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THE HOUSE OF TOYS

By

HENRY RUSSELL MILLER

Author of

THE MAN HIGHER UP, HIS RISE TO POWER THE AMBITION OF MARK TRUITT

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY

FRANK SNAPP

[Transcriber's note: Frontispiece missing from book]

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER.

I THE PLANS II THE WITCH III ON THE SANDS IV TO THE RESCUE V GOOD FAIRIES VI SPELLS VII SANCTUARY VIII CERTAIN PLOTS IX A NEW HOUSE X AT THE DOOR XI THE WITCH LAUGHS XII WHICH HOUSE? XIII THE HAPPY ENDING

THE HOUSE OF TOYS

CHAPTER I

THE PLANS

This is not a fairy tale, although you will find some old friends here. There is, for example, a witch, a horrid old creature who tricks the best and wisest of us: Circumstance is one of her many names, and a horde of grisly goblins follow in her train. For crabbed beldame an aunt, who meant well but was rich and used to having her own way, will do fairly well. Good fairies there are, quite a number; you must decide for yourself which one is the best. But the tale has chiefly to do with a youth to whom the witch had made one gift, well knowing that one would not be enough. Together with a girl—a sunflower who did not thrive in the shade, as Jim Blaisdell has said—he undertook to build, among other things, a house of love wherein she should dwell and reign. But when it was built he met another girl, who was—say, an iris. There are white irises, and very beautiful flowers they are. From her—

But that is the story.

He was, then, tall, as well favored as is good for a young man, with straight-gazing though at times rather dreamy gray-green eyes, kinky brown hair and a frank friendly manner that was very engaging. Since his tenth year he had been alone in the world, with a guardian trust company for sole relative. But he tried to make up for that by having many friends. He did not have to try very hard.

Men liked him, which was much to his credit. Those near his own age often made him a confidant in such matters as their ambitions and loves. His elders saw to it that he was asked not only to the things their wives and sisters gave but to week-ends in the family bosom as well.

And women liked him, which was not so much to his credit, since we judge our own sex far more wisely than the other. Old ladies praised his manners and visited his rooms, taking an active interest in his intimate wardrobe. Younger women flirted with him ad libitum and used him unconscionably, sure that he would take no advantage. Girls of sixteen or thereabouts secretly held him in awe and spun romances around him. In return he gave them all a sort of reverence, thinking them superfine creatures who could do no meanness or wrong. He envied his men friends who had mothers or sisters or wives to be served; in the life of a young man alone in the world there are gaps that even pleasant friendships can not fill. He had a dream over which he used to burn much tobacco: of a day when he should not be alone. He awaited impatiently the coming of that splendid day.

Therefore he dabbled recklessly in the tender passion. About twice a year on an average he fell experimentally in love. It made him very sad that after a brief captivity his heart was always set free.

Moreover, there was something about him that made his friends, men as well as women, say to one another, "Some of these days that Davy Quentin is going to do big things." You have known young men like that; as often as not they continue through life a promise unfulfilled.

In David's case the faith survived stubbornly on scanty nourishment. He had been left a little patrimony sufficient to carry him beyond college, where he smoked the usual number of cigarettes, drank a limited quantity of beer and managed to pass his examinations respectably though not even *cum laude*. After that he studied architecture, with more distinction because he had a real enthusiasm for the work, especially the ecclesiastical branch. And it happened that soon after he hung out his shingle he won a prize offered by a magazine for plans for a three-thousand-dollar bungalow. This, when they heard of it, fortified the faith of his friends, who carelessly supposed the prize to have been much bigger than it was and a brilliant career thus to have been safely launched. Oddly enough, however, it never occurred to them to lend a hand at the launching. They took its success for granted and saved their help and their business for young men, such as the energetic but otherwise untalented Dick Holden, of whom less was expected. It is so hard to make friends understand that even a brilliant career needs support at first.

It was not wholly their fault; a very creditable pride kept David from hinting that he was in need of help, which indeed became the fact. The little patrimony had dwindled to a cipher. Clients were few and commissions small. But David, less from design than from habit and taste, maintained the front of prosperity. He had the trick of wearing clothes well, lived in nice rooms, played golf at the country club and was always his jolly, cheerful self.

His good cheer was not a pretense, for he was never made to feel a pinch. This was a misfortune and the blame must be laid to his own engaging qualities. He found that he could borrow as easily as, when in funds, he had lent. Even Jim Blaisdell who, in his cashier's office, was held a skinflint and a keen judge of men, was cordiality itself when David went to him with a note for discount.

"Gladly," he said. "But you'll have to have an indorser, you know."

"I didn't know," laughed David. "You see, I never tried this before. Am I an innocent?"

"It'll be all right, though," Blaisdell answered. "I'll indorse for you."

Something made David hesitate. "It's fair to say I mightn't be able to meet it promptly."

"Then we'll carry you. Your face is collateral enough for me. Beat it now—I'm busy. And come out for dinner to-night, Davy."

Sometimes David would feel a qualm of discomfort as he found himself gradually getting behind and sometimes he would wonder, a little sensitively, at the slowness of recognition. But such moments were brief. Unconsciously he had imbibed his friends' vague confidence in his future. Some day he would win a big commission which, brilliantly executed, would make him forever secure. In the meantime, because he was an honest workman, he gave to his few clients the best he had, a really fine best, worthy of wider notice. And because he grew daily more in love with his art and proposed to be found ready when his great chance came, he put in his spare hours studying hard, making sketches—he had a pretty knack for that and might have become a third-rate painter—of the numberless ideas that floated to him out of tobacco clouds or down from a moonlit sky or across a music-filled room. Sometimes he would tear the sketches to bits. But sometimes, lingering lovingly over one, he would know a deep thrill.

"Why, this," he would exclaim, "this is good. Oh!" hugging himself, "they'll have to come to me yet."

On the strength of this conclusion he would allow himself some special extravagance.

When he was twenty-seven he was making about nine hundred a year, spending it all as it came, and owed more than five hundred dollars.

Then he met Shirley Lord.

It was at a dinner given by the Jim Blaisdells, whose guest she was. Mrs. Jim introduced them.

"Shirley dear, this is our Davy Quentin. As a special favor—to each of you—I'm putting you together to-night. You have just a minute now to get acquainted." And Mrs. Jim fluttered away.

David spent most of that minute looking with a thrill—much the sort he felt when he was pleased with his sketches—into a pair of blue eyes that smiled at him out of the prettiest, sweetest, kindest face he thought he had ever seen. And it was very pretty and sweet and kind just then, as she looked at him with the friendliness he always inspired. Framing the face was a lot of wavy brown hair with golden lights dancing in it, her neck and shoulders were slender but softly rounded, the figure hinted at by the

soft clinging gown was trim and girlish. But those were details that he drank in later.

He heaved a sigh, so patently one of content with his lot that she laughed outright. To laugh well is a gift from the gods.

"You're not a bit as I thought you would be."

"How did you think I should be?" stammered David, trying to grasp the fact that this dainty creature had been thinking of him at all.

"Why, grim and haughty and altogether overwhelming. You know, you're supposed to be rather wonderful."

David felt anxiously for his head.

"Does it expand so easily?"

"I just wanted to be sure it was still there. I can see it would be easy to lose it."

She laughed again.

It is probable that they talked a polite amount with their respective neighbors. But if so, they regarded it as untimely interruption of the real business of the evening. It was amazing the number of things they found to discuss and they discussed them so earnestly and withal, as it seemed to them, so wittily and wisely that they were blissfully unaware of the significant smiles going around the table. When the coffee was served, David surveyed his cup stupidly.

"Does it strike you," he inquired, "that they've hurried this dinner out of all reason?"

"It has been the usual length, I believe."

"Funny—I've a hazy recollection of fish—and of an ice just now—but entrée and salad and the rest are a total blank."

"Very funny!" she agreed.

"But the queerest of all—" He broke off, with a laugh that did not quite reach his eyes.

"Yes?" she queried provocatively, knowing that one of his daring bits was coming.

"The queerest of all," he repeated, "is that you should turn out to be—*you*."

"No queerer than—" Then she broke off, with a laugh that did reach her eyes.

The next afternoon they played golf. It was at the fifth tee that they abandoned the last pretense of formality. She topped her drive wretchedly; the ball rolled a scant ten feet.

"Oh, David!" she cried. "Did you ever see anything so *awful*?"

"Many times," answered David, who was looking at her, not at the ball. "I've often wondered," he mused raptly, "how 'David' would sound, set to music."

He was rewarded by her rippling, musical laugh. "You say the absurdest things—and the nicest."

They pursued her recalcitrant ball until it led them, by many zigzags, to an old elm that had upset more than one good game. But they did not swear at it. They sat down under its generous shade, David lighted a cigarette and they gave themselves to a more agreeable exercise. They pretended to define it.

"I suppose," Shirley broke a brief intimate silence, "people think we're having a violent flirtation. But we're not, are we?"

"Certainly not," said David with emphasis.

"They couldn't understand. We're just naturally meant to be good friends and it didn't take us an age to find that out."

"Yes," said David slowly.

"Tell me about yourself."

He tried to make it interesting but when he came to the point there was really little to tell.

"But that isn't all. You haven't told me why people are so confident of your future."

"I don't know that. Sometimes I wonder whether they've the right to be confident."

"You've been very successful, haven't you?"

He shook his head. "I'm still poor—so poor you'd probably call it indecent—with my way to make. It seems a very slow way, too."

There was a hint of disappointment in the quick glance she turned upon him.

"Have I lost caste?"

"No. I was just wondering— But you're going to be successful, aren't you? *Everybody* can't be mistaken in you. Tell me what you want to do."

So he told her of his love for his work, of his studies and sketches, of the beautiful churches that he hoped he should some day build.

It was early October; which is not unimportant. Before them opened a vista of wooded hills, tinted by the first frosts dull yellows and maroons, here and there a flash of rich crimson. A thin haze lay over the land, violet in the distance, about them an almost imperceptible golden. The voices of other players came softly to them, subdued and lazy as an echo. Fading hillsides, dying leaves, blue horizons—autumn, too, has its wistful charm, as potent as spring to bring young hearts together.

"Everybody can't be mistaken," she repeated. "All those things you will do. I feel it, too. It's something you can't explain. You *know* a man is big, just as you know a woman is good— And you couldn't lose caste with me. I'm poor, too."

He swept her with an incredulous glance that took in the beautiful, soft, hand-knit sweater jacket, the white flannel skirt with its air of having been fashioned by an expensive tailor, the white buckskins and bit of white silk stocking. He knew girls, daughters of rich fathers, who did not wear silk stockings for golfing.

She caught his glance. "Mostly presents," she answered it, "from an aunt who has more money than she knows what to do with. The rest is just splurge. It's quite true about my poverty. Ever since we were left alone Maizie and I have had to work. We could have gone to live with my aunt, but we wanted to be independent, to make our own living. And we've made it, though," laughingly, "we've been pretty hard up sometimes. So you see, I'm not a butterfly but just a working girl on her vacation. Have *I* lost caste?"

Needless question! As she asked it, her chin—her prettiest feature, cleanly molded, curving gently back to the soft throat—went up spiritedly. He caught a picture of a struggle far more cruel than her light words implied. A wave of protest swept over him, of tender protectiveness. He had to fight down an impulse to catch her close, to cry out that thenceforth he would assume her burden. He rejoiced intensely that he had found so rare a spirit, fragile yet brave and equal to all the hard emergencies life had put upon her.

Then he took thought of his income and the brevity of their acquaintance and was abashed.

The Jim Blaisdells met them at the club for a dinner at which David was host. It was a nicely appointed dinner, the best the chef could contrive. Also it was distinctly an extravagance. But David did not care. His spirits ran high, in a gaiety that was infectious. It was a very successful party.

After that came two short hours on the veranda, while a three-quarters moon rose to shower the world with silver, gaiety dwindled and a solemn tender happiness mounted. Then they drove homeward, by a roundabout way, in Jim's car. David and Shirley had the back seat, for the most part in a free intimate silence that was delicious indeed.

Later Mrs. Jim found her guest dreamily braiding her hair for the night.

"Shirley," she began directly, "this is going too fast. David's too nice a boy to be hurt. He's taking your flirtation seriously."

"I'm not flirting with him. At least I don't think I am," Shirley amended slowly.

"I thought you were interested only in rich men?"

"I did think so. But now— It might be fun to be poor—with him—for a while. It wouldn't be for long. You said yourself he'll have a brilliant future."

"I think so. But it *might* be long coming. A professional career is so uncertain at the start. And it's never fun to be poor—unless you're equipped. Married life is more than parties and golf and dinners at the club. Shirley, dear," she concluded pleadingly, "do be sensible."

"Of course, I will be. You forget I know all about poverty from experience." Shirley looked up suddenly, keenly. "Why do you warn me? Is there any reason why you're afraid to entrust me to David Quentin?"

"No-o," said Mrs. Jim.

How could she voice the question in her mind? It was, could she entrust David Quentin to Shirley?

Still later, "Jim," she said to her almost sleeping husband, "I'm worried. I'm afraid David and Shirley will get themselves engaged."

"Won't hurt 'em," grunted Jim.

"But they might get married."

"People do it sometimes. Be good for him. Life's been too easy for Davy."

"I feel responsible. Couldn't you speak to Davy and warn him to go slow?"

"I thought," mumbled Jim, "you were a wise woman," and dropped off to sleep.

At the same late hour David was sitting at the window of his darkened room, smoking pipe after pipe, gazing raptly up at the moon-lit sky. "By George!" he would breathe ecstatically, "By George!" as though he had been seeing something wonderful in ecclesiastical architecture. In fact he was planning that wondrous house of love, none the less entrancing for that many other young lovers had designed it before.

Every day during Shirley's two weeks' visit she and David were together, sometimes, through Mrs. Jim's contrivance, with others and often, by grace of their own ingenuity, alone, drifting carelessly down the most traveled stream of life. If Mrs. Jim's warning had awakened any doubts in Shirley's mind—and it had—the doubts were quickly laid by David's presence. She let herself drift; this in spite of certain very definite and very different plans which she had made for her future. (In her home city was one Sam Hardy, a money-maker, very attractive, very devoted.) People saw it and were charmed; a young woman simply, daringly, unquestioningly yielding to love is a picture from whose wonder neither time nor repetition can subtract. Only to Mrs. Jim did it occur to ponder whether the impulse to surrender sprang from deeps or shallows.

And only Dick Holden, who was then David's chief chum, ventured to hang out a danger signal.

"My son," he said one day when he managed to find David alone, "I'm afraid you're growing susceptible to women."

"Always was. Any great harm in that?"

"Huh! If you'd had sisters," grunted the ungallant Dick, "you wouldn't ask that. You don't know 'em. You think they're nice, fluffy little angels, don't you? Well, they're not. They—they say catty things. And they've claws in their white, soft little paws, and they'd rather scratch than eat. And they don't understand men."

"Whoopee!" said David. "Do it some more."

"Huh! *You* think they're kind and sympathetic, don't you? You think because they look soulfully up at you when you're gabbling about ecclesiastical architecture they're taking it all in. Well, they're not. They're thinking, 'He has nice eyes—too bad he hasn't money!' I know. I've heard 'em talking behind the scenes. They don't understand the *game* of things. They only want a husband for a provider and they soon let him know it. Then he might as well go lie down and die. Take it from me. Few men," Dick concluded sagely, "survive matrimony."

David laughed uproariously at this counsel.

"You blooming old cynic! You poor old he-Cassandra! Where did you get all your wisdom? Just wait until you find some one—"

"Huh! I have found her. Or rather she's found me. I could let her make a fool of me. But I won't. A

long life and my own life for me. I'm wearing a sign, 'Nothing doing!' You'd better get one just like it."

David roared again.

"All right, laugh!" growled Dick. "Rope, tie and brand yourself. And then some of these days when you're one woman's property and you find the other woman is just around the corner waiting— That's another thing, Davy."

But David turned his back on the counselor and fled. What did Dick know about it?

The dream was being realized, the lonely gaps filled. He was to have some one of his own to love and to serve. This time his heart was a captive for life; any one who had been in love a baker's dozen of times could tell that. He expected great things of love. He saw it as something exquisitely fine and beautiful and yet proof against the vandal fingers of familiarity; a joy always, a light for the dark places, a guide and comrade in stressful times; and everlasting as the hills. Just as the poets have always sung of it. Would any man wear a sign, "Nothing doing!" in the face of that?

The last afternoon of Shirley's visit came, clear and crisp, a strong west wind lifting the haze from the tinted hills. They pretended to play golf, but their strokes were perfunctory, absent-minded. They talked little and that in strangely low tones, always soberly. After a while they gave up the pretense, sought a seat on a secluded sunny slope and fell into a long silence.

"Shirley!" he broke it at length.

"Yes, David?"

"I'll hate to see you go back."

"I know. I'll hate to go, too."

"It—hurts me to think of your going back to work."

"Oh, I'm used to it." She smiled. A world of sweet courage was in that smile.

"Shirley—*dear*!"

She raised her eyes to his.

"A poor man—I suppose he's a coward to ask a woman to share— But it wouldn't be for always. You believe that, don't you?"

"I believe that."

"I'd try to make up for the lack of money with other things—worth more than money maybe. Are you willing to be poor with me for a while?"

"Yes, David."

He sat very still. His face went white. A happiness, so intense that it hurt, flooded his being.

"You really—mean that?" he whispered.

Tears of tenderness stood in her eyes. She had the sense of having found a rare treasure, worth any sacrifice. She was a little awed by it and lifted to a plane she had never reached before.

"Of course, I do." She laughed tremulously. "We'll wait six months, to give you a chance to get ready. Then I'll come to you. We'll start very small at first and live on what we have, whatever it is. If it's only seventy-five dollars a month, we'll hold our heads as high as if we had millions. We'll make the fight together. I used to think I never could do that. But now I want to. And then when your success comes it will be partly *mine*."

Her head was lifted in the pretty brave gesture. The glow of a crimson sunset was about her. In her eyes was the glow of the flame he had lighted.

If only the spirit of sunset might abide with us always! . . . .

The witch often turns herself into an old cat and plays with us poor mice before she rends us.

Almost from the beginning of the engagement David's clients increased in number. During the six months which Shirley had set as the term of their waiting his income was almost as big as that of the whole year before; partly because he was taken in by Dick Holden—who had the knack of getting

business—on a commission to which that energetic young cynic felt himself unequal. The fee thus shared was a substantial one.

"Our love," David wrote to Shirley, "was born under a lucky star. I believe we are going to have more than we expected. That makes me very happy—on your account."

Nevertheless, when the six months were at an end, he was not out of debt.

"David, dear," Shirley wrote, when she had been scarce a month gone, "couldn't you manage to come on for a few days? Maizie thinks I'm crazy, and I want her to see you and be convinced that I'm not. And I want to show off my wonderful lover to my friends."

David, nothing loath, went—a night's journey into the West, to a city where hotels mounted high in the air and rates mounted with them. This journey became a monthly event. And when they were together, thought of the exchequer took wings. There were theater parties, at which tired Maizie was a happy though protestant third. There were boxes of candy and flowers, seeing which Shirley would cry, "Oh, you extravagant boy!" in a tone that made David very glad of his extravagance. They loved; therefore they were rich. What had they to do with caution and economy?

"We can be engaged only once," they said. "Let us make it beautiful.
Let us have something to remember."

Money, it seemed, was necessary to a memorable engagement.

Maizie at sight of him opened her heart. Shirley's friends hugged and kissed her and declared her lover to be all she had promised. The rich aunt regarded him with a disfavor she was at some pains to voice.

"Shirley tells me," she informed him, with the arrogant assurance of the very rich, "that you're poor. Then I think you're foolish to get married—to Shirley, at least. *I* wanted her to take Sam Hardy. I hope you understand my checks will stop when she's married."

"But you'll still give her your love, won't you?"

"Of course, but what's that got to do with it?"

"Having that," said David, with the arrogant assurance of young men in love, "Shirley will be content."

The rich aunt stared. "Humph!" she sniffed, "You're not even grown up.
On your own head be it!"

Shirley took some risks in inviting these visits. The picture David had got had her and Maizie living in dingy rooms, marks of hardship and privation thick around them. In fact, he found her a charming hostess in a cozy little apartment, comfortably furnished, with pretty dishes on the table and even a few pictures on the walls. And clearly, to eyes that saw, it was homely faithful Maizie whose arduous but well-paid secretaryship financed this ménage; Maizie who, returning home tired from her long day, got the dinner; Maizie who washed the dishes, that Shirley's hands might not be spoiled, and did the mending when the weekly wash came back. Shirley set the table, sewed on jabots and did yards of tatting. Her "work" consisted of presiding over the reference room of a public library, telling shabby uninteresting young men where to find works on evolution and Assyrian temples and Charlemagne. This position was hers because her rich aunt's husband had political influence and her salary, together with the checks from Aunt Clara—not so big as the latter would have had David suppose but still not to be sneezed at—generally went to buy "extras," little luxuries working girls do not often enjoy.

But David was in love; he saw only the mistress of his heart. And Shirley, who had the habit of contrasting what she had with what she wanted to have, did not see any risk incurred.

"It's been such a grind to-day," she sighed, one afternoon when David went to the library to escort her home. "Fussing half the day with a long-haired Dutchman who wanted to know all about the origin of fire worship. Why should any one want to know about the origin of fire worship?"

David didn't know, but thought it a shame she had to fuss with long-haired Dutchmen.

"It's so deadly dull," she went on in the same plaintive voice. "Oh,
David, you don't know what a rescuer you are, taking me away from this.
I'll be so happy when we're in our own little home and I'll be
dependent again."

David's emotions were too deep for words but he gave her a look more eloquent than speech.

The experts are in accord as to the purblindness of love. No scales fell from his eyes, even when Maizie, on his next to last visit, made an occasion for a serious chat.

"David," she suggested a little timidly, "don't you think you and Shirley had better wait a little longer?"

He laughed at the notion. "Do you think we're not sure of ourselves?"

"Oh, no! I've no doubts there. Just until you're a little better fixed financially."

He shook his head decidedly. "Things are going pretty well with me now.
And I've got to get Shirley out of this awful grind at the library."

Maizie smiled faintly. "It isn't hard. Not so very hard, that is," she amended hastily. "It wouldn't hurt her to stay there a little while longer. You see," picking her words very carefully, "Shirley isn't—she's such a dear we've all petted her a good deal—and maybe spoiled her a little. She hasn't had to give up much that she wanted. People like to do things for her and give her things and save her from things. I think she doesn't quite realize how much has been done for her."

"Do you think that is quite just?" David was very grave. "She is very appreciative of what you've done for her."

Maizie flushed under the reproof. "Oh, yes," she went bravely on, "she's a dear about that. That's one reason why every one likes to do things for her. What I meant was, I don't think she quite realizes how important it has been to her. You see, she has never had to face any real trials. If any came, they would be *very* real trials to her. And I'm not sure just what she—just how she—" Poor Maizie, torn between loyalty to and fear for her Shirley, floundered miserably and fell into an ashamed silence.

"You don't know how brave Shirley is. Sisters are apt to be that way, I suppose." Poor Maizie! She flushed again and hung her head in shame because she had dared to suggest, however gently, a latent flaw in Shirley. "What you forget is, we have something that makes other things of no account. And besides, trials are just what you make them. If you look at them just as an adventure, part of a big splendid fight you're making, they become very simple—you can even get fun out of them. And that's what we're going to do."

Maizie, with a sigh, yielded the point. But, "David," she said earnestly, "promise me one thing, won't you?"

"Of course, Maizie. Anything but the one."

"Then, if anything happens and if you should happen to mislay those spectacles and—by mistake, of course—put on another pair, you won't judge her too harshly, will you? Just say, 'It's all the fault of that homely old Maizie, who didn't teach Shirley to take life so seriously as she ought to have done.' You'll say that—and think it—won't you?"

David laughed at the absurd notion. "That's easy to promise."

They were married in May, on a night when the wind howled and the rain drove fiercely. The rich aunt gave Shirley the wedding, in the big house on the hill, and intimated that therewith the term of her largess had expired. All of Shirley's home friends were there, exuberantly gay and festive, making merry because two lives were to be mated, as though that were a light matter. The Jim Blaisdells and Dick Holden, who was to be best man, were there thinking of David.

In the room reserved for the groom Dick turned from the mirror where he had been complacently regarding his gardenia, and caught a glimpse of David's face.

"I say, old man, what's wrong? Funk? Cheer up. It'll soon be over."

"It isn't that."

Over David it had suddenly come that the mating of lives is not a light matter. Standing at a window, he had caught from the storm a vague presage of perils and pitfalls approaching, through and around which he must be guide for another. That other was very, very dear to him. The thought set him to quaking. It was the first responsibility he had had in all his life.

Then quick upon the thought surged a wave of deep poignant tenderness for her to whom he must be guide.

There was a tap at the door, answered by Dick.

"They're ready. All right, old man?"

"All right," David said. "I'm ready."

A minute later he stood waiting, while the old music rolled from the organ. A slender veiled figure appeared in a doorway. The mist in his eyes cleared away. Very steadily he took her. . . . .

They entered their machine amid a shower of rice and old slippers. He caught her close to him and held her, silent. After a while he felt a sob shake her.

"Why, dearest, crying!"

"Oh, David, be good to me! I'm afraid. A girl gives so much. Be good to me always!"

He drew her closer, if that were possible.

"Of course, Shirley—always. You mustn't be frightened. It's the storm.
In the morning the sun will be shining and things will seem different."

And sure enough, in the morning the sun was shining and things seemed different.

CHAPTER II

THE WITCH

The perils and pitfalls appeared. But they were not seen for what they were. As a guide David left something to be desired.

Very carefully the lovers had planned the disbursement of their income: so much for rent, so much for the household and "extras," so much for David's down-town expenses. A limited amount was set for the furnishing of their home-to-be. With many declarations that love made up for all lacks and with many tiltings of Shirley's pretty chin, they had vowed to adhere rigidly to this budget.

But the choice of the abode of so much love and happiness had been put off until after the brief honeymoon, that Shirley might share the fun of house-hunting. They thought it would be fun.

It was not.

That week, as they inspected an indefinite number of apartments of as many degrees of shabbiness and general undesirableness, Shirley's spirits and chin fell steadily. David's heart, seeing, fell with them.

"Discouraged?" he asked at the end of the last day's hunt.

She nodded wearily. "Landlords are pigs. They want so much for so little. Are you sure there's nothing else we can look at?"

"I'm afraid not. I've gone through the lists thoroughly."

"I wouldn't mind being *shabby*, if it weren't for the neighborhoods."

She was tired. Her lip quivered. His heart misgave him. He tried to be gay.

"Oh, let's forget it for a while. Let's go out to the club and play nine holes and then have a little twosome at dinner out there."

They went. Low spirits rose on the scented May breeze. The dinner was a success. Afterward they met friends, who were regaled with a humorous account of the week's adventures.

The friends, of course, made suggestions. One in particular knew "the very thing you want, and really absurdly cheap." She was enthusiastic in description. Then the rental was named—fifteen dollars a month more than the budget allowed. David made a great show of taking the address and promised to inspect the "find" on the morrow.

"Let's really see it," Shirley suggested, as they rode home on the front seat of a trolley-car.

"We'd better not," said David, clinging desperately to a dwindling remnant of caution.

"Not to take it, of course. Only to remind us that there *are* pretty places in the world—waiting for us later on." She snuggled closer to him.

In the morning, of course, they saw the apartment. And it was almost uncanny, Shirley declared, how exactly it matched what she had had in mind. She proceeded to place in fancy David's chairs and desk and lamps, the dining-room furniture that was to be Maizie's wedding gift and the mahogany bedroom suite the Jim Blaisdells had given them. She went into ecstasies over the china closet, the dainty bathroom, the clean convenient kitchen.

"David, can't you *see* it? With a few small rugs and plain inexpensive curtains and the pictures we have it would be a gem. We'd never feel shabby here. And with the hardwood floors and tiled bath and that kitchen the housework would be so easy." She sighed rapturously.

"We'd better get away. My mouth is beginning to water. I'm sorry, dear." He kissed her to prove it. "But we oughtn't even to consider it."

But at the door she stopped and looked back—a risky business, as Lot's wife once proved. She surveyed the place with a lingering wishful glance.

"I wonder if we couldn't make up the difference in rent by cutting down somewhere else. We could cut the extras in half. And I won't need any new clothes for a whole year—not a single stitch. By that time—" She paused, as it seemed for a reply.

"Do you want it so much, Shirley?"

"Oh, if we only could do it, David!"

David, too, did sums in subtraction and found that, with care, he could cut his expenses down-town.

They took the apartment.

In fact, there came a time when David remembered, with a sickening qualm, that in almost every item they had stepped little or far beyond the limits of their budget. They did it because the disappointment written on Shirley's pretty face when something on which she had set her heart seemed beyond their reach, was more than he could bear.

But the old cat was still playing. It was a "boom year": the beginning, said the wise statesmen and newspapers, of an era of unprecedented prosperity. The city was growing rapidly. Architects' services were in demand. David's business continued good. Among his clients was a gambling contractor who shaved his architects' fees but made up for that by the largeness of his operations. There seemed to be no need of cutting down "extras." They were not cut down.

It was on the whole a cloudless year. There were, to be sure, a few little quarrels, impatient words sharply answered, but there was also the exquisite joy of harmony restored. There were occasions when David found Shirley in tears, both cake or roast and fingers burned; occasions which he made festive by carrying her off to the club for dinner. There were evenings at the theater and concerts, gifts impulsively bought and rewarded with kisses, little household purchases that gave a pleasure out of all proportion to their cost, as it seemed at the time. But there were never any doubts, nor any fears. For all their demands there was money. The handicap of debt under which they had started was even a little diminished. As for rainy days—but why should happy young love take thought of them?

On their first anniversary they gave a dinner in the apartment, twelve covers with flowers and all the wedding silver on display and a caterer's man to serve. Shirley, in a new gown, was at her loveliest, beaming with the happiness of hospitality prettily dispensed. When the last guest was gone, they turned out all the lights but one shaded lamp, she found a seat on his knee, snuggled close to him, and they fell into a long silence.

After a while she stirred. "It's been a wonderful year, hasn't it?"

"You express the sense of the meeting, dear."

"Being poor isn't so bad, after all, is it?"

"Not bad at all, I find." He took up the catechism. "You haven't once regretted that Sam Hardy chap, have you? With all his money—let's see, was it millions or billions?"

"Hush!" She laid a hand over his lips. "Not even in fun. That's almost profane."

There was another silence, broken at length by a contented chuckle from David.

"Am I doing anything specially ridiculous?" she murmured sleepily from his shoulder.

"I was just remembering. A year ago tonight I was frightened almost into a faint. I thought living together might turn out to be *hard*."

"And *we* know that is perfectly absurd."

You must excuse them. If they had been lovers out of a book, they would have talked in dithyrambs or long perfervid paragraphs. Since they were real, they could bear witness to their happiness only by spooning and being a little bit silly. But—it was part of their happiness—they did not know they were silly.

The beginning of the second year was like unto the first. But the witch was biding her time. Toward the end of that year the sky darkened and the winds howled roughly around the house of love. Sometimes the designer of this pretty abode—if he was the designer—bethought him to look to its foundations. But they seemed strong and safe.

In the first place, there was a sudden falling-off of new business. It was so with others than David. Only a temporary slump, said the wise statesmen and newspapers, due to trivial causes and not long to interrupt the era of prosperity. Jim Blaisdell shook his head and advised his friends to prepare for heavy weather. The reception of his counsel made him growl, "Asses!"—a sweeping epithet that included David, who was not so deeply troubled as he should have been. Unfinished commissions kept him reasonably busy, and when they were concluded others would come to meet his needs. They always had; therefore, they always would. David was content with this logic.

In the second place, a baby was coming. And many and elaborate were the preparations for this momentous event. Countless stitches must be taken, a serious number of dollars spent, that the prettiest layette possible might await the coming mite. But Shirley, in one of her soft house dresses, head bent over her dainty stitching or laying out before him for the hundredth time the tiny articles she had collected or her friends donated, made too pretty a picture; he had not the heart to ruffle it with discussions of economy. And when, her time drawing near, she complained of the work in the flat, a maid was installed. He was glad summer was coming; his overcoat was getting shabby and he felt he could not afford a new one.

For despite his optimism David was beginning to take thought of the morrow. And this leads to our tertium.

Sometimes he had moments of restiveness, so vague and fleeting that he could not define them, under what he did not know. There were times when little criticisms of Shirley would pop maliciously into his mind, never worded, hastily banished and always followed by a reaction of shame that he should have become critical even in thought at such a time. To correct this disquieting tendency he took medicine for his liver.

And growing upon him was his joy in his work: not the old boyish enthusiasm at the thought of ultimate recognition, nor yet the later gratification that he was earning money against their needs, but a deep-seated content merely to be in it, an almost personal affection for the sketches which, after a lapse, had once more begun to multiply. Gently overruling Shirley's protests, he had taken to sitting up late of nights after she had retired. Then in the pregnant silence of midnight he would sit before his easel, smoking furiously and occasionally making a light swift stroke, until the clock struck one or two or even three. Many nights would pass thus, and there on the easel would stand a restful little chapel or a noble cathedral, with separate sketches for details such as doors or rood screen or altar, the very presentment of which, if only in black-and-white, filled him with a solemn worshipful glow. He did not hug himself or say that "they" would have to come to him yet, but would pat the sketch lingeringly, thinking, "I'd like to see you *real*."

The next evening he would show the completed sketch to Shirley, who would give it a cursory glance and say:

"It's very pretty. I wish some one would let you build it. It would be a big commission, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," he would answer, with a slight sinking of his heart. For some reason he would tuck the sketch away in the big portfolio and hastily change the subject.

One evening the house shook in the wind. It was after dinner and David was opening a new book he had brought home, a bulky volume bearing the formidable title, *Ecclesiastical Architecture Since the Renaissance*. Shirley found a seat as close as possible to him and began.

"David, I have a confession to make." A smile proclaimed her assurance of absolution.

"Yes," he smiled back.

"I broke a rule. I—had something charged."

"Oh, Shirley, when we—"

"But wait until you see what it is. Then scold me if you can."

She led him into another room where on a bed reposed a hooded wicker basket, lined and covered in silk—blue for a boy—with fine lace trimmings. She awaited his verdict.

"It's very pretty. But— How much was it?"

She named the price.

He whistled. "Wouldn't something cheaper have done as well?"

"David, you ought to be ashamed of yourself." Her indignation was three-fourths in earnest. "*I'd* be ashamed not to get Davy Junior the very best of everything. It's the duty of parents to get their children the very best of everything."

"The best they can afford, yes. But— However, it's here and the only thing to do is to pay for it. I'll send a check in the morning."

He returned to the living-room. Shirley followed. He stood for a long minute by the table, looking down at the new book. Then he restored it to its wrappings.

"What are you doing?"

"I think I'll not keep it, after all."

"What is it?"

"A book I wanted for some cathedral sketches I'm making."

She studied his face intently.

"David Quentin, do you mean to say you begrudge things for Davy Junior, when you can buy expensive books for plans nobody will ever want?"

A retort sprang to his lips—that professional knowledge is always an asset. But the words did not fall. Nor did it seem worth while to tell her that for three weeks he had had his lunches over a dairy counter to save money for the book. Instead he mustered a smile.

"As you see, we're keeping the bassinet and the book goes back."

She saw only the smile. "Why, we almost had a tiff, didn't we. Brrr!" She pretended to shiver. "And you know we mustn't have them, because they'd have a bad effect on Davy Junior."

So that squall passed, and they talked of Davy Junior. And Davy Junior—they were sure it was to be a boy—was already a personage in that household, a hope and a love in which both shared.

But long after Shirley had gone to bed David sat thinking of the episode. One of the little criticisms, quite definite now, lingered: a suspicion that Shirley's words were not always pearls of wisdom, that her attitude was a little too possessive, her demands upon his time and thought and scanty store of money a trifle less than reasonable sometimes. Sternly he crushed the suspicion back.

"It must be that I'm settling down. The novelty's wearing off. And I suppose, having no one but myself to think of for so long, I did get to be pretty selfish. I must be very careful." But somehow the argument did not quite convince. "I wish— Maybe when the baby comes Shirley will take things a little more"—he halted before the word so disloyal—"sensibly." . . .

Davy Junior and the panic came at the same time.

And with them came Worry.

The wise statesmen and newspapers offered many explanations of the panic. But explanations could not soften the grim fact. Ruin stalked through the land, and its ghostly twin, Fear. Men who had been accounted rich, men who had been rich, heard the approach of the fearsome twain and trembled. And what shall be said of their dependents, the small fry, earners of salaries, young men of the professions, who saw incomes curtailed or cut off; to whom frank poverty would have been almost a relief but who must, as habit and the custom, of their kind decreed, keep up their sham and shabby gentility?

Business was at a standstill. The city ceased to expand. There was no building. Dick Holden closed his desk and locked his office door.

"There'll be nothing doing in our line for some while. I'm going to
Europe for two or three months to learn something about architecture.
Better pack up your family and come along, Davy."

David laughed grimly. "My Dickybird, you're quite a joker."

Trips to Europe!—when the apartment was a miniature hospital. Davy Junior was sickly. Shirley's strength came back slowly. For six weeks the trained nurse stayed, ordering expensive things for her patients.

Anxiously David saw his scanty resources dwindling fast. One by one his old commissions were paid and disappeared down the hopper of household expenses. He took to thinking of what would happen when the commissions were all paid, and to haunting Fisher's office. Fisher was his contractor client and owed him five hundred dollars. But Fisher always put him off.

In the meantime the dairy lunch became a habit. He smoked only a pipe now. The books he loved and needed, little things he used to think were necessaries, were foregone. He thought wistfully of the indulgences he might have gone without in the past.

Fisher continued to put him off. Then Worry began to shadow David by day, to share his pillow at night. If Fisher, like so many others, should fail—! But with an effort he concealed the unbidden guest from Shirley. With her he was always cheery, ready with quip and laugh, teasing her over her devotion to that red-faced bit of humanity, hight Davy Junior. And in truth, the sight of her, still weak and fragile but happy in the possession of her baby, would give him a fresh courage. Things *couldn't* happen to hurt her, he assured himself. For her, for them; he would weather the storm—somehow. "Why," thus he would snub intrusive Worry, "we've got Fisher, anyhow. When he pays, we'll simply *make* it last until business picks up." . . . .

The doctor's bill and word that Fisher had gone into bankruptcy reached him by the same mail. Dazed and trembling, he got out his bank-book and tried to strike a balance; the figures danced crazily before him. But too well he knew that slender sum! He could see barely a month ahead.

He walked home that evening, to get a new grip on his courage. He found Shirley almost breathless with excitement.

She waved a letter before him. "You can have two guesses to what's in it."

But David was unequal even to one guess just then.

"It's from Aunt Clara. She wants me to take the baby out there for two or three weeks. You don't mind, do you, David?"

"Do you want to go so much?"

"I'm just crazy to have them see Davy Junior. And I haven't seen Maizie and auntie and the rest of them for so long. And I think the change will do me good. I get tired so easily, you know."

This last was a convincing argument and quite true. "I know. But I'm afraid, dear, we can't afford it."

"Is business so bad?"

"It's pretty slow—-and getting no better."

"Hasn't that Fisher man paid up yet?"

He hesitated. But he could not find the heart—perhaps it was courage he lacked—to break his evil tidings to her.

"Not yet."

"I'd like to shake him. But he must pay soon. And anyhow," she reverted to the original topic, "it wouldn't cost so much. There'd be only railroad fare and in two weeks—or maybe three—we'd save that in house expenses. We could let the maid go, you know."

He caught at that straw. "And maybe, when you come back, you'll be strong enough to get along without her—for a while?"

"Maybe." Her tone lacked assurance. "We'll try it, anyhow."

Two mornings later David stood on a platform and watched a train pull slowly out of the shed. Then he gulped twice, sternly set his teeth together and walked swiftly to his office.

Shirley and the baby stayed, not two weeks nor three, but five. There were other expenses than railroad fare, just what her letters did not set out in detail. Twice she had to write to David for money; in the midst of riches she found it hard to economize. Still David, by taking his meals at a cheap boarding-house, managed to save a little.

In other ways the trip was a great success. Shirley's letters were glowing. She was getting stronger every day. She could lie deliciously in bed all morning, if she chose. Aunt Clara had a nurse for the baby. The weather was fine and there was motoring daily. All her old friends came to see her with warm words of welcome on their lips. Among them was Sam Hardy.

"He is very nice. (But you mustn't think *anything* of that. Every man I see makes me glad I married my David.) He has a gorgeous new machine and takes us all out. He gets his clothes made in New York now. Such good times as we're having!" And down in one corner of the last page was, "If only you were here!"

"P. S.," popped into his mind. But very sternly he drove it out, calling himself hard names. Ought he not be glad that Shirley was having a good time?

"I *am* glad. Poor dear! It's going to be very hard for her if things don't get better soon. You see," he explained to himself, "in some things Shirley hasn't quite grown up yet, just as Maizie said, and good times mean so much to her."

He sat down and wrote her the cheeriest letter he could compose.

He himself felt old enough to interest an antiquarian. Before Shirley came back he felt older, with nothing to do but sit idly in his office, figuring his bank balance for the thousandth time or working over some of his old sketches, jumping nervously every time the door opened. (But the visitor always turned out to be some one who wanted to sigh and groan in company over the hard times.) Of evenings in the apartment, which grew dustier and lonelier every day, he would write his letter to Shirley, mail it and then get out his easel. Frowning with determination, he would put and keep his mind firmly on a new idea for a Norman Gothic cathedral, until, about midnight, worry and loneliness would steal away and leave him with the swiftly growing sketch.

Shirley's visit ended at last. David was pacing up and down the platform a full hour before her train was due. In the street-car that evening people smiled kindly at the pretty little family group—the gravely smiling young man who held the baby so awkwardly, the pretty wife bubbling over with joy in the reunion and with accounts of the good times she had been having.

Afterward, when Davy Junior had had his bottle and closed his eyes,
Shirley dusted off one chair and they sat down in it.

"Now tell me about yourself and business and everything."

So, finding it harder than he had thought it could be, he told her of the panic and what it meant to them. She listened with a pretty air of taking it all in and making ready to meet the situation.

When his account was ended, she pushed herself back to look into his eyes.

"David, when did you know about that Fisher man?"

"The day you got your aunt's letter." David flushed as though he had done something shameful.

Her eyes filled with tears. "And you kept it from me so my visit wouldn't be spoiled, and stayed here worrying by yourself while I was out there having a good time. Oh, David— Oh, David! Well," she got to her feet and stood upright before him, "I'll tell you this much. Let the old panic come on—I'm not afraid. We'll make out somehow. And we won't worry either. What if we do have to give up things? We have each other—and Davy Junior—and nothing else counts."

They repeated in chorus. "We have each other and Davy Junior and nothing else counts."

They were very happy just then and so it was easy to be brave.

CHAPTER III

ON THE SANDS

In a few months the first stress of the panic lifted. The worry creases between men's eyes were being ironed out. A few who had money, taking advantage of cheap labor and materials, began to build. Dick Holden came home, with a trunkful of presents for his friends and another of English clothes for himself, and at once became busy.

The Quentins were still hanging on—"by a frog's hair," David said.
But they had paid. It always costs to survive.

They had paid, despite their brave words, in the coin of worry. More than once David had jingled a few coins in his pocket, wondering where he could add to them on the morrow and when he had borrowed how he could repay.

But they had paid with a bigger price than that. The pretty flower of romance was withering in the shade. The cozy little times, when one chair did for both and they became beautifully silly, were fewer and briefer now. When they tucked Davy Junior in at night and whispered that he was almost too bright to be healthy, shadowing their pride was the chill cloud of fear that he, too, might have to feel the pinch. Often they moved restlessly about the apartment or sat listlessly yawning, wishing there were something to do. And sometimes, without warning, quarrels would blaze, over nothing at all. It is so easy to mislay your temper when worry is gnawing at your heart, and perhaps you don't try very hard to find it. David always had to find his first, but the making up was never quite perfect.

And, though their well-to-do friends were beginning to talk of new model cars and going abroad once more, the Quentins continued to be hard up. David seemed to have struck a dead level. One month business would be pretty good; the next he would make almost nothing. But the average was always the same, and always a little less than they spent. The note at Jim Blaisdell's bank and the little loans from Dick Holden kept slowly piling up, and though neither Jim nor Dick ever dunned him, the thought of his debts weighed heavily on David's heart.

It was worse than if they had had a steady income. They were kept zigzagging between hope and disappointment, and when they had money, it was often spent foolishly. David did his best to save. His suits and overcoat had shiny spots. He smoked only cheap tobacco that burned his tongue. He gave up even the dairy lunch, saying that two meals a day were enough for any man. He walked, rain or shine, to and from his office, and bought no more books. But the sum of these savings seemed pitifully small. Shirley, too, did without things during the lean months. But when a fee came in she could never say no to her wants.

"We must have this. We must do that," she would say.

"Dear, don't you think we'd better go slow?" he would venture.

"Oh, what's the use of having money, if not to get what we want?"

"We could use it to pay a little to Jim and—"

"Oh, let Jim and Dick wait. They can afford it. I've had to do without so much I think I've a right to this little spree. And I *hate* to wait for things. If I wait, they lose all their fun."

It always ended in her having her own way. But sometimes David wondered whether she would have lost interest in him, too, if she had had to wait.

For he saw that another goblin had come unbidden into their home: Discontent. He had learned to seek and always found the wistful look with which she regarded their callers' pretty gowns or heard tales of jolly dinners at the club. (Months ago the club had been dropped.) And he knew that in her heart she was drawing comparisons.

Once she said, "It wasn't like this when Maizie and I were together."
She did not guess the barb she left quivering in his heart.

Dick Holden was making no such heavy weather of it. He was even so busy that little odds and ends of his work were turned over to David, crusts for which the latter was as grateful as the Lazaruses always have been. But this suggested another comparison to Shirley.

"Dick Holden gets business and makes money, and everybody says he's not half so clever as you. How does he do it?"

"He works people for their business."

"Then why don't you do that?"

"I don't know how. And if I did know, I couldn't, anyhow. The people that come to me come because they have confidence in my ability. If they don't have confidence, I couldn't work them because—I just couldn't, that's all."

"You're too thin-skinned. If I were a man I'd *make* them come to me, and then I'd teach them to have confidence—the way Dick Holden does."

"Dick Holden's way, somebody else's, never mine," he thought bitterly, "is always the best."

But he did not let her see him wince. Instead, he said gently, "In the long run it's not the sound way. If I do good work, some day people will realize it and come to me. And I *do* good work," he cried, not to boast, but because their courage needed a tonic, "and some day when I get my chance I'll do far finer."

She smiled wearily. "Some day! It's always some day. Why don't you *make* your chance—as Dick does?"

That talk rankled in David's heart long after Shirley had forgotten it. She could say such things and forget them in an hour. But her comparisons never angered him, only hurt. He tried to be just, and blamed himself for their predicament. If he had been wise and firm at the beginning, when the temptations to indulgences came, they could have escaped these troublous waters. Firmness now seemed only cruel.

"You see," he would explain to himself, trying to believe, "she's really only a child still. It is very hard on her. If I said no to things now, she wouldn't understand. I must just make it as easy as possible for her—somehow." But he sighed, "If only we could give up this apartment and live cheaply and—and honestly until we're on our feet. If only she'd look at it that way!"

He had suggested that to Shirley once—but only once. "Oh, no!" she had cried. "That would be a confession to everybody. It would be humiliating, more than I could bear. We've got to keep this apartment and not let people know we're hard up."

They thought people did not know.

So it went for nearly two years. You must not think there were no happy times, hours or days or even weeks when they took joy in their love and Davy Junior; though more and more these times lost their wonderfulness and the power to charm away the grisly goblin Care. But the ugly or weary or despondent hours bulked largest in David's mind because he took them so keenly to heart. Yet, though his debts slowly grew, and he was always a month behind in his office and apartment rent, he did not lose faith in himself; he gave his very best to the little business he had and worked away at his sketches, which grew better all the time. (It hurt him more than a little that Shirley took no interest in them.) And though he saw clearly that she had faults, even as you and I, he did not lose faith in Shirley nor cease to love her. Often at nights, especially after there had been a quarrel, he stole away from his sketching to the room where she slept with the baby by her side and lightly kissed her hair or an outflung arm. Then the old tender protective impulse swept over him; he wished he were the sort of man that could give her all the things she wanted, thinking that the way to prove a love.

Then a "chance" came. Or, rather, he tried to make one. A rich parish decided that it could best honor God by building a new church, finer and costlier than anything else in the city, and invited several architects to submit plans. David entered the competition, not by the adroit methods Dick Holden practised, but in the simple open-handed fashion which alone was possible to him. He went to the chairman of the building committee.

"Will you let me submit plans?" he asked.

"I suppose so," Bixby said carelessly, eying his caller dubiously.

For David, though he had carefully pressed his trousers for the occasion, was getting to be a little shabby. If you looked close you saw that his cuffs were trimmed, his necktie was threadbare and his shoes were run down at the heels. And he had not the look that speaks of success. Seeing him, Bixby did not think as people had used to think, "This is a young man who will do big things some day."

"When must the plans be filed?"

The chairman told him, and added, "You understand, of course, they have to be bang-up—up-to-date in every particular, and *impressive*?"

"Some things," David said gravely, "are so beautiful that they are up-to-date in every age. And real beauty is always impressive because it is so rare."

"Humph!" said Bixby, and dismissed his caller.

David set to work that very night, going over all his old sketches in search of the best. And because none of them had ever quite satisfied him, he discarded them all. He began a new series of sketches, sitting up at nights long after he should have been asleep. He discarded these, too. For this idea must be so very good that the committee couldn't help accepting it.

"I think," he told himself often, "I have reached the point where I can do something really worth while."

One night when he had gone reluctantly to bed, sleep would not come. For a long while he lay staring at a white patch of moonlight on the floor.

Suddenly he sat up, sprang out of bed and, still in his pajamas, sat down before his easel.

In the morning Shirley found him there, looking raptly at the completed sketch.

"David Quentin, what in the name of common sense are you doing here?"

"Look!" he whispered, almost in awe. "This is it."

Shirley looked. And she, who had picked up a little knowledge of architecture from him, knew that it was good.

"Do you think," she asked, "do you think it really has a chance?"

"Shirley, it's so good I can hardly believe it came out of my head.
Maybe it didn't, but just passed through coming from—somewhere."

He was thinking it was an inspiration. . . . Well, since then many men who ought to know have thought and said the same thing about that church.

For two months he toiled every spare moment of the day and in the still watches of the night, elaborating that first rough sketch, working out details, which came to him as of their own accord, making beautiful plans and elevations and long sheets of specifications. He gave to the work enthusiasm, patience and stern criticism. In return it gave him a new faith in himself. And hope. He *knew* he would not fail in this.

It was not really hard work. For, as the weeks sped by, there grew up in his heart a love for the thing to which he was giving birth, deep, warm and abiding, a love that counted no hour of labor too heavy, no task too exacting. He did not care to think of the day when the work must pass out of his hands.

A little of his ardor entered into Shirley. She, too, hoped. She thought of the fee such a commission would bring, of the release from care and the good times that fee would buy. Sometimes she had a glimpse of the new love growing up in David's heart, but, though she did not wholly like that, she gave it no serious thought.

"Would you mind coming back to me?" she asked one evening, thus bringing him out of a smiling brown study.

"I was just thinking what it would feel like to see the church *real*."

"Don't you ever think of the money it will bring?"

"That, too, sometimes. But I never knew before how much the work—just being in it, you know—means to me."

"That's very temperamental," she said with a shrug. "Sometimes I believe you think more of your

work than you do of your family."

"I love you both," he answered gently. "And I don't love you and Davy Junior less because I think so much of the work."

It was a fleeting shadow. Those months of preparation and hope were the happiest they had had since the panic began.

Only once did his faith waver. It was on the day when Dick Holden, a roll of plans under his arm, came into the office.

"Davy, are you too busy to do a little job for me?"

That was the formula Dick, who was very thoughtful in little things, always used when he turned work over to David.

"I guess I can make room—with crowding." That was the reply David, with a smile only half humorous, always made. "What is it?"

"I want you to make one of your pretty-pretty pictures of some church plans I'm making."

"What church?"

"St. Christopher's."

David looked up quickly. "Let's see the plans."

Dick spread them out on the table. David glanced over them hastily.

"You're trying for it with that?"

"Even so." Dick laughed. Dick at that stage of his career laid no claims to genius. "But I know what I'm doing. I've been talking with old man Bixby."

David looked up again.

"Dick, it's fair to tell you that I'm trying for that St. Christopher's job myself."

"Meaning you'd rather not make pretty-pretty pictures for a competitor?"

"No. I mean you'd be wasting your money."

"Why?"

David drew out his original sketch and laid it before Dick.

Dick looked—and looked again. He leaned over and studied it intently, his eyes widening and shining. Suddenly with a queer gesture he rose and went to a window. He stood there, back turned to David, for several minutes.

When he turned a flush was on his face and he found it hard to meet David's questioning eyes.

"Davy, it's good. It's damn good. It's so much better than mine that I can't find a comparison. I know just enough architecture to be sure of that. I take off my hat to you. But it's fair to tell you—it won't win."

"Why not?"

"*I'm* going to win."

"With that?" David nodded toward Dick's plans.

"With that."

"How?"

"I'm giving old Bixby what he wants, and I'm—" Dick made gestures of pulling wires.

David was silent.

"Maybe," Dick went on after a moment, "you think I oughtn't to work this game against you. And maybe I oughtn't. But if I didn't somebody would beat us both out. They're all working it. It's the only

game that pays nowadays. And besides, I need the money. It isn't out yet, but I'm going to be married—and she's used to a lot of money. I've been doing pretty well, but if I land this job I'll be fixed and able to give her the things she deserves. Do you blame me, old man?"

A troubled smile was on David's lips. "Not wholly, Dick."

There was another silence, awkward now, and then Dick began to move toward the door. But with his hand on the knob he turned.

"Davy, why don't you play the game? You've got the stuff. If you only could put it across, if you had the punch, you could go any distance. I—I'm not quite big enough to step down for a better man, but I'd rather have you beat me than any other man alive. Why don't you try it?"

The troubled smile lingered. "I can't, old man."

David did not hear the door close. For a long time he sat staring vaguely at his sketch.

But that night, when he was alone with his work once more, the old faith rushed back into his heart. Dick was wrong—he must be wrong! The committee were honorable men; they held a position of trust. Surely they could see how much better his plans were than Dick's. And surely they could not be tricked into passing them by for a hodgepodge that would only bring ridicule down upon their church.

He was ashamed that he had lost faith, even for a day.

Toward the end of the two months Shirley began to grow a little impatient with his industry.

"Will it never be finished?" she would sigh plaintively. "You never have any time to spare for me any more."

"You see," he would explain, "there are so many details to be worked out in a thing like this, and I mustn't slur over any of them. We must make it the best we can. And it will soon be done."

But a little throb of regret would clutch his heart as he said that.

And one evening he did come to the end, the illustrative sketches complete, the beautiful plans all made, the last calculation for the specifications set down.

"There! It's done."

He propped a sketch on the easel and leaned back, sighing.

Shirley looked up from her novel. "Thank goodness—at last! Are you sure you've made it the very best you can?"

"Yes." He looked long at the sketch, a strange wistfulness in his eyes. "Sometimes I wonder if I shall ever do as well again."

"Suppose it shouldn't win, after all?"

"Oh, don't!" he cried. "Don't suggest that—just now."

She caught the sudden sharp pain in his voice and looked at him wonderingly.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Nothing," he answered, his voice gone dull now. "I guess I've been working harder than I thought and am pretty tired."

"You'd better go to bed early and get a good sleep."

"Yes," he said, "I'm going to do that."

But he did not do that. Instead, for the last time, he stayed up until nearly morning in the company of his completed work. It was as if he watched the night out with a loved one who in the morning must go upon a long uncertain journey. . . . This also Shirley, had she known, would have called very temperamental.

For a month they waited, a feverish, anxious but always hopeful month, for the committee's decision.

And then one morning as he sat idly in his office an errand boy came, under his arm a long round parcel.

"Mr. Bixby sent me with this."

When the boy was gone David quickly ripped open the parcel. It contained his sketches and plans. With them was a note.

"As we have accepted the plans submitted by Mr. Richard Holden, we return yours herewith. Thanking you for. . . ."

The rest was a dancing blur. . . .

It was mid-afternoon when he rose from his table. The first dizzying shock had passed, but a dull unceasing ache was left and he was very tired. He tried to smile, to gather together the tatters of his courage and faith, but he could not think of the future. When he tried to think of Shirley a sickening qualm rushed over him, leaving him weak and nerveless.

"Poor Shirley!" he muttered. "How can I tell her? Poor Shirley!"

Mechanically he put on his hat and overcoat and went out. It was storming. He had no umbrella, and if he had had one it would have been but scanty shelter against the driving rain. But he did not care. He was even glad of the storm and the discomfort of wet feet and clothes.

For an hour he splashed aimlessly through the city's streets. Then he turned slowly but doggedly homeward.

"Poor Shirley!" he kept saying to himself. "I mustn't let her see how it hurts. I must put a brave face on it before her."

He was half-way home when he stopped with a sudden "Oh!" that was almost a groan. A memory had cut even through his misery. It was their fourth anniversary!

He took out what money was in his pocket, counted it and tramped back through the rain until he came to a florist's. There he got a small bunch of carnations. It was all he could buy with the money he had with him, and it was too late to go to the bank—and little enough was there! He started homeward once more.

By the time the apartment was reached he had pulled himself together a little. With an effort he achieved a smile and went in.

Shirley was waiting for him. "Any word?"

He shook his head. He could not tell her just then, but he could not trust his voice with a kindly lie.

"Oh, I thought surely we'd hear to-day— You've brought something for me?"

"It isn't much."

He gave her the little box—it was rain-soaked now—and saw her face fall as she peeped within. Always he had brought her some pretty extravagance on their anniversary. But she kissed him and sent him to his room to put on dry clothes.

They sat down to dinner, a special dinner with things they both liked and could not always have. And for a while he tried to be as merry as the occasion demanded. But not for long. His tongue fumbled over his poor little jokes and his laughter was lifeless. Shirley saw.

"David, look at me."

His eyes wavered, fell, then rose doggedly to hers.

"What's the matter? Something has happened. Do you mean it's—"

"Yes, Shirley. Dick Holden won."

For a moment she stared blankly at him, then burst into a storm of weeping. In an instant his own heartache was swallowed up in sorrow for her. He sprang to her side, catching her close and petting her, begging her "not to take it so," saying foolish brave things.

The storm subsided as suddenly as it rose. With a sharp movement she pushed herself away from him and sat looking at him with eyes in which he would have said, if he could have trusted his senses just then, anger and—almost—hate were blazing.

"Shirley," he pleaded, "don't take it so. Our plans *were* good. It was only pull that beat us. Dick told me—"

The eyes did not change. "It doesn't matter why, does it? They didn't take them—that's all. What difference does it make if things are good when nobody will buy them? And I had hoped—"

"Dear, don't take it so," he repeated. "We must be brave. This is only a test—the hardest of all. If we're brave and keep hanging on—you remember what we used to say—"

She laughed, not her old beautiful laugh, but a shrill outpouring of her bitter disappointment.

"Oh, we said a lot of silly things. We were fools. I didn't know what it would be like." Anger—yes, and even hate—were unmistakable in that moment. She sat up sharply. "And, David, you've got to do something to change it. I'm tired of it all—sick and tired of scrimping and worrying and wearing made-over dresses and being—just shabby genteel. You've got to do something."

Every word was a knife in his heart. But he could not be angry with her; he was thinking of her disappointment.

"But, dear, I'm doing all I can. How can I—"

"You can get a position somewhere and at least have a steady income that would—"

"Why, Shirley, you don't mean—give up my profession? You *couldn't* mean that!"

"I mean just that. It would give us a steady income at least."

"But I can't give it up. There's more than money to working. There's being in the work you want to do and are fitted for—"

"Ah!" She turned on him fiercely. "I thought you cared more for your work than for your family. Now I know it. You would keep us poor, just so you can do the things you like to do. And what right have you to think you're fitted for it? Why can't you be sensible and see what everybody else sees—that as an architect you are—"

"Shirley!"

But she said it.

"—a failure."

For a little he stared blindly at her. All other aches were as nothing beside this. . . . Then something within, that had sustained him since he left the office, snapped, gave way. His head and shoulders sagged forward. With a weary gesture he turned and went into the living-room.

That storm, too, passed. It had been more than half the hysteria of shattered hope. She had hardly known what she was saying. Now she remembered his eyes as she had dealt her thrust. She was a little frightened at what she had done. She waited nervously for him to come back to her; always David had been first to mend their quarrels, and Shirley thought her kisses balm to heal all wounds.

But he did not come back. In the living-room was a heavy silence.

At last she went softly to the door. He was standing by the table, still in the broken attitude, with the same dazed eyes. He did not see her.

"David!"

He did not seem to hear. She went to him and put an arm around his shoulder.

"David, I didn't mean to be nasty. It really isn't your fault. I didn't mean—"

The sound of her voice brought him out of his daze. He shrank from her touch and, turning, regarded her with a queer new look that held her from him. After a little the sense of her words seemed to come to him.

"I think you did mean it," he said wearily. "And I think—I think you are quite right."

CHAPTER IV

TO THE RESCUE

In the morning the world, strangely enough, was outwardly the same. Even the sun had the bad taste to shine, as though a black shadow were not on their hearts.

They went through the routine of bath and toilet and breakfast. David glanced over his newspaper and romped a bit with Davy Junior. And because he kissed her as he left for the day, Shirley supposed that the scene of the night before had been filed away with their other tiffs, in a remote pigeonhole labeled "To Be Forgotten." She was glad of that.

"And maybe," she thought hopefully, "it was a good thing I said that to him. David is clever and good and dear and all that, but the trouble is he lacks ambition and push. He needs bracing up and to take things more seriously. Perhaps it will be just as well if I take the reins for a while."

Her first act as whip was to write a long letter to Aunt Clara.

David, not guessing that the reins had been transferred to Shirley's hands—not guessing, in fact, that they had ever been out of Shirley's hands—was trudging listlessly, not to his office, but to Jim Blaisdell's bank. His note fell due that day.

"Same old story," he told Jim. "I'd like to renew, if you don't mind."

Jim fingered the note thoughtfully.

"Davy," he said at last, "don't you think it's about time to clean this up? It's been running a good while."

David flushed and his head went up. "Of course, if you'd rather not indorse—"

"Don't be a fool, Davy. It isn't that. There's nothing Mrs. Jim and I wouldn't do for you and Shirley, and you know it. What I mean is, debt's a bad habit. It grows on you and you get to a point where it doesn't worry you as it ought. And it leads to other bad habits—living beyond one's means, and so on."

David's prideful pose collapsed suddenly. "I know," he said wearily. "I'd like to clean this note up. It worries me quite enough. But the fact is—the fact is, I'm strapped and can't. We've been living from hand to mouth for a good while. And it begins to look"—David's laugh went to Jim's heart—"as if both hand and mouth would be empty soon."

"It's really as bad as that?"

"Worse than that."

Jim slowly scrawled his name across the back of a new note. David got up and crossed the office, fixing his eyes—which saw not—on a flashlight photograph of the last bankers' association banquet. He cleared his throat vigorously.

"It's worse than that. Jim—" He paused.

"Yes?"

"Jim, you don't happen to know any one with a job—living salary attached—concealed about his person, do you?"

"What!"

Jim whirled around in his swivel chair and stared hard at David's back. David continued his regard of the bankers' association banquet. "This is you in the corner, isn't it?— Because, if you know of any such job I'd be glad to take it over."

"In your own line, of course?"

"In any line. Preferably *not* in my line."

"But—good lord, man! You're not losing your nerve, are you—just because business has slumped a little? What about your profession?"

"As to that," David cleared his throat again, "as to that, I think we may say—safely—I haven't made good."

"Oh, piffle! You're too young a man to say a fool thing like that. If it's this note that's bothering you—" He stopped, because David had turned and Jim saw his eyes.

"The note is only part of it. But, if you don't mind, we'll not discuss it. I'll be glad if you can help me out. And I'll try to cut this loan down a little next time—somehow. I'll not keep you any longer now." David moved toward the door. "Remember us to Mrs. Jim, won't you?" And he went hastily out.

"Why, damn it!" muttered Jim, left alone. "This is bad. This is entirely too bad."

David went to a long weary day at his office, where he had nothing to do but sit at his desk and gaze into space. Shirley was mistaken. Her words had not been filed away in the remote pigeonhole, "To Be Forgotten."

For a while Jim stared frowningly at the crumpled note in his hand.
Then he began a long series of telephone calls.

The thing was still on his mind that evening when Mrs. Jim descended from the children's dormitory and silence reigned at last through the house.

"You might as well out with it now as later," she observed, as she took up her sewing. "What has been bothering you all evening?"

"I've been congratulating myself on my cleverness in the matter of choosing a wife."

Mrs. Jim surveyed him suspiciously. "What put that into your head?"

"Davy Quentin—by way of contrast, I suppose."

"What about Davy?"

"I'm afraid he's got into a pretty sour pickle."

"He's been there for four years. Though he didn't always know it.
What is the particular development now?"

"Debt, insolvency—in fact, genteel poverty."

"And worry, discontent and disillusionment at home. I've been afraid of that."

"He didn't say so."

"Davy wouldn't, of course."

"It must be pretty bad, for he wants to give up his profession and take a job. You know, Davy's liking for his work amounted almost to a mania."

"Does he *have* to give it up?"

"It doesn't meet their needs—at least, their requirements. And worst of all, he's got it into his head that he hasn't made good."

"But he has made good. He has done good work. And he has talent.
Hasn't he?"

"In a way. But there's only one divine spark nowadays—push. He hasn't that. He prefers to let his work speak and push for itself. Poor Davy!"

"Poor Davy! But you'll get him a position, of course."

"There are times," remarked Jim, "when you're as innocent and credulous as Davy himself. It isn't so simple. He's fitted only for his own line. And there are very few men willing to pay a living salary to a greenhorn just for learning a business. In fact, after to-day I'm ready to say there is none."

"Poor Davy!" Mrs. Jim repeated softly. She threaded a needle and bent over her sewing. Jim watched the swift deft fingers proudly; they had acquired the habit of industry in a day when the Blaisdells had had to wrestle with the problem of slender income. After a few minutes' silence she let her sewing fall to her lap.

"I think, Jim, if you'll have the machine around I'll go down-town with you in the morning."

Jim sighed in relief. "You've solved it, then?"

"I want to call on my latest acquisition. You remember asking, 'Why is Jonathan Radbourne?'"

Jim nodded, with the smile the thought of that gentleman always evoked.

"The answer is, of course—Davy."

"I'm wondering," said Jim thoughtfully, "just how Davy would like it if he knew you were going to beg a job for him."

"I'm not going to beg a job. I will merely state the case to Mr. Radbourne."

"Suppose he concludes that making a job for Davy is too high a price to pay even for your ladyship's favor?"

Mrs. Jim smiled confidently. "Mr. Radbourne and I understand each other. And he doesn't have to pay for my favor. I have made him a present of it."

Two mornings later David found a note from Jim, asking him to call at the bank. David obeyed the summons at once.

"Davy," Jim began, "did you mean what you said the other day about a job?"

"Yes," David answered quietly.

"Well, I took you at your word. And I think I've landed you one. Radbourne & Company want a good man to do mechanical drawing. They'll pay a hundred and fifty to the right man at the start, and they'll raise that later if you turn out well. Do you care to try it on?"

"Yes," David said again.

"I still think you're making a mistake—but that's your business. Shall we go around to Radbourne's now?"

"Yes."

To those three monosyllables David added nothing during the few minutes' walk. Had Jim been leading him to the prisoner's dock David could not have taken less joy in the journey. Jim discoursed of the judge before whom the prisoner was being led.

"Odd fish, this Radbourne. Dinky little man. With whiskers. You're apt to think he's a fool at first. But that's a mistake. He isn't at all—I'd hate to lose his account. He makes machines in a small way, but very well *and* quite profitably. His father made a reputation for turning out high-class work and the son keeps it up. We got to know him at St. Mark's. Mrs. Jim says he's the only man of real charity she knows—not even excepting me."

David forgot to smile.

They were shown into a small bare office, where, behind a littered flat-top desk, the judge got nimbly to his feet; although "judge" was in this case a queer fancy indeed, as David had later to confess.

There are several ways in which men can be homely, and Radbourne, of Radbourne & Company, had chosen the worst way of all. When you saw him you wanted to smile. He was little and roly-poly. His eyes were too small, their blue too light. His nose was acutely and ungracefully pug. His ears were too big and stood out from his head. His mouth was too wide. His hair and eyebrows were thick and red, too red, and his round chubby face was flanked by a pair of silky, luxuriant red Dundrearies that would have done credit to a day of hirsute achievements. His linen was strictly without blemish, and he wore a creaseless black frock coat and a waistcoat of brown broadcloth. And as he stood looking up at his tall visitors, head on one side, he reminded them of nothing so much as a sleek cock-robin who had just dined to his taste. He seemed to be in his late thirties.

David would have smiled at any other time. "Why, this," he thought unkindly, "is a mere comic valentine."

The comic valentine smiled, a little shyly it seemed, and put out a slender long-fingered hand.

"This," he announced, "is a great pleasure."

David took the hand and murmured something polite.

Blaisdell chatted briskly for a few minutes, then departed. Radbourne turned to his draftsman-to-be.

"Perhaps Mr. Blaisdell has told you we are needing a man here. Do you think, now you've had a look at us, you would care to come and help us?"

"That's a pleasant way of putting it," said David a bit grimly. "I'm needing a job badly. If you think you aren't afraid to try me—"

Radbourne smiled protestingly. "If you knew all Mr. Blaisdell has said of you, you wouldn't say that. You have warm friends, Mr. Quentin, if he is a sample."

"Did he tell you I've failed in the only thing I ever tried?"

"He didn't put it that way," the little man said gently. "Nor would I, if I were you. There's such a thing as getting into the wrong niche—which isn't failure at all. Shall we consider it settled that you will come?"

"I'd like to be sure," David said, flushing, "that this job isn't one of your—charities."

The little man flushed, too. "Oh, I *beg* of you not to think that. I expect you to prove it a good stroke of business for me. And I hope we shall please each other. Your first name is David, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And mine is Jonathan. That ought to be a good omen. Don't you think so?" And that diffident smile, so absurdly out of place on the face of an employer, appeared again.

"Why, I hope so," said David.

"And I hope you will like the work, though it may not be very big at first. I understand how important that is to a man." Radbourne nodded gravely. "But I have a theory that if he puts his heart into his work he is bound to get a good deal of happiness out of it. Don't you think so?"

"I'll try to remember that. When do you want me to come?"

"Could you make it next Monday?"

"I will be here then."

David went away from Jonathan Radbourne, the comic valentine; and the heartache, for some reason, was a little eased, courage a little stiffened.

"After all," he kept saying to himself, "it's only a gift to Shirley and the baby. And I'm *glad* to give it to them—they're worth anything. It's a debt, too. I owe them everything I can give. And maybe now we can be happy as we used to be—no worries or quarrels."

He tried to keep thinking of that—of the comfort in knowing that next month's expenses could be met, of debts growing less, not bigger, of a love happily reborn under freedom from worry.

He went to Dick Holden's office. That busy young man met him with visible embarrassment, which, however, David ignored.

"Dick," he plunged at once into his errand, "I owe you a lot of money."

"Oh, not much—not worth speaking about. No hurry about that, old man."

David smiled grimly at that. "It won't be paid in a hurry—can't be. But I'm quitting the game and taking a job, and I can pay you some every month now; not much, but a nibble, anyhow. And if ever you get rushed with business and I can help you out at nights, I'd be glad to work part of my debt off that way."

"Why," said Dick very eagerly, "that'll be easy. I've got three sets of plans I'd like to have you work out right now. And there'll be more. You know, I'll be pretty busy over that St. Chris—" Dick's tongue halted sharply and the red crept over his face until even his ears were glowing.

"Of course. I haven't congratulated you yet. I do most—"

"Don't you, Davy Quentin!" Dick interrupted fiercely. "Don't you go congratulating me. I feel darn small potatoes just now. You're quitting the game because I beat you out on the St. Christopher's job, and I—"

"Not at all," David interrupted in his turn. "You mustn't look at it that way. I was foozling my approach right along anyway, and the St. Christopher thing couldn't have changed that. One swallow doesn't kill a summer thirst, you know." He laughed at this slender joke so heartily that Dick was almost deceived.

"Is it a pretty fair job?"

"I must say it is. And I expect to make a mighty good draftsman for Radbourne & Company. I've always been rather long on mechanical drawing, you may remember. And I've got a first-rate boss, if I'm any judge. On the whole, it looks pretty good—much better than dubbing along at a game where—where one hasn't the punch, as you put it."

Dick flushed again. For several minutes he was silent save for the drumming of his fingers on the desk. Then he stirred, with a sharp irritable movement.

"Well, I wish you luck. And I'll have the data for those plans to-morrow."

David took this as a hint to go. When he had gone Dick heaved a sigh of relief. During those silent minutes a strange inspiration had come to him, to suggest a partnership in lieu of the new job. Dick felt that he had had a narrow escape from an expensive generosity.

Next David called on a young architect who was looking for quarters. To him it was arranged to transfer the office lease and to sell enough of its furniture to pay the rent in arrears.

Then David went home to lay his gift at Shirley's feet.

And yet, as he neared the apartment, he felt a strange shrinking from telling her the news, lest she guess what his gift had cost him. He wondered at that.

He found Shirley flushed with excitement over news of her own.

"Guess who's coming!"

David could not guess.

"Aunt Clara!"

"Why, that's fine," he rejoiced weakly.

Shirley kissed him nicely.

"And, David, I think she's coming to talk over things."

"Aunt Clara generally is— What things?"

"Why, our affairs. Money, you know."

His glance sharpened. "Why do you think that?"

"Because—now don't scold!" She brushed an imaginary bit of dust from his shoulder. "Because—I asked her."

"Shirley!" His clasp of her relaxed.

"Now *please*, don't let's have another scene. What's the use of rich relations if they can't help you out once in a while? You've no right to let your foolish pride cut Davy Junior and me off from Aunt Clara's help."

"Luckily we shan't need her help, because"—it was not so he had thought to tender his gift—"because to-day I got a job."

"A job? Oh, David!" Her arms tightened around his neck, Aunt Clara for the moment forgotten. "What is it?"

He told her.

"Just a draftsman? That isn't a very high position, is it?"

"Not very."

"How much does it pay?"

He told her and saw her face fall.

"Why, that's only a little more than you have been making."

"At least, it's steady and sure."

"But even Maizie makes that much. I used to get ninety from the library. I thought men—clever men—"

"Beggars," he said, "even clever beggars, can't be choosers."

"But we're not beggars, are we?"

"Your Aunt Clara will think so."

He turned away into another room, leaving the matter of Aunt Clara suspended in the air. He saw then that he ran no risk of Shirley guessing what his gift had cost him. He wondered if *he* yet guessed how much it would cost.

Soon Aunt Clara arrived, in a taxicab and wearing a businesslike, purposeful air. She made herself promptly and perfectly at home and freely passed judgment on all she saw; and very little escaped Aunt Clara's eyes. She inspected the flat and, inquiry establishing the rent, sniffingly reminded them that she and Uncle John—now unhappily deceased—had begun their housekeeping in a fifteen-dollar-a-month cottage. Pouncing upon a drawerful of Davy Junior's sweaters and slippers and lacy dresses, she cited the case of John, *fils*, who until he was three years old had never had more than two dresses and one coatie at a time. David's books struck her as an appalling extravagance; she and the late Uncle John had never thought of a library until they had ten thousand in bank.

"You are very poor managers, I must admit. You've been married more than four years, and what have you to show for it but didoes—and debts, as I understand?"

The question went home to David's heart. But it was he who, catching up Davy Junior, held out the crowing youngster for her inspection.

"We have this."

And then, a sudden wave of emotion surging unbidden within him, he caught the child sharply to him. He turned away quickly to hide this unwonted demonstration, but Aunt Clara saw.

"Very pretty! But sentiment butters no bread."

"Sometimes," he returned gravely, "it makes dry bread palatable."

"Humph!" remarked Aunt Clara. "And now let us have dinner—something more than dry bread and sentiment, if you please. I never talk business on an empty stomach."

To David, love and pride quivering from hurts lately sustained, that dinner, eaten to the accompaniment of the jarring critical voice, seemed endless. And yet, thinking of a worse thing to come, he could have wished it to last until midnight or that hour which found Aunt Clara too sleepy for business. It lasted until Aunt Clara had slowly sipped her second cup of coffee—which, inquiry brought out, cost forty-three cents the pound.

Perhaps the dinner had mellowed her humor a little, for:

"You may smoke," she nodded to David, "provided it isn't one of those nasty little cigarettes."

"It will have to be a pipe."

"A pipe is the least objectionable," she graciously conceded. "Your late Uncle John smoked one to the last."

Then she produced and donned a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles and through them fixed upon David the sternest of glances.

"And now, since I must leave in the morning, let us get to business.
You may tell me the situation."

"What situation have you in mind?"

"The one that made you write to me for help."

"But I didn't write to you for help."

"Shirley did, which is the same thing."

"When Shirley wrote, without my knowledge, she hadn't all the facts. I have just taken a position—"

"That is very sensible. What sort of a position?"

"A very good position, quite sufficient for our needs. And so we needn't spoil your visit by discussing our dull affairs."

Aunt Clara glared. "Young man, are you trying to snub me? I remember you tried that the first time I saw you."

"I hope," said David gently, "I haven't given you that impression."

"It's just his silly pride, Aunt Clara," Shirley put in soothingly.

Aunt Clara silenced Shirley with a gesture and kept her attention on David. "You did leave that impression. And you are thinking that I'm nosing into what is none of my business. On the contrary, young man, it is my business. You married against my advice, but it's no credit to me to have my relatives hard up and in debt. You are in debt, I understand?"

"That is true," David answered quietly, "but—"

"But you don't want my money to pay them with, you were about to say? Young man, when you refuse my money, you're a little—*quite* a little—in advance of the fact. I'm not going to give you money. I don't believe in giving money to able-bodied young men."

"Thank you," said David.

"But I will give you some advice and some help. You can take them or leave them. My advice is—get rid of this expensive apartment and store your goods. For the rest, I will take Shirley and the baby to live with me, paying all their expenses, until you can get on your feet. With your new position and no one but yourself to pay for, it oughtn't to take long."

Shirley gasped—unmistakably with delight.

David turned red, but he answered, still quietly, "It is good of you to make the offer, but of course it is out of the question. I think Shirley would prefer—"

"Young man," Aunt Clara reminded him, "in my family nothing I suggest is ever out of the question. As for Shirley, let her answer for herself."

"*I* think it would be very sensible," Shirley answered for herself, eagerly.

"She means," corrected Aunt Clara, who was nobody's fool, "she means it would be pleasanter living in my house than scrimping here to pay for dead horses. So it would. But it would be sensible, too. You've got into hot water. I blame Shirley—I know her. But I blame you most. A husband ought always to keep a tight rein on household affairs. Your late Uncle John—well, never mind him. Because you've been weak, you've run into debt, the worst disturber of household peace. I give you a chance to be rid of it quickly. Have you a quicker way?"

"I have a better way. Since we got into the hole through our own carelessness, let us work our own way out."

"Humph! More sentiment. You'd make your family pay for your weakness. However," Aunt Clara rose with the air of having done her whole duty, "I've made my offer. It is for you to decide. I will now go into the other room while you and Shirley talk it over. I make it a rule never to intrude into discussions between husband and wife."

She moved toward the living-room. David ushered her to the door and closed it behind her. Then he turned to Shirley. . . . .

He had made many mistakes, no doubt, been as weak and foolish as Aunt Clara said. But they had been loving faults, born of a deep desire to make Shirley happy. And he had atoned for them. He had declared himself to his world a failure; he had swallowed and forgiven the word that ought never to be

on a wife's tongue. Because it seemed best for her, he had given up a work that was very dear to him, even in failure; how dear, he had not known until he had resigned it, as he thought, forever. He had taken unto himself a master and a task that to his cast of mind could never be aught but drudgery. It was no easy thing he had done. But he had not whimpered, he had made an effort, none the less brave because so boyishly obvious, to keep up a smiling front. He had sought to offer his gift from the heart, ungrudgingly, because he had loved her, still loved her, he thought.

That which they had now to decide seemed big and vital to him. His pride was touched. A need was involved. Good sense might counsel acceptance of Aunt Clara's offer, but he thought it cowardly. Since they had failed in the issue of making a living, the brave course was to retrieve that failure by themselves. More—it did not seem to him the act of a loving woman to leave him, even for a few months, when his need of her and her love was greatest.

He did not ask her to count the cost of his gift; he knew she could not. He did want her to *justify* the gift, to prove that the love for which he had paid so big a price was real love dwelling in a fine brave woman's heart. . .

Shirley was sitting at the table. He went to a chair across from her.
She looked up eagerly.

"Shirley, shall you mind very much if I say, no?"

"I think the only sensible thing is to take her at her word."

"Perhaps. But I'd rather not be under obligations to—to anybody."

"Oh, that's just sentiment, as Aunt Clara says. And it's quite time for us to begin being practical. Think of being rid of all those horrid debts! You don't seem to understand what a weight they've been on me."

"I think I do understand, dear. But it will be different now, because we know that if we're careful for a while we can clean them all up. Radbourne seems a good man to work for and maybe this job will develop into something better. And I'll be doing work on the side for Dick for a while. It won't be so long before the debts will melt away. Then we'll have the satisfaction of knowing we did it by ourselves, without any one's help. We'll have proved ourselves, don't you see?"

"That's more sentiment. I can't see anything so awful in going to Aunt Clara's. It would be just a visit, such as any one would make. It wouldn't be for so very long, and it would do us all good. I would have a fine rest, and the change would be good for you, too. You could read and work in the evenings with no one to bother you. And you'd have a fine chance to see all your old men friends."

"It isn't the men I want to see just now. Shirley, dear—" He was pleading now. "Shirley, dear, I— You see, it's cost me a little, a good deal maybe—letting my profession go and taking up work that isn't—isn't so very interesting and is for another man. It'll be a little hard—just for a while of course, until I get used to the idea. And I'd like to have you here with me. Don't you see, dear—I need you."

But the plea failed. With a sharp sinking of his heart he saw her pretty brow wrinkle in an impatient frown.

"I don't see at all. I should think, if the position is such a good one, you'd be glad you've taken it. And you ought to be glad to think of Davy Junior and me out at Aunt Clara's instead of moping around a cheap dingy flat or boarding-house."

"You mean," he tried to keep his voice steady, "you *want* to go?
You'd really rather—aside from saving money?"

"Want to! I'm wild to go. Of course, I'll be homesick for you, but all husbands and wives expect to be apart sometimes on vacations and trips and—oh, David, can't you see? It's been so long since I've had any really good times and I'm hungry for them—starving. And out there at Aunt Clara's, where you don't have to think of money all the time— Why, you couldn't—it isn't like you to be so selfish as to refuse me that."

He said no more. He sat fumbling with a napkin, his eyes cast down. He dared not lift them to Shirley's, lest he see there a truth he had not the courage to face just then. After a little he rose, went to the door and opened it.

"Will you come in now?" he nodded to Aunt Clara. "The family council is over."

Aunt Clara marched into the room.

"Well, what have you decided?"

"Shirley has convinced me," he smiled queerly, "that you are right. But your hospitality is all we ought to accept. For her other expenses I will send something from my salary every month."

"But that isn't what I—"

"I'm afraid," he interrupted quietly, "you will have to concede so much to me—and sentiment." . . .

In the morning Aunt Clara left.

"This is what comes," was her benediction, "of marrying before you're ready and living beyond your means. I hope it will be a lesson to you never to do it again."

David was too tired to smile.

The rest of that week was too full for much thinking. The office was to be cleaned out. Trunks were to be packed, china and silver and bric-à-brac to be wrapped and boxed for storage, a thousand little preparations for moving when a new tenant for the apartment should have been found. David was grateful for that. He did not want time to think. Especially he did not want time to feel.

On Sunday morning he took Shirley and Davy Junior to the train. Not once did he let the baby out of his arms. At the very last a doubt seemed to disturb Shirley.

"David—" They were sitting in the station waiting-room then. "David, it's dear of you to let me go like this."

"It's better than moping around here."

"You don't think I'm selfish in wanting to go, do you?"

He shook his head and kept his eyes on the child's face.

"It doesn't mean I don't love you—oh, with all my heart! I'll be so lonesome for you. I'll be thinking of you all the time and write you every day. And when I come back—! Do you know, dear, I have the feeling that now, with the new position and the debts cleaned up soon, things are going to be different with us, so much brighter."

"Why, I think so, Shirley."

"I'm sure of it." She squeezed his hand. "When people love as we do, things just have to come out right."

"Yes, Shirley."

The gates were thrown open and they went out on the platform. The train thundered in. David took Shirley and Davy Junior into their car. He kissed her hastily and lingered longer over his good-by to the baby. Then he ran out of the car and stood again on the platform, while Shirley made the youngster wave his hand. David managed an answering smile.

He walked homeward by a long roundabout way. The rest of that day he spent in working feverishly at unfinished odds and ends of packing. Then he got out all his sketches and plans and slowly tore them into bits, until the floor around him was littered with the fragments. Last of all he came to the St. Christopher's plans. But his hands refused his command to destroy. He sat looking at this evidence of his failure, until darkness fell and hid them from his sight. He rose then and, wrapping them up carefully, put them with the boxes for storage.

There was nothing more that he could do. He had not eaten since morning but he was not hungry. He leaned back in a chair and let all the thoughts and feelings he had held at bay during the busy days rush at him in the darkness. An incredible loneliness was upon him, a sense of loss bitterer even than loneliness. It seemed that something for which he had paid dearly had been stolen from him.

CHAPTER V

But what of the fairies?

So far the old witch had had it all her own way, and that she had done very badly, if not quite her worst, you will have to admit. She had David by day in a cubby-hole office adjoining a noisy throbbing shop, making drawings of mechanical devices out of Radbourne's or an irritable foreman's brain; by his easel in the lonesome apartment at night, working out on paper from Dick Holden's notes the ideas of Dick's clients, who knew exactly what they wanted but not how it would look; saying sadly but sternly, "Begone!" to ideas of his own (in ecclesiastic architecture) that might nevermore hope to have a real birth. She had taken from him what no one could restore, the fine silky bloom of his youth; and something worth even more, though that was a loss he was not yet ready to admit. Worst of all, she had him convinced that he was a failure, a weakling and misfit, a sort of green fool who had asked for the moon and been properly punished for his temerity. And that was a skein even fairies would find hard to unravel.

But there was one who was willing to try.

Who ever heard of a fairy with red Dundrearies? Nobody, of course, but you shall hear of one now. Although the whiskers are really beside the case; all a good fairy needs is a pair of keen eyes and a heart as big as a drum.

An odd fish, no doubt of it, was Jonathan Radbourne, though a good man to work for and, as Jim Blaisdell had said and David soon found, by no means a fool. There was no hint of masterfulness about him, which was because he never thought of himself as a master. He never gave orders and never reproved; he made polite requests and sometimes, gently and apologetically, he showed where mistakes had been made. If you happened to do about what you were paid for doing, he beamed with delight and thanked you as though you had done him a favor. He was always busy and nearly always on the move, flitting back and forth between office and shop with hopping little strides that made him more robin-like than ever, and really accomplished a great deal. But he often found time for friendly little chats with his employees on topics that had no connection with the business, such as the babies at home, the rheumatic old mother, the state of the heart or the lungs; he made it a specialty to know all their troubles. And he always was smiling—on that mouth it was really a grin—a crooked cheery smile that made others smile, too, and he never acknowledged bad weather.

From the first he made a habit of seeking out David. His manner on such occasions was one of shy wistful friendliness, not quite sure of its welcome, that gave David an impulse to pat him on the head and say, "There, there, little man! It's all right. You're my chief and my time is all yours—though *I'd* rather use it for work." However, he never said that, but was always respectful and polite. He took advantage of these chats to learn more of his duties. With unwearied patience Jonathan explained them, as well as other details of the business, expressing delight at David's interest.

David saw that he had much to learn and he had grave doubts that he was earning his salary. He knew next to nothing of mechanics and did not always understand when Jonathan or Hegner, the foreman, explained some new device for which drawings were needed. But that wrought no change in Jonathan's manner.

"I'm afraid," he would say, "we weren't very clear on that." And he would go over the explanation once more.

When the drawings were correct: "Very good!" he would beam. "I wish I could draw as beautifully as you."

"Do you think," David asked on one such occasion, when he had been in the position nearly a month, "that I'm really the man you want? Sometimes I seem pretty slow."

"Oh, you mustn't think that," Jonathan said warmly. "You're catching on faster than I ever hoped for. You don't know what a help you are to me. The draftsmen I've had before used only their hands. You use your head."

"Thank you," said David, grateful for the assurance, even if the good will behind it was a trifle obvious.

"And you find your work interesting, don't you?"

"I'm learning to like it—very much."

He tried to make his answer convincing. But when he had left the office, Jonathan shook his head and

sought out his bookkeeper.

"That's a very nice young man, Miss Summers," he said. "Mr. Quentin, I mean."

Miss Summers agreed.

"But I'm afraid he's pretty heartsore yet."

Miss Summers looked a question.

"He's a young architect," Jonathan explained, "who didn't make good. I'm afraid this work seems a come-down to him."

"That's too bad," said Miss Summers.

"If you get a chance, I wish you would try to make things cheerful for him here."

"Of course," said Miss Summers, who understood Jonathan quite well.

"*We've* got to try that. We must make a little conspiracy to that end. I'll try to think up some details."

Miss Summers smiled as though she liked making little conspiracies with Jonathan. "Of course," she said again, and looked upon that as a promise.

Very quietly she set about keeping it. A little timidly, too; which was strange, since with others in the office and shop she was not in the least timid. She could do little, it is true—a cheery "Good morning" and a friendly nod at evening, an occasional smile when something brought David into her office, once in a long while a brief little chat in which she, with a breath-taking sense of having an adventure, took the lead. Another young man might have detected her friendliness and considered his charms. But David, though his grave courtesy never failed, neither thought of his charms nor was conscious of hers. Her charms, to be sure, were not of a striking sort; at least at first glance. She was a frail-looking body whose face was nearly always pale and sometimes, toward evening of a hot day, rather pinched; her arms were too slender to be pretty and the cords of her broad white neck stood out. She was not very tall and, perched on her stool at the tall old-fashioned desk by the window, she seemed more girlish even than her years, which were four-and-twenty. She did not look at all like an iris, even a white iris girl; David would almost as soon have suspected Miss Brown.

"I might," thought Miss Summers, "be a part of the furniture, for all he sees in me." She did not think it resentfully, though with an odd little twinge of disappointment. She regarded him as a very superior young man, the sort she had always wanted to know. But she had made a promise and she would not desert the conspiracy.

She noticed that he never ate or went out at the noon hour, as if there were no such thing as an inner man demanding attention. Thereafter her luncheon, which was always carried in a dainty little basket, was seasoned with a conviction of gross selfishness. And one day, after she had eaten, she went, basket in hand, to the door of David's little room.

"Mr. Quentin—" she began.

Instantly David was on his feet—one of his habits she liked so well; other men in the office did not have it. "Yes, Miss Summers?"

She held out the basket. In the bottom reposed two fat cookies and a big apple whose ruddy cheeks had a rival in hers at the moment.

"My eyes were bigger than my appetite. Would you care for them?"

"Thank you, Miss Summers," he said politely, "but I never eat at noon."

"I *wish* you would," she insisted. "If you don't, they—they'll spoil."

"By to-morrow? Hardly, I should think. Thank you, no," he repeated. "I find it doesn't agree—"

He saw her face fall.

"On second thought I believe I will. They look so tempting. It's very good of you to think of it."

He took the basket from her hands. But she did not leave. She stood, still hesitant, looking up at him. He motioned to his chair, the only one in the room.

"Won't you sit down?"

"But where will you sit?"

He answered by brushing some papers from the corner of the table and seating himself there. She took the chair—and the sense of adventure was very vivid.

David bit into a cooky. "Fine! This is good of you. Ordinarily I'm not hungry at all at noon—habit, you know. But to-day I am. How did you happen to guess it?"

"I didn't guess it. I just thought—" She looked up at him again, timidly. "Often I bring more than I can eat, and if—"

He had to smile at that. "Isn't that a little obvious? I could go out if I wanted to, you know."

"Oh, I didn't mean *that*!" She was overcome by confusion.

"And I didn't mean to snub you," he smiled again. "You needn't apologize. One need never be ashamed of a bit of hospitality, need one?" To give her time to recover, he went on, "There's a good deal of that around here, isn't there? Tell me something about Mr. Radbourne. You've been here some time, I believe."

"Two years. He's the best and kindest—"

She entered, eager to cover up her late awkwardness, upon a glowing history of their employer's multifarious kindness. There was Miss Brown, the stenographer, rescued from the department store where she had been "dying on her feet," sent to a commercial school and given a position she never could fill. And Blake, the collector, who had lung trouble and half the time was not able to report for duty. And Hegner, who was a genius but had a burning palate, picked up almost from the gutter and given an important place in the shop in the hope that responsibility would restore the shattered will. And Smith, the latest recruit, but recently out of the penitentiary.

"Though I wish he hadn't taken *him* in. He looks bad and has fishy eyes and is always so surly."

"Is this a business or a sort of hospital for broken lives?" David inquired.

"I think in his heart Mr. Radbourne is more interested in the hospital."

"It's too bad he's so homely, isn't it? It's rather hard to take him very seriously."

"Yes." She sighed, then caught herself up loyally. "*No*! Because when you get to know him you don't think about his face at all."

David was thinking he had not done full justice to her face. It was spirited and really intelligent, he decided, though its prettiness was as yet open to question. He perceived what hitherto he had missed: that she had hair and eyes quite worthy of consideration. Black as night the former was, and fine and rebellious, with little curling wisps about her ears and neck. The eyes were a peculiar slaty gray and had depths inviting inspection. He found himself wishing he could see them really alight.

"It would be something," he said thoughtfully, going back to Jonathan, "to be able to run that sort of hospital. But what a crew of lame ducks we are! Except you, of course!"

She laughed. "Oh, you needn't be polite. I'm one, too. Not a very big one or very tragic. A lame duckling, shall we say?"

He suggested that a lame duckling might grow up into a wonderful swan, and munched his apple ruminatively. Neither happened to think of a certain incident, much discussed, in which that edible figured prominently. And he did not ask a question.

"But how does he get his work done, with such a crew?"

"We're not all lame ducks, you know. And—you work hard, don't you?"

"Of course. It would be only decent—"

"We all think that. Even the big strong ducks like to work for him."

"I'm told he makes money."

"A good deal more than he spends on himself. I keep his personal accounts and I know. Several of his specialties are very valuable, inventions of his father's that are still in demand. He'd make more money

if he had a better system. Hegner says he can't accept all his orders. Maybe," she suggested, "you could help him there?"

He shook his head. "I'm afraid, Miss Summers," his laugh was not pleasant this time, "I don't know much of anything useful."

"You could learn, couldn't you?" she asked quietly.

He flushed, because he had let himself whimper. "Why—I suppose I could try."

She left him then. And strangely—how, he could not have told—soothing oil had been poured into his wounds.

By most rules set by most men he should have been happy enough. He had work, clean and honest, that he was learning to do well. He had paid a first installment on his debts. Dick Holden had been as good as his word, the evening hours were busy ones and Dick would soon cease to be a creditor. Shirley wrote daily. She was well, the good times had materialized, Davy Junior was learning a new word every day and they both were so homesick for him.

He was learning a new thing—to work, not with the natural easy absorption in a well-loved calling, but with faculties through sheer force of will concentrated on tasks set by others, in which he had no heart; to shut out of mind and heart, while he was working, all other facts of his life. It is a good thing for a man to know.

But, let his will relax its grip, and instantly his hurts began to throb. His pride had suffered; he had proclaimed himself to his little world a failure in his chosen calling. The new work was not *his* work. Desire for that would not die, despite failure. His mind, once freed from his will's leash, would leap, unwontedly active, into the old groove, setting before him creations that tantalized him with their beauty and vigor and made him yearn to be at work upon them. And that was a bad habit, he thought; if he was to learn content in the new work, he must first put off love for the old. When the debts were paid, the work for the successful uninspired Dick should cease.

And in idle moments, though they were few, and in sleepless hours, not so few, the incredible loneliness would rush upon him, not lessened by custom; and a more poignant sense of loss. To that vague sense he carefully denied words, lest definition add to the hurt.

Perhaps he was more than a little morbid. Men are apt to be so, when harassed overlong by care. And perhaps he made a mistake, shunning his friends and seeking an anodyne only in a wearying routine.

That afternoon the subject of the noon hour's chat came into David's quarters to ask a question about some drawings. The errand accomplished, he, too, lingered. He refused the chair David vacated and sat on the table.

"I heard you and Miss Summers talking a while ago," he said abruptly.

"You said you heard—" David looked up, self-conscious.

"I heard you laughing." Radbourne's eyes twinkled keenly down on his draftsman. "So you were talking about me?"

"There was nothing you couldn't have heard—without offense, sir."

"I know that. Miss Summers is a loyal friend."

"I hope the same can be said of me, sir."

"Would you mind," Jonathan asked, "not sirring me like that? That's a very fine young lady, Mr. Quentin."

"Evidently," said David, though with something less than his employer's enthusiasm.

"An inspiration to any man," Jonathan continued.

"I have no doubt."

Jonathan smiled. "Meaning you do doubt it? But I forgot—you probably don't know. She had a disappointment, Mr. Quentin, a heavy one, and she bore it as—as you and I would have been proud to. She had a voice. And just as she was beginning to make her living out of it and getting ready for bigger things, she took diphtheria. It left her throat so weak that she had to give up singing, altogether for a while, professionally for good."

"Why, that was too bad!"

"It was very bad. But she didn't whine. Just put it behind her. Since she had to make her own living somehow, she went to a commercial school and studied bookkeeping. I was lucky enough to get her."

"She could really sing?"

"She would have gone far, very far. I had happened to hear her and I followed her progress closely enough to know. I have never been reconciled—"

Jonathan broke off sharply, staring hard at a crack in the wall. The little blue eyes were very sad. David, too, fell into a long thoughtful silence.

He broke it at last. "As you say—"

Jonathan started, as if he had forgotten David's presence.

"As you say, it called for more courage, because she was a real artist and not a proven failure."

"But I didn't say that."

"You had it in mind when you told me that. You are quite right. Thank you for telling me."

"There!" Jonathan beamed happily. "I said she was an inspiration to any man."

"At least," said David grimly, "she is a good example."

Jonathan left. But in a moment he returned.

"Do you like music?"

"Very much."

"Then one of these evenings we'll go out to my house, we three, and have some, if you'd care for it."

"I should be glad to."

"Next Saturday, perhaps?"

David repeated his polite formula.

Jonathan eyed him wistfully. "You know, you're not obliged to say that if there is something else you would rather do. I shouldn't care to take advantage of my position to force my company and—and my friendship upon you."

"I should be very glad to have them." And when he had said it, David knew he had meant it. "Both of them," he added.

The little man's face lighted up eagerly. "You really mean that?"

"I certainly do."

"I am very happy to hear you say so. You see," Jonathan explained, "I lead a rather lonely life of it, away from the shop. I am not equipped for social life. People of talent and agreeable manners and taste do not seem to care for my company. They are not to be blamed, of course."

The homely face was sad again. David was uncomfortable and silent.

"However," Jonathan's smile reappeared, "I am fortunate to have found congenial friends here. Miss Summers is one. And now I add you to the list. With two friends a man ought to count himself rich, don't you think?"

David agreed smilingly.

Jonathan started away for the second time, then caught himself. "I forgot. I am ashamed to have forgotten. Perhaps you ought to be with your family Saturday evening. I should hate to feel—"

"My family is away."

If David's voice had become suddenly curt, Jonathan did not seem to perceive it.

"Then we'll consider it settled."

This time his departure was final. And the cloud, lifted a little by the efforts of a white-faced bookkeeper and a comically ugly manikin, settled upon David once more. He bent grimly to his interrupted work.

At that moment Radbourne was obtaining Miss Summers' assent to the occasion of Saturday. It was not hard to obtain.

"I like that young man," he confided. "I think we're going to be very good friends."

"I hope so."

"Yes. It would mean much to me, Miss Summers."

"But I was thinking of him," she said gravely.

And the slate-gray eyes, as they rested on the little man, were very gentle. . . . .

CHAPTER VI

SPELLS

A unwonted excitement pervaded the offices of Radbourne & Company on that Saturday morning, radiated no doubt from the head of the concern himself. He flitted about restlessly, tugged at his whiskers continually, and his voice, as he rattled off his correspondence to Miss Brown, had a happy boyish lilt. Occasionally, chancing to catch Miss Summers' eye, he would nod with a sly knowing smile.

For the original program for Saturday had been enlarged. Miss Summers and David had been notified to be ready at mid-afternoon for an event as yet cloaked in secrecy.

Mid-afternoon arrived. Radbourne glanced out into the street, nodded with satisfaction, closed his desk with a bang—greatly to the relief of Miss Brown, who would now have leisure to recopy the letters she had bungled—and vanished into his cloak-room.

At the same moment David strolled into Miss Summers' presence, watch in hand.

"The hour has struck," he burlesqued. "What doth it hold?"

"Whatever it is," she answered, "you must seem to be delighted."

"I think I shall be." David was actually smiling. "For the last hour I've been looking at my watch every five minutes. This excitement is infectious. He hasn't grown up, has he?"

"But isn't that his great charm?" Miss Summers seemed already delighted over something.

"Charm?" David looked doubtful. "I hadn't thought of him as—"

But he did not finish. Quick staccato footsteps were heard. Then a strange vision burst upon them—Jonathan Radbourne accoutered for motoring, in visored cap and duster, with a huge pair of shell-rimmed goggles that sat grotesquely athwart his beaming countenance. On one arm he carried a veil and another coat.

"Ready?" And to their astonished gaze he explained, "First we're going for a little run—if it is agreeable to you?"

They assured him, in italics, that it was.

"Then let us hurry." He handed the coat and veil to Miss Summers. "I brought these along for you. They are my mother's. I got them for her but she never would go out in a machine. She thinks it would be tempting Providence. I'm sorry," this to David, "I had nothing to fit you. Can you do without?"

David put him at ease on that point, and Miss Summers retired.

In a few minutes, fewer than you might suppose, she returned. Radbourne clapped his hands in delight.

"Look, David!"

David obeyed.

And then he was sure that he had never done justice to the face peering up at him from under the veiled hat. He was bound to admit that it had, after all, certain elements of prettiness; he was astonished that he could have thought otherwise. But then he had never seen her when cheeks glowed shell-pink and eyes danced with that undefined but delicious sense of adventure.

As he looked he smiled. It was a very friendly smile and the shell-pink deepened.

A touch on his arm interrupted—it seems there was something to interrupt.

"Have I taken a liberty? I called you David."

David turned the remnant of the friendly smile upon Jonathan Radbourne.

"Of course not. I hope you will do that again."

Jonathan beamed. "Thank you. And now, shall we start?"

An hour later they were bowling swiftly along, up hill and down dale, over a smooth country road. Fields of young corn sped by, stretches of yellowing grain that rippled and tossed under the sweep of the breeze, fragrant wood-lots whose shadow was a caress. The host of the occasion sat with the chauffeur, turning often to point out to his guests some beauty of landscape they already had seen, commenting tritely, obvious as always in his effort to be entertaining, happy in the belief that he was succeeding. And he was succeeding; such is the uplifting power of the spirit of true friendliness, even when dwelling in a dinky little man with whiskers absurdly swept by the rushing wind.

The guests were silent for the most part when his comments did not call for answer. In the girl—she seemed very girlish that afternoon—the sense of holiday and adventure continued, her eyes shone softly and the pretty color did not fade. This despite her seatmate's evident wish to be left to his thoughts. She had no wish to break through his reserve. But she wondered, a bit gravely, what he was thinking, and she did wish she could make things brighter for him, the superior young man who for all his nice courtesy and friendly smiles held himself so aloof and was so evidently subject to the blues. She thought she knew what troubled him. She could understand that. She was not always so contented as her quiet cheery manner proclaimed; sometimes, in the middle of the night, she awoke crying for the gift that had been taken from her.

His thoughts were less somber than from his long face she supposed. He, too, had his pleasurable sense—of respite. For once, though idle, neither loneliness nor dejection oppressed him. It was good to lean back lazily in the chariot of the rich, dreamily watching the ever-shifting picture, soaking in the sunshine. It was good, too—but in no-wise alarming—to have beside him this pretty girl who knew when not to talk and in whose occasional smile was a new subtle flattery. It was even good to be with that odd fish Jonathan Radbourne, for whose company, in a more fortunate case, he would have had no desire. He was glad Radbourne had arranged this little party.

They came, at the end of a long climb, to a ridge lifted high above those they had crossed. On its crest, at a word from Radbourne, the chauffeur brought his machine to a stop.

Behind them lay the rough broken country of the foot-hills through which they had passed. And before—the mountains! To them the eyes of the holiday-takers turned and clung.

Range after range they rose, like mighty billows, mounting higher until the tallest, dimly outlined in a thickening purplish haze, cut the sky, a rampart vision could not pierce. They seemed alive, those hills, the thick untouched growth stirring ceaselessly under the wind, a restless sea of sunlit green with flashes of white from laurel thickets and soft glintings where satiny oak-leaves caught and tossed back the slanting rays. And they sang.

"Listen!" Jonathan commanded, and the chauffeur shut off the panting motor.

They listened—all but the chauffeur, that philistine, who opened the hood and gingerly felt of the heated engine. And the voice of the wind, wandering through the forest, came to them. David heard a long wondering sigh from the girl beside him.

Jonathan, too, heard and turned quickly.

"That is real music, isn't it?"

She nodded.

"Is it worth the long ride?"

"The ride was good enough in itself, but this—! I never saw mountains before and I—oh, there aren't words for it."

"I know," Jonathan nodded, and the little twinkling eyes, even through the hideous goggles, seemed very tender as they rested on her. "'I will lift mine eyes unto the hills.' The old fellow who sang that knew what he was talking about, didn't he? If you've happened to mislay a faith anywhere, the mountains are a good place to look for it."

"Even faith in one's self?"

"The easiest to lose and the hardest to recover? Yes, even that. Particularly that. To any one needing it, I'd prescribe a month over yonder. I've never been able to do that, but often, when the world seems a little—gray, I ride up here for an hour. It does me good."

The philistine yawned and turned his passengers' thoughts to a more interesting matter.

"See there." He pointed to a thin low-lying cloud on the western horizon. "That's the city. 'Most sixty miles. Done it in two hours, up-hill more'n half the way, too."

"That's very good time, isn't it?" said Jonathan politely.

"Humph!" The philistine's disdain was marked. "We'll do better'n that goin' back. That is," he hinted, "if the dark don't catch us."

It seemed best, on such sound considerations as a waiting dinner, to take the hint. The big car panted once more, moved slowly along the ridge, then dipped sharply as it took the down grade. They coasted, gathering headway with each turn of the wheels. The girl, half turned, wistfully watched the mountains until the ridge rose to shut off the last crest from her sight. Then she settled back in the seat as though she were very tired.

David saw and on an impulse leaned toward her.

"Do you mean," he asked in a voice so low that the others could not hear, "that you lose faith in yourself?"

"It's the same thing, I suppose. I lose courage sometimes. I get tired of trying to like to do things I never really can like."

"I understand," he said gently. "Mr. Radbourne told me about you. Will you let me say, I am very sorry?"

She started, as if she had forgotten herself, and flushed deeply in her contrition.

"There! I'm perfectly nonsensical, letting myself be a cry-baby just when I'd intended— It isn't my habit at all. There's nothing really to be sorry for. If you give any work your best and put your heart into it, you'll get—",

"A great deal of happiness out of it," David finished dryly. "Exactly! I recognize the formula. Also its author. I think you're just whistling to keep up your courage now."

"But that isn't a bad thing at all to do. Why—" She turned to face him, with a little gasp for her daring. "Why don't you try it?"

It was his turn to grow red. "You think I'd be more cheerful company?"

"I think," she said, with a pretty gravity, "you make too much of being a—lame duck. And I think that isn't like you."

"How do you know whether it's like me or not?"

"That," she laughed to cover her discomfiture, "is an embarrassing question. But I do think it."

"At least, I'm not such a grouch as I sound. And I know how to be thankful when I find good—friends?"

She nodded emphatically, and indicated their host. "Two of us."

"I'll hold you to that. And," he continued, "you make me a little ashamed. I should like to say that you, being with you, is very good medicine for lame ducks."

Another flush—not of contrition this time nor yet of displeasure—deepened the pretty color. He pursed his lips and whistled, as well as he could against the rushing wind, a bar or two of the latest popular melody. They found humor in this and laughed, so merrily that their host turned and beamed approvingly upon them.

It was a good car and the chauffeur was as good as his word. The miles stretched out behind them, at a pace that forbade conversation. The exhilaration of speed was upon David; and a deeper joy, born of a friendship found in a waste of loneliness.

The late June sun was just sinking to rest when they entered the outskirts of the city and drew up before a rambling white house set well back on a velvety lawn. Two great elms stood in the front of the yard and rhododendrons bloomed against the wide porch, their fragrance lingering on the evening air.

"That," said Jonathan, "was a very spirited ride. But I hope," this to David, "you aren't sorry it's ended, because this is my home, where we want you to come very often. Miss Summers," he added, "already knows her welcome is sure."

He got to the pavement and helped Miss Summers to alight, as deferentially as if she had been the finest lady in the land. And, despite red whiskers and cap and goggles, to David the manner did not seem absurd. . . .

A little later David descended from the room where he had removed the traces of their ride. At the parlor door he stopped, looking uncertainly at the sole occupant of that cozy room. She was reclining, eyes closed and hands folded, on a pillowed settee, where the glow of a shaded lamp fell softly upon her, and David thought her the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. A very wisp of a woman she was; he could have held her in his arms and scarcely felt the weight. But he would have taken her very tenderly, so fragile she seemed. Under a filmy lace cap her hair, still fine and plentiful, shone silvery. The face, though the face of age and white and thin almost to transparency, was strangely unlined. She wore a black silk dress with many folds and flounces and fine ruching at neck and wrists.

He thought she was taking one of those naps which are the prerogative of age at any hour, and began to tiptoe away. But she started and sat upright, her face turned toward him.

"Who is it?" she asked. "But I know. You are Mr. Quentin, of course. I am Jonathan's mother." She smiled.

But something was wrong with that smile. It seemed incomplete.

"You may come in."

She held out a hand. David advanced and took it. She caught his in both of hers, in a soft lingering clasp.

She smiled again. "It is a good strong hand. You are quite tall, aren't you?"

"Almost six feet."

"And broad, too?"

"Rather, I believe."

He tried to speak lightly, but a hard lump was gathering in his throat.
For he knew what was wrong with that smile. She was blind.

"I am glad of that." She nodded brightly. "I am very fond of large men. It has been my cross that Jonathan took his size from me and not from his father. I could walk under his arm and not even graze his sleeve."

She drew him down beside her.

"Do you mind if I touch your face?"

"It isn't much of a face, you know." But that lump was very stubborn.

She reached up and passed both hands over his face, a light caressing touch he scarcely felt.

"Now," she smiled, "I see you. You are quite mistaken. It is a good true face and I like it very much.

Ah!" She had touched his lashes. "You are feeling sorry for me. But you must not," she chided gently. "I don't like people to be sorry for me."

To that David had no answer. But on an impulse—or it may have been an inspiration—as the little hands left his face, he brushed one lightly with his lips.

She beamed—always with that pathetic lack—just as Jonathan did when something pleased him.

"That was very pretty." She nodded again. "I see I am to like Jonathan's new friend very much. You know, you have quite won him. He talks of you all the time. You like him, do you not?" The smile had become quite wistful.

"Better all the time," David answered promptly and with truth.

"I am glad of that. And it is good of you to come here. We have so few visitors—I suppose," she sighed, "because we aren't very interesting. I am afraid Jonathan gets very lonely sometimes, having to spend most of his evenings here with no one but me. Not," she made haste to add, "that he isn't always good to me."

"I think he is good to every one."

"You have found that out? It is because he had a great disappointment once, I think."

"One would never guess that."

"No. Of course, when one has had a disappointment or been made to suffer, one makes up for that by trying to make the world brighter for others."

"It seems," said David, "that some people do that."

"He wanted to play the violin professionally. He had studied hard and his teachers said that he had talent. But his father forbade it. He said it wasn't a man's work to fiddle in public. My husband," she sighed, "was a very firm man and wanted Jonathan to learn the business. So Jonathan went to the technical school here and studied engineering. Jonathan," she added proudly, "had been well brought up and knew that his parents were wiser than he."

"I see," said David.

"But I think," the little lady went on, after a pause, "we didn't know how hard it was for him. I understand better now. Sometimes, though he doesn't suspect, I hear it in his playing. Then I wonder if we were wiser than he—and if I was selfish. Of course, the music would have taken him away so much and it would have been very lonely for me—and very dark. Sometimes I wonder if that wasn't his real reason for giving up his music."

David was silent.

"You say nothing." Even without eyes to give meaning, her smile was wistful as a child's. "Are you thinking he would have been happier—or better off—in the work he wanted than in taking care of me?"

"I think," said David, "he is happy because he stayed with you."

"He has said so himself." She sighed. "I wonder—I wonder!"

For a little they said nothing, David thinking very hard.

"And now," she said at last, "you may tell me what you think of Miss Summers."

"Why," he answered, "she seems very attractive."

"Jonathan has led me to believe so. And a gentlewoman, should you say?"

"I think so," said David, who had not thought of it at all. "Oh, yes, undoubtedly."

"That is my opinion. And she sings very nicely." Jonathan's mother sighed again.

There was a dinner that included creations not found in cheap boarding-houses: fried chicken, for example, tender and flaky and brown, and crisp waffles with honey, and sweet potatoes in the southern style. It was cooked and served by a white-haired old negress whose round eyes popped with pride at the destruction David wrought. She listened shamelessly, fat bosom aquiver, to her radiant master's quips, commenting, "Mistuh Jon'than,—*chuckle*—ef yo' ain'—*chuckle*—de beatenes' evuh!" and warned

David in a stage whisper to save room for a miracle of a pudding to come. Mrs. Radbourne opened the casket of her memory to display several well polished anecdotes of a day when the world must have been very bright indeed, full of light and color; chiefest jewel of which concerned a meeting with the elder Booth, from which occasion her husband—that very firm man—had emerged with credit. If, as some wise man has said, wit is all a matter of the right audience, then David must have been very witty indeed. And across the table from him sat a pair of slate-gray eyes, still aglow with that sense of adventure.

Then there were cigars, mild and very good, smoked on the porch; both ladies protesting that they liked the fragrance of tobacco. And then the host, with the air of having come to the real business of the meeting, rose and said:

"Shall we have some music now?"

"Oh, by all means!" said David politely, wondering how much credence he ought to place in the advance notices.

They went into the parlor, where Jonathan turned to Miss Summers, "Do you feel like singing this evening?"

"Yes," she said, and went at once to the piano.

She played a few chords softly. And then her voice rose in a low crooning note that went straight to David's heart.

For she sang as the thrush sings—because God had put music in her heart and shaped her throat to give forth pure rich liquid sounds and meant her to be revealed through song. And that evening, in the simple little slumber song she sang first, there was no faltering or roughened note to tell that part of her gift had been taken from her. While she sang, there was nothing in the world but melody and the rest of which she sang . . . and the singer.

She ended. But over at least one of her audience the spell of her voice lingered. For a long moment David sat motionless, lips parted, staring wonderingly at her, even after she had swung around to face them.

"Why—" he stammered foolishly. "Why—I didn't think—"

The rose pink in her cheeks became rose madder and it was easy to see that she was happy over something. "Oh," she said, "it just happens to be one of my good days. Sometimes my voice leaves me in the middle of a note and lets me down flat." She laughed, as though there were humor in that.

David did not laugh. He saw no humor in that. He could not believe that it had ever happened. . . .

And so she became the iris girl. But he did not suspect that yet. He was not looking for iris girls; it is much to his credit.

They did not notice the excitement glistening in Jonathan's eyes.

"You have been practising again," he declared.

"Just a little. And only for the fun of it. Not in earnest of course.
It's your turn now."

He said no more about her practise but got out his violin, tuned it carefully, opened a book of music before her and waited for her to play the prelude. Then, tucking the violin under his chin with an eager caressing gesture, he began to play.

That was a night of wonders to David. He was transported from a world of failures and disappointments into a delectable land where a dinky little man, armed with nothing but a horsehair bow and his own nimble fingers, compelled a gut-strung box to sing songs of love and throb with pain and dark passions and splendid triumphs. That is always magic, though some call it genius. And the magic did not cease there. It touched the player, transformed him. The homely manikin, a bit ridiculous with his mannerisms and whiskers, a trifle too obvious in his good will to others, disappeared. Where he had been stood a man strong but fine and gentle in his strength, proud and passionate, as strong men are apt to be, but brave enough to turn willingly from his chosen path because another way seemed best. David, watching the player's swaying body and transfigured face, understood, as even the blind little mother could never understand, how much her son had given to her.

"If only he could be playing always!"

Jonathan's mother slept. But for two hours the man who was no longer manikin and the girl who in real life was only a frail little bookkeeper played to David: a brilliant polonaise, a nocturne that was moonlight and shadow set to music, a concerto that only the masters attempt, a few noble old classics. Between them she sang thrice, songs chosen by Jonathan, each a little more taxing than the one before. Not once did she falter and only once, in the last song where her contralto voice had to take *b*-flat above middle *c*, was there a hint of strain.

More than rare harmonies and melodies and rhythms were coming to David. Player and singer, though they did not know it, were giving themselves to him. This was the man, and that the girl, whom —rather patronizingly, as though he were conferring a favor—he had let proffer their simple unaffected friendship! "He gave up his work of his own accord for that poor old woman who can't even guess at what it cost him. *She* was forced out of hers when success was in sight. I don't know which is worse. And *they* don't make gloomy grandeur out of it."

The last song, to which Jonathan improvised an obbligato, ended the music. Esther—for that was her name—pointed in dismay, toward the clock and the sleeping hostess.

"Thank you," said David from his heart. He was thanking them for more than the music.

Mrs. Radbourne stirred, yawning daintily. "Are you stopping so soon? My dear, you sang very prettily. Jonathan, you surpassed yourself. Particularly in the *Largo*. I remember Ole Bull, in 'sixty-seven. . . ."

When that anecdote was concluded, the guests rose to leave. Because it was very late, Mrs. Radbourne prevailed upon Esther to stay overnight. David would not be persuaded. So they gathered around him at the door. And, having shaken hands, he said again:

"Thank you. And I should like to say—"

A sudden awkward lump jumped into his throat. He began anew, "I should like to say—"

But what he would like to say would not be said. "Good night," he forced out abruptly and hurried into the night.

Jonathan Radbourne stood before the cold fireplace, tugging with both hands at his whiskers.

"Miss Summers," he said, "that young man grows nicer all the time."

"Yes," she said.

"I wish I could make things brighter for him."

"You are, I think."

"No more than he has earned from me. He's a very faithful worker, you know. I must look up some of his professional work. And I have an idea that concerns you, young lady. There's a new throat specialist I've just heard of. You're to call on him on Monday."

David walked home. When that absurd lump had been conquered he began to whistle determinedly, as became a young man who was no longer to make gloomy grandeur out of his failure. He kept it up until he reached the apartment and its chill loneliness smote him.

"Oh, Shirley," he cried, "if only you were—" And that was another saying he did not complete, because it might have been lacking in loyalty. . . .

A new tenant for the apartment had been found. The next Saturday David turned the key for the last time on a scene of defeat. He was not sorry to leave. That night he took a train for an over-Sunday visit with Shirley. She had been urging him to come.

"I know it's an extravagance," she wrote. "All the nice things are. But Davy Junior and I are so homesick for you." David's heart cut no capers at that, even before he read what followed. "I'm afraid people will think it queer, your not coming, and of course, I can't tell them it's because we are *poor*."

It was an unsuccessful trip from the beginning, though Shirley, all smiles and exclamations, met him at the station and hugged him so hard that she wrinkled his collar. She took him to Aunt Clara's in that lady's new car, saying, "Home, Charles," as if she had been born to automobiles and chauffeurs. There the day was taken up by many guests—including the resplendent Sam Hardy, in cutaway and silk waistcoat, New York made, that made David feel shabbier than he looked—come to inspect Shirley's husband. The only real "aside" he had was with Aunt Clara, who quizzed him concerning the state of his debts.

"You are doing quite well," she was pleased to approve. "I begin to believe there's something in you, after all."

"Thank you," David murmured, as politely as the case allowed.

"Now don't get huffy with me, young man," she said. "That's saying a great deal, from me to you. You can't expect *me* to fall on your neck."

"Not exactly," said David.

"Humph!" she sniffed. "Sounds much like 'God forbid!' Which isn't grateful. You've much to thank me for, if you only knew it. Shirley's better off here—and you're much better off having her here—than back there pinching pennies with you. There are some things Shirley never could understand."

David answered nothing, but a little voice within was piping, "It is true! It is true!"

Aunt Clara looked at him sharply, then suddenly—to her own great surprise—blew a trumpet blast from her long nose and said:

"Tut! tut! Don't mind my impertinent old tongue. I like you better than
I sound. You may never set the river afire, but you have a pretty
patience *I* never had. And I could be a fool over you, if I let myself.
Do you want me to send her back home? I will, if you say the word."

David hesitated a moment.

"Do you want her to go?"

"No," said Aunt Clara. "Shirley can be good company when things go to her taste."

"Does she want to go?"

"If she does," said Aunt Clara, quite herself once more, "she's bearing up under the disappointment remarkably well—for Shirley. I take it my question is answered."

Shirley and David went to the station as they had gone from it, alone in Aunt Clara's car. All the way he was trying to tell her of the new resolve he had taken when Jonathan and Esther Summers made music for him. It was strangely hard to tell. Not until they were in the station, with but a few minutes left, did he find words for the essay.

"Shirley, I'm afraid you thought I was pretty babyish—about giving up my profession. I—I *was* babyish. I'd like you to know I've got my nerve back."

Shirley was very sweet about it. "I did think you were a little foolish to take it so hard, dear, when the old architecture never brought us anything but disappointments. I always knew you would come to look at it sensibly."

And she dismissed the subject with the carelessness it may have deserved.
"When do you think Mr. Radbourne will raise your salary?"

"Probably before I have earned it."

"David, do you think we'll *ever* be rich?"

"I suppose not. There seems little chance of it."

She sighed.

"There is nothing in the world but money, is there?"

Tears of self-pity were coming into her eyes. "It's terrible, having to look forward to being poor forever."

The train announcer made loud noises through a megaphone. David rose and looked down in a sudden daze at the pretty young woman who was his wife—to whom he had become but a disappointing means to an end, to whom his heart, though he might thrust it naked and quivering before her eyes, would ever be a sealed book inspiring no interest. His pretty house of love was swaying, falling, and he could not support it.

"And I begin to think," he said queerly, "that we'll always be hopelessly, miserably poor."

Even Shirley could perceive a cryptic quality in that speech.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing that need disturb you. I have no reason," he added grimly, "to believe that it will disturb you."

She eyed him reproachfully and gave a sigh of patience sorely taxed.

"David, I wonder if you never realize that in some of your moods you are very hard to understand."

"Too temperamental, I suppose? Right as always, my dear." He laughed. Men sometimes laugh because they can not weep. But Shirley did not know that. "But I think I can promise you—no more temperament. I'm learning a cure for that. And now I'd better turn you over to Charles. I think that noise means my train is ready."

He took her to the car, kissed her and helped her into the seat and watched her ride away. Then he went back into the station just in time to catch the train.

Shirley found herself perturbed and close to tears; she hardly knew why.

"I wonder what he meant by that about temperament?" She sighed again. "Sometimes I think the worry and everything are turning David's temper sour. I wish—I wish he were like other men. He doesn't realize how trying he is sometimes."

And Shirley being Shirley, she bade Charles drive faster and tried to put David's unlikeness to other men out of her mind.

David being David, he sat up all night, submitting to his cure for temperament. He was facing the truth from which he had been hiding ever since Shirley went away. His heavy sense of loss had been defined.

A little imp with a nasty sneering voice that jabbed like a hot needle perched itself on his shoulder and kept dinning into his ears:

"The truth is, you had nothing to lose but a fancy. Shirley never really loved you. You were only one of her toys, one sort of a good time, and not worth the price. You didn't really love Shirley, only what you thought she was, what you see now she is not. Therefore . . ."

CHAPTER VII

SANCTUARY

Some men fall out of love with their wives as easily and unconcernedly as they fell in. They even feel a sort of relief, thinking a disturbing factor thus removed from their lives, and they live happily ever after. But they are not "temperamental."

It was not so with David. He thought it a tragedy, at least for a while. Even when it had failed him, when it had refused to shine in darkness, itself turned upon him in an hour of need, he had not lost faith in love. He had said in his heart, "At least I have love left, which is worth while in itself; and having that, I can yet work out some sort of happiness for us all." He had clung desperately to that hope, though the evidence was against it.

He had been clinging to an illusion. When he found that out, he had nothing left. He was bewildered by the task of working out a happiness where no love was. How could he rebuild when he had not even wreckage with which to build?

He went to live at the boarding-house where he had been taking his meals, a dingy cheerless establishment that had but the one merit of cheapness. He spent his evenings there alone, smoking too much, reading or working for Dick Holden. The cheap tobacco burned his tongue and the loneliness, more than ever, ate into his soul. He thought of going out to call on the Jim Blaisdells or for dinners with the men he had used to know. But he shrank from that because he supposed his old friends must be saying, "That David Quentin—poor Davy!—has quite petered out, hasn't he?" As probably they were.

He had sense enough to understand that these nights were not good for him.

"As far as I know, I've got to exist a good many years yet and make a living for myself and Shirley and Davy Junior. So I mustn't let myself get into this sort of a rut. I must hunt up a more cheerful place to stay."

When a love is dead, it is dead, and there's an end to it. After a decent period of mourning you get used to the fact. . . .

The office, after all, was not so unbearably prison-like. There was the balm of friendship—a double friendship—which is good for the self-respect of a man. And there was the work, with which he was growing more familiar and which, therefore, was more easily and quickly and better done. At his own suggestion the scope of his duties had been broadened; and he borrowed books from the library and tried to study out schemes to systematize Jonathan's business. Some of these schemes were not wholly absurd and one or two were adopted, which pleased Jonathan far more than David. Strictly speaking, David was not putting his heart into his work, but he was giving fidelity and a desire to do his best; and he was getting back, perhaps not happiness, but at least a measure of the honest workman's best reward. So that Jonathan's theorem was given a partial demonstration. Jonathan saw.

"Mother," he said one evening, "I am more than a little ashamed. I took David Quentin into the office because Mr. Blaisdell said he was badly in need of a position and nothing else offered. I'm afraid I thought it a charity and was rather patronizing at first. I'm afraid," Jonathan sighed, "I am puffed up at times by my charities, which don't amount to so much, after all."

"We are not required to be *too* humble," she reminded him. "Why are you ashamed just now?"

"It wasn't charity at all. David is really a very capable man and a hard worker. He more than earns his salary—I'll have to raise that very soon. I can't understand how he failed as an architect."

"Perhaps he didn't have the right talent. I understand architecture is a very difficult profession."

"It is a noble art," said Jonathan, "and very few men have the talent. That must be the explanation, though I've looked up some of his work and it seems quite as good as that of many architects I know. But I find it hard not to be glad that he was forced to come to me. He is the most likable man I have ever met."

"He seems attractive," said his mother, less sweepingly, "and has excellent manners. He is good-looking, is he not?"

"Very." Jonathan winced. "He is just what a man would like to be.
And I never had a friendship that meant quite so much to me."

"Has he displaced Miss Summers?"

"Miss Summers," said Jonathan, "is—different. What shall I read to-night—*Earnest Maltravers*?"

Boarding-houses that are both good and cheap are not easy to find. David took his problem to Esther Summers. It made an excuse for a minute's chat. He liked to watch the dancing lights in those expressive gray eyes.

"Do you happen to know of any pretty good boarding-house? I say *pretty* good, because it has to be pretty cheap, too. The place I'm at now is a nightmare. They're always frying onions. And the star-boarder is a haberdashery clerk. He looks like an advertisement of ready-made clothes and talks out of the side of his mouth in what he thinks is an English accent. He's always talking to me about the squabs on his staff."

"What is a squab?" she asked.

"I'm not quite sure, but I think it's a wholly imaginary creature much taken by the charms of haberdashery clerks."

"I see. I don't think of any place now. Unless—" She hesitated doubtfully.

"Unless what?"

"My aunt has a third-story room that is empty. It's a very nice room, though it isn't furnished now. There are only two other roomers, who are very quiet and never bother any one. We never fry onions and there is a pretty good boarding-house only a block away. You could get your meals there."

"It sounds like the very thing. I could furnish the room myself with some of my stuff that's in storage.

And— Do you happen to live there?"

"I happen to. Of course, if that's an objection—" She laughed.

"Would you let me set my door on a crack when you sing?"

She nodded. "Since you'd probably do it anyhow!"

"Then I think I could waive that objection. Would you mind speaking to your aunt about it?"

"This very night," she said.

That is how David went to live under the same roof that sheltered
Esther Summers.

It seemed a harmless arrangement. He saw her very rarely there. In the morning he left the house before she did, at the end of the day stayed longer at the office; not by intention but because his work called for longer hours. In the evening she stayed with her faded old aunt in their part of the house. The other roomers were as quiet and exclusive as the prospectus had promised. So David, in his new quarters—pleasant enough once his things had been installed—was left alone with his books, his letters to Shirley and his work for the successful Dick Holden.

But there was something in that house—not to be accounted for by mere creature comforts—that made it easier to fight off the blue devils of loneliness and took away a little of the reminder's stings when some tantalizing shape appeared in his tobacco clouds. Every morning he was awakened by her voice at the piano, a few minutes of scales and then one song, always a true matin song, full of hope and the sheer joy of living. In the evening she sang again, a little longer at scales and another song, sometimes two. Then David's door would be set on a crack and he would lean back in his chair, listening and thrilling with some emotion as vague but as beautiful as a very good idea in ecclesiastical architecture. Sometimes a film would come over his eyes; it is not clear why, for when she sang he forgot to remember that he was a failure, that he was in mourning for a love lately dead and that he had become a mere drudge for money.

One evening when he had been under that roof for nearly three weeks she did not stop with the second or even the third song. Ballads and arias followed until she had sung steadily for more than an hour. Wondering, David stole from his room and sat with the other roomers on the stairs, listening raptly to the golden voice that floated up to them. And not once did it falter or lose its pure timbre.

Silence fell at last. The other roomers, sighing, went back to their rooms. David went down to the parlor.

The singer was still sitting before the piano, absent eyes fixed on the open sheet of music; a happy but half-incredulous smile was playing about her lips. It became a friendly welcoming smile when she saw him at the door.

"Did you like my little concert?"

"Like it!" He used a gesture to explain that she had set too big a task for his tongue.

Her cheeks made answer.

"Do you know," he asked abruptly, "that your voice is getting better and stronger all the time?"

"I think so," she said quietly.

"Don't you think that maybe your throat is getting well?"

"I think so. But I can't be sure. It's too soon to tell yet. And it's too good to be true."

"Oh, no!" he protested. "You mustn't say that. You mustn't *think*—"
He stopped with a curt laugh. "That's queer advice from me."

"But it's very good advice—for any one, I am sure." Her eyes had become very grave. "And I shouldn't have said that, for it really doesn't matter so much as it did once. You see, I was pretty cowardly about it at first, when I found I couldn't depend on my voice. Because I couldn't have all I wanted I wouldn't have anything at all. For two years I wouldn't sing a note. The doctor says the long rest is what gives me a chance now, but I don't deserve that. I made myself foolishly unhappy. But it's different now. Even if I can't go back to studying or ever hope to do big things, I know I can sing a little for myself and get a great deal of happiness out of that."

It may be that her smile was a little too bright.

"Do you really mean that?" he asked. "Or are you only whistling again to keep up your courage?"

"If I'm only whistling—why, please let me whistle. But I think I do mean it. It's very sound philosophy. Even if the lame duckling can't fly, is there any reason why it shouldn't waddle for the fun of it?" And now the smile was just as it should have been.

David considered that. For some reason hidden from her his cheeks were burning; you would have said that he was ashamed again.

"No reason at all," he said at last, "if the duckling happens to be very brave. But I hope she is going to fly very high and very far."

And with that he left her, more abruptly than was polite. She would have been glad to have him stay longer.

For many minutes she sat there by the piano, thinking not of the gift that seemed to be coming back, but of the queer lame duck who took his lameness so much to heart. She saw no harm in such employment. She wished she were a fairy godmother, so that she could by a wave of her wand make his wings whole once more.

Up in his room David, too, was thinking earnestly. After a long while he rose from his chair, set up the easel and began to work, not on a pretty-pretty picture for Dick Holden, but on an idea of his own that lately had been haunting him.

That became a habit in his spare hours.

Swiftly the new idea took form, as the flower grows in the field, without travail or effort. He worked harder than ever at Jonathan's drawings those days—hot lazy days they were, too—to earn release a half-hour earlier; and he swallowed his dinners more hastily than was wise. Then, when no hack work for Dick Holden was to be done, he sat at his easel sketching until the clock struck an hour—more often two—after midnight. Esther's aunt was a model landlady and had nothing to say about extravagance in gas.

He did not pat himself with the remark, "They will have to come to me yet." He never even thought of that. Neither did he say, "I am doing a big thing," having no opinion at all as to whether the thing was little or big. But he whistled sometimes as he worked, quite softly, and he went to bed always in a warm mellow glow that merged easily into sound restful sleep. In the morning he awoke ready, even eager, for the new day.

He even took some pleasure in his work for Dick Holden. It was Dick who gave him a bit of interesting news. David had called that noon to get data for some plans Dick wanted him to make.

"I could do them myself," the latter explained. "But I'm loafing this summer. I'm in town only because there's talk that St. Mark's is going to build."

David did not wince. "And to pay tribute into your coffers?"

"That's what I'm here for," grinned Dick.

"And what are you going to give them?"

"*I* don't know." Dick waved a confident hand. "Whatever they want."

"I'm working out an idea," David suggested a little timidly, "that maybe you can use. Drop around to my room some time and I'll show it to you."

"Why, yes, I'll drop around some time," rather too carelessly said Dick, who was no longer so thoughtful in little things. Too much success seemed to be going to his head.

David flushed and dropped the subject. Dick, too, dropped it, both from tongue and mind.

A few evenings later, while David was working on his new idea, violin strains rose from the parlor. But he did not go down or join his fellow roomers on the stairs, though Jonathan and Esther made music until the evening was no longer young. It was a good hour for work; the harmonies from below awoke other harmonies in his heart and clarified his vision. That evening he completed a first sketch of the interior: the picture you get looking toward the altar from a point well back in the nave. It was good even as a sketch, for he had seen very clearly and worked eagerly.

When it was finished he sat back and looked at it for a long time while the music from the parlor flooded up to him. But he saw not a sketch.

He was back in a simpler age when the symbols of faith had power; seeing with a new understanding a picture that had formed in his mind as he worked out this creation—for him it was already created. . . . A narrow crooked street, filled by a gay colorful throng that slackened its pace and lowered its voice before a gray, weathered old church. A beggar crouching on the steps, mouthing his whining song. A constant stream of worshipers passing in and out through the great open door: plumed cavaliers, their arrogant swagger for the nonce put off; gray pilgrims, weary and dusty, with blistered feet and splintered staves; mailed soldiers ready to march for the wars; tired-eyed crusaders home from a futile quest; a haughty lady, a troubled daughter of artisans, a faded wanton, brought into a brief gentle sisterhood by a common need; all seeking the same thing. And perhaps in the doorway a faltering sinner unconfessed, fear of punishment a flaming sword in his path. . . . Ah, well! It was not so absurd, that picture. For those seekers have even unto this day their children who, amid their pleasuring and warring and questing, sometimes grow faint and would rest.

In such company he entered. On the threshold they paused with a quick breath for the chaste beauty of vista and line, the soft play of color and shadow. Then sense of beauty faded before a thing that eye can not see nor tongue express, what the seekers had needed and what they found: peace, passing understanding, unseen but undoubted; hovering above them in the noble nave, kneeling with them in shadowy aisle, winging toward them on the shaft of sunshine streaming from heaven itself upon the altar. Here, for intrigant and ravager, penitent and saint, failure and world-weary, was sanctuary—respite, if only for an hour, from sin and strife, passion and hate and self. It was good to stay there a while, humbled yet uplifted, aspiring anew. For there was a Presence in His own house.

A wonderful thing had happened to David Quentin. His sensitive quivering heart had caught and recorded the great human need, and to him it had been given to build a rest house for many weary and poor in heart. Perhaps if his commonplace little trials had not seemed big and tragic to him, he never could have known the need and so he never would have written in stone and wood the story of sanctuary that has meant so much to the ages.

He did not foresee that. He did not think of it as a possibility. He was thinking only of the great discovery he had made: that a man may find sanctuary, as he may give worship, in a task well loved and well done. Life was a pretty good thing after all, since it could not take from him eyes to perceive or heart to rejoice in the beauty he could create, though none else cared to see. The days of his whimpering, even to himself, were ended.

"I should have been doing this all along."

Nor did he notice that the music had ceased. He did not know even that he was no longer alone, until a voice broke in on his reverie.

"He doesn't look very hospitable, does he?"

"Maybe," said another, "he doesn't feel that way."

David jumped to his feet and peered over the easel at Jonathan and Esther.

"But he does, indeed. Visitors," he announced, "are requested to stay on this side of the door."

They stepped within. "Since you wouldn't come down," Jonathan explained, "of course we had to come up. Though Miss Summers almost lost her courage on the way. She said we were taking a liberty."

"But I didn't," she protested in some confusion. "I only said—"

"That you don't seem to care much for company," Jonathan completed her sentence. "She was mistaken, I trust?"

"Woefully," smiled David. "And I've had company all evening. They played and sang and helped me to work." He waved a hand toward the easel.

"Do you think," Jonathan inquired of Esther, "we may take that as a compliment?"

"I'm not quite sure," she answered.

"She means," chuckled Jonathan, who seemed to be enjoying himself hugely, "she must see the work before she commits herself. Is it allowed—?"

"Of course, if you care to," David said. "And you'll find these chairs comfortable, I think. Over here, where you get the light." When they had sat down, he turned the easel toward them. "Now, ladies and gentlemen," he burlesqued, "if you will look upon my right—"

They looked. And their sudden surprised interest made his heart skip a beat.

"Why, I—I didn't know—" Esther began, in the words he had once stammered to her. She gave him a quick questioning glance, then looked again at the sketch.

Jonathan had become very grave. "You have a gift for drawing."

"Only a knack," said David.

"A very pretty knack then. Is that a copy?"

"Just a sketch of an idea I've been trying to work out lately. This," David placed another drawing on the easel, "is about what it would be like outside."

"It is," said Esther, "like seeing music."

Jonathan studied that drawing for several silent minutes.

"You keep up your professional work as a side issue?" he asked abruptly.

"Oh, no! But sometimes I—waddle for the fun of it. Under advice,"
David smiled at Esther, "of a very good fairy."

Jonathan did not understand that saying, but he thought from her color he could guess the fairy's name.

"And very good advice, too. Have you done any other ecclesiastical work?"

"Why, that," laughed David, "I used to think was my mission in life."

"Is there anything else you could show us?"

"I have a set of drawings I submitted to St. Christopher's last spring. They're all that escaped a general destruction when I took down my shingle."

David got the plans from a closet, unrolled them and placed the illustrative sketches before his visitors. Jonathan studied these drawings, too, very carefully.

"St. Christopher's, you say?" he said at last. "But I don't understand. I happen to have seen the plans they accepted. I don't know very much about architecture technically, but I should say yours are better—manifestly better. Am I right?"

"They weren't what St. Christopher's wanted."

"But they are better, aren't they?"

"I think they are," said David quietly.

"But I believe I like the new idea even better. Am I right again?"

"I suppose it is better in a way. It's less pretentious and spectacular, but has more warmth—more meaning, I suppose."

David tried to speak casually, but excitement was mounting. He caught up the new sketches and compared them eagerly with the old, forgetting for the moment what St. Christopher's had meant to him. And he saw the new idea as he had not seen it before.

"It *is* better," he muttered. "I—I hadn't realized."

"David!" It was hard to believe that Jonathan could be so stern. "You are a fraud. You came to me under false pretenses. You gave me to believe that you had been a failure."

"I was."

"You know better than that. Any man who can work out such things—!
For a very little I would give you your discharge this moment."

"But I beg of you—Mr. Radbourne, you don't know what my position means to me—"

"I didn't mean that seriously, of course. But you ought to be back in your own work. Why did you ever leave it?"

"Because I couldn't make a good enough living." David flushed as he said it. How pitifully poor, despite all his late philosophizing, that reason sounded! "Mr. Radbourne, let us drop the subject."

But the shining-eyed Jonathan would not drop it.

"I think I can understand," he said gently. "Because it seemed the best thing for others, you gave up the work you wanted to do and were fitted to do. You didn't whine and you did my little drudgeries well and patiently, as though they were the big things you would have done—"

"You don't understand. I did whine—"

"I never heard you. Miss Summers, we owe David an apology. We were sorry for him!"

"Not now," she said.

"No, not now. David, how long will it take you to finish your new plans?"

"But I'm not going to prepare plans. A few sketches for my own amusement—that's all."

"I happen to know that St. Mark's is about to build."

"I am not interested, Mr. Radbourne."

"But I am. As a member of St. Mark's and as your friend, I am deeply interested. How long will it take, David?"

David only shook his head.

"Man," cried Jonathan, "will you let one reverse—"

"Mr. Radbourne, I beg of you, don't urge that. It's all behind me. I'm not fitted for the work as you think—drawing pretty sketches isn't all of it. I—a man told me once, I haven't the punch. I don't know how to meet competition. And it cost me something—it wasn't easy—to get settled in other work. I don't want to get unsettled again, to face another disappointment. I—"

David stopped. And Esther, watching him too closely to be conscious of her own heart's eccentric behavior, saw in his eyes the hurt which disappointment had left, and philosophy, even a very sound philosophy as formulated by a lame duckling, had not yet fully healed. And she saw indecision there, a longing that she understood, and a fear—

Of its own accord her hand went toward him in a quick pleading little gesture. "You must!" she said softly. "Please!" . . .

Jonathan had left, beaming with joy, violin under one arm, a roll of sketches under the other. They stood on the porch in an intimate silence they saw no reason to break. A young half moon was sailing over the city, dodging in and out among lazy white cloudlets. David watched it and wondered if he and his friends had not been more than a little foolish. He shrank from the thought of another defeat. He shrank even from the thought of a victory; for, should it come now, it would not be alone through his gift or any power that dwelt in him.

"I believe you're sorry you promised him."

He turned to the girl. The disappointment in her tone reached him.

"He isn't hard to read, is he? He's planning to—to pull wires for me.
He won't trust my work to win out."

"Ah! I was hoping you wouldn't think of that."

"I can't help it. It sticks out—you've thought of it yourself. Do you think it is a foolish pride?"

"Not foolish!" she answered quickly. "And not just pride, I think.
It's hard to realize that good work isn't always enough."

"Then you don't think me—temperamental?"

"I think you are—honest. But after all, there's no real dishonesty if you do good work. And I think"—there was a sudden return to her old shyness—"I think, if you win out, your great reward will be the

good work you have done."

"How do you know that?"

"If it weren't true you wouldn't have made those sketches."

And he knew a quick stirring of gratitude that he had found this girl who understood so well, who saw the verities as he saw them and had neither laugh nor sneer nor impatience for his finickiness.

"I wish," she went on, "it could come to you as you want it. But I am glad it is coming—even though some one does pull wires to bring it to you."

"But the wires may not work. I've got to remember that others may not see my work as you and he do."

"That is possible," she said. "What of that?"

"I can try again, you mean? I suppose I can do that. I think I will do that, as I can. And probably, if I turn out work that's worth while, some day my chance will come. If I don't—why, there are other things to do, and if you put your heart into them you can get happiness out of them. Do you mind if I plagiarize a bit?"

"I don't mind at all," she smiled.

"And I've got to remember that, win or lose, I owe a lot to you and him. He doesn't understand what a quitter I was when I came to his office. I'd turned sour. I thought, because things hadn't gone the way I wanted, I'd been hardly used."

"I know how that feels," she said.

"The truth was—" Moonlight loosens tongues that by day are tied fast. "The truth was, I'd had the best luck in the world. I'd met him—and you. You went out of your way to make things pleasant for me, a stranger. And by just being yourselves you shamed me into looking at things from your point of view. It's a very good point of view. I'd rather have it now, I think, than build all the churches in Christendom."

The moonlight revealed the friendliness in her eyes. He could not fight down a new thrilling faith in his gift, in himself, in his strength to stand straight though he should fail again.

"You'd have found it by yourself," she said. "If you'd really been a quitter, if it hadn't been in you, you couldn't have found it, even through him. But I know how you feel. I feel the same way toward him. *Isn't* he the dear, funny little man?"

And that opened a fertile and profitable field. Jonathan's ears must have burned a long while that night.

CHAPTER VIII

CERTAIN PLOTS

Three good fairies had their heads together. One was an astute banker with a mouth delinquent borrowers hated to see, one was a woman who was known to be wise and one was a dinky little man with red whiskers.

"The question before the house," said Jim Blaisdell, "is, are we justified in playing politics to bolster up a young man we're afraid can't stand on his merits? *I* don't fancy pulling wires—in church matters, that is."

"The question," said Mrs. Jim, "is no such a thing. It is, whether we're to let that insufferable Dick Holden give us another St. Christopher's?"

"Or to help make a strong fruitful life?" amended Jonathan.

"I can't quite see Davy as strong," said Jim, "though he is paying his debts. But Dick certainly is getting to be a conceited duffer. The ayes," he sighed, "seem to have it. The next question is ways and

means. Old Bixby's method in St. X looks good to me. A conditional contribution—what do you say?"

"How much?" inquired the practical Mrs. Jim.

Jim took out an envelope, did sums in subtraction and division and held out the result to his wife. She took it from him, did a sum herself—in multiplication—and exhibited that result to him.

"Woman," he cried, "would you rob me? I'm no Standard Oil."

"It's the least I can possibly consider," she answered him firmly.
"You can't expect to play good fairy without paying for the privilege.
Now, Mr. Radbourne, what will you do?"

Jonathan, too, took out an envelope, wrote slowly a row of figures, scratched it out, wrote another and handed it doubtfully to Mrs. Jim.

"Will that do," he inquired, "for a starter?"

Mrs. Jim gave him a special smile. "*That* is something like." She waved Jonathan's figures under her husband's nose. "There, Mr. Pinchapenny! Are you blushing for shame?"

"Phew!" whistled Jim. "If that's how he squanders his money, he needn't ever come asking credit of me." He grinned at Jonathan. "Davy must be a mighty poor workman, when you'll pay so high to get rid of him."

"Oh, no," Jonathan protested. "It will be very hard to fill his place—in one way entirely impossible. But, you see, Davy and I have become good friends, and—"

"And of course," Mrs. Jim put in sweetly, "in friendship one forgets one is a shaver of notes."

"Oh, my hands are up," Jim groaned. "I'll match your figures,
Radbourne. But, for heaven's sake, don't raise me again!"

"What I'd like to know," said Jim, when Jonathan was gone, "is, why we are going to the poorhouse for Davy Quentin?"

"First," said his wife, "because we know Davy will do work that is worth while and because he is Davy. Second, because it is good for us to give a little out of our much."

"No one helped me when I was poor," growled Jim.

"That," she explained, "was because you were known to have a talent for helping yourself—and because you married me, who am help enough for any man."

"There may be something in that," Jim was forced to concede. "Shirley still at her aunt's?"

"Yes."

"Hmmmm! Mighty long visit. What's she doing there?"

"Having a very good time."

"While Davy—hmmmm! Any trouble there, do you suppose?"

"No-o-o! But Shirley keeps writing about 'poor David, who doesn't seem to have the money-making knack'—with an air that says, 'Poor Shirley!' And when a woman begins to speak sadly of her husband's flaws, it is time they were together again with all flaws repaired. Shirley being Shirley, it had better be in prosperity."

"Who's going to repair Shirley's flaws?"

"That's part of the scheme. We must get her back somehow before she knows Davy's plans are accepted. Then she will seem—"

"I see." said Jim dryly. "That may allow her time for a very long visit—a lifetime, in fact. But isn't there a theory that hard scratching is good for the soul?"

Mrs. Jim eyed her lord with contempt. "My dear Jim, you are old enough to know that no family ever came happily through money troubles unless the wife was patient and wise indeed. Besides, I'm not trying to prove a theory, but to correct a mistake before it's too late."

(But of all this David never was told.) The old witch must have gnashed her teeth in rage as, peeping through his windows, she saw her spell broken. There is a good fairy called Hard Work, and another hight, Hope, and both of these were standing guard. David must have been happy, because he never thought of happiness, its causes or effects. There was a new set to his jaw that meant far more—if you were looking for signs of the future—than the youthful enthusiasm once reflected on his face. So the witch, shrieking grisly maledictions, rode away to vent her spite on colicky babies and gouty old men.

There was one thing the fairies could not guard against, perhaps because they had not been warned. Sometimes the witch perceived that David was not alone. Those occasions were not many: a few minutes now and then when household errands were prolonged a trifle, or lemonade and cookies, sweetened by the aunt's good wishes, were carried to him. And sometimes he went down-stairs to listen to a song and to tell the singer that her high *b*-flat was unmistakably easier. There was no great harm in that, to be sure. But the witch, baleful creature that she was, took a hint and hatched a wicked plot.

They had a bond, you see. They faced the same adventure. It did them good to compare notes of progress; and an audience was needed if they were to make a jest of setbacks, such as a throat that seemed all burrs or an idea that had for the moment lost its charm. Also he needed some one to remind him that he took too little sleep and never exercised. He would have been wiser if he had listened. Instead, he laughed at her and said, "Work never kills, and in summer I always get thin." But evidence of her concern always left him pleasantly glowing.

In August she took her vacation. But she did not go away. Part of each day she spent in his room, putting it to rights and keeping it sweet and clean. She liked to do that, because he never failed to note the result of her labors or to thank her. When she had finished her sweeping and dusting, she would sit for an hour or more studying the sketches and plans he had left on easel or table. She thought it a marvel that a young man could think out a church so proportioned that its harmonies set one to dreaming and thinking, so devised that it would not fall down though the storms of centuries charged against it. And it was a relief to think of him and his work; it took her mind from an ugly little fear lurking in her heart. Her throat did not always behave as a well-meaning throat should.

Sometimes she studied also a new photograph on his mantel—of a pretty laughing-eyed young woman playing with a sailor-suited cherub. The young woman, she knew must be the wife of whom he never spoke.

"You are very pretty," she would whisper. "Why do you stay away from him? Don't you know he is lonely, with no one to cheer him up but a funny little man—and me? You're the reason he gave up his own work."

She tried not to be prejudiced against Mrs. David Quentin. But she had a burning curiosity, which is a weakness of all women—and men.

She mentioned the picture one evening, very casually.

"This is your family, is it not?"

"Yes," he said in a queer curt tone she had never heard him use.

"She is very pretty, isn't she?"

"Yes. They are—spending the summer at an aunt's."

"What a darling little boy!" she said.

Soon after she left, thinking, "I wonder *why* she is away from him? It isn't a happy reason, I'm sure. . . . *I* wouldn't stay away from him."

David was thinking much the same thing. The next day the picture was nowhere in evidence.

When he went down-stairs one evening to tell her the plans were complete, she dissembled her excitement and said, "Now you'll be able to get enough sleep." But when, after a few minutes of gay nonsense, he had left her to take her advice, and she thought what success would mean to him, she became very grave and had her first taste of a suspense that grew heavier with each waiting day. . . .

The blind woman was first to see.

There was another dinner at Jonathan's house, by way of celebration of the plans' completion, with music, most of which came from his violin. Esther sung only twice, because that was one of the days when the throat behaved ill. "I've been working it a little too hard," she explained.

Between times they were very gay. It seemed to Jonathan that his guests were unusually witty and happy.

Mrs. Radbourne was *not* asleep, though the lids drooped over the poor sightless eyes. She was listening. But not to the music or jests. And she was seeing, through a sense that only blind people have.

When Jonathan came back from his walk with his guests to the trolley, she was waiting for him.

He began to pace back and forth across the room. She listened closely to the quick staccato tread.

"You seem very happy over something, Jonathan."

"I am." She did not need eyes to know that he was beaming. "Did you notice that they both seemed in better spirits than usual?"

"I noticed."

"They are coming into their own. I can't help feeling that our ventures are coming out well. It will be something to have helped them a little. There are compensations, you see—" He caught himself abruptly.

"Compensations for what?"

"Oh, for all the things," Jonathan said vaguely, "that one would like to do and can not."

"Even for giving your life to the care of a helpless, uninteresting old woman?"

"Hush, mother!" He reached her in a twinkling and patted the fine silver of her hair. "You know better than that."

"I know what you have given up for me. It is only lately that I have begun to understand. Oh, Jonathan —"

"But think what I've gained by staying with you! There have never been any regrets."

"You have been a good son." But her smile was very faint. "Do you like David Quentin as well as ever?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"There are no 'whys' in friendship, mother."

"Does he return your friendship in equal degree, do you think?"

His answer was without hesitation. "No."

She was silent.

"That is not to be expected, of course," he said simply. "I think he would if he could. But such matters are not to be forced."

She lifted her face and the poor lifeless eyes seemed to be straining to see him. "I am just beginning to know my son. Ah! if I could see you—only once! I would ask nothing more."

Her hands reached toward his face. But he caught them and held them gently.

"Why do you never let me touch your face?"

He mustered a laugh. "I'm afraid you would be disappointed. You know, your hands have seen David, and—"

"Ah!" she breathed. "Always your David! Jonathan—" She paused sharply.

"Yes?"

"Jonathan, there is a Mrs. David Quentin, is there not?"

"Yes."

"Where is she now?"

"Visiting relatives, I believe."

"It is a strangely long visit, don't you think? In my time husbands and wives lived together."

"It is an arrangement for the sake of economy, Mrs. Blaisdell tells me.
It seems David had got into debt."

"I should think," she said slowly, "Mrs. Quentin would find it economical to return."

"Mother!" Jonathan started. "Just what do you mean?"

"Her husband and you find Miss Summers quite agreeable, do you not?"

"Mother," he reproved her gently, "you should not even hint such a thing. David is a man of honor."

"Say he is a man—and stop there. A presentable young man whom people seem to like and whose wife has been long away. And Miss Summers is an attractive young woman who has been thrown much with him. . . . I have seen what I have seen."

"Mother!" Jonathan stood stiffly, as though he had been turned to stone. "Oh, that is impossible. You are unjust. It isn't like you to be so suspicious. There is nothing between them but a friendly attachment."

"A friendly attachment! In words, perhaps. But—oh, my poor blind son! Jonathan, sit here beside me."

He went to her and sat down by her side. She took both his hands. And her voice was very gentle.

"You are in love with her, are you not?"

"Yes," he said.

"Then press your suit quickly, my son."

"But I can't—you must see that. I am her employer. She is dependent on me. It would put her in a distressing position."

"I approve of your delicacy. Not many men display it in these greedy days, I am told. But delicacy can be carried to excess. Women love to be wooed strongly, masterfully. I remember how your father—"

"My father was equipped for masterfulness. I," he smiled sadly, "am not."

"You are small, I know, like me. I had hoped my son would be tall."
She sighed. "But many small men have been great and strong."

"You don't understand. Mother, you have been blessed—you have never had to look on your son. That is why I never let you touch my face. I am more than merely small. I am ugly. I am ridiculous. I am almost grotesque. People smile in amusement when they see me and never take me seriously."

"Does *she* smile in amusement when she sees you?"

"No. She is too big-hearted for that. She is gentle and kind and friendly, because she is a little sorry for me and because she thinks mistakenly that she has reason to be grateful. As a friend, a helper, I am tolerable. As a lover I should only be absurd. See, mother, for yourself—this once!" He lifted her sensitive hands and guided them over his face. "My nose—my ears—my little pig's eyes—this grinning mouth—these silly whiskers that hide a little of my absurdity—"

She drew her hands quickly away.

"You are a gentleman, a fine, great-hearted gentleman—"

"With a face like a comic valentine. Even my mother can't say no to that. What woman wants a comic valentine for her lover? Don't you understand now? I can have her friendship now and be with her a little. And I can do little things to help her. I can't risk losing that to seek something she never could give."

"But she could have given it once. I know it. I knew it then, but I wouldn't tell you because I wanted to keep you for myself. He—your friend David—had not come then. You must take the risk for her sake. And before it is too late."

"But I can't inflict myself on her. It would be no kindness to her or to me." He left her and began to

pace back and forth agitatedly, in the pompous, hopping little strut. "You are wrong—you must be wrong. It is impossible. It would be terrible, tragic even though they are both good. And it would be my fault. I brought them together, thinking she would help make things cheerful for him. . . . Mother, I wish you hadn't put this in my mind! I can't believe it. I won't believe it. He is honorable—"

The blind woman smiled sadly. "It is a thing with which honor or duty or law has nothing to do. And I fear—I fear it is already too late—because I kept silent when I should have opened your eyes."

But Jonathan was not listening. He was seeing the faces of his friends as they had been that evening. The scales were falling from his eyes, an evil black fear entering into his heart.

"Oh, Jonathan, my son—my dear son—"

She held out her hands to him and he went to her and knelt at her side. And she mothered him, that dinky, absurd little man, and he bowed his head on her knee.

CHAPTER IX

A NEW HOUSE

Radbourne & Company was in a daze. And no wonder! For a week the "little boss" had not once beamed, the spirited hop had gone out of his walk, a new querulous note had come into his voice. When a matter went wrong—which, it seemed, happened oftener than usual—he reminded the delinquent of the fact, not gently, but sadly, as though deeply aweary of the frailty of men. Miss Brown confided to Esther that she was well on the way to "nervous prostration." Esther was worried, and wondered what grave mischance could have worked out such a change in Jonathan. He seemed to avoid both her and David, and when they did meet his manner was constrained and awkward.

It was like chicken-pox and evil gossip and other contagious diseases. It spread. Gloom hung like a fog over office and shop. No one whistled or hummed at work. Good friends lost their heads and exchanged cutting words. And Hegner, the shop foreman, who had been sober for a year, lost his grip and got drunk. Because he was ashamed and hated himself, his temper was always at half-cock.

And Smith—poor Smith, the ex-convict, to whom Jonathan's kindness had been as water on a lame duck's back—had to bear the brunt of Hegner's distemper. He stood it as long as he could; which was not very long.

One noon hour he presented himself, sullen and whining and bleeding at the nose, with a grievance for Jonathan's ears. The latter looked up frowningly from the pile of letters he was signing; they were sadly misspelled, the agitated Miss Brown having been at her worst.

"Yes, Smith," he said wearily. "What is it? A complaint, I suppose?"

"I wants to know," began Smith in a whine, "why I can't git a square deal here. The shop boss he—"

"Is Hegner mixed up in it? Then go bring him here and say what you have to say before him."

Smith departed, to return a few minutes later, an apprehensive eye cast back at the trailing Hegner.

"Now, Smith," said Jonathan, "what is your complaint?"

"The boss he keeps damnin' me up an' down all the time," Smith explained. "An' this morning he slugs me—right here on the beak." He laid a gentle finger on the corpus delicti.

"Hegner," inquired Jonathan, "why do you keep damning him up and down all the time? And why did you slug him on the beak?"

"Because," Hegner grinned sheepishly, "his beak was the place most convenient."

"This isn't a joking matter," Jonathan reminded him sharply.

"So it ain't." Hegner turned a glance of contempt on Smith. "He's a bum an' a loafer, He won't learn an' he won't try to work. Why, Braun, who'd ought to be in bed instead of at a lathe, turns out half as much again as him. How can I jack the other men up if I let him lag behind? An' this morning I told him

I'd had enough of his soldierin' an' what I thought he was good for. He hauled off with a steelson to crack me—but I beat him to it. That's all." Hegner blew tenderly on his knuckles.

"Smith," said the judge, "what have you to say to that?"

"'Tain't so. He's only huntin' an excuse to fire me an' give some one else my lathe."

"So I am," Hegner put in grimly. "Some one who'll work an' who ain't an ex—"

"Hegner, hold your tongue!" Jonathan turned to Smith. "I have to believe Hegner, because I've been watching you, Smith. I took you on here, as I told you at the time, not to do you a favor, but because I thought you were in earnest and would justify it. I was willing to be your friend. And you soldiered. You stole the time I paid you for, which is the same as stealing my money. And you stole something else—my trust—which is worth more to me than my money. But I suppose that is something you can't understand."

"I un'erstan's when I ain't wanted," answered Smith, with an ugly laugh. "I'll git my time an' git out."

Then Jonathan's trouble found voice in a sharp querulous outburst.

"Yes, get your time. I'm tired keeping men who won't help themselves."

Smith vanished, and his surly ugly face was only the reflection of the ugliness just then in his heart.

"You, too, Hegner!" Jonathan turned blazing eyes on his foreman.
"You've been drinking again, when you promised me—"

"You ain't more disgusted than me." Big Hegner, ashamed, looked down at his feet. "But I couldn't help it. Honest, I couldn't. Everything's been goin' wrong here for a week."

Jonathan's outburst ended as suddenly as it began. "I know," he said wearily. "I know."

An hour later David, seeking Jonathan on a matter that was only a pretext, found him idle, elbows on the desk and head propped in his hands. Jonathan looked up listlessly. The matter disposed of, David ventured, uncertainly, because he had learned the last week to remember that he was an employee as well as a friend.

"Mr. Radbourne, are you ill?"

"No."

"I'm afraid something's wrong."

"Something's wrong, David."

"I hope it is something that can be easily mended."

"I'm afraid it can't." Jonathan looked at him queerly. "I'm afraid the damage has been done. Will you please go to the shop and see if Smith is anywhere around?"

David departed, to return with the word that Smith was gone.

"Ah! I'm sorry. I owe him an apology and some amends. A little while ago I lost my temper and did him an injustice, when he needed to be helped. I had no excuse. But it hurts to be disappointed in a man." Jonathan looked queerly at David again. "In any one, David."

"I have found that out," answered David.

Jonathan picked up some papers. "If you will excuse me now—I have some work—"

David took the hint promptly, with the feeling that somehow he had been the one to disappoint his friend. That hurt as deeply as it puzzled.

That afternoon Jonathan went out for two hours. When he returned he summoned Esther to his office.

"Miss Summers," he began abruptly, "how is the voice?"

"I'm afraid—"

"You must be afraid of nothing," he interrupted.

"I'm afraid," she repeated quietly, "I have come to a standstill. Some days I feel as if I could sing

forever, then the very next day one easy little song will seem too much. And if I am in a draft for a minute or get caught in a shower, my throat gets sore and hoarse at once. It doesn't seem to get any stronger."

"Probably it won't until you do the right thing. I took the liberty of talking to Doctor Jenkins. He says the trouble is all with your general health. You'll have to build it up. So—so you must get away from this office, that takes up your time and strength, and live as much as possible outdoors and grow strong."

"But I can't do that. I can't afford it and I can't impose on my aunt."

"Could you afford it if you had a good church position?"

"Yes. But I'm not ready for that. I couldn't fill it. No church would want me, with a voice so uncertain —"

"The Second Presbyterian is looking for a new contralto. I have asked them to give you a trial. Will you sing for them?"

"When?"

"At the vespers service next Sunday afternoon."

"But I can't do that. It's too soon. It wouldn't be fair to them, even if I should sing well at the trial. I—I'm afraid I've been letting you expect too much—" Her face had grown whiter than usual.

"But you can." Jonathan was very earnest. "You must believe—you must *believe* you can. You must make up your mind to sing your very best next Sunday. If they hear you at your best, they'll be glad to have you, even if your voice is a little uncertain at first. And you must get away from this office."

"You mean my work here isn't good enough—that you want to get rid of me?"

"Not that!" Jonathan almost gasped. He looked down at his desk and nervously ruffled his whiskers. "Oh, not that! I shall—miss you very much. And if you ever want to come back, there's a place waiting for you. But I want you to have your career—everything that is best for you. And"—he raised his eyes to her again and they joined his tongue in the plea—"won't you try it for—for my sake?"

She looked away quickly, a sudden catch in her throat. And though her heart was filled with dread for herself, it was aching, too, for the little man—not so absurd to her just then—part of whose secret she had seen.

"I will try it," she said. . . .

Of course she told David that evening. (How easily and naturally, now that his work on the plans was done, they had drifted into those little evening chats!) He had a moment of grave doubt. His face showed it.

"Do you think I can't make it?"

Doubt vanished on swift wings. "I think nothing of the sort. And you mustn't think of it, either. You must believe you can. It is half the battle. Hear me preach!" he laughed.

"That's what he—Mr. Radbourne—said."

"He was right, as always. This is very exciting. Do you know, I've a feeling you're going to knock 'em galley-west. And that," he nodded gaily down at her, "and that would be the finest thing that could happen."

"You forget your church," she smiled back.

"So I did! But now I remember it, I have nothing whatever to take back."

The witch chuckled as only witches can and sent her broomstick steed prancing madly across the sky. . . .

He saw Esther and her aunt away that Sabbath afternoon with a jest—an extravagant salute and an "Up, lass, an' at 'em!" to which she made answer with a determined smile. When they had been perhaps five minutes gone, he put on his hat and followed.

He found a seat in the rear of the church and waited, nerves strung taut as if the ordeal were his, wishing the services would begin and yet dreading it. His eyes swept the gathering worshipers idly until they happened upon a familiar face across the church, a homely face set sternly rigid toward the

choir loft.

"He would be here, of course," David mused. "In a way, if ever she makes good, her success will be his. It will be because he has given it to her."

A nameless little regret followed that. But before he could give it a name the organ burst into the prelude and the choir filed into the loft.

In the first anthem her voice was heard only with the others. The second was a trio in which she did not sing. The offertory solo was hers.

So, while the organ softly played the theme, she rose and faced her ordeal. The late afternoon sun was streaming through the tall west window. One amber shaft reached out and enfolded her caressingly, vivifying the white girlish face: a picture he has to this day.

"By the waters of Babylon. . . ."

For a breath fear clutched at his heart. In those first few notes was a weak quaver, a huskiness that ought not to have been there. His whole body grew tense with effort as mind and heart sent winging to her a silent message. "You must not fear! You must believe!" Another was sending her the same word. But David had forgotten him.

One of those messages must have reached its mark, for of a sudden her voice grew true and steady and clear, shaken only by the poignant grief of her song. Then there was no more ordeal, only a frail wisp of a girl singing as he had never heard it the exile's plaint. David did not quite know her. Up there in the loft, bathed in the mellow radiance that had singled her out as if in prophecy, letting out to the full, as she could not in the little parlor, a voice of power and passion to thrill multitudes, she did not seem the girl who had made music for him, who had offered him friendship in his loneliness. She had grown as the occasion of her song had grown; she had become one of the custodians of great talents, set apart to keep alive and reveal the harmonies that men through centuries had been hearing and recording. Quivering with joy in her triumph, he was abashed as well. He had too easily accepted the friendship, so naively tendered. He had not appraised it justly. . . . And then there was only the song. He was a captive in a strange land and the ache of the exiled was in his heart.

". . . By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept."

He realized at last that she had ended. The ordeal was over; she had passed through unscathed. He leaned back and smiled at the imprints of nails in his palms. His eyes grew wet, but not with the exile's tears. . . . When they had cleared, without his bidding they turned to where Jonathan sat, whiskers crushed upon his breast.

It was a wonderful world through which David walked homeward that Sabbath evening. He went by a roundabout way, that he might miss none of it. He thrilled with a sense of victory, a song of thanksgiving was in his heart. And from that he should have known what had happened to him. But he was to have that hour perfect.

She was sitting on the porch when he came in sight of the house. She may have been waiting for him. He quickened his pace.

He stood before her, smiling down into her shining eyes.

"A question of identity is disturbing me. I'm still hearing a certain song—I think I can never forget it. Are you by any chance the singer?"

"As it happens, I sang a little this afternoon."

"Then the finest thing in the world has happened."

"Did I do pretty well?"

"Pretty well? Hmmm!" he considered the matter judicially. "Yes, I think I may safely say that."

She laughed as though he had been very witty, then quickly became grave.

"Were you thinking hard for me at the first, when I almost fizzled?"

"The hardest I knew how. I was afraid you were losing your nerve."

"I was. I never was so scared in my life. It came over me all at once that the next few minutes would probably decide everything for me, and I could see only strangers—critical strangers who wouldn't care. Then I saw you sitting back there and—and then I could sing. Thank you for coming."

"You're quite welcome, I'm sure." He laughed at her thanks. "Did you think for a minute that I could stay away? And are you aware that we have never shaken hands? It is really high time. Would you mind?"

Her smile was sunshine itself. "With all my heart." She put out her hand. He took it and held it.

And he dropped it and stood looking strangely at his own hand. For it was tingling deliciously. And at her touch and the look that went with it his heart had burst into a sudden mad singing—a song not of exile or thanksgiving, but of a longing to which he might never give tongue.

The hand fell slowly to his side. With an effort he lifted his glance to her questioning, startled eyes. He tried to make his voice easy and natural, but it was heavy and stiff.

"I—I congratulate you. I hope—I know—to-day is only the beginning of many fine things for you."

Then he turned quickly and left her.

In his room, when the first daze had cleared a little, he set himself sternly to face this new thing. For he knew now why the old sense of loss—of the dream woman shrunk to a wife to whom love was only a bauble to be worn in fair weather—and why the failure of love had ceased to trouble, why Shirley had drifted so quickly, so easily into the shadowy background of his life. He saw what had helped him to win his new brave philosophy, had builded the walls of his sanctuary. His poor sanctuary! What refuge could it offer now? Another house of his building lay about him, a grim hopeless ruin.

"Oh, Esther!" he whispered to the girl he might not have. "Oh, Esther!"

He sat there, trying to see what he must do. Darkness fell. But he wanted no light. He did not stir until late in the evening chords from the piano reached him.

He rose and opened the door and a voice, athrob with pain, floated up to him.

"By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept. . . ."

CHAPTER X

AT THE DOOR

But Shirley was a fact. By morning—no sleep came to him that night—he had decided what he must do about that fact. It was then not a very complex problem.

He took a lightly packed bag with him to the office and at the first opportunity presented himself to Jonathan.

"May I take to-morrow off? There is a matter I must attend to at once.
I can be back by day after to-morrow."

"Certainly," said Jonathan, without looking up.

"Thank you." David hesitated. "Mr. Radbourne, do you know anything definite of the situation at St. Mark's?"

"Nothing definite."

"Do you think there's any chance for me at all?"

"The committee will decide this week. There's a man named Holden—"

"I know him."

"He seems to have influence—and not much else. But Mr. Blaisdell is trying to see that you get fair

play."

"Is it necessary for Mr. Blaisdell to use his influence very actively in my favor?"

"I'm afraid it is."

"I'm sorry. I knew, of course, that you and he would do all you could—if it was needed. But I thought perhaps my plans would justify the committee—"

"They do. And they justify any work that has been done for you. There is no obligation that need weigh heavily on you."

"It isn't that. I appreciate my—my friends' willingness to help. But I'd hoped to be able to win solely on my merits in this thing."

"Do you wish us—Mr. Blaisdell to refrain?"

"No. I need to get back into my profession. It means so much to me—in a new way—that I'll be glad to have it on any terms. That doesn't mean that I'm not grateful for the kindness I've had here.— But I'm interrupting." And David went back to his drawing.

All that day he avoided Esther, sticking close to his table. Not until she was leaving at the end of the afternoon did he seek her.

"Miss Summers, I forgot to tell your aunt that I shan't be back until day after to-morrow. Will you please tell her for me?"

"You are going away?"

"Yes." He made no explanation.

"I will tell her."

"Thank you." And because he was holding himself sternly rigid, lest eyes or tone cry out what must not be said, he spoke almost curtly.

She moved quietly away from him and did not once look back, though she knew he was watching her. But when a door was between them she stopped for a moment, quivering lips pressed hard, both hands tightly clenched. Then she, too, sought Jonathan.

"Mr. Radbourne, the church people telephoned to-day that I can have the position."

"I am very glad. When shall you be leaving the office?"

"At the end of the week, if you can get some one for my place."

"So soon! I—"

"I will stay as long as I'm needed, of course."

"Oh, no! You're quite right to go at once. I can get some one to do your work. But not to take your place. I shall—" Jonathan seemed deeply interested in the crystal paperweight on his desk. "We shall miss you very much."

"I haven't thanked you—"

"Please don't thank me for anything. I have done nothing any one could not have done. It is," he said huskily, "it is to my happiness, my great happiness, if I have been able to help you a very little."

Then he looked up and saw her face.

"Miss Summers! You look overtired—and I have kept you standing. You must sit down, and let me get you—"

"It is nothing at all." She forced a smile to her lips. "It is only the reaction from yesterday. The ride home in the car is all I need. Good night, Mr. Radbourne."

"You are quite sure—"

"Oh, yes. Quite all right, Mr. Radbourne."

"Good night, Miss Summers."

And when she was gone, he sat down and took a small mirror from a drawer and looked long and sadly at what it recorded. Suddenly he dropped the mirror and bowed his head on the desk.

"Esther!" It was almost a sob. "If only I could help you now!" . . .

David walked the next morning from the station to Aunt Clara's house. He walked slowly, because Aunt Clara lived on a hill and because he dreaded facing Shirley. But he did not have to face her at once. As he neared the house he saw an automobile, filled almost to overflowing, roll down the driveway and turn up the street; and Shirley was one of the party. She did not notice her unexpected visitor.

But as he turned into the grounds he met a little sailor-suited cherub in tow of a nurse who did not know David. He dropped his bag and squatted before the child.

"Hello, old man! Aren't you going to shake hands?"

Davy Junior clung tightly to the nurse's skirt, put one chubby finger into his rosebud mouth and stared, round-eyed, at the big man.

"He's always that way with strangers," the nurse explained.

"Oh!" David winced and stood up. "He's forgotten me, then. When he has had his walk please bring him to the house. I'd like to get acquainted with him again. I'm his father, you know." He picked up his bag and went on to the house.

A few minutes later he was shown into Aunt Clara's sitting-room. She greeted him in astonishment and offered her cheek for a kiss.

"This is a surprise. Shirley's out, too. They're gone for a picnic and won't be back until dark."

"Yes. I saw them start out. How is she?"

"Shirley's quite well. And seemingly enjoying herself."

"I suppose so," he said.

"And the boy, too."

"Yes. I just saw him. He—" David cleared his throat. "He didn't know me."

"That's to be expected. Children forget easily. You're not looking well yourself."

"I've been working pretty hard of late."

"Are you on your vacation?" Aunt Clara was studying him curiously.

"No. I have just to-day. I came to get Shirley to come back."

"Are you out of debt then?"

"Not quite."

"You've had a raise? Or has something better turned up?"

"I've had one little raise. Nothing else has happened—that I can count on. But we can get along nicely now, thanks to your help."

"For which you're not thankful at all," she smiled grimly.

"It was a mistake."

"Humph!" she sniffed. "Have you lived with Shirley four years without learning that she can't stand—"

"Suppose," he interrupted quietly, "suppose we don't criticize Shirley. I shan't criticize you, either. I blame myself for letting her come here. Now we're going to correct that mistake."

Aunt Clara sniffed again. "What has got into you? You used to have no more spirit than a mouse. Now you remind me of your late Uncle John in some of his moods. Suppose Shirley thinks it better—*sniff*—to stay here a while longer? If you're not out of debt you'll still have to pinch pennies and—"

He interrupted again, still quietly. "You must help to convince her it is best. She must come—before it is too late."

"What do you mean by that—'before it is too late'?"

"I mean—while I still want her to come."

"Eh?" Aunt Clara stared sharply at him. She put on her spectacles, that she might stare more effectively.

Then a light broke in on her, a light too incredible, too dazing even for Aunt Clara's confident mind. "Eh? David Quentin! Do you mean to tell me—do you mean—there is another woman? Who is she?"

He made no answer, but though his tired face went even whiter, steadily withstood her gaze.

"Such a thing never happened in our family before," Aunt Clara gasped weakly, "that I ever heard of. I don't know what to do about it."

"There is only one thing," he said steadily. "Shirley must come back at once."

Aunt Clara took off her spectacles, rubbed them mechanically and donned them again. Her hands fell nerveless to her lap.

"I don't know what to do," she repeated. "For the first time in all my existence. I—I have no precedents. You must leave me for a while until I can think this out."

He rose. "You can't think it out. I have tried."

"You'd better lie down and get some sleep. You're looking quite badly."

"No. I'll go out and find David Junior."

"Perhaps that would be better."

He went. For an hour Aunt Clara sat alone, trying to work out the hardest problem of life, how to raise a love from the dead. And all she achieved was a bitter self-reproach. For the first time in all her existence.

A ripple of childish laughter came to her through an opened window. She rose and looked out. She saw the Davids, little and big, sitting chummily on the lawn. Then Aunt Clara thanked God that David and Shirley had been given a son.

"We have that much to start with—though it seems little enough just now."

She sniffed, as a matter of necessity, and hastily reached for her handkerchief.

When it was time for Davy Junior's dinner and nap she summoned David to her sitting-room again.

"David," she began, very meekly for Aunt Clara, "I've been thinking it over. I ought to blame you. But I can't. I've had all I could do blaming myself. Are you thinking I am a selfish, meddlesome old fool?"

David shook his head wearily.

"But I am. I was lonesome alone here in this big old house and I really thought— But never mind that now. Does she—that other woman know?"

"I think not."

"Is she—is she in love with you?"

"Oh, no! That is impossible. Oh, no!" he repeated. "That couldn't be. It would be too terrible."

"It's terrible enough as it is. Are you going to tell Shirley?"

"That wouldn't help matters, would it?"

"I suppose not," she sighed. "David, you must be very gentle with her. It isn't her fault she wanted to run away from hard times. All her life we have spoiled her, her father and mother and Maizie and I. I did it worst of all, as I never spoiled my own child. David, come over here."

He went to the chair beside her and she reached for his hand very awkwardly.

"Oh, David, it's going to be very hard for you—all because an old fool—" Aunt Clara was crying now, noisily and unbeautifully because she had had little practise. "And I'm afraid that when you see Shirley

you'll find it even harder than you thought." . . .

Shirley came only a little before it was time for him to start for his train. He was playing on the library floor with Davy Junior when an automobile came to a panting stop before the house. A minute later came Shirley's voice from the hall, "*Da*-vy!" The little fellow scrambled to his feet and ran to meet her at the door. She caught him and swung him strongly in her arms, hugging and kissing him. And David saw that the months had been kind to Shirley. The marks of worry and discontent had been erased, her eyes danced and her cheeks glowed with health and pleasure. Oh, a very fair picture was Shirley, in the full flower of her loveliness.

But his heart went not one beat faster for her.

Then she saw him and set the child down. "David!" And she ran to him and kissed him—very prettily, as a loving wife should.

"And now," said Aunt Clara, "I will say good-by to David and leave you alone to the last minute. The car will be waiting for you when you're ready." She held up her cheek to David and left them.

Shirley gasped. "You're not going to-night?"

"In a few minutes. I must."

"But—but this is ridiculous. Surely you can stay overnight at least."

"No. I promised to be back to-morrow morning. My time isn't my own."
Which was not quite fair to Jonathan in its implication.

"Why didn't you let me know you were coming?"

"I didn't think of it until this morning when I got here and saw you going out. I supposed I should find you."

"Surely you're not piqued because I— David, what is it?" A look of dread came into the dancing eyes. "You're looking wretchedly. You're not going to tell me we've had some more bad luck?"

"I hope," he said quietly, "you won't call it that I came to ask you to go back—home."

"Why, I—"

It was no glad eager light that took the place of dread. It was consternation, a manifest, involuntary shrinking from what he asked. . . . Then she was in like case with him. He had not counted on that.

He felt his heart turning hard and cold; and that was not the way of the gentleness he had planned. He, too, had shrunk from what he asked; yet he had not hesitated to ask it, thinking to save her from some hurt. She, without the key, thought only of the loss of her good times. He could tell her the whole truth and she would not care—if it led to good times. Couldn't she see, couldn't she *feel*, the tragedy in this end of their once pretty romance? Since she could not, why try to save her from a hurt she would never really know?

Yet he went on, though not just as he had planned.

"So you do think it bad luck? Don't you ever want to go back, Shirley?"

"That's foolish. Of course I do. But—but the debts aren't paid yet."

"Pretty nearly. If we're careful we can clean them up quickly now."

"But it seems so foolish—and so unnecessary. We could wait a little longer. The salary is so small at best. How—how should we live?"

"Very simply, I fear. But," he added, in the same even, repressed tone, "always within our means, I'm sure. We'll go to a boarding-house first and then look around for an apartment we can afford. We'll be starting over again, Shirley."

"But—" She was still stammering. "But it's been so good for Davy here. And the weather's still warm —"

"That's only an excuse, I think. And it's a risk he'll have to take.
It's better than—than some other risks."

"What other risks? Since we've waited so long, what difference would a few weeks more make?"

She did not guess what a temptation she was putting before him. It would be so easy to make this a fork in the road from which he and she should take different ways forever, in the end leaving him free, and at little cost to her! But he fought that thought sternly.

"Shirley, can't you see what has happened to us? We've been drifting apart. We're very far apart now. You don't really want to come back at all. And I—I could easily say, 'Then don't come.' I'm capable of that just now. And you wouldn't really care."

"How can you say such a thing? Of course, I would care. I don't understand—"

"You wouldn't care or you would have come of your own accord. Shirley, I came here to coax you. I can't, now I see how little it all means to you. But— You've mentioned Davy. We've got to think of him." He looked down at the child playing between them. "I want the boy, Shirley—and I want you with him."

There was an edge to his voice that she had never heard.

"But I wouldn't think of leaving him. I—I was going back— When?"

"As soon as I can find temporary quarters for us."

"You say—I *must*?"

"I don't say that. I say only, if you are coming at all, come while I want you."

They faced each other in silence, the pretty, pleasure-loving young woman to whom life had been only a house of toys, and the rather seedy young man who had been one of the toys. The bond that held them was a slight one; a little more strain and it would have snapped. But the toy man had grown—somehow—into a real man whom she did not want to let go, and she knew that, as he had said, he had got far away from her. She could not understand; still she had not the key. And she was afraid.

"David! What is it I feel about you? You don't think—oh, you can't think—I don't love you?"

"I suppose you think you do. But it's not much of a love." A clock struck. He had forgotten his train. "Let me know if you want to come. I've got to go now."

He caught up the boy and held him close, then kissed her hastily. And before she quite realized it, he was gone.

Aunt Clara found her standing where he had left her, staring blankly at the door, unmindful of the little David tugging at her dress.

"Aunt Clara! What is it? What has happened? David has been talking about—about my never going back—"

Aunt Clara made a good guess as to what had been said. And she had been doing some more thinking of her own.

"Between us we've nearly lost you a husband. That's what *has* happened. And you're going to pack up and pack off to win him back, for his sake if not your own. That's what is going to happen."

"Win him back!" Shirley's world was fast sinking from under her feet. "Is—is that what Mrs. Jim has been hinting in her letters? Do you mean—you think David has stopped—*loving* me?"

"You think it incredible?"

"But he's my *husband*."

"What's that got to do with it? Oh," cried Aunt Clara, "can't you get it into your silly, selfish little head that you can't keep a love without earning it? You've been a fool. And I've been another. I never was so foolish in my life. I wonder your late Uncle John doesn't turn over in his grave. Come, Davy, it's most nine o'clock. To bed with you and leave your mother to think for once in her life."

CHAPTER XI

THE WITCH LAUGHS

David was at his desk early the next day, working closely in the effort to shut out his own problems; it was not a very successful effort. All morning he avoided Esther strictly; that was much easier. She was avoiding him, too, but he did not guess that.

During the noon hour he had a caller; Dick Holden, if you please, a Dick who was plainly perturbed.

"Davy," quoth he, "have I done you some favors?"

"You have," said David.

"One good turn deserves another. It has to do with St. Mark's. Something queer's stirring there. My wires won't work. You're pretty thick with Jim Blaisdell. Get him to put in a word, a good strong word, for me, will you?"

"I'm afraid I can't, Dick," said David, "very consistently."

"Why not?"

"The fact is, I think Jim is putting in his best words for me."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I have plans in there myself."

"The devil!" Dick stared. "I thought you were out of the game."

"I'm back in to this extent."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't suppose you would be interested."

"Are your plans any good?"

"I think so," said David.

"Then I bet you're the one that's blocking me there." Dick shook his head reproachfully. "Davy, I'm disappointed in you. I call it playing it low down on me. You might at least have told me, so I could know what to meet. It isn't fair. It isn't friendly. And after all I've done for you! I didn't think you could do it." Dick sighed sorrowfully, his faith in human nature evidently shattered.

"I'm sorry, Dick," said David. "I supposed you put all your faith in your wires."

Dick thought a few minutes.

"Well, I'll tell you what we'll do," he offered at last. "When friends find themselves competing, they should meet half-way. We'll pool on your plans—I'll take a chance on them, sight unseen. I'll throw my pull over to you. Then we'll split the spoils, two and one. The two to me, of course."

"Why the two to you—of course?"

"The prestige of my name," said Dick with dignity, "is worth something, I think. We'll have to get busy at once, because the committee meets this afternoon."

"I'm afraid, Dick, I'll have to say no. You had a chance at my plans before I thought of putting them in. You could have had them for almost nothing, but you didn't think them worth looking over. I think I'll stand or fall with them."

"That's final? After all I've—"

"Yes, Dick, final. But it doesn't mean I'm not grateful—"

With a gesture Dick waived that. "Very well," he said sadly, rising. "I thought there was such a thing as friendship in business. I see I was mistaken."

David wondered if Dick were losing his punch.

That afternoon came a wire.

"Am packing up now. Love. Shirley."

He tore the yellow paper slowly to bits. "Poor Shirley!" he muttered.

Poor Shirley, with her house of toys! Frightened now, no doubt, into thinking that she wanted what she did not really want, as he had been driven, by resentment at her blindness, into saying what he did not really mean. She at least would never miss what he could no longer give. She would be content with the hollow pretense their life together would be, missing only her good times. But he must have her beside him, to remind him that he was not free and never should be free to go browsing in the green fields of love.

She would never know. Still, poor Shirley—none the less!

He set wearily to work once more.

The afternoon came to an end somehow. The clamor of machinery from the shop was stilled. The other offices became silent. He supposed the others had gone. A janitor made the rounds, closing the windows. Doggedly David stuck to his table until he had completed the design he was working on. Then he put the table in order for the night, donned his hat and coat and started to leave.

But the corridor door of the adjoining office was open. He looked in—and saw Esther, hatted, but still on her high stool by the desk, looking out into the street. She heard him, started and turned, then said:

"Oh, I thought every one was gone."

"Yes, I thought so, too."

They fell silent, awkwardly silent. The easy comradeship was no more.

Then she smiled; no one but David could have told that the smile was forced.

"I was just thinking—isn't it funny?—that I'll be sorry to say good-by to that dingy, rackety street. I'll hate to leave this office. I've been here two years and—"

"You are leaving, then? I didn't know."

"Yes. At the end of the week."

He commanded his feet to go on. And they went—toward her. He rested his folded arms heavily on the tall desk.

"I'll miss you," he said. "I'll miss you very much. It won't seem the same here without you."

"But maybe you'll be leaving, too. If your plans are taken, you know."

"I'd forgotten them. I don't seem to care so much about them as I ought—now they're out of my hands. And I can't count on them. I suppose we'll not see each other very often after you leave here. I'll be leaving your aunt's in a few days. My—my people are coming home."

"Oh! You'll be glad of that."

"Yes." And again, "Yes."

He let his eyes dwell hungrily on her, as though this were indeed their farewell, drinking in every detail of her—the dark curling wisps straying from under her hat, the slate-gray eyes, a little sad just then, the slender girlish figure that seemed so frail. For that moment there were no Shirley, no law, no honor.

"I'll miss you," he said again and fumbled at his collar. "One way and another I owe you a great deal. I shan't forget that. I shan't forget you. I'll remember that I came here—to prison, I thought—and found some good friends. One very good friend who—"

"Don't!" The little hand lying on the desk clenched tightly. "Don't talk about it. I—" She got slowly down from the stool. "I must be going now."

But her eyes did not leave his. They went suddenly dark. And in them he read the same hurt that was in his own heart. He saw with a fierce blinding joy—then with horror—and then with joy again.

"Esther! You, too! Oh, I never wanted that. I hoped you— Oh,
Esther!"

She gave him no answer but stood looking at him piteously. No one, seeing them, could have failed to understand. The man who had come to the door saw and understood.

It was Jonathan.

They saw him. No word passed then; there was nothing to say. She moved slowly out of the room by another door, the men, both as if in a daze, following her with their eyes. When her footsteps had died away, they looked at each other helplessly.

"David!" Jonathan's voice broke like a boy's. "David! What have you done?"

After a little that cry reached David's understanding. "I never knew—" He turned away from the stricken accusing face.

He heard Jonathan start away at last, then turn and come toward him. A letter was laid on the desk.

"I was bringing this to you," said Jonathan's choking voice. And again, "David! David!"

That time Jonathan did not return.

Mechanically David took up and opened the letter. He had to read it twice before he grasped its import.

"The committee of St. Mark's has selected your plans. . . . We shall want you to supervise the work . . . usual terms . . . congratulations."

The letter fluttered from his hands to the floor, St. Mark's from his mind.

So he was not to have even the consolation of knowing that no one but himself had been hurt. It would be on his soul that he had hurt her, too—cruelly, hopelessly hurt her. And he could not help her, only run away and leave her to face it alone. And Jonathan, his kind friend—the meaning of the grief on that homely face was plain.

The cup of David's misery ran over. He fell forward on the desk, her desk, pillowing his head on his arms.

"Esther!"

As if summoned by the cry, another little imp took stand by David's ear. And his tongue was specious and honeyed, and he had the trick of making black seem white and gray a golden splendor.

Why run away and leave her to face it alone? . . .

He was there a long time. It grew dark. The street, deserted by its daylight toilers, grew quiet except for the tramping of an occasional heavy-footed watchman or policeman. David did not stir. He was slowly draining his bitter cup—and listening to the eloquent imp. Once to nearly every man comes an hour when he stands on a high mount and is shown the kingdom of his desire, to be his if he will—at a price. There David stood that evening. And he fell. He listened and looked too long. He did not haggle with his tempter over the price but agreed to pay, if only he might have his beautiful kingdom.

He did not hear stealthy footsteps along the corridor, nor the rustling of cautiously drawn shades in Jonathan's office.

The visitor, too, supposed that he had the building to himself. But he worked by the light of a dark-lantern and tiptoed instinctively. Very carefully, as his former cell-mate had taught him, he made his preparations, substituting a sixty- for a six-ampere fuse—which would give him, the old cracksman had said, "juice" enough to cut through the ribs of a war-ship—and clamping one strand of his extension wire to the safe door. This done, he unscrewed all the light bulbs from their sockets lest, when he turned the switch, a sudden glow through the shades arouse some prowling watchman's curiosity. Then he took up the other strand of his wire, to which was attached a carbon electrode, knelt on the floor and—gingerly, for so much juice suggested many possibilities to a novice—touched the carbon to the safe door.

He drew back hastily, almost unnerved. The old cracksman had not warned him of that blinding flash or that sputtering, loud enough, so it seemed, to be heard a block away. But he remembered that Jonathan often kept money overnight in the safe. He forced himself to make the contact again.

David heard a shuffling sound from a near-by office. He straightened stiffly, wondering dully who the newcomer was. The watchman probably, on a round of inspection. Or perhaps Jonathan, who came to his office sometimes of nights to work off odds and ends that his lack of system allowed to pile up on him. Jonathan, his friend, who had been hurt, whose stricken, accusing, contemptuous face danced before him. David's heart gave a sharp twinge at that. He hoped it was not Jonathan. He did not want to face Jonathan just then.

He started at a sudden crackling report that resounded through the lonely building, followed by a strange continued sputtering. He went slowly into the corridor and to Jonathan's office. At the door he stopped, staring in stupid surprise at the intent kneeling figure dimly outlined in the glow of hot metal and the bluish crackling flame. Then, with a vague notion that it was the wrong thing to do but his overwrought brain not quite grasping the situation, he took two steps into the room.

"Get out of here—whoever you are."

With a muttered ejaculation the intruder turned his head to look, then sprang back from the safe, breaking the contact. Instantly the room became black. David stared, still stupidly, at the dull red spot on the safe until it faded into blackness. Then he realized. He stood very still, muscles tense, senses sharply alert. He heard a faint rustling but he could not make out from what part of the room it came.

Smith crouched, rigid and breathless, waiting for a shot. It did not come. Slowly, as silently as possible, he reached for the sheath knife he carried and drew it. He had a gun, but a knife, the old cracksman had said, was much better for a fight in the dark and it had the superlative virtue of noiselessness. He became motionless again, his eyes vainly straining to pierce the darkness, waiting for the other to make a move. The silence and inaction became unbearable. He gathered his nerve and muscles for a rush to where the door ought to be and leaped forward. At the third step a fist struck out and caught him on the neck. He recoiled a little, then lashed out blindly with the knife. He heard a sharp gasp and a body crumpling to the floor. But Smith waited no longer. Groping his way to the door, he sped along the corridor and through the shop to the rear window where he had entered.

A quarter of an hour later a watchman espied the open window. He whistled a policeman to his aid and together, after a period of timorous deliberation, they entered and with many discreet pauses tiptoed over the building. They found David in the corridor, where he had given up crawling, weakly trying to stanch the flowing blood.

The policeman was young and new to his job. He mopped his brow nervously at sight of so much blood.

"Are yez much hurted, d'yez think?" he inquired anxiously.

"More scared than hurt, probably." David smiled wanly. "But, just the same, I think you'd better call up a doctor."

CHAPTER XII

WHICH HOUSE?

The doctor did not share David's opinion. He shook his head gravely, looked important and said, "It's lucky I got here so soon." Then he brightened a little. "But it's a lovely clean cut and we'll do what we can."

So, he stopped the flow of blood, washed out the wound with an antiseptic solution and took several stitches; which hurt much worse than Smith's knife had. Then he ordered David to the hospital. But by that time some one had got Jonathan by telephone and he said, "No, bring him here." And David protesting in vain, an ambulance took him to Jonathan's house and gentle hands laid him on the bed of the special guest-room. A nurse was installed and in time David fell asleep.

Through the night Jonathan watched, stealing every few minutes to David's bedside. It was not at all necessary; the nurse slept, no fears disturbing her slumbers. But Jonathan wanted to watch. He kept thinking that David might have died. He shuddered and went pale at the thought. For Jonathan had loved David; he loved him even now.

The bitterness of that day was gone; so much could a little letting of blood accomplish. But the thought of one tragedy, so narrowly escaped, did not help Jonathan to forget another impending—if it was to be tragedy. His heart ached for his friends; it was only of them he thought now. They faced each other across a chasm too wide to be leaped or bridged; only by a descent into chill dark depths could their outstretched hands meet. He did not blame them for having strayed to that brink; not in the impulses of the heart do we sin, only in the yielding.

But such chasms need not be tragic. There grow the sweetest flowers for those having the will to see and gather. All his life Jonathan had been schooled in that lesson, and he had learned to pluck happiness as he turned his back on desire. He had even been happy in an unrequited love, he had not sought to cast it out of his heart, he had loved his love—at least until it had seemed helpless to save her from a hurt. He could be happy in it still, if instead of tragedy they could find strength and courage and the greater triumph growing on the brink of their chasm.

It seemed very simple and easy, what he wanted them to learn. He did not understand that only the Greathearts find it simple and easy. He never suspected that he was a Greatheart. An odd fish, this Jonathan!

But it was a knowledge that he could not give them. They must win it, if at all, for themselves.

In the morning the doctor came again, inspected the wound, discovered no evidence of infection and was mightily pleased with himself.

"Don't look so sad," he adjured David. "You got off lucky. If that knife—"

"I suppose so," David said querulously. "If you've finished, would you mind going? I'd like to sleep some more."

The doctor nodded comprehendingly. "Pretty weak yet," he confided to the nurse in a whisper. "Lost quite a bit of blood before I could get to him. Must humor him."

David closed his eyes. Not, however, to sleep. Rather to listen to his tempter, who had returned to stand guard, to keep the victory it had won. But the imp's words were less plausible this morning, a certain sly malice had crept into his voice. David remembered shrinkingly the resolve he had taken.

"It's because I am weak." He tried to stiffen himself. "I have a right to be happy. Why should two be made to suffer for one who wouldn't care?" He repeated that over and over to himself and almost achieved belief.

The nurse came to his bedside. "I'm going out for my walk now. Ring this bell if you want anything, and one of the maids will come."

He nodded and she left. A minute later he heard other steps coming into the room.

"David—David!" said a voice over him. A compassionate voice that was near to breaking.

He opened his eyes and, not easily, met Jonathan's. "I'm making a good deal of trouble. You should have let them take me to the hospital."

"Hush, David! I wanted you to come here. Is the wound very painful?"

"I've had toothaches that were worse."

"It's like you to make light of it."

"It isn't like me to make light of it. You've seen me and ought to know that. It's more like me to whine."

"But it's serious." Jonathan shook his head gravely. "The doctor says, if the knife had gone an eighth of an inch deeper—"

"They always say that, don't they? It didn't go an eighth of an inch deeper."

"But it might have," Jonathan insisted. "David, why did you do it? Did you think a little money was worth such a risk?"

David frowned petulantly. "I'm no hero. I didn't mean to take any risks. I just blundered in and was too stupid to get out. So I got hurt. It's a habit of mine."

"Ah!" Jonathan understood the allusion. "David, can you forgive me? Yesterday I was thinking you—what you are not. I was bitter, not quite myself. I was blaming you for what you couldn't help and thinking you were going—"

"Don't! Don't talk about that! I—" David turned his face to the wall.
"I wish to God Smith's knife had gone deeper!"

Jonathan started. "Smith! You say it was Smith? Then this happened because of me. I let myself get at odds with all the world and in that temper sent him from the shop. You have much to forgive me for,

David."

"That's pretty far-fetched, isn't it? If it's any consolation, I couldn't swear it was Smith. I only had a glimpse of him."

"It is a consolation. Because now, if any one questions you about what happened, you needn't identify Smith. I hate to think of any man having to go to jail. Sin is its own punishment—and heavy enough. God knows! We must find Smith, David, and try to help him. You could help him most. When he knows that you, whom he hurt, are ready—"

"Do whatever you want with him. I have no wish to send him to jail."

David stirred restlessly; his wound began to throb. Why couldn't the manikin go away and take his silly exaggerated—and disturbing—sentimentalities with him? Didn't he know that his very presence there was a reminder of something David wanted to forget—that the kingdom of desire was not to be entered without payment?

But Jonathan did not leave, though he saw what the patient wished. He went without further détours to the thing that lay between them.

"David, what are you going to do?"

David made no answer but stared unwinkingly at the wall.

"What are you going to do, David?"

David had not guessed how hard it would be to give tongue to his desire.

"I don't know that you have any right to ask. But if it will do you any good to know, I'm going to get free and—"

He turned and looked defiantly into Jonathan's eyes. He saw the suffering there. But Jonathan's voice was still gentle.

"You would do that?"

"I would do that."

"You mean," Jonathan persisted, "you will get a divorce? And then go to her?"

How ugly, how sordid, that seemed, spoken aloud in the clear light of morning!

But David said, "I mean that."

"Have you thought of—your wife?"

"She wouldn't be hurt, wouldn't really care."

"And you have a boy. A beautiful boy, I am told."

"That—that is part of the—price."

"Ah! the price! You have thought of the price then. And you are ready to pay it. Other people have paid it, I know. I have wondered if they didn't pay too much. David—" Jonathan looked away. "Have you thought of—*her*?"

"Can't you understand I am thinking of her? I can't let her be hurt.
And I want her—you can't know—"

He flung an arm over his face. And he was glad of the sharp pain that shot through his side.

"I know," said Jonathan. "I know."

They were silent for a while. The silence became almost unbearable to one of them. He let his arm fall slowly to his side.

"Well, say it! If you have anything against it, say it."

"No." Jonathan turned to him once more, sadly. "I have nothing to say against it. I know it would do no good, if I had. I say only, do it, if you think she will not be hurt—if you think you can. . . . I must go now."

He left. Soon the nurse returned. She looked closely at her patient and took a thermometer from the table.

"No!" he said sharply. "I'm all right. Just go away and leave me alone."

Being a wise nurse, she obeyed. . . .

When Jonathan reached his office a trembling white-faced girl was awaiting him.

"How is he?"

He told her. "It needn't be serious. But he had a narrow escape."

"Why didn't you let me know last night?"

"It would have done no good." He looked at her searchingly. But neither shrinking nor shame was in her eyes. "Will you go to him now?"

"Go to him? I— Why do you ask that?"

"He needs you," he said. "There is no one else who can help him now.
Will you go?"

"Yes." She understood the help that was needed.

"Then come."

Together they went out to the street. He hailed a taxicab and they entered and drove away. Neither spoke during that ride. When they reached the house he led her to the parlor.

"If you will wait here," he said, "I will get the nurse away."

In a few minutes he returned.

"You may go up now."

He watched her ascend, heard her quick light tread along the hall above and the closing of a door.

"Esther!" he whispered. "My poor Esther! Who will help you?"

CHAPTER XIII

THE HAPPY ENDING

She halted just within the closed door. At first he could not believe it was she. For a little he went blind, a black streaming mist hiding her from him. But when it cleared away she was still there. Their eyes met and clung across the room.

"Esther! You came! I didn't believe—"

"He asked me to come."

"He asked you! I don't understand—"

"Would you rather I had stayed away?"

For answer he held out hungry arms toward her. He would have sat upright; pain and weakness were forgotten. But she was at his side in a breath.

"You must not."

She put her hands on his shoulders to restrain him. He caught them and held them close to him. She let him for a moment, then gently freed them from his clasp.

"It is no worse than he says—your hurt?"

"It isn't bad at all."

"You're sure? You see, I didn't know until I got to the office. And they made it out very bad there. They even said you mightn't live. And I had to wait until he came with definite word. It was terrible. When I thought—oh, David!"

The steadiness she had had to keep up before others gave way. Suddenly she sat on the bed, pressing both hands tightly against her face.

"Don't, Esther!" Her weakness hurt him. "Don't! There's nothing to cry for."

"Let me. I'll be all right—in a minute."

He let her then. And he wished that the hot iron in his own heart could be cooled a little in tears. But his eyes were dry and aching and the iron burned deeper. There *was* something to cry for.

"Now!" It was the tempter whispering. "Now is the time to tell her."

But a strange paralysis was on his tongue and will.

She waited until she could achieve the smile she wanted him to see. Then she let her hands fall to her lap. And in the brightness of that smile the tears on her lashes were dewdrops that had caught the morning sunlight.

"Speak up! Now!" It was the imp again.

"Why do you falter?" Now was the time to tell her of that beautiful kingdom and how he proposed to win it for them, to ask her to wait until he could lead her through its gates. And still he could not. . . . And suddenly he knew that he never could. . . .

"There!" The smile was perfect. "That is over. I didn't mean to be so foolish. It's only because I had been thinking it was so much worse. Now I can take time to be glad. About this, I mean."

From the pocket of her jacket she drew forth a folded sheet of paper and held it out to him. It was the letter from St. Mark's.

"It seems almost too good to be true, doesn't it?—though we ought never to say that. I found it on the floor by my desk this morning. I thought it was some of the office correspondence and opened it and—do you mind?—when I saw what it was I read it through. I hardly knew what I was doing. It didn't seem important then. But now— Oh, I am glad—glad!" She nodded brightly. "The finest thing in the world has happened."

He looked dully at the letter which ought to have meant so much to him.

"I had forgotten that."

"It means you can go back to your own profession, doesn't it?"

"I suppose so. Yes, it means that."

"It has been like a story, hasn't it? This summer, I mean. A beautiful story! In the beginning you came to the office—to prison, you said. And I was plodding along, trying to make myself believe that I liked bookkeeping. A pair of lame ducks we were, with broken wings. I'm a little sorry for us yet—aren't you? But now we— Do you think it would hurt you if I raised the shades? It's such a glorious morning and I love sunshine."

"It wouldn't hurt, of course."

She went to the windows and raised the shades and the morning radiance, the light in which all hues are seen as they are, flooded the room. Then she went back to her seat beside him.

"That is much better, isn't it? . . . A beautiful story! Now our wings are strong again. . . ."

And so she went on, painting in the brightest colors she knew how to mix what she supposed the future held for them. She tried to make it splendid. St. Mark's was to be but a beginning. He was to go very far, building many beautiful churches, striving to make each a little finer than the one before, until he was famous throughout the land—"Which is worth something, of course, but not half so much as knowing that you have done good work. You remember, I said once that would be your great reward." She was to live outdoors, careful not to overdo her voice practise at first. After a while, when she had grown stronger, she would study hard to make up for the years she had lost, perhaps go abroad to work under the great voice builders and coaches there. And "some day," perhaps, rumor would tell him of a

new contralto whom people loved to hear sing. . . . It was a little childish, no doubt, and rather overdone.

But he did not think of that. He was not listening. He was seeing, not the picture she painted but that which she made, there in the sunshine. She was whiter than ever. Deep shadows were under her eyes. But the eyes themselves were very steady, her voice never quavered, nor did the smile flicker. Where did she get her spirit, this slender fragile girl who seemed so in need of another's strength for support?

And upon the bright brave soul of her he had wanted to put a stain. He could not do that! He no longer wanted to do that.

For the questions Jonathan had left burning in David's heart had answered themselves. As he watched her, he saw what on the high mount he had refused to see. He had hurt her enough. Not through another hurt could he find healing for her. And it would hurt her, what he had planned. It would take from her all that he loved; and it would add shame, the shame of cowardice, if not of cruelty to others. He could not do that; even if she were willing he could not. Yielding was not the simple thing it had seemed. Something he lacked—or something he had—which forever shut the gates of that kingdom upon him. It had been but an evil impossible dream. But a beautiful dream! There was yet no joy in renunciation.

David went down from the mount into the valley where shadows were deep and unbroken.

"And so the story ends happily, as it should. Everything has come out right."

"No! Everything has not come out right!"

"You mustn't say that. You mustn't think—"

"Esther!" It was hard to meet her eyes then. "I've got to say it—to let you see the sort of man I am. Last night I was thinking of—of what has happened to us and what we would do. There seemed only one way out that I could bear. I made up my mind. I was going to you to tell you that I would get free—I would have managed that somehow—and then come to you. I could have done it—last night."

The smile faded. She waited for him to continue.

"But Smith stopped me. I am glad he stopped me. For now—" He could not go on.

"Now you can't. Is that it?"

"I can't."

"I am glad you can't."

She said it very quietly. Her eyes left his and turned to the sunny window. But the light that shone on the thin tired face came not from without.

The ugly tempter lifted its wings and flew swiftly away.

"Are you," he began again at last, "revising your opinion of me? I hope you are."

A hand fell lightly on his lips. "I don't want to revise my opinion of you. I couldn't. And I understand—what you wanted and why it is impossible for us. Because—last night— I could have let you do it."

"Oh, Esther, I never meant to hurt you. Can you believe that?"

"I know. But you haven't hurt me—even though for a while I was shameless as I never thought I could be. I said the story has ended happily. And it has—with the happiest ending possible, the only happy ending it could have. Because there is nothing to regret."

"Nothing to regret!" Unbelief was in his gaze.

"Ah! We mustn't talk about it—but can't you see—can't you understand?"

She leaned over him, giving him her eyes, letting him look to the very depths he had once wanted to explore. He saw love there, and joy in love, but as well the will to renounce gladly—and no lurking shadow to say that she had bravely lied.

"Do you believe—that I am not unhappy and will not be?"

"I can't understand. But I have to believe. I am glad to believe."

He closed his eyes and relaxed his tired body, to learn that the wound was throbbing sharply. But that was a little thing.

She sat beside him, her face turned again to the sunlight. Once she reached out and touched his hand caressingly; he caught hers and clung to it as though he could not let it go. It was not a long silence.

But it was long enough. In those few minutes he went up out of the valley again and stood with her on another mount. And to him, too, came the free will to renounce; and understanding. Sorrow abode with him still, an exquisite pang that was to leave a lasting scar. But in his heart glowed a strange fire—as if for some splendid victory—lighted only for that hour, it may be, but revealing to him what he had found; a love that had not failed, that asked nothing, able to triumph over all things, even itself. It was so he had dreamed love might be. He was glad he had found it. He was glad of the cup it had put to his lips. He was the richer for her. He would be the richer for seeing her go. He hoped that the sorrow would never quite pass out of his heart, that the love would never shrink to a mere memory.

He lifted shining eyes to hers.

"Now I understand! Some things aren't worth all they cost. What I wanted last night is one of them. But this—I would not be without it, even though—"

"Nor would I."

Tears were gemming her eyes once more. But they were not sorrowful tears and they did not fall.

It was time for her to go. The hands that had not ceased to cling fell apart. She went slowly across the room.

At the door she lingered a moment, looking back. Through the streaming mist he saw her face, bright in the white glory of renunciation. She smiled . . . and was gone. . . .

The same brightness was upon him. But he did not know that. He stood on the mount to which she had led him, still seeing her. And still there were no regrets. To him was coming the strength he was to need, a faith in himself that was to tide him over many gray morrows. It was a very high place, the peak of his life. Ever afterward he was to look up to that hour.

* * * * * *

That evening came Shirley, summoned by Mrs. Jim. But the nurse turned her back at David's door. He had fever and the dreaded infection had set in. There must be no excitement. So Shirley must wait. Two days more she had to wait, anxious days during which she learned fast. On the third the nurse raised the embargo for a few minutes, and Shirley, breathless and afraid, went to the door through which the other had gone.

He was ready for her coming. His only dread was that she might see what he must never let her know. He had a deep pitying tenderness for her, to whom love had appeared only as a pretty toy.

She halted uncertainly at the door. He saw that she doubted her welcome.

"David, do you still want me to come?"

"Come, Shirley."

She went quickly to him and knelt by his side, and kissed him.

"Dear, I wanted to come. I couldn't stay away. And it wasn't because you gave me a choice. Won't you believe that, David?"

"I believe that, Shirley."

"You only said, 'Come.' Don't you really want me? Do you think that after a while, when I've learned all I have to learn—and proved what I have to prove—you will be glad that I came?"

"I am glad now."

He touched the pretty gleaming hair caressingly.

"I believe you are! And they said—oh, David!"

She caught his hand and pressed it to her cheek.

Then he saw that she had come to the threshold of her house of toys and stood looking out, trembling

and frightened before the bigness of the real world. He was staggered by that. She had come to the door too late; for if she fared forth, she must go alone and untaught through a country whose loneliness he had known. He must save her from that. He could not give her the one thing which could companion her through those arid wastes. The tender protective impulse surged stronger to his aid.

Gently he sought to lead her back into her playhouse.

"Shirley, I have a confession to make. While you were gone St. Mark's decided to build. I submitted some plans and—they were accepted. Do you like my surprise?"

"Then you can go back to your profession. I am glad of that."

"It's a big commission, Shirley. Almost as big as St. Christopher's would have been. We'll be rolling in wealth—for us."

"You won't have to worry any more. I am glad of that, too."

She was resisting, looking back toward the still open door and the prospect beyond. It had frightened her, but it had thrilled her, too. Anxiously he pointed inward.

"It means more than that. If I've done pretty well—and I'm sure I have—it will bring a lot more work. We can have all the things our mouths used to water for. We'll move into a very nice apartment at once, and have a maid, maybe a nurse for Davy Junior. We'll take on the club again—think of hearing the crack of a good drive once more! There'll be theaters and concerts, with a taxi on rainy evenings. And when we're settled in that new apartment we're going to give a beautiful dinner to celebrate our return to the surface. My stars! can't you see our guests' eyes popping? And when the first check comes in from the St. Mark's people I'm going to buy you—let's see, what *shall* I buy you?— Pinch me, please. When I think of it I can't quite realize that it's true. Isn't it bully, Shirley—dear?"

"Of course," she said slowly. "But somehow those things—they seem so—so little, now I have you back. Do they really mean so much to you, David?"

"You've come back—that's the great thing, of course. And there'll be no worries to make things hard for us, no penny-pinching and discontent, no—misunderstandings. Don't you see? It's the whole thing. And so—" He tried to laugh gaily, but an echo was in his heart. "And so the story ends happily."

For a little a question rested in her eyes. His laugh, trailing off into huskiness, puzzled her, vaguely hurt her. She sighed. Then habit began to prevail. The poor little sentimental regret for this sudden prosperity died. Her eyes rested on the pretty new toys tricking out her house. And as she looked the door closed softly, shutting her in forever. She did not know.

"Do you know, I was almost sorry for a minute? I hardly know why. It is better this way. We'll have to go back to believing in fairies, shan't we?"

Her eyes were dancing. Happiness tinted her velvety cheeks. All that she saw was good.

"Oh, David, I believe we're going to be happier than ever before!"

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE HOUSE OF TOYS ***

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