.

"Well, I think you are very sensible to do the washing. One must have some occupation to fill the days, mustn't one? And there aren't many things, when one is tied to the house. If to-morrow is warm, I wonder if you would feel up to a little drive in the afternoon?"

"I shouldn't be surprised if I would."

"And do you care for reading? I've brought you a rather clever little story. I see you have all the magazines."

"Yes, Lena sends 'em. She thinks they'll occupy me and save her the trouble of comin' herself. But, good land, I don't care for 'em beyond lookin' at the pictures and the advertisements—except the *Ladies' Home Companion*. That has good recipes in it; only Sarah can't make nothin' that's fit to eat. But I did read that thing in the *Chatterer* about Miss Elton. You've seen it, of

course!"—and she laughed with cheerful malice and licked her lips like a cat.

"About Miss Elton? In the *Chatterer*? I haven't the least idea of what you are talking," said Mrs. Lenox in a dazed way.

"It's over there," returned the lady, with a comprehensive wave of the thumb. "You can read it. Lena said it couldn't be anybody else." Mrs. Lenox rose and took the magazine from the table. She walked over to the window and deliberately turned her back on her hostess. Her hands shook a little as she turned page after page till her eyes fell on this little paragraph.

"In a certain western city which is famous for its flour and lumber interests, there lives a bachelor who has made it still more illustrious in the realms of art and literature. It is a standing insult to feminine humanity that a man both famous and wealthy should remain single, but, so far, all attacks upon the citadel of his heart have proved futile. Rumor now has it that a capitulation is imminent, but the besieging force has been driven to unusual measures to secure it. A college training gives a girl the advantage over her fellows, both in expedients and in determination. Not content with the extraordinary attractions conferred on her by her own beauty, the young lady who is ahead in the race for the gay bachelor's heart has been carrying the war into Egypt. Gossip saith that there are quiet hours spent by these two in the seclusion of the bachelor's stately home, when, doubtless, his masculine heart melteth within him, and the bonds of his servitude are tightened. Still, it is a dangerous game for a supposedly reputable girl to play, isn't it? and a little—well, let us call it unconventional."

Mrs. Lenox shut the magazine and her own teeth.

"It is inconceivable that such stuff should be printed, and that people should buy it," she said. "But you see it is so vague that it might refer to any one at any place, and even if we knew who was meant, it is too insignificant a piece of small malice to receive anything but contempt. And now good-by, Mrs. Quincy. I hope these coming spring days are going to help you to better health."

"Good-by. I always appreciate your visits," whined Mrs. Quincy. "I'm sure, with all you have to do, I don't wonder you don't come oftener. I know there's nothin' to draw you."

Mrs. Lenox went away with a deep breath and a longing for fresh air. She shook her head at the waiting coachman and said, "I am going to walk, Emil."

She moved along in a cloud of conjectures, not that the small paragraph seemed to her very important, but she was a little sickened by the sudden glimpse of petty minds, who, being rich, stay by preference in the slums.

"Mrs. Quincy, like Mrs. Percival, makes me feel that life is not a big thing to be lived for some big reason, but an affair to be scrambled through day by day, grabbing everything you can, and hating those who have grabbed more. What a way to worry through seventy or eighty years!" she groaned to herself.

Almost at her own door she met Ram Juna, who turned with her to make one of his ponderous calls, while she sat and talked with him of emptiness and philosophy, with that vivacious patience that becomes a habit with women of the world; but when the door opened and her husband appeared, accompanied by Dick Percival and Ellery Norris she heaved a distinct sigh of relief.

"We know that the dinner hour is looming on the horizon, and we're not going to stay," said Dick. "But your husband has some civic reform monographs that I thought I would borrow while he was in the lending mood."

"You needn't apologize, Dick," she laughed. "You are more than tolerated in this house."

There came a sharp noise, and Madeline Elton, with pale face and eyes big, stood in the doorway. Every one knew that something had happened, and Mrs. Lenox, who saw the rolled magazine in the nervous hand, guessed its purport in a flash.

"My dear girl!" she cried, running forward, "you are not going to let such a pin-prick hurt you!"

"Oh, Vera," exclaimed the girl, putting her face down on her friend's shoulder, "you know! It does hurt. I can't help it," and she sobbed.

The three men looked on in puzzled helpless masculinity, and the Swami surveyed the scene as the two women clung to each other.

"Vera," said Mr. Lenox, "are we permitted to know what this means?" Mrs. Lenox kept her arm around Madeline's shoulder as she turned.

"It's only an ugly little fling in the *Chatterer*, Frank," she said, "and it sounds as though it might refer to Madeline. It is nothing, but I dare say my dear girl does not enjoy a bit of dirt even on her outer garment. And, Madeline, very likely it is not meant for you."

"Oh, yes, it is," cried the girl. "Some one sent me this marked copy. And I went there once when I thought he had invited a crowd to see some tapestries. There was no one else there. There is just so much truth in it."

"Would you rather that we should not see it?" asked Mr. Lenox.

"I'm afraid every one will see it," said Madeline shamefacedly, as she held out the guilty pages. The three men leaned their heads over the table with a curiosity that would have done credit to women, while Ram Juna still looked on.

"I have already beheld the writing," he said suavely. "Mr. Early gave way to unwonted anger when he saw. The lady must have an enemy."

"That is it," cried Madeline, turning upon him swiftly. "I think I am not so much hurt by the scandal—every one who knows me will believe better of me—but what cuts is that there should be some one who wants to hurt me. I—I've always thought of the world as a friendly place. Who is it that hates me?"

"Bah, it is a very small enemy who seeks small revenge," said the Swami, whose own heart was filled with contempt and irritation. This was not according to his plan. "In India, we do not so revenge."

Mr. Lenox stepped back to the fireplace, from which point a man always surveys the world at an advantage.

"It isn't worth an extra heart-beat, Miss Elton," he said. "Ignore it and your world will promptly forget it."

"But, Mr. Lenox, you do not understand. It is not the question of the truth or falsehood of the story that shakes me. As you say, that is too absurd. But I shall always wonder who is my enemy, and why."

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Norris was looking at her with awakened terror. With the intuition of love, he had read the processes of her self-conquest at the time of Dick's marriage. But here was a new possibility. Could it be that this fair and delicate creature was now to be enwoofed by Sebastian Early, whom at this juncture Ellery characterized to himself as a "fat toad"? He made up his mind that it would not do to trust, as he had been doing, to time to stand his friend. He must also bestir himself.

"I wonder," he said aloud, "I wonder if Miss Huntress knows anything about it. I have a dim idea that some one told me that she wrote things for the *Chatterer*. Our society editor, you know."

"But even if she did dislike me—and I don't know her from Adam—how could she know?" said Madeline, turning on him. "You see I was alone with Mr. Early, and I am sure, for certain reasons," here Ellery was horrified to see a little flush creeping over her face, "that he would not be guilty of any attempt to besmirch me. And no one else knew that I was there—except—" A sudden startled look came over her face and she looked involuntarily at Dick. "Except—" she said, and her voice trailed off.

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"Besides, these small acts are those of women," said the Swami placidly. Dick had caught Madeline's look of astonished comprehension and he turned pale as he saw. Now, with Ram Juna's words, conviction flashed upon him. He remembered Lena's dislike for Madeline, of which he had made light; he remembered the little insignificant woman whom he had met in his wife's boudoir; the fact that he was Mr. Early's nearest neighbor clapped assurance on suspicion, and his muddled mind was capable of only one idea. No one else, least of all, Madeline, must suspect her little meanness.

"Dick, you have an inkling," said Mr. Lenox abruptly, but in all innocence.

"Not in the least," said Dick hurriedly. "I assure you that if I had the slightest reason to suspect any one, I would be the first to speak. I—you know I think everything of you, Madeline." He went toward her in a futile way, with outstretched hand, but Madeline's eyes were down, and apparently she did not see the friendly overture. His face looked pale, strained and old as he stood for a moment before her, and the others surveyed them in silence.

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"As you say," said Dick, in sprightly fashion, "the best thing is to forget the whole incident. Lenox, if you will give me those papers, I must be off."

"Our lines lie parallel," said the Swami. "Will you permit that I walk with you?"

The four who remained stood awkwardly during the departure, and with the closing of the door, Mr. Lenox gave an inarticulate ejaculation.

"Miss Elton," he said, "I think your problem is solved."

"You mean it was Mrs. Percival?"

"You are as sure as I."

"And Dick knew," said Ellery. He blushed as he spoke.

"Oh no, Mr. Norris!" cried Madeline in sharp distress. "That would be unendurable. And besides, he said he didn't."

"Dick lied," Ellery stated calmly.

"I will never believe that Dick would lie."

"He certainly lied," Ellery persisted. "Any man would lie to protect the woman he loves."

"Never!" exploded Mrs. Lenox. "Frank, you would not lie for me!"

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"Assuredly I would," her husband answered quietly, "if you needed lying for."

She looked at him with speechless dismay.

"Therefore," Ellery went on, "it behooves a man to love a woman who demands truth and not untruth as her reasonable service. The responsibility rests with you women. You can not only make men lie, but you can make them believe that there is no such thing as truth in the universe. Isn't it so, Lenox?"

Mr. Lenox smiled and nodded, Jove-like.

"Oh, yes, they pull some strings," he said; "but don't cocker them up too much. Don't make them think we are nothing but clay in their hands."

"You couldn't, because, to our sorrow, we know better," retorted his wife.

"Nevertheless, you've unsettled everything," said Madeline dejectedly.

"But, Miss Elton," Norris put in, "you must not think that I believe that a man is without responsibility for the kind of woman he loves. That is where the first turning up or down comes in. He's no right to give his soul to the thing that is mean or base. He has the right to choose his road, but after he's chosen, he has to travel wherever the road leads. Dick's disintegration began from the moment that he met Miss Quincy. I've known it for a long time."

"Poor little thing!" said Madeline. "She is so small. I hope she will grow to be something like a mate for Dick."

"Do not flatter yourself with wishes," cried Mrs. Lenox. "There's only one soil in which the soul can grow, and that is love. Unless I misread her, there is no room in her for anything but Lena Quincy Percival."

"And yet," objected Ellery, "she is certainly not a person weighted with intellect. I should say she is all impulse and emotion."

"Anomalous but by no means uncommon, Mr. Norris," she rejoined. "All emotion, yet without emotion of the heart. In her little world, self lies at the equator, and every one else is pushed off to the frozen poles."

The others looked at her doubtfully.

"Don't you think I have studied her? She has been a bald revelation to me of things I have only half understood in better-bred women. She's like a weed transplanted from her lean ground to a garden and grown more luxuriant in her weediness. Do you know what I think? I believe that when the last judgment shall strip her of her sweet pink flesh, there will be nothing found inside but a little dry kernel, too hard to bite, and labeled 'self'."

"You are positively vicious, Vera," said her husband gravely.

The tears came to her eyes as she turned to him.

"I really loved Dick, and she has stung him."

"But all this does not explain her hatred for Madeline."

"Do you not understand that even petty people can see how dreary and stupid their lives are when a person like Madeline comes along? So they hate her."

"It's good of you to consider my feelings how they grow, and to try to bolster them up," Madeline smiled. "But I am fearfully tired. I must go home. I hope that my father and mother will never hear of this."

"Why should they?" said Mr. Lenox. "It's only a trifle after all, though, to be true to her nature, Vera must needs philosophize about it. It's only a trifle."

"Except for Dick," Ellery exploded.

"Except for Dick," Mr. Lenox echoed.

"It's a great pity," Mrs. Lenox meditated, "that Dick can't knock her down and then they could start again on a proper basis."

"It is a disadvantage to be a gentleman," laughed her husband.

"Vera," said Madeline impulsively, "you won't let this make any difference between us and Mrs. Percival? If she is a little twisted, poor child, she has had a cruel training; and she needs decent women all the more. I—I really have quite got over my anger with her—and don't let us lose Dick. Dick is like my brother. I mustn't break with him. We must all be good to him."

"I do not know that I feel any large philanthropy," answered Mrs. Lenox, with something between a laugh and a wry face. "But as I have invited them as well as you to spend Easter with us in the country, I suppose the ordinary laws of society will require me to behave myself." The older woman kissed Madeline warmly, and Ellery moved out with her. He had so entirely made up his mind to walk home with her that he quite forgot to ask her permission.

He began to talk to her about himself, for almost the first time in his reticent intimacy, and she forgot her own affairs, as he meant she should, in listening.

Afterward she could not remember his words because parallel with them she was reading her own interpretation. Already in a vague way she understood him, but his little story gave her the crystallized impression.

She had a picture of a lonely childhood, fatherless and motherless and pervaded with a longing for love that early learned to keep silence. That had been the first step in his self-possession. Education had been hard to get, and yet he had got what to the sons of rich men comes easily, and because to him it meant struggle, it had been the more treasured. Knowledge came hard because his mind worked slowly and painfully; therefore his grip was the tighter, and the habits of thought wrought out by exercise were now giving him a facility that cleverer men might envy. He could not know how the simple history gave her an impression of slow irresistible manhood, always, without drifting, moving toward its chosen end.

When they halted at her door, she had a feeling that she could not let him go, just yet.

"You'll come in and dine with us, will you not?" she asked impulsively.

"I wish I might," he answered with that longing tone one falls into when surveying an impossible and alluring temptation. "I simply have to work to-night. I'm already late for my engagement. May I come sometime soon?"

"I wish you would. Father is really very fond of you," she went on, defending her warmth. "He likes young men. He has a sneaking longing for them that no mere girl satisfies. Dick used to be a great deal to him, but—Dick has drifted away. You have not been to see us for a long time."

"Not since the day that Dick's engagement was announced," he answered, looking her boldly in the face. "I couldn't. You made me feel then that you despised me."

"I despised you?" she spoke with bland innocence but rising color.

"Yes."

Madeline hesitated and looked down. She was scarlet.

"I'm not going to pretend to misunderstand you," she said, and turned laughing eyes toward him. "I knew all the time that it was Dick who had done some shabby thing, and you were trying to shield him."

"You knew?"

"Of course I knew."

"But you told me I ought to get a mask," Ellery fumbled.

"I meant when you try to tell lies. You don't do it with the grace and conviction of an accomplished hand. Pooh, I can read you like an open book."

"I am very glad you can," he said deliberately. "I thank God you can, because on every page you will read the truth—that I love you—I love you. I'm wanting you to read it in your own way, but some time I am going to let the passion of it loosen this slow tongue of mine and tell you in my own fashion how much it is."

He turned and strode abruptly away. Madeline went in to the firelight of home.

"Why, you look as bright as though you'd heard good news," exclaimed Mr. Elton, peering over his newspaper in welcome.

"Do I, father?" Madeline stooped to rub her cheek softly against his and laughed to herself. "Why, I believe I have. That shows what a whirligig I am. I went out thinking life was a tragedy, and I come back thinking it—"

"What, little girl?"

"A divine comedy," said Madeline and laughed again. "Just see what a walk in the open air will do for a body."

CHAPTER XVIII

EASTER

Easter came late in April, when, to match man's mood, it should come; for the world was alive with new vitality. The south winds were infusing their wonder-working heats, and the bluebirds flashing their streaks of color through branches that felt the stir of sap, amid buds that strained to burst. There was the smell of growth where bits of "secret greenness" hid behind the dead leaves of last fall.

On Saturday evening Mrs. Lenox welcomed the same circle that had met at her home the November before, and Lena's little heart glowed with the soul-satisfying sense of the difference to her. Then she had been a social waif, received on sufferance. Now she was one of them. She could even afford to have her own opinions. The very memory of past discomforts doubled the present blessedness, and Mr. Lenox looked only half the size that he had six months before. It was a long stride to have taken in half a year, and with reason she congratulated herself on her cleverness. In Mr. Lenox's gravity of manner as he took her in to dinner, she perceived only respect for Mrs. Percival, not knowing that he had in mind the small episode of the *Chatterer*, which his wife and Miss Elton had agreed to ignore.

"What very sensible people we are!" exclaimed Mrs. Lenox as she surveyed her small table party. "We shall spend to-morrow in hunting for anemones instead of looking at our neighbors' spring fineries; we shall catch the first robin at his love song, instead of listening to the cut and dried, much-practised church music; and we shall find rest to our souls. Dick, I am sure you need it. You look worn out. I'm afraid politics is proving a hard mistress."

"I wonder if it is possible to do too much," said Dick, rousing himself, with manifest languor. "It's only the way he does it that plays a man out. Here's Ellery, now, who works like a galley slave and looks as fresh as the proverbial daisy."

"Well, come, you are criticizing yourself even more severely," Mr. Lenox said. "You'll have to learn the secret, Dick, of letting your arms and legs and brain work for you, while your inner man remains at peace. That's the only way an American man can live in these hustling days; and if you don't master it, the young men will come in and carry you out by the time that you are fifty."

"And there are worse things than that," rejoined Dick. "I suppose it is the universal experience that when one gets out of the freedom of extreme youth and settles down to the jog-trot, harnessed life, the way looks rather long and monotonous. A fellow can't help feeling tired to think how tired he'll be before he gets to the end. To-night I feel as old and dry as a mummy. If you touch me, I'll crumble."

"Mrs. Lenox and I have been longer in the game than you, Dick," answered his host whimsically. "We are getting dangerously near the equator; and we do not find ourselves exhausted. On the contrary, I rather think the scenery improves, in some respects, as we go along."

"You are hardly capable of measuring the common fate. You have had the touchstone of success, and the world has opened up before you. But what depress me and impress me are the sodden people whom I meet by the hundred; and I can't help reading my fate in the light of theirs. There are such millions of us, obscure and uncounted except on the census."

"If you will persist in talking serious things," said Ellery, "isn't obscurity, after all, an internal and not an external quality? You've got to believe that you are a creature that is worth while. There is no bitterness in belonging to the myriads if the myriads are themselves dignified by nature."

"But are they?" cried Dick, now rousing himself. "I look at every face I pass on the street. I'm always on the search for some ideal quality; and what do I see? Egotism and greed answer me from all their eyes. The ninety and nine have gone astray."

"Then it belongs to you to be the hundredth who does not go astray; and who gives a satisfactory answer to the same eternal questioning that meets you in the eyes of other men. It's not given to any man to play a neutral part in the world conflict. In all the magnificent interplay of forces, I doubt if there is any force strong enough to keep one standing still."

"Yes, my dear Ellery. And it is just that eternal motion that I am complaining about. It is burdensome to the flesh and wearisome to the imagination to look forward to a future of eternal rushing and striving. I have a multitude of experiences every year, and I straightway forget them; and that deepens the impression that all these little affairs of ours, about which we make such an infernal racket at the time, are matters of very small importance in the march of the centuries. The march of the centuries may be majestic, but the waddle of this little ant of a man is not. It's insignificant."

"That's a dangerous state of mind to be in, Dick," said Lenox.

"And after all, you can't help being a very important thing to yourself," said Madeline. "And it must be of eternal significance to you whether your soul is walking with the centuries or against them."

"My dear Madeline," answered Dick, "when I am with you and such as you who live on a little remote mountain, eternity seems a very important matter; but when I am with most people, next Wednesday, when taxes are due, looms up and shuts out eternity. And you will permit me to think that you women who are sheltered and who sit with the good things of life heaped about you, don't know very much about practical conditions."

"But why isn't my conscience as practical as my clothes?" persisted Madeline. "And why is the fortune made to-day in Montana mines and lost to-morrow in Wall Street any more practical than this same majestic march of the centuries and the great thoughts that circle about it? 'Practical' is such a foolish word, Dick."

"Undoubtedly, to you," said Dick with a little sneer. "But to most of the race to which we have the honor to belong it is the word that makes the dictionary heavy. It is because you do not know its meaning that you women, or perhaps I ought to use the despised term, 'ladies,' become the very beautiful and useless articles that you are—works of art, which may thrill and charm a man for a moment, when he has time to look at them, but which bear little relation to the stress of life which you can not comprehend."

"Dick!" Madeline spoke almost with tears in her eyes. "It is not like you to have a fling at women."

"You see I'm gathering wisdom as I go along."

"Gathering idiocy, you mean," interposed Mr. Lenox. "Dick, you young fool, the ideal woman is the goal toward which the rest of humanity must run; and the sooner you bend all your practical faculties in that direction, and there abase the knee, the better for you."

He nodded down the table toward his wife, and she pursed up her lips and said, "You nice goose! That's the way to keep us sweet-tempered."

"I hope you're not going to turn cynic, Dick," said Ellery. "The rôle does not fit you."

"A cynic," interposed Mrs. Lenox, "always thinks that he has discovered the sourness of the world. In reality all he has found is his own bad digestion. I should hate to think there was anything on my table to cause acute indigestion, Dick."

"Perhaps there is a cog loose in his brain so that his wheels do not work together," added Ellery.

"At any rate, cynicism is self-confessed failure; so don't give way to it," Mr. Lenox concluded.

"Oh, I give up. Spare me," cried Dick.

Mrs. Lenox rose with a little nod, and as Madeline swept past him towards the door, Dick turned for an instant and stopped her laughingly.

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"Forgive me," he said. "I did not mean it. I felt like saying something obnoxious."

"But you always used to want to be nice, Dick," she answered.

"Miss Elton," Mrs. Percival spoke severely, as a matron to a heedless girl, "perhaps the gentlemen would prefer to have their smoke alone. Are you coming to the drawing-room with us?"

Later, much later, Lena, in the privacy of her own room, awaited the coming of her husband who seemed to her to prolong outrageously the game of billiards which made his excuse for sitting up a little longer than herself. She shook out her fluff of hair, and arrayed herself in a bewildering pink dressing-gown from beneath which she toasted some very pink toes before the fire. She knew what arguments told on the masculine intellect. And at last Dick came.

"Sit down over there," she commanded. "No, you shan't come near me, Dick, until I've said my say. I'm really much displeased, and you need not act as though you thought it was a trifling matter."

Dick sat humbly in the spot appointed.

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"Dick, I don't want you to say any more horrid little things about women. You've done it several times lately. The other day you said something to Mr. Early about his 'glorious freedom'; and you made a sneering remark to Mr. Preston about women's small dishonesties."

"Only jokes, I assure you."

"Everybody knows that women are a great deal better than men."

"They must be," said Dick. "Literature is full of statements to that effect."

"And marriage is far more desirable than 'glorious freedom'."

"It is," answered Dick. "So long as there are things to disagree about, marriage will not lose its savor."

"You say that in a perfectly mean way, as though you did not really believe anything nice. But whether you believe it or not, I am going to ask you not to talk so any more," Mrs. Percival went on with dignity, "because it sounds exactly like a criticism of me, and I think you owe it to me to treat me with respect. What must people think of me when you fling in—what do you call them—innuendoes like that around?"

Mr. Percival looked at his wife in silence; then he picked her up, chair and all, and whirled her around in front of a long pier glass.

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"Do you see that?" he demanded.

Lena saw and dimpled.

"Now I propose," Dick went on, "to carry you down stairs, just as you are! I shall then arouse the whole household by my shouts and gather them around you; and when every man jack of them is there, I shall say 'Ladies and gentlemen, is it possible for a man whose wife looks like this to utter any serious accusation against femininity?'"

"Dick, don't be silly," said Lena, pouting with pleasure, and she glanced again at herself in the glass. "I am nice, am I not?"

"Nice!" ejaculated Dick, "Huyler and Maillard and Whitman and Lowney, all rolled into one big candy man, never dreamed of anything so sweet. Did you really think I was disrespectful? Why, little Lena!"

Easter morning dawned, a God-given splendor of blue and spring softness, and the six stood, after breakfast, on the veranda and looked at the day.

"Time and the world are before you. Choose how you will spend the forenoon," said Mrs. Lenox.

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"I should like to drive," Lena promptly replied. "Mr. Lenox was telling me last night about his new pair of horses. I know he is pining to show them off."

She cast one of her most fascinating glances at her unmoved host.

"Just the thing. How shall we divide up?" And Mrs. Lenox looked vaguely around.

"Miss Elton and I," said Norris boldly, "are going to row, just as we used last summer."

Madeline glanced sidewise at him with some astonishment, as he made this radical statement, but although she pondered a moment, she offered no objection. Dick also glanced at him longingly as he said "last summer". Our lives seem made of little bits that have small relation with each other. Things just happen. And yet, when we look back over a long stretch we realize that life is a coherent whole, that it leads somewhere, and Dick's life had led a long way in the past year. So he too became grave but said nothing, as he resigned himself to a back seat beside Mrs. Lenox and watched Lena perched airily beside her host.

"Now I hope that matter will be amicably settled," Mrs. Lenox began, looking with a satisfied air at the two unmarried people who were starting toward the boat-house.

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"What!" Dick exclaimed with a sudden start.

"Are you a bat that you can not see daylight facts?" she cried, turning upon him.

"I dare say I am." And he looked very sober. "Yes, I suppose it is all right. Norris is one of those fellows who always knows what he wants, and just plods along until he gets it."

"I said 'row'," Ellery remarked as he pushed the boat out from shore, "but I meant 'loaf and invite the soul'. The sunlight is too delectable for anything strenuous."

"But inviting the soul is always a solitary experience," objected Madeline.

"Perhaps. But it is delightful to know that there is a sister soul also inviting herself close at hand. I hope yours will accept the invitation. 'At home—the soul of Mr. Ellery Norris, to meet the soul of Miss Madeline Elton'."

A soft flush rose over Madeline's face and she devoted herself to the tiller ropes.

"P.S. Please come," Ellery went on with a laugh. "R.S.V.P."

"Aren't you 'flouting old ends'?" she smiled.

"I hoped I was flouting new beginnings," he answered soberly, and he rowed languidly in a silence which Madeline rushed to fill.

"I've been thinking ever since last night about Dick," she said. "He is so different from the buoyant creature of last summer. And it is only a year."

"Well, perhaps this is a phase." He rested on his oars and looked at her. "Dick is healthy, and joy is his normal state. He ought to be able to recover from his malady."

"Sometimes I think it is permanent."

"I am almost afraid, too. But you see you can not get any bargains in the department store of this world. You have to pay full price for everything. If you want self-indulgence, you have to pay your health; if you want health, you have to pay self-control. You never pay less than the value of what you get, and you are often horribly over-charged for a very inferior article. Now Dick wanted Lena Quincy. He bought a little gratification, and paid—"

"What?"

"Everything he had," answered Norris abruptly. "Do you think I have not watched his courage and ideals wither as if they had been frosted? He is numb. 'Heavy as frost,' Wordsworth said, and that's the weightiest figure he could find. It did not take her a month to begin to change him. In three months she has him well started. Isn't it a pity that the worse one of the two should have the controlling force? But Dick's very volatility that we love has laid him open to this thing."

"I'm glad," said Madeline slowly, "that he has his political interest."

"Yes, he's going into it with a kind of fury."

"Won't that give him a big outlet?"

"He may get a lot of satisfaction and do a really creditable thing."

"Your tone does not sound very hopeful."

"A single interest in life may accomplish more for the world, but I don't believe it is very satisfactory for one's self."

Madeline looked at him inquiringly.

"God gives us of His own creative power," he said reverently, and there came into his very practical face that dreamy look which she had seen there once or twice before. "He supplies us with the raw materials of the universe, gold and beauty and food and desire—and love—and He bids us out of these things to build a man. We can't build a successful man if we use only one ingredient. We get a complete man only when we use them all."

Madeline stared off across the waters, and Ellery watched her over shipped oars. At last he said, "But are you going to think only of Dick, and Dick, and Dick for ever?"

She turned on him a face flushed but utterly frank.

"I know what you are thinking," she said. "But you are mistaken, quite mistaken." And she met his eyes squarely in spite of her heightened color. "At this very moment I was thinking more of you than of him," she added.

"And what of me?"

"I was thinking how I misread you at first. I thought you a kind of grub."

"And now?"

"That you are dogged and persistent; and that therefore you stick to your ideals better than he."

"Do you know how comparatively easy that is, even for a plodder, when his ideals are set up before him in visible form, so that he can not forget them by day or by night? I wonder if you can realize what it means to have a face like yours looking up from every dirty strip of galley-proof, and a voice like yours sounding under the rumble of the big presses. It's something of a possession for an every-day man." A soft glow that might have been a trick of the spring sun spread over Madeline's face. There is no thought more intoxicating to a girl than to feel that she

stands to a man for his ideals. A long sweet silence fell between them, while she mused on this thing, and he watched her in tense anxiety.

"Madeline!" he cried, suddenly leaning forward and catching her hands. "I must tell you! You must know, and I must know!"

With the grasp of his fingers, the first physical touch of love, an electric pang seemed to leap through the girl's body; and in the flash were shown to her new heights and depths in herself, and a thousand dim things in the future. She felt, in the man, the revelation of that mystery by which the body's passion slips into passion of the soul—that soul-love, which by its very nature can never know lassitude nor revulsion. And what was actual in him, grew radiant with possibility in herself.

She looked up to meet his eager face and his eyes like lamps. "No, no!" she cried. "Don't tell me."

"But do you know without telling?"

"I must think."

"But surely you must have read it long ago."

"I only glanced at it. I never looked it in the face."

"Don't examine it too closely now, or I'm afraid you will find it a poor thing," he said whimsically. "Take it on impulse, Madeline."

But she waved him away with her hand, turning her face to one side, and leaned back in her cushions, while Ellery waited, hardly breathing. There was a deep hush on the opal waters under the April morning sky, and no sound but the far-off note of a wood-thrush.

"Madeline!" he cried at last. "Be merciful, and speak to me."

She gathered her self-possession and turned to face him with smiles and dimples, and one swift look full in the face.

"Mr. Norris," she said airily, and then laughed as his face fell at the title, "we are in the middle of a big sheet of water, and I do not want you to upset the boat; we are visible from many miles of shore, and the world and his wife are driving and motoring on this most beautiful of days; but over on our right there is a lovely little beach, and a clump of willows that have forced the season a bit. Perhaps, if we went there, I might listen to what you have to say."

"Oh, Madeline, my Madeline," he said, "I can never tell you because the words are not made that will hold it, and it will take a lifetime to tell it all. But, if you are willing, we will make a beginning over there by the dipping willows." He shot a stormy glance at her as he caught the oars, and she met it bravely. "Please don't trail your fingers in the water," he said. "You are delaying the progress of the boat."

"Heaven forbid delay!" she cried in mock horror, and showered him with the drops from her lifted hand.

The keel grated, and Ellery sprang ashore and held out his arms to help her.

"Madeline," he said, sternly holding her at arm's length, "this spot is so evidently created for a lovers' bower, that I suspect you of having had your eye on it for a long time. How did you come to direct me here?"

"Instinct," she laughed. "That wonderful instinct of woman."

"Shall we stay here for ever and let the world wag?"

"And live on locusts and wild honey?" she asked.

"Yes, if you will be my wild honey. I'm going to begin to devour you right away." And he caught her at last.

"Who gave you permission?" she whispered with cheek close to his.

"Who? Haven't you heard the universe shouting aloud? The sky, and the sun and the lake and the woods. They've been crying 'Mine! Mine! Mine!' for the last ten minutes. You'll never contradict them, sweetheart?"

"Never," said she.

For a long moment they looked into each other's eyes, and she read in his that mastery without tyranny which for some inexplicable reason sets a woman's heart beating with unimagined bliss.

Ten minutes later, or so it seemed, Madeline pulled his watch from his pocket and started in dismay.

"Ellery," she cried, "do you know that we have been sitting here for four hours? What will Mrs. Lenox and all the others think?"

"Who cares what they think? Let them think the truth, if their imaginations can soar to that height."

"We must hurry back."

"Don't you think it is a little brutal to invite a man to leave Heaven and go back to earth?"

"Perhaps we need a dose of the world. Medicine is good for one."

"Not unless he is ill; and I was never well till now."

"Come, Ellery, we really must go," she said with severity.

"Well, there's lunch," he meditated. "I confess that I can view the prospect of luncheon with something like equanimity. There are certain advantages about the world, Madeline."

It was long after the driving party had returned when Miss Elton and Mr. Norris strolled up the path from the boat-house, quite indifferent to the fact of their lateness. Dick on the piazza watched their coming and needed no handwriting on the wall. The girl glowed and Ellery reflected her light.

"It would be a perfect woman who should unite her spirit with Lena's soul-delighting body," Percival said to himself. "And Ellery chooses the spirit, and I, God help me, love and choose the body. But I can not bear to meet them."

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He was turning to slip away when he met his wife face to face, and stopped half in curiosity to see what she would notice and hear what she would say. Lena, too, gazed at the oblivious advancing pair.

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed Mrs. Percival. "I should think she'd feel pretty cheap."

"Why?" asked Dick, startled.

"Coming down to a nobody like that!" Lena retorted in scorn. "But I think she has been going off in her looks lately, and I dare say she knows it, and is glad to get even him."

The billiard room was empty, and Dick went in and shut the door.

CHAPTER XIX

ORIENTAL RUBIES

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As the months drifted into summer, young Mrs. Percival often felt very dull. She had not even the excitement of envy left her for, with the engagement of Miss Elton and Mr. Norris, much of her old enmity for Madeline faded. Ellery looked to her like a fate so inferior to her own that she could afford to drop her jealousy; and since Mr. Early and Dick were now wholly released from thrall, she considered Madeline a creature too inoffensive to be reckoned an enemy. She could even share the tolerant and amused pleasure with which the world surveys a love match. This pair was so evidently and rapturously content that they diffused their own atmosphere. Lena could not understand that variety of love, but its presence was patent to her.

Most of the "real people" as Mrs. Appleton called them, in improvement on their Maker's classification, were leaving town either for the lake or for some more distant breathing place, but she was tied at home, first because Mrs. Percival the elder, whom Dick refused to desert, preferred the wide quiet of her rooms, and second because Dick himself grew daily more absorbed in his political labors.

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Lena went to say good-by for the summer to Mrs. Appleton and was bidden to come up stairs to a disordered little room where that matron superintended a flushed maid busy with packing.

"I am really quite played out with all this turmoil," Mrs. Appleton sighed. "Truly, dear Mrs. Percival, I think you are to be congratulated on staying at home. The game is not worth the candle."

"I think, if Madame is tired, I could finish alone." Marie lifted a face that manifested hope from the bottom of a trunk, but Madame shook her head. It was one of her principles to see to everything herself and so gain the proud consciousness of utter exhaustion in doing her duty.

Lena glanced enviously about the heaped up gowns and lacy lingerie. It made her own stock seem mean.

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"Perhaps it will amuse you to look these over while I am busy," Mrs. Appleton went on good-humoredly, pushing a leather-bound case across the table toward Lena's arm. Mrs. Percival lifted out one little tray after another with growing sullenness. The profusion of jewels gave her no pleasure. She slammed the trays back in place.

"Did Mr. Appleton give you all of these?" she demanded.

"Yes. Isn't he generous? But he says that my type of beauty is one that can stand lavish decoration."

"He's certainly more free than Dick," Lena said with bald envy, reviewing her own small store that a few short months ago had seemed to her like the wealth of Ormus and of Ind.

"My dear," Mrs. Appleton exclaimed with a self-conscious laugh, "you can hardly expect Dick Percival to rival Humphrey."

Mrs. Percival felt bitterly her friend's loftiness of position. It was of course impossible for a woman to feel superior to what she owns and Mrs. Appleton owned more and always would own more than Lena Percival. "Do you know, my love," Mrs. Appleton pursued, "I think your husband is making a great mistake in going in for petty politics. With his pull, and his fair amount of

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capital to start with, he ought to be able to make a fortune. He's just throwing his life away."

"Don't you suppose I know it?" Lena cried tearfully. "I've told him so a hundred times. He's just crazy over these nasty little things. He's willing to sacrifice anything to get the place of ward alderman away from some miserable Swede. Think of me tied in town all summer!"

"I wouldn't stand it," Mrs. Appleton answered absently, her eyes on Marie, stuffing tissue paper in a sleeve. "A woman has such influence on her husband. Take matters in your own hands, my dear."

Lena, rebellious at heart, found her only diversion in occasional week-ends at other people's country houses, or in long flights by evening in Dick's motor. Her husband was self-absorbed and often silent, another person, as she frequently and querulously rubbed into him, from the ardent creature of a few months before.

Sometimes he made attempts to open to her his subjects of thought, but Lena never attempted to understand things that did not interest her, and now that she was safely married, it was too much trouble to make much pretense at it; so she was often alone, and frequently bored.

Even Mr. Early was away most of the time, and the great blank eyes of closed windows blinked down at her from his closed house beyond the dividing hedge that flanked the garden. His place stood on a corner, and on the two sides that fronted the streets, Sebastian had hidden the wonders of his terraces and trimmed trees by high walls, but toward the Percivals he had been less exclusive. Most of the houses in St. Etienne, like their own, had no property dividing line, but lawn melted into lawn with a park-like openness that hinted at communistic kindness. This had its disadvantages in lack of privacy, and hence it was that in spite of quite an extensive demesne, Lena found in her own garden no spot absolutely hidden from curious eyes of passers, except in one thicket of trees and shrubbery over near the Early boundary. Here there was seclusion, and here, therefore, young Mrs. Percival had her hammock and her group of chairs and tables; and here she spent long indolent afternoons in sleepy reading and sleepier dreaming, which was only less agreeable than the social triumphs of which she dreamed. And yet she often found herself weary of nothing, and wished she had some one exactly to her taste to keep her company and talk to her about little things in that "fool's paradise of laziness" where, it is said, Satan is entertainer in chief. Once in a while, on his brief home-stays, Mr. Early illuminated her retreat with his presence.

Toward the middle of the summer, certain business interests called Dick to North Dakota, and then life was duller than ever.

Therefore it was a not wholly unwelcome diversion when, late on an August afternoon, she saw the thick laurels of the hedge near her part a little and the form of Ram Juna stand in the cleft, snowy white from turban to slippers save for the gleaming ruby and the polished bronze face. He looked like the day itself, glowing, sultry, indolent.

"Pardon me, dear lady," he said, "that through the bush I spied you. I was solitary. You are solitary. The heat suits not with the severer thought. The weak body refuses to yield to the commands of mind. I fail to write; and perhaps you fail to read."

"I guess your thinking is harder work than my reading. Won't you come over and sit down?" said Lena cordially.

"Then you, like me, would welcome companionship?"

"Yes. Isn't this a nice shady place?" Lena answered. "The maid is just bringing me some iced drinks, and I dare say they'll taste good to you if you have been trying to write that wonderful book of yours in all this blaze."

The Hindu pushed the hedge still farther asunder and swept with a sigh of content over to a cushioned reclining chair.

"If one's heart were set on the things that fade, what greater satisfaction? Shadow, deep shadow from the heat, cool drafts, the voice of a fair woman."

"You must not count me among the things that fade, though," laughed Lena, as she handed him a tall glass of clinking fragrance. "I shan't like you a bit if you do."

"Everything fades, the rose, the lady, even thought, which is after all but a grub on the tree of truth. All, all fade."

"I wish you wouldn't talk that way," objected Lena. "You make me feel quite creepy."

"Ah," said Ram Juna, "you love the things of to-day. To me the thought that all is transitory is bliss. Is it not so?"

"Yes," said Lena, "I'm sure I like roses and jewels and iced minty stuff to drink. And Ram Juna, I wish you would tell me the really-truly history of your ruby. I've heard so many stories about it." He put up his hand, detached the great jewel from its place and laid it in her small outstretched palm.

"That is a mark of my confiding," he said. "There are few to whom I would give to handle my treasure. It may truly be called a stone of blood. Such angry storms of greed and passion, such murders of father by son and husband by wife link their story to it. And now it rests at last on the head of a man of peace. For how long? For how long?" Lena looked at it with the eyes of fascination as it lay in her open hand.

"It charms you like a serpent?" asked her companion, leaning forward with indolent amusement.

"You are true woman. You love the glitter. Would you like to see others?"

"Have you others?" cried Lena. "Oh—oh, I should like to see them!" He rose, made her a salaam of grace, parted the hedge once more and disappeared only to return bringing in his hands a curious box of carven ivory, which he set on the table between them and proceeded to unlock with a key of quaint device.

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Lena gave a cry of rapture and astonishment as the lid fell back. Ram Juna laid his hand on her arm.

"Silence!" he commanded, "would it be well that the flippant public who pass near at hand on the pavement should know that there are such treasures in this thicket?"

"I did not know that there was so much splendor in the world," whispered Lena in admiration.

"Rubies—all rubies! They were the stones beloved of my ancestors. This dangled once on the neck of a maha-ranee, more beautiful than itself, only, unfortunately, she lost her neck, murdered by a rival queen."

He twisted the string of gems about her arm, bare to the elbow, and Lena gasped with pleasure.

"Let me add this bracelet—a serpent. See of curious carved gold the scales, and the eyes again two wicked rubies to beguile men's souls. Yet it becomes the arm, does it not? Look, at your pleasure, at the rest of the box."

He pushed the case toward her and Lena began to finger its profuse contents with occasional sighs of envious delight and glances at her white flesh enhanced by its ornaments. Ram Juna sat in silence.

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"How do you dare to carry such things around with you?" she asked.

"Not much longer," he answered with a shrug. "To me they are delusions inappropriate. I see that is your thought. Is it not so? What have I to do with necklaces and rings of princesses? I had forgotten that I had them, until a chance thought recalled it. I had long since meant to sell them and give the money to the great cause for which I labor. That is my treasure, is it not? I shall never take them back to India. I must hasten to get rid of them, for I purpose to return there at once."

"Why, are you going away?"

"To-morrow I leave this city. My work here is done. It is the last of work. Hereafter I shall find some solitary spot and end my life in meditations. And the rubies—I might give them away; but perhaps the trifle I should receive for them would help the Brothers in their service. I shall not expect or wish their value."

"Oh, I wish I might buy some of them!"

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"Why not? No lady could wear them with greater dignity. Young, beautiful, beloved, and clothed with jewels. It is the frame for the picture, Madame."

"Oh!" said Lena.

"To you, whom I reverence, they should cost but a trifle."

"How much?" gasped Lena.

"The necklace, now," said Ram Juna, and he leaned over and twisted it about her arm as he seemed to hesitate, "I would give you that for five thousand dollars—and you can see that it is worth—ah, I know not how many times that sum. I do not understand these things."

"But my husband is away, and I have not any thing like that sum. Besides, I could not buy it without asking him, you know. Oh, I should like it!"

"Bah, it is a trifle to a lady in your position. You could in many ways raise so paltry an amount. I can not, unfortunately, give you time to deliberate." He was speaking very rapidly with many gestures, quite unlike his usual calm. "I tell you I return to India without delay. If you would wish those beautiful things you must hasten—to-day. Any person, I think, would lend you such money. Mr. Early—ah, yes—Mr. Early."

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"Mr. Early is away, isn't he?"

Lena was growing confused. She turned the glittering string around and around on her arm, and her heart was big with foolish longing. The necklace seemed the only thing in life worth while. Ram Juna's quick movements and urgent words quite took away her powers of reasoning.

"Mr. Early? Yes. He returned this morning. Shall I tell you a great secret, Madame? A man loves the one for whom he does a favor. Would it not be wise to let Mr. Early do this thing for you? I know he will lend you without question. It will hereafter bind him to you. See. I make the arrangements with him myself. Ladies know nothing of business, and I not much. But I talk with him, he understands, and I make all smooth. Will you? Shall I? Yes or no? Do not lose such a treasure by hesitancy. Your husband shall thank you when he comes again. Yes? See the sunlight comes through the trees and makes the rubies like itself."

"Oh, if Mr. Early would," said Lena. "I don't see why I shouldn't. And if Mr. Percival thinks I can't afford it, the rubies are worth more than I paid for them anyway."

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"You are reasonable. Hold it. I trust you while I go to see Mr. Early, and return. The necklace is yours, beautiful lady."

Ram Juna was awakened from his usual serenity and full of tiger-like restlessness. Again he

plunged through the hedge, and Lena saw the white turban flying toward the house. Even Mr. Early looked around startled as his usually torpid guest burst into the little den.

"Hello!" he said. "What's up?"

"Early, I bring you opportunity, the greatest of gifts. The favor I shall confer, is it less than the favor I have received from you?"

"What do you mean?" asked Sebastian.

"Once you say that you will give much to get the young Percival in your power."

"Yes. What of it?"

"It is done."

A look of real interest began to illuminate Mr. Early's face. "Well?" he said sharply.

"I have rubies—rubies to lure the heart of a woman from her bosom. Madame, the young wife would give her soul—if she but had one. That is too hard. Let her give her note." The Swami laughed gently. "You would lend her five thousand dollars, my friend, to buy rubies from me. That is an empty show. She gives you the note. I give her the necklace that she must have. That is all. There is no need to give me money. I return your hospitality thus."

"Well, suppose I did all this. Dick Percival could easily discharge his wife's debt."

"Not so fast. Not so fast. The young wife is a fool as well as a knave. To the note she shall sign her husband's name. That I will bring to pass. But you know nothing of this. Of course not. You suppose that the signature is genuine. You are unaware that Percival is out of town. And I—if I am guilty—I am with my guilty knowledge in the hut in the mountains of India. Do you not think that while you hold that note young Percival will gladly serve you in any fashion that you may choose, rather than that so foolish a piece of wife's knavery should come abroad?"

"Gee whizz!" exclaimed Mr. Early, gazing at the simple seeker after truth, whose face shone with a radiant smile. "Gee whizz! Ram Juna, but you are a business man! But she won't sign her husband's name."

Ram Juna's smile expanded cheerfully.

"Let that remain to me. You have but to play your part," he said.

Mr. Early thought hard for a moment.

"There is need to haste," said the Swami gently. "She is now in the garden where access is easy. Make the note. I will take it to her to sign. Hasten, my friend."

Mr. Early drew toward him pen and ink.

"It's a little flyer, and there may be something in it," he said. "I don't see that I get into trouble any way. But see here, Swami, you deserve something for your work. I'm not going to see you lose that five thousand. When you bring me this I O U with Dick Percival's signature, I'll give you my check for the amount. Understand?"

"Be that as you will," said the Hindu, and he caught the piece of paper and fled toward the thicket where Lena still played with her toy.

"Have I not told you?" he began suavely. "The necklace, less fair than its owner, is yours. But one moment. Will you first do me a favor?"

He lifted the great white turban from his hot forehead and set it on the table before her.

"A simple bit of the skill of my country," he said. "Will you look fixedly into the great ruby that remains mine? And, as you look, will you yield your mind to me, and let me show you a vision? So—even deeper let your eyes penetrate to the heart of the jewel. Deeper and yet deeper."

He made a swift motion or two before her, and her eyes grew fixed.

"What do you see?"

"Myself," she answered.

"Naturally. What else could you ever see? But you are different. You are a thousand times more beautiful. The world lies at your feet. It is a world of adulation. Do you see this?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Now look away. We must not longer see the beautiful picture. You remember we have business. Mr. Early, your friend, and my friend, will lend you money. But how are you to repay him? You have nothing of your own. It must be your husband who secures you. In the front of the book which you are reading it is written 'Richard Percival'. You will copy this with your utmost care, here on this paper. Ah, for you it is not hard to do this thing. For some it would be hard to persuade them. You make but a poor copy. That is of indifference. I will return this to Mr. Early. You will await me here."

The August afternoon was closing, and the shadows grew strong here where vines knit the trees into close brotherhood. Lena lay back in her chair and clutched her treasure in a kind of stupor, until, in an incredibly short time Ram Juna again appeared, tucking a scrap of yellow paper into some inner pouch as he came. The Buddha smile still played about his lips. He seated himself on the ground and stared unblinkingly at the girl, and she gazed almost as fixedly back, except that once in a while her eyes wandered to the big red stone which still hung in the turban on the table. Ten minutes—fifteen minutes—they sat in silence, as though the Swami enjoyed the

experience, then the bronze man rose and moved slowly toward her.

"Awake!" he whispered. "You must never forget that you wrote your husband's name when you had not the right. Ah, in India, our knaves are not also fools."

There was a sudden sharp noise and a cry in the garden behind the hedge; and the Swami leaped into attention with the swift motionlessness of a wild animal. Lena roused herself heavily and blinked about. There was no Swami to be seen. His turban lay on the table, but he himself had disappeared in a twinkling. She heard a rush of feet and voices raised in excitement and then a sharp command. Even while she listened, confused, a blue-coated starred man appeared at the opening in the hedge and over his shoulder she saw Mr. Early's face, startled out of its decorum into bewildered anxiety.

"Beg pardon, miss," said the officer. "Have you seen anything of that nigger preacher?"

"The Swami?" asked Lena.

The man nodded.

"He was here a moment ago—at least I think he was. I—I'm not sure. And he seems to have gone away. I don't know where he is." She looked vaguely around.

"Left this in his hurry, I guess," said the man, taking possession of the turban. "He must be hiding somewhere near. With your permission, I will search the house, miss," and he moved off without waiting for the said permission.

"Mrs. Percival," said Mr. Early.

"Beg pardon, Mrs. Percival," the man threw back with an added air of respect. "It is an unpleasant duty, ma'am, but you'll not object, I know." He beckoned sharply to two or three others who stood behind Mr. Early, and turned toward the open door.

"What does all this mean, Mr. Early?" Lena gasped.

He tumbled as if exhausted into the same easy chair that Ram Juna had occupied a few moments before.

"I am completely staggered," he exclaimed. "The police seem to think they have reason to suspect my guest of being implicated with a gang of counterfeiters. In fact they say that it is his extraordinary cunning of hand that produced the bills that have been appearing everywhere. And—great heavens!—he used my house as—as—as a fence! My house! Pardon me, my dear Mrs. Percival, but I am horribly upset. They've found dies and all kinds of queer things in the little room that he kept sacred to his meditations. But of course I can't be suspected of knowing. Why, all my servants can bear testimony to the fact that I know nothing about that room."

"Of course, Mr. Early, no one would think of accusing you."

"Still, my house, you know—and my friend. It's horrible!" In fact Mr. Early was shivering as though he had the ague. "It would drive me mad if any one should think—why, Mrs. Percival, think of the scandal of having him with me for months. Of course, if they catch him, I'll make him clear me at once. But, take it how you will, it is awful. The least I can expect is to be laughed at over the whole civilized world for being his dupe. I've always prided myself on my clean skirts. You think I'm raving, Mrs. Percival. I am nearly mad." Mr. Early suddenly leaped up with horror newly reborn in his eyes. "And I had just given him a large check. That is bound to look bad. There is no knowing how it may be misconstrued. Great heavens, what am I to do?"

Lena flushed.

"I'm afraid that check was for me," she said. "Mr. Early, I want to thank you—for—for being so generous to me; and when Dick comes back from North Dakota, he will repay you at once."

Mr. Early caught himself up and remembered that he had a part to play in the present drama.

"When Dick comes back," he said in a stupefied way, "what do you mean by 'when Dick comes back'? Isn't he here now? Why, he must be. It isn't an hour since he signed—"

"Didn't you know he was away?" asked Lena timidly, her heart sinking, for Mr. Early's tone was sharp.

"I certainly thought he signed a note made out to me. Was it another piece of the Swami's clever forgery?"

"He—I—" cried poor Lena in confusion. "Oh, Mr. Early, do you call it forgery?—my own husband's name? Oh, I—oh, Mr. Early, what are you thinking?" At this moment she was the picture of confused innocence.

Mr. Early looked at her and gave a long-drawn breath of astonishment.

"I understand," he said at last, while Lena hung her head. "You wrote Dick's name for him, and he knows nothing about it. Well, let it go at that. It is a matter of no consequence. And, my dear Mrs. Percival, I would suggest that this matter be kept a secret between you and me. We'll never mention the debt again. I'm sure you will accept the rubies as a little gift from one of the most humble of your admirers." He bent forward and kissed her finger-tips in his most gallant manner.

"Oh, Mr. Early, you are so good!" Lena's voice expressed manifest relief. The memory came back to her of what Ram Juna had said about the bond created by favor. It flashed into her mind, "He thinks it is sweet and innocent and womanly in me to do such a thing in ignorance. Dick

would think so, too. How should I know?"

"But suppose Dick shouldn't like to have me take them from you, such a magnificent gift?"

"I would suggest," Mr. Early's manner was regaining some of its self-possession, "that you speak of the necklace—is that it in your hand? a really wonderful thing, with curious settings, carved by hand—as I was saying, I would suggest that you speak of it as a gift from the Swami, who, as is well known, was much impressed by your charms. A present from such a creature, who hardly comes into the category of ordinary men, would create no such remark as might a gift from me. Do you not see? We will let the truth remain a little secret between us two. I have an idea that we shall not be likely to see Ram Juna again. I fancy he is a fellow of greater cunning than any of us dreamed; and if he has a little start of the detectives, I doubt if they have so much as a glimpse of his heels; though, to be sure, he is rather a marked figure, and difficult to disguise. Now don't forget. The Swami, with oriental profuseness, gave you the rubies."

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"You are a dear," gushed Lena. "Oh, I do hope he is gone!" After all, it was a relief that Dick should not know.

"One favor I must ask, my dear Mrs. Percival," Mr. Early went on hesitatingly. "If, by any chance, Dick should ever come to know of this, will you assure him that I supposed his signature to be genuine? I wouldn't have him suspect that I—that I was a party—or at least that I knew that you wrote it for him. For really, little woman, it wasn't strictly honest, you know."

"I'm afraid it wasn't," Lena confessed with charming blushes. "But I didn't think. I don't know much about such things, you know."

"Of course you don't. No nice woman does," said Mr. Early comfortingly. "And now let us forget it."

"Here come the officers," said Lena.

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"It ain't no use," said the captain disgustedly. "He's given us the slip, somehow. And we'd watched the house and made sure we'd nab him."

"What are you going to do?" asked Mr. Early.

"Take his kit, and set guards and send telegraph descriptions of him in all directions. 'Taint likely he can get clean away. He'll be a marked man wherever he goes."

"If there is anything I can do to help you," said Mr. Early grandiloquently, "you can command me, though you may imagine that it is very offensive to me to be mixed up in this kind of affair."

"Well, rather," said the officer dryly. Then, seeing the flush rising on Mr. Early's face, he went on with the patronage of the majesty of the law: "You needn't fear that you'll suffer any personal inconvenience. We've had you under surveillance for a long time—ever since we began to suspect your nigger friend; and we know you are all right." But the assurance seemed to add to Mr. Early's discomfiture. "Looks as if it was going to blow up a storm. A dark night would be a good thing for him and a nuisance to us. But we'll catch him sure."

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They were gone, and Lena lingered a moment, fastening her dearly-bought bauble around her neck and gathering her books, while a maid came scudding from the house to bundle rugs and cushions away in face of the thunder-heads looming in the southwest. A sudden sibilant sound brought Lena to attention.

"Mrs. Percival!" she heard. "Look up."

Among the branches over her head the leaves were drawn so closely together that only a few faint glimmers of white showed, and the brilliant eyes that glared down at her were the most conspicuous things she saw.

"Listen and reply not," he said. "You will bring a dark and large great-coat, and other dark garments that you can find, and leave them here with swiftness and secrecy. I command you. If you do not obey, I will make it the worse for you."

He snarled suddenly, and Lena jumped back as though a tiger had sprung at her throat.

The face disappeared among the leaves, and Lena sped toward the house, hastened by a crash of thunder and a few great drops, that seemed to her frightened imagination like the servants of the savage creature that she had left in the tree-tops. She slipped out again, in spite of wind and rain, obedient to his command, and as she dropped her bundle at the foot of the tree trunk, she whispered,

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"I hope, oh, I hope that you will get away!" But she heard no reply. The storm came down and the night fell, seamed with lightning.

Lena quietly ate her dinner, and listened to the well-bred calm voice of her mother-in-law as she wondered what Dick was doing, and when he would be at home again. But Lena wondered what Ram Juna was doing, and whether she should ever see him again.

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CHAPTER XX

A LIGHT FROM THE EAST GOES OUT

To be in the heart of a great country, fifteen hundred miles from the Atlantic, and two thousand miles from the Pacific, to be forbidden the public highway of the train, and to have one's objective point India,—this is by no means an easy problem, even to the oriental mind. And who could know what was going on in the being that crept away into the storm, strong with the instinct of hiding and of cunning. He must have balanced all things. To go westward, where the great steamers plied toward the Orient, this would seem the natural course; and yet that way lay interminable prairies and empty stretches, and again deserts and piled mountains, without shelter and without food. It is easier to hide among people than amid solitudes. On crowded city streets, we jostle without seeing.

It was no great feat to transform the once Swami of the flowing robes and lofty port into a hulking skulking negro tramp, like the sturdy villains of ancient days, sleeping in woody nooks by day, and pursuing his slow journey under the stars, answering the look of such human beings as he met with suspicion, keeping to the hamlets where police officers were scarce and knowledge of the criminal world scarcer, and where solitary house-wives, whose men were in the field, could be persuaded, half through charity and half through fear, to dole out food. Ah, but it was a weary journey. The world, of whose littleness we boast when we think of steam and electricity, grows very sizable again when a man comes back to the elemental means of progress—his own two legs. As for the smaller world in which he had been living—the world of luxury and of worshiping disciples—he laughed silently to think what a mirage it was and always had been.

Down the Mississippi he crept, sometimes peering from between the great trees that flanked its steep banks, as the red Indians did long ago, to see the boats of the white man go serenely up and down that mighty swirling current, and stopping even in his self-absorption to feel a little of the beauty when the great river spread itself into the shimmering expanse of Lake Pipin, or to remember, at Winona, the picturesque legend that he had heard of the deserted Chippewa maiden who here threw herself from the overhanging rocks into the pitiless rush of waters below, and left only her ghost and her sweet-sounding name to the spot. He halted to inspect the great monolith, a hundred feet in height, of Sugar Loaf.

He had an idea that in some little town to the south he might venture to board a straggling cross-country train to Chicago; and, once in the thick of men again, he believed himself safe. He had always been wary enough to keep on his person a certain sum of money. Such as it was, it might serve his purpose. It also tickled his sense of humor to think that—shabby black wayfarer that he was—he had in his pocket a check for five thousand dollars, that he could not cash, and a handful of rubies that were enough to awaken the suspicions of the least suspicious. But still, day after day and night after night, he plodded patiently on his way down the water course, until at last, at Prairie du Chien, two hundred miles from St. Etienne, he felt that he might comfort his inner man with hot food, and his weary legs with a bed and a pillow. He prowled along the streets of the country town looking for some cheap lodging-house where such as he, a humble, cringing, dog-like fellow, might find shelter. He looked through a dusty window and saw a shaggy-bearded, roughly-dressed man shoveling food with a knife, and he felt that he had found the right place.

The proprietor of the establishment sat at a small table absorbed in the perusal of a week-old Sunday newspaper. He growled out a "Guess so. Sausages; baked beans; coffee," to Ram Juna's polite inquiry. It neither looked nor smelled inviting, but the Hindu submitted to fate and swallowed a hasty and unpalatable meal.

"Can you tell me where I can get a bed for the night?" he asked, turning to his host.

The evident refinement in his voice made that worthy look up from his literary occupation in some startled curiosity.

"They ain't many places where they take niggers," he said with an unpleasant grin. "But I guess you might find a berth at Sally Munn's, if you ain't too particular about morals. She's a merlatter herself; keeps a place 'bout six houses down, first street to the left." The man stared impudently as he spoke, but Ram Juna said, "Thank you," with his usual politeness as he went out. The Hindu noted the impudent stare, but he went away with an indifferent air.

"See here!" said the proprietor to his single other customer, "ain't this picture in the paper the very image of that black feller that just skipped?"

"Say, it's him!"

"We'd ought to look this up. There's a big reward offered."

While Ram Juna slept, lying in all his day clothes, some subtle subconsciousness kept watch, became aware of disturbance, and roused his body to attention. He got up, tiptoed to the open window and looked out at the group of men standing below in the darkness.

"Aw, shut up, Sal," one of them was saying to an angry woman in the doorway. "We ain't goin' to raid ye, though Lord knows you wouldn't have no kick comin' if we did. What we want is that black feller that come to-night. We suspect he's one of a gang of counterfeiters that the St. Etienne police are after; and we ain't goin' to lose the chance of the reward. You fellers keep right under the window, and I'll take you six up stairs with me. He's big and he may show fight. Get your guns ready. Don't shoot to kill. We want to deliver him alive. But you needn't be afraid to use a ball on him."

Ram Juna drew away from the window and smiled his old Buddha smile. With clumsy creaking

precautions they mounted the stair. The moment for the climax came; there was a rush all together, a breaking down of the shaky door. The crew burst into the room—an empty room—and stared puzzled and stupefied at the walls and at each other.

“Well, if that don’t beat all!” ejaculated the sheriff. “Where in — has that fellow disappeared to?”

“They say,” said Josiah Strait, a lank westernized Yankee, “that them Hindu jugglers and lamas, and so forth, has supernatural gifts, and I begin to believe it.”

Something over a month later, Mr. Early burst in on Mr. and Mrs. Percival as they dawdled over the breakfast-table.

“It’s no time to be paying calls, I know,” he apologized, “but I’ve had such a sensation this morning that I had to come over and share it. Yes, there are times when a man wishes that he had a wife to talk to!”

“What is it, Early?” Dick asked indifferently.

Mr. Early was waving a bit of paper about in a way quite hysterical.

“Do you see that?” he cried exultantly. “I never expected to see it again, but I declare it is worth its price. I was going over my bank accounts the first thing this morning and I found it.”

“How do you expect us to know what it is when you’re fanning it about that way?” Dick demanded.

“It’s a check, man, a check for five thousand that I gave Ram Juna the very day of his unceremonious departure.” Lena turned scarlet, and Mr. Early noticed it with fresh glee. “A check I gave Ram Juna,” he repeated. “It’s been cashed, with four indorsements, in New Orleans. Now how did he manage that, tell me. The Swami is one of the great geniuses of the age. Of course I wanted to see the rascals punished, and it makes me hot to think how they used my house and all that, but, by Jove! I’m glad they haven’t Ram Juna. From New Orleans, a seaport, mind you! I am willing to make a good-sized bet that he’s well on his way to his favorite Himalayas by this time, ready to meditate on the syllable ‘Om’ for the rest of his life. Oh, it’s too good! How he must laugh in his sleeve at the rest of the world! But how did he get that check cashed?”

“Well, if I were in your place, I should have it traced back,” said Dick, the practical.

“Of course I shall,” exclaimed Mr. Early. “Of course I shall. I shall put it in the hands of the police at once, for I’m sure of one thing, if it helps to root out any sinners, Swami Ram Juna won’t be among them. He’s gone for good, take my word for it; and as for the other rascals, I hope with all my heart they may suffer.” He nodded jubilantly at Mrs. Percival, and she flushed again.

“It’s a very good joke, certainly,” said Dick, “but rather an expensive one for you, I should say, Early.”

“Oh, I shall get five thousand dollars’ worth of satisfaction out of it,” Mr. Early went on enthusiastically. “And I’m proud of the Swami, proud of him. And the splendid simplicity of him! I was talking yesterday with the detective that ferreted him out. The plunder they found in my little room was perfectly primitive. He had practically no tools to make the cleverest counterfeits in years. A deft hand and a wonderful thumb had the Swami.”

“What are they going to do with the big ruby in his turban?” asked Lena.

“Oh, that is one of the chief things that I came to tell you about. You, my dear Mrs. Percival, have especial reason to be interested in this.” He turned, brimming with information, to Lena, “The captain of police took it to Brand’s—the jeweler, you know—to be appraised. Now isn’t this the crown of the whole story? Brand tells him that it is paste!”

Dick sat back in his chair and laughed with abandon, and laughed again.

“And what about my rubies’?” screamed Lena, springing to her feet.

“I have not the slightest doubt that they are paste, too. Everything he touched was fraud.”

“I’m glad of it! I’m glad of it!” cried Dick, with a new access of mirth. “The old rascal! Giving my wife jewels! Why, Lena, you couldn’t wear his stuff anyway, after all this fracas. It will do to trim a Christmas tree.”

But Lena, with angry face, tapped the floor nervously with her gaudy small slipper, and made no reply to her husband’s hilarity.

Even to her slow-working mind it was evident that she had paid a high price for some worthless bits of glass. This conferring of a favor was indeed a bond.

She wondered what Mr. Early thought of her; what Dick would say if he ever discovered.

CHAPTER XXI

A LIGHT IN THE WEST GOES DOWN

The strenuousness of the fall campaign almost wiped these events from Dick's mind. Day after day he spent in bringing home his points to the man on the street and in the workshop. Much of it was dreary and monotonous work, but he kept doggedly at it. It seemed his whole life, now. And night after night Mr. Preston, Dick and Ellery tried to put fire into some dingy little hall-full of men. To Percival's surprise, Norris developed a plain common-sense variety of eloquence that appealed to his audiences quite as much as did Dick's more fervid eloquence. Ellery invariably spoke straight to some well-known condition. But they hammered and pounded and reasoned and explained; they tried emotion, and logic and everything except bribes to win their ground, until their speeches began to sound automatic to themselves, their voices grew hoarse, and they moved like men in a dream.

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"If there were one day more of this," Dick said to Norris, as they tramped home late on the night before election, and felt a certain restfulness in the November starlight, "I should send down a wheezing nasal phonograph to grind out my speech. I am played out. Everything I say sounds like tommy-rot."

"It does grow hollow. The worst of it is it robs me of my evenings with Madeline."

"Um!" said Dick. "When are you to be married?"

"About Christmas. The death of Golden, poor fellow, shoves me up a peg on the editorial staff, and justifies me in facing matrimony. Mr. Elton is good enough to give us a little home. They are a family to hang to, Dick. I feel as though I had 'belongings' for the first time since I lost my own father and mother. Madeline and I shall make rather a small beginning, but, as you know, she has not set her heart on luxuries."

"No," said Dick slowly. "You are a lucky fellow, Ellery. You're going to get away ahead of me in the long run. Preston said yesterday that the honors of this campaign were yours. He has been a fine figure-head, and I have hollered loud, but you've hollered deepest, and the public knows it. I guess that's the real reason that you've been shoved ahead on the staff. Here's your boarding-house. Good night, old fellow. To-morrow night our labors will be over."

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"I hope yours will have just begun, Mr. Alderman," Norris retorted.

The polls closed in uncertainty and for three days speculation filled the papers, and election bets remained unpaid. Then the decks cleared. Mr. Preston was elected mayor by a narrow plurality; and out of the eighteen aldermen, the reform element had carried seven, Dick Percival among them, to victory. The Municipal Club counted its gains and was jubilant, for this meant that, if the city council passed any objectionable measure, their iniquity could be vetoed by the mayor, and the bad men of the city fathers lacked one of the two-thirds majority which they would need to carry their legislation over the executive's veto.

Dick took Lena and went away for a fortnight's rest, but came back looking old and dissatisfied.

It was understood that the first battle in the new council would be over the lighting franchise, which was about to expire and which the company in power wished to renew. There had been some talk of an attempt to force it through before the old council went out of power, but even Billy Barry's henchmen refused to commit themselves to so unpopular a measure on the very eve of election; for St. Etienne had been paying a notoriously high price for notably bad lighting, and the citizen, usually a meek animal, had been stirred to a realization of his injuries by wholesale exposition of the truth.

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But now there were new councils of war, and Billy swore more intricate oaths than he had ever been known to produce in days of yore. He was still in possession of his aldermanic seat, but a little uncertain whether it was a throne or a stool of repentance. Still Billy talked loudly of the things he meant to do; and, as usual in his troubles, went to consult the delphic Mr. Murdock; and Mr. Murdock went to see Mr. Early; and Mr. Early, after very much demur, went to see Mr. Percival. Sebastian did not like to mix himself publicly in politics, and the reformers were his friends.

Still, one evening just before the franchise was introduced, Mr. Early did drop in on Dick in a friendly sort of way. Percival took him to his own sanctum, and settled down with him to the friendly communion of cigars.

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Mr. Early hesitated and was manifestly ill at ease, which gave Dick a pleasurable amusement while he waited to hear the discomfort unfolded.

At last Sebastian said: "Dick, you know I am a man of art rather than of politics, and of course I am in entire sympathy with the idea of clean government; but I want to talk to you about this lighting business."

"Well?" said Dick, as he took out his cigar.

"It's a matter of some importance to one or two of my friends, and I may say, to myself, that the old contract should be renewed," said Mr. Early, gaining confidence. "I want to ask you to look at it in a reasonable light. I suppose you fellows had to be a little outrageously virtuous to make your campaign; but now it's time to drop that and get down to business."

Dick resumed his cigar with an air of settling the question.

"Mr. Early," he said, "I do not think it necessary for us even to discuss this matter. This was one of the main issues in the campaign. Some of us were elected on purpose that we might rid the city of this kind of thing; and we propose to carry out our pledges. There is nothing more to be

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said."

"There are personal considerations to every question, Percival," answered Mr. Early, shading his face with his hand, and watching Dick's expression with artistic appreciation of the changes that he felt sure he should see.

"Not for me," said Dick. "Thank Heaven my hands are clean, and I can do whatever I believe to be right."

"Yes, for you," answered Mr. Early suavely, and then he broke into a suppressed laugh. "Why, you young idiot, if you care to be told, your feet are limed, and the sooner you recognize the fact the better."

"What do you mean?" cried Dick with fierce resentment.

"Oh, sit down, my boy," said Mr. Early, still amiable. "There's no use in rampaging. I just want to tell you a little story and show you a little piece of paper."

Dick sat down and glared at his guest.

"Your wife—" Dick started up with something like a groan. "Yes, your wife, Percival. You see a man does not always stand alone. Your wife has a necklace of worthless rubies, which she has told you was a present from our dear departed Swami. If people only knew about it, there might be a certain amount of scandal about a young woman's receiving a supposedly valuable gift from a swindler who was also a social idol. Don't go off your head, Dick. You've got to listen to me. As a matter of fact, she lied to you when she told you he gave them to her. She bought them; and she had not the money to pay for them. I suppose it was at his suggestion that she borrowed the sum from me. That would have been all right, except that she gave me a note signed by Richard Percival, and she quite omitted to tell me that her husband was away at the time. I found that out by chance afterward, after I had supplied her demand. Would you like to see the forgery, Dick? It's an ugly word, but we might just as well be plain with each other."

Dick's tongue had grown dry and speechless, so that he seemed to have no power to check this recital, and now all he could do was to reach out an eager hand.

"Not so fast," said Mr. Early. "It's mine, not yours. And it will take more than the five thousand dollars out of which it swindled me to buy it back. It sounds bad, doesn't it? A forgery, connected with a rascal who was the talk of the country. I should not myself care to pose again as the dupe of a woman and her friendly counterfeiter, but that would be a small matter compared with the hail of scandal that would whirl around the head of that pretty little butterfly, your wife."

"Scandal! My wife!" Dick staggered to his feet.

"That is what we all want to avoid, don't we?" Mr. Early asked with his fat smile.

They looked at each other in silence. Dick had a wild impulse to fling himself on his knees, spiritually speaking, and to beg for mercy; but the expression of Mr. Early's face suggested that all sentiment would fall into cold storage in his breast.

"You've been devoting yourself, with a certain amount of success, to digging out the hidden things in other men's careers," the tormentor went on with a cheerful sneer. "I suppose it has amused you. I know it amuses me, and it would doubtless amuse the public, to fix attention on this little affair of your own. You must remember that you have this disadvantage: you and your kind are thin-skinned. Billy Barry and his kind are pachyderms."

He settled back comfortably in his chair and smiled benevolently at Dick's white face.

"Well?" Dick asked at last hoarsely.

Mr. Early carefully refolded the slip of paper, and tucked it away in his vest pocket, but he spoke with engaging openness.

"It's yours, my dear boy, the day after the lighting franchise passes over the mayor's veto. If they fail to pass it, I shall know that you and Mrs. Percival are willing to stand a little public obloquy for the sake of what you consider right. Very creditable to you, I am sure, and damned uncomfortable for your wife."

Dick still stared at him, and he went on: "I'll leave you to think it over. In fact, I do not know that it is necessary for me to learn your decision except by your action. Sorry to have to take extreme measures, but it's every one for himself, in this world."

He went out, and Dick sank into a chair and stared at his toes and the ashes.

"What's the use?" he said to himself. "She didn't know what she was doing. I can't change it or her."

Winter went on, and Ellery and Madeline were married. Dick squandered himself on their wedding present, and looked like a thunder-cloud as he watched the ceremony. On the day after he returned from his brief honeymoon, Norris started down town to take up the routine of life, irradiated now by love and purpose. The world seemed fresh and fair, and even the face of Billy Barry less unlovely than usual as they met near Newspaper Row.

"Morning," said Mr. Barry. "You look ripping. My congratulations. Sorry you could not come around to the council meeting, last night. You'd have been pleased to see the old franchise waltz through."

"What do you mean?" demanded Norris, stopping short.

"Haven't even read the morning paper? Good land, that's what it means to be a bridegroom!" Barry went on with a chuckle. "Couldn't stop looking at her face behind the coffee-pot!"

Norris restrained an impulse to throttle him and allowed Barry to proceed.

"Why, yes, we passed the old thing. I always said we would. Your friend Percival voted with the combine. He's the real stuff. When he saw how truth and justice lay, he buckled down and did the square thing. Have a cigar? No? Oh yes, it's straight goods I'm givin' you. You needn't look so queer. And say, on the quiet, I'm rather stuck on you reform fellers. All they need is argument. So when you get 'em, you get 'em cheap. Say, it's better than cash, any day."

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Norris ran up the steps and snatched a morning's paper. Yes, it was true. Percival had voted against his friends and had given the victory to the other side. Ellery flung into his office and whirled into his day's work in a kind of daze. There was much to do and no time for outside thought, but when the afternoon was over, instead of rushing back to the little home, as he had expected, Norris hurried into his coat and hastened to find Dick. Mr. Percival was at home; and, without waiting to be announced, Ellery sprang up the stairs to the little sanctum where the two had confabbed on many a day. He plunged in on Dick, pale and unresponsive, and blurted out his question.

"Yes," said Dick, "I voted for it. I became convinced that it was the best thing the city could do. I've been telling the boys so for the past two weeks. I really didn't understand the matter before. Don't get so excited, Norris."

He spoke quietly, but without meeting his friend's eyes, and Ellery's heart sank.

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"I don't know what it means, Dick," he said bitterly, "but it seems to me that, like Lucifer, you've been falling from dawn to dewy eve, and now you are likely to consort with the devils in the pit. Are you the old Dick who used to be my idol?"

"Oh, bosh!" said Dick. "You are making mountains out of mole hills. The franchise is all right."

"It's not all right; and you're not all right," cried Norris, in a frantic grasping after the truth of the matter. "The old relationships are slipping away and something that was as dear to me as myself is going with them."

He turned away and Dick suddenly rose.

"Ellery," he cried hoarsely, and Norris turned to see anguish in Dick's face and outstretched hand, "I—I—can't explain to you," cried Percival; "but, Ellery—" he moved forward, "don't cut the bonds of old friendship, for God's sake! I need you now, as I never did before. If you desert me, I shall lose my grip."

Norris stepped back, and the two took each other's hands and looked steadfastly, eye into eye. And Norris saw something that took on him the hold that death has on us, and made him ready to forgive. Death is the big problem of every mind. We may perhaps master and solve the question when the death is of the body, but when the soul dies out, the problem is too great.

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Ellery sank into a chair with weariness.

"Tell me about it," he said.

Then Dick stiffened again.

"There isn't anything to tell."

"See here," said Norris. "This isn't only a question of the lighting franchise. The city may walk in darkness and be damned for all I care; but I can't bear that you should walk in darkness. Do you realize what it means? You have fought your first public battle on a basis of truth. You make your first public appearance in league with evil. You are killing the hope of your public career before it is fairly in bud."

"I know it," said Dick.

"Percival, you've stirred this city into consciousness. It's been wonderful how you have done it so swiftly, for it is your doing. The decent elements are marching forward into control and it belongs to you to march at their head. The thing has got to go on. If you don't lead it, some one else will."

"I know it."

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"And you are going to give up?" Ellery urged, incredulous.

"I haven't decided. Perhaps I have done with politics."

"And if you abandon your public career, what are you going to do?"

"What do other failures do?"

"Oh, stuff!" exclaimed Norris, and began to pace the room. "Then you did not vote for the franchise because you believed in it. Somebody has a pull on you. I'd never have believed that any man in this wide world would get a pull on Dick Percival."

"Well, somebody has," said Dick shortly. "I wouldn't say so much as that to any mortal but yourself. Now spare me, Ellery, and don't carry it any further. Do you think," he went on bitterly, "that I have not gone over the whole ground and told myself the old truths that never mean anything to you until life rams them home on your consciousness? A man may creep out from under the machinery of state law, and escape from the punishment he deserves; but from the laws under which we really live, there is no escape. It is reap what you sow; hate and you

shall be hated; sin and suffer. And it isn't as though one went out to sow. One sows perforce, every minute, whether he will or not. In some instances the reaping is singularly little fun, Ellery."

"Well, whatever hold this mysterious some one has on you, be a man. Stand up and own yourself and let the consequences go hang."

"I know some men could. You could. That's the advantage of having taken a good many hard blows. You learn to stand up against them," Dick answered slowly. "You know other people's opinion has always been a god to me. I haven't the strength to defy it now."

There was a short silence, then Dick laid his arms across his friend's shoulders, quite in the old friendly way.

"Now may we drop that subject and be good pals again?"

"Not yet," Ellery said sharply. "We won't drop it till I've had one more say. Dick, don't be knocked out by a single blow. You! Why, I thought you had a grip like a bulldog. I can't believe even in this ugly mess. Still less will I believe that you haven't the courage—that you aren't man enough to own your defeat, and then go on as though you hadn't been beaten."

Dick poked at the andirons with his toe. Suddenly he looked up with a flash of his old brilliance and buoyancy.

"Suppose I do!" he exclaimed. "What a fellow you are, Ellery, to stick to me this way! But don't underestimate my difficulty. I'm not an absolute coward, but I've been beaten not only once, but on both flanks and in the middle. Everything in life seemed to be giving me a kick. I was at the bottom when you came in, but if you believe in me, perhaps I'll begin to believe in myself again. You've always been telling me how much I did for you. You've done more for me to-night than I ever dreamed of doing for you."

Ellery's face cleared. They stood with clasped hands, and there seemed no need of further explanations or assurances. Norris drew a long breath of relief.

"So we are friends still?" asked Dick.

"Till the Judgment Day and beyond."

"Now good-by," said Dick, as though anxious to get rid of him, "till to-morrow."

"Till to-morrow."

A moment later a radiant vision stood in the doorway making a pouting face.

"Dick," said Lena.

Dick started and stiffened himself as though to give battle, his hands rested on the chair-back in front of him, but an instant's survey of his wife's rose-leaf face, her well-groomed masses of hair, her dainty evening gown, seemed to inspire another attitude. He threw his arms passionately around her.

"Oh, Lena," he cried, "love me! You must love me—you have cost me so dear!"

"Nonsense!" Lena gave him a sharp push and spoke resentfully. "I'm not half so extravagant as most of the women we know."

Dick drew away and became rigid again.

"Extravagant!" he exclaimed as though to himself. "You have cost me my self-respect, a big part of my future and the cream of my best friendship. What higher price could a man pay for the thing he loves?"

"I do think, Dick," said Lena severely, "that you can talk the silliest nonsense of any person I ever heard. What on earth is the meaning of all this? No—no—" as she saw that he was getting ready to reply. "I have not time to hear. I thought that tiresome Mr. Norris would never go. What can you see in him?—Have you forgotten that we are going to the Country Club for dinner? It's long past time for you to dress."

"Imagine it! I had forgotten that dinner!" Dick answered bitterly. For a moment he turned away as though, he would not see her while he readjusted something in himself. He felt like a different man and looked to her indefinably strange when he faced her again quietly. To himself he was saying, "What would Ellery do?" and on his answer to his own question he was readjusting his whole life.

"We will not go out this evening, Lena," he said. "We've come to a crisis in our affairs more important than a club dinner."

"What, have you been losing money?" cried Lena, startled and resentful.

Dick looked at her with a very unpleasant smile.

"No," he answered. "I wonder what you would say if I told you that I was ruined?"

Lena gasped with horror. For the moment she could not speak. A gulf of poverty—no one knew better than she what that meant—yawned before her. A blind fury against Dick, if he should have plunged her into this, possessed her; and Dick watched her and read her as he had never done before.

"Will you sit down?" he asked courteously. "I want to talk with you—just by our two selves. I haven't lost any money, Lena. Let me relieve your mind of its worst apprehension." Her face

smoothed, but she seated herself quietly, puzzled and foreboding. Dick was so singularly inaccessible.

"I've lost no money," he repeated, "but I've come desperately near ruin for all that. Lena, a moment ago I made a real appeal to your love. You answered me by a shrug and a push for fear that I might muss that very pretty and exceedingly becoming gown. It was a kind of illustration of all our married life."

Lena still stared at him dumbly, vague with uncomprehending fear. This didn't seem like the easy-going husband she knew. She wished he would look at her.

"When we were married," he went on, "I had a dream that a man's wife stood for his ideals, that he might mold his life by her purity and nobleness and love. I've always been saying, in effect, 'Lead on, Mrs. Percival and I will follow where you lead!' You've led me into the depths, Lena, and I'm never going to say that to you any more. You and I have got to remold our relations and start again."

"What has happened?" Lena asked faintly, and feeling very helpless. She seemed suddenly to realize how very big Dick's body was, and how little chance she stood against it. If he was inaccessible in spirit she had no hold over him. She wished he would get angry. That would be something concrete. She would know how to meet it.

"What has happened?" she repeated.

"Only this," Dick said. "I am going to refuse to delude myself any longer; and it is fair to you as it is to me that you should know it. I am going to stop telling myself that you are my ideal woman, when you have shown me, for instance, your unwillingness to make such tender self-sacrifice as a mother must give to a child—that you are true and honest when you are guilty of an underhand thrust like that little squib about Madeline—that—"

"Ah," shrieked Lena, leaping to her feet with the light beginning to come into her eyes. "So that's what's the matter! That girl—"

"No," said Dick evenly, "that is not what cuts most. What hurts through and through, Lena, is the knowledge that you don't even love me enough, in spite of all my wasted passion, to keep from intriguing with another man behind my back for the sake of a few bits of red glass."

"How—did Mr. Early—?" Lena began, but he interrupted her again.

"Did it seem such a simple thing to keep me perpetually blinded? Last night, Lena, I paid your debt to Mr. Early. I sold my vote in the council, along with my self-respect and my honor in the sight of others to get back this shred of paper. Once I might have thought you sinned ignorantly, but I know you better now. Here is that priceless scrap." He drew it from his pocket and threw it into her lap. "Now I've swept away all the mists! There can't be any sweet illusions between you and me, Lena." He drew a sharp breath.

Lena's heart was beating very fast and her eyes were down. She saw shrewdly that there was no need of argument on any of these topics. The less she said about them the better for her. And Dick, with his hands in his pockets, was watching her from the other side of the room. She twisted the piece of paper in her hands. She had always a bald way of telling herself the truth. Now she would face Dick in the same spirit. After all, she was his wife. He couldn't get away from that.

"Well," she said, "I suppose you don't love me any more?" Her voice was like her mother's, acid and selfish.

"Do you love me?" asked Dick.

"No!" said Lena. She saw him writhe and felt glad that she had the power to hurt him, but he answered very gently.

"Then I still have the advantage of you, Lena. I love you, not in the old way I once dreamed of loving—but still I love you. All this that I've said to-night was not spoken in the heat of anger. I've known these facts for a long time, and you have never felt any change in my manner; but gradually I have come to see that there could never be any genuine relations between us—you and me—so long as you thought me just a silly dupe for you to get everything you could from, to be played on as you pleased. We must begin again, a new way. You don't love me, you say. I do love you, sweetheart, not for what I thought you were, but for what you are, because you are my wife, because you need my tenderness and help. But I'm not going to let you lead any longer. We can't even walk side by side as some husbands and wives do." Dick seemed to hear the voices of Ellery and Madeline by their own fireside, and he went on hurriedly. "You needn't look at me that way, Lena, as if you were afraid of me. I shall want you to be comfortable and happy. I shall try to give you the things you want—things—things—things! But I have some purposes in life, and they, not you, are to be my master-spirits."

Dick turned away and stared out of the winter window, stirred by his own words into a strange new understanding of himself—a mere fatuous self-believer, a man who trusted to fate not fight, to fortune not to mastery, who had not made his standards, but let them make themselves. And now it was come to this, that a half-hour in a room with a foolish girl was the turning-point in his life.

He seemed strange to himself, as though he were examining a life from the outside rather than from the inside, and fumbling at its real meaning.

He had done no wrong; but what does the march of events care whether the failure be

intentional or careless? Results follow just the same.

There flashed before his inward eye the face of his long-dead father, white and set with some inward pain of which he did not speak. Dick remembered that as a boy that had seemed to him a pitiful thing. Now he saw it somewhat as the believers once saw the face of the martyr, the visible manifestation of triumph—the success of being true to yourself in spite of all the world.

424

Dick drew a long breath and dropped his boyhood without even a regret. He knew he could accept conditions and limitations and not kick against the pricks, but quietly, as one who is capable of being superior to them. The bitterness, the depression of an hour, two hours, ago faded into trifles, and the thing nearest to his consciousness was that dead father who had had his wound and lived his life in spite of it; nearer, infinitely nearer, than the living wife whom a slight noise brought to his remembrance. He had forgotten her. She belonged now to the elements outside his dearest life.

He turned toward Lena, waiting, silent, uncomprehending,—poor little Lena, a woman who could never be anything more. He felt a wave of strange new pity for her, unlike the pity he had once experienced for her poverty of body, a sorrow, this, for what she was in herself, his wife—poor, poor little child!

Lena sat still, picking at the bit of paper, but she looked up now, moved in spite of herself by the exultant ring in Dick's voice, as he strode over to her and held out both his hands.

425

"And so we begin again—honestly, this time. Perhaps some day you'll come to accept my standards inwardly as well as outwardly. Perhaps you'll even come to love me, some day, little wife."

Lena took his hands submissively. Her small tyranny, her stock of little ambitions had slipped from her and she shivered as though she was stripped and cold; but behind there was a kind of delight in this new Dick, with authoritative eyes into which she stared, wondering still, with trepidation, what he was going to make of her life.

CHAPTER XXII

ANOTHER BEGINNING

426

Norris, as he left Percival's house, had a glimpse of Lena coming down the hall, wonderful in her shimmering evening gown, brave in jewels. She dazzled him, though he despised his eyes for admiring her and told himself that she was tinsel.

He bowed in response to her curt nod, well aware that she thought him too unimportant to merit her courtesy, while she resented her husband's inexplicable regard for him. He went out into a cold winter drizzle and turned his face toward home and Madeline, those new and thrilling possessions. For the moment, however, there was no exhilaration in his heart, rather a depressed questioning whether, after all, everything beautiful was a sham. Was the daily grind a mechanical millwheel? Dick and Dick's marriage, were they but samples of the way life deals with hope? A pang stabbed through him as his own marriage rose and stood beside Dick's in his mind. It meant so much to him; yet only a few months before his friend had been bubbling with an exultation more open-voiced than his own.

427

There are not only great Sloughs of Despond waiting here and there for the pilgrim, but there are in almost every day little gutters of despond that must be jumped if one does not wish cold and soiled feet; so here his healthy mind cried out against morbid thoughts and he reviled himself for companionship the thing he held sacred with the thing he had always felt foredoomed to failure. He told himself that middle-age was not a dead level of hopes grown gray and withered, but rather a heightening of the contrasts between success and failure. A word of Mr. Elton's spoken long ago, flashed back to him: "Don't build your attics before you've finished your cellars." That, after all, was a test. If one could but get a good solid foundation under hope, one might trust it to lift its pinnacle as far toward Heaven as the ethereal upper air. Alas for Dick!

Then, though he still loved his one-time hero, Ellery put Dick from his mind. His feet quickened and his heart began to beat joyously again. He ran up his steps, delighting in the commonplace performance of putting a latch-key into a lock. The cold and drizzle were shut outside, and Madeline waited in the warmth and light of the hall to insist on helping him off with his overcoat, a task so absurdly difficult that when it was finished they laughed and kissed each other in mutual delight at their own foolishness.

428

Then Madeline took his hand and drew him into the living-room, where the light was low and shaded, but blazing logs painted even far-shadowed corners with warmth, and pranked the girl's white dress into glowing pink, while the fire hummed and crackled its own triumph:

"I consumed the deep green forest with all its songs,
And all the songs of the forest now sing aloud in me."

Ellery stood with his arm around his wife's waist and looked about with a quizzical expression

that made her ask,

"What are you thinking?"

"I was remembering."

"And pray what business have you, sir, to live in anything but the present?"

429

"Perhaps I get more from to-day because I don't forget yesterday. When I first came to St. Etienne, sweetheart, Dick took me to his home. You know, with your mere mind, but you can not appreciate, how unrelated my life had been. You can't imagine how hungrily I looked at that restful room and at Dick's mother. I felt as though I would give anything—my soul—to have a home. And now, behold, I have one."

"And you had to pledge your soul to me to get it."

"True. I paid dearly," he said. "But I was wondering how it was that you had managed to put so much atmosphere into so untried a place. It looks to me as impossible as a miracle. Here are some new walls, and new furniture and new curtains and new vases and new pictures. Even the books are mostly new. I always resented new books. They are like green fruit. A book isn't ripe until it begins to be frayed around the edges. It would seem to me a hopeless job to make a home out of all this raw material. Yet this room already reminds me of Mrs. Percival's library, Madeline, and it isn't only because it is a long room with a big fireplace."

"I think it is a good beginning," she answered. "Now all we have to do is to live in it."

430

"You talk as though 'living' were a very easy matter," he remonstrated. "I think it must be the hardest thing in the world, judging by the failures. I know heaps of people who are drifting, or grubbing, or wallowing, or stumbling, or racing, but only a handful that are living. The thought of it made me blue all the way home."

"Dick?" Madeline asked with ready intuition.

"Yes, Dick. He voted with the combine and against the reform element in last night's council meeting; and he did it on some one's compulsion. I can't tell you how it has stirred and disheartened me."

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"That he could not explain."

"Then," said his wife decisively, "it is some of Lena's doings. About anything else—anything—he would have told you, Ellery."

"Very likely, though it is hard to see how Mrs. Percival could be mixed up in affairs like this."

Madeline was moving about restlessly.

431

"Ellery," she said at last, "I feel as though you and I had to be a sort of pair of god-parents to Dick. He is so dear, so lovable, so fine—and so unable to go alone. You, particularly, dearest, are the stanchest thing he has. I know just how he feels about you, for I feel so, too. You are going to push behind him and understand him and back up all his resolves, aren't you, even if he does half disappoint you? You aren't going to let anything alienate you or come between your friendship and his, are you? I know you love him, and I'm sure he needs you."

Ellery smiled down at her questioning eyes and the intoxicating appeal of her confidence in him—Madeline's!

"I rather think I am Dick's friend for all I'm worth," he said slowly, at last. "Even if I were tempted to disloyalty, I should be ashamed to harbor it with your faithfulness standing before me. And I believe this very afternoon was a kind of crisis with him—that he was gathering himself together when I came away."

"And by your help, I dare say," added his wife.

"I hope so. I know but one thing that seems to me more worth while than the purpose of helping Dick Percival to be what it is in him to be."

432

"And what is that other better thing?"

"You arrant fraud! Do you need to ask?" he said, laughing.

"Well, comfort yourself. You are to go on fulfilling your two purposes in life—you and I together."

"I pray we may. I believe we shall," answered her husband earnestly.

"I know we shall, doubting Thomas. I'm one of the women who are strong in unreasoning faith."

They stood silently smiling at each other for a moment.

"Shall we celebrate the beginning of home with pomp and music?" she asked. "There's a little time before dinner. Make yourself comfortable. Push Mrs. Percival up to the fire."

"Mrs. Percival!" Ellery exclaimed, dropping his guilty arm and looking about in a startled manner.

"Oh, I forgot you didn't know. I've been all over the house this afternoon, christening our things with the names of the people that gave them to us. Doesn't it make all the wedding presents

seem very friendly and not at all new? Wouldn't you know, even if you hadn't been told, that this particular chair was Mother Percival—it's so graceful and comforting. Dump yourself into it, Ellery."

She pushed him down laughing.

"Ah, I begin to see that you stole your atmosphere. The things aren't so new after all. They're old acquaintances."

"Of course they are. Isn't it jolly to have 'your loving friends' tucked around in spirit in every nook and corner of the house, without the nuisance of having the good people here in the body to disturb our privacy?"

"I see," he meditated, then went on ungratefully: "After all, I think I'm more taken with the privacy than with the spiritual presences, though they can hardly be considered skeletons at the feast."

"I should think not," exclaimed Madeline indignantly. "I love them each and all—well, with a few exceptions, Ellery. You needn't grin sarcastically. Now there's the piano—such a piano as I have always dreamed of but never hoped to own. If I called it a Steinway Grand, I should know that it was an excellent instrument; but when I call it 'Vera,' it warms and delights my heart a thousand times."

Ellery rose and bowed ceremoniously to the piano.

"Vera, will you and Mrs. Norris favor me with Schubert's *Serenade*, while I sit on Mrs. Percival?" he asked. "I am ragingly hungry, but perhaps the *Serenade* will keep me harmless and quiet for a little."

He sat and listened and looked into the warm deep heart of the friendly fire. Dreams and hopes came back to him, as things once seen through a glass darkly, but now face to face. Without turning, he was conscious of Madeline, across the room, filling life with music.

When a small maid, as new as the books, appeared to announce dinner, he looked up startled.

"Shall we go?" asked Madeline, rising.

"To our own private particular family communion-table," he answered, drawing her arm through his.



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